

# The Victorian Newsletter

Editor

Ward Hellstrom

Managing Editor

Louise R. Hellstrom

Number 104

Contents

Fall 2003

		Page
Christian Manliness and Fatherhood in Charles Kingsley's Writings by Laura Fasick	1	22
Jane Eyre, Eros and Evangelicalism by Laura Haigwood	4	29
The Professional Adrift in the Victorian Novel: (1) <i>Agnes Grey</i> by Robert D. Butterworth	13	34
The Professional Adrift in the Victorian Novel (2) <i>New Grub Street</i> by Robert D. Butterworth	17	34
		22
		29
		34

Cover: Frances Trollope from a painting by Auguste Hervieu

The Victorian Newsletter is sponsored for the Victorian Group of the Modern Language Association by Western Kentucky University and is published twice annually. Editorial and business communications should be addressed to Ward Hellstrom, CH 106, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY 42101; e-mail ward.hellstrom@wku.edu. Please use *MLA Handbook* for form of typescript. MSS cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscription rates in the United States are \$5.00 for one year and \$9.00 for two years; foreign rates, including Canada, are \$6.00 per year. Checks should be made out to *The Victorian Newsletter*.

## Christian Manliness and Fatherhood in Charles Kingsley's Writings

Laura Fasick

The nineteenth-century Anglican clergyman and author Charles Kingsley encapsulates in his writings many of the concerns about fatherhood and manliness that vexed Victorian England and that remain with us today. Like many Victorians, Kingsley idealizes the selflessness and gentleness that supposedly comes naturally to women, especially in their maternal role. At the same time, he wishes to uphold an ideal of manliness that requires males to be combative, aggressive, even violent—yet good, moral Christians nonetheless. Where, however, can boys find a model for such Christian manliness? Their mothers may be paragons of goodness—in Kingsley's fiction they usually are!—but because theirs is a feminine virtue of long-suffering and meekness it is ill-suited as a model for sons. Fathers are the obvious figures to whom to turn, and Kingsley writes extensively about both biological fatherhood and the spiritual fatherhood of priests. Yet throughout Kingsley's fiction fathers, both biological and priestly, fail their actual and spiritual sons, while maternal women assume the leadership in shaping men into what they ought to be. When forced to confront the implications of his own theory, it appears that Kingsley decides the best father is a mother after all.

Although credited with originating the cult of "Muscular Christianity," Kingsley himself vigorously rejected the term and the excessive emphasis on physical prowess that he believed it to connote. Yet he no less vigorously declared himself the advocate of manly virtues. In fact, he specifically warned his society that it needed to promote "a healthy and manful Christianity, one which does not exalt the feminine virtues to the exclusion of the masculine" (qtd. in Girouard 143). Scholars from Donald Hall to James Eli Adams to Herbert Sussmann to John Tosh have established that definitions of masculinity within the Victorian period varied considerably<sup>1</sup> but Allen John Hartley points out that for Kingsley, the "'feminine vein'" found in a Biblical hero like King David includes "a 'vast capacity' for sympathy, which enables him to share the sufferings of others" and a "passionately tender" nature (166). Tenderness and sympathy are thus defined as feminine—whether these qualities appear in women or in men—and a masculinity that is defined in opposition to this softness will necessarily emphasize toughness. Kingsley proclaimed himself the spokesman for the roughest specimens of masculinity: the Esaus who live a "wild wandering life" rather than the "smooth" and "sleek" Jacobs of the world ("Preface" xv-xvi). The pugnacious heroes who populate his novels exemplify the rough-hewn maleness of which Kingsley approved.

Yet Kingsley struggles with various aspects of the very maleness he endorses and perhaps the most troubling aspect

is that of fatherhood. After all, although the father might have been the ultimate authority in a patriarchal society, childcare was typically reserved for women. Not only was a mother assumed to have more direct contact with her children than a father but she was often credited with almost unparalleled importance in the children's moral development. Her influence could shape a child—either male or female—for life. As Claudia Nelson observes, the "caregiving parent was typically the mother, who was now cast . . . as the gentle moral influence molding her children's characters in an almost imperceptible fashion" (15). John Tosh points out that this emphasis on the mother's importance meant that "fatherhood held a decidedly ambiguous position in the culture and practice of Victorian family life. Did [fathers] offer their children something distinctive and essential? Or was their role to duplicate as closely as their natures permitted the services performed by the mother?" (79). At first glance, it would appear that Kingsley's answer would be a resounding "Yes" to the first question and "No" to the second. After all, if the ideal mother embodied typically feminine virtues, than how could she model the manliness into which male children should grow? Surely only a father or surrogate father could demonstrate for his sons what they themselves must aspire to be.

An Anglican priest as well as a writer, Kingsley also had theological reasons for stressing the importance of fatherhood. Kingsley fought what he regarded as Roman Catholic Mariolatry and effeminacy by insisting on the centrality of God's fatherhood and of Christ's manliness to a proper understanding of Christian religion and life. Kingsley's fierce opposition to what he saw as the "effeminacy" of the celibate Roman Catholic priesthood and his desire to express virtue in emphatically masculine terms led him to emphasize the fatherhood of God and the need for priests to be literal as well as spiritual fathers in order to fulfill their clerical duties. According to Kingsley, "Fully to understand the meaning of 'a Father in Heaven' we must be fathers ourselves" and thus "the theologic ideas which a celibate priesthood have been unable to realize in their teaching, are those of the Father in Heaven—the Husband in Heaven" (*Letters* 1: 166).<sup>2</sup> By upholding the model of God as Father for Christian men everywhere (including priests), Kingsley could combat the Roman Catholic ideal of priestly celibacy and incidentally justify his own marriage. Kingsley's letters reveal that early in life he was attracted to the very Church and priesthood from which he later recoiled and his biographer Susan Chitty has documented the extent to which his powerful sexual urges made him eager for moral grounds on which to justify his sexuality and dismiss the sup-

<sup>1</sup>See the collection of essays edited by Donald Hall, *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*. Adams's *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood*, Sussmann's *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and*

*Masculine Politics in Early Victorian Literature and Art*, and Tosh's *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*.

<sup>2</sup>See also Kingsley's comments in *Letters*, 1: 221-229.

posed morality of celibacy. An insistence on the moral and spiritual imperative toward fatherhood was certainly one way to idealize, if not sexuality itself, then certainly its most immediate and important consequence. Further, if the "feminine" virtues of the mother provided an insufficient model for boys, then the father's presence was vital as a model of moral masculinity.

Kingsley vividly sketches the dangers of insufficiently masculine father figures when he deals with the priestly "fathers" of the Roman Catholic Church. According to Kingsley, priestly celibacy and an undue emphasis on the Virgin Mary combined to make Roman Catholicism not only an effeminizing religion but even a dangerous one for both men and women. Neither the emasculated Catholic clergy nor the cloyingly maternal Madonna can provide sound spiritual guidance for needy supplicants. Thus, in *Westward Ho!* (1855), the Roman Catholic convert Eustace Leigh (who like every other major male character in the book is without a strong biological father) mistakenly turns for counsel to a Roman Catholic priest. Unfortunately, his celibate confessor cannot understand the heterosexual yearnings from which Eustace suffers, "seeing that a swine has no eye for pearls" (84). As a result, "he took instinctively the crooked and suspicious method" (84) and "his moral torture" of Eustace only exacerbates Eustace's already tormented soul (84). Misled by such inadequate father figures, Eustace loses not only his chance for heterosexual fulfillment but even his masculine identity. Eustace becomes a Jesuit and therefore, Kingsley announces, vanishes from his book.

This book is a history of men; of men's virtues and sins, victories and defeats; and Eustace is a man no longer; he is become a thing, a tool, a Jesuit; which goes only where it is sent, and does good or evil indifferently as it is bid; which, by an act of moral suicide, has lost its soul, in the hope of saving it; without a will, a conscience, a responsibility (as it fancies) to God or man, but only to "the Society." In a word, Eustace, as he says of himself, is "dead." Twice dead, I fear. Let the dead bury their dead. We have no more concern with Eustace Leigh.

(428)

Kingsley condemns Roman Catholicism, then, partially because its "fathers," themselves effeminized by celibacy, deviousness, and a general renunciation of masculine virtues, can only corrupt and destroy the young men who seek guidance from them. Yet another danger of Roman Catholicism, however, is the undue (to Kingsley's eyes) emphasis on the power of the ultimate mother: the Virgin Mary.<sup>3</sup> In *Yeast* (1848), Luke, another Roman Catholic convert, describes the appeal of Roman Catholicism this way:

Would you have me try to be a Prometheus, while I am longing to be once more an infant on a mother's breast? Let me alone . . . I am a weary child, who knows nothing, can do nothing, except lose its way in arguings and reasonings, and 'find no end, in wandering mazes

lost.' Will you reproach me, because when I see a soft cradle lying open for me . . . with a Virgin Mother's face smiling down all women's love about it . . . I long to crawl into it, and sleep awhile? I want loving, indulgent sympathy. . . I want detailed, explicit guidance. . . You ask who will teach a fast young man? . . . I answer, the Jesuit. Ay, start and sneer, at that delicate woman-like tenderness, that subtle instinctive sympathy, which you have never felt. . . (80)

Significantly, Luke embraces this return to infantilism and a self-indulgent surrender to feminine care at the very moment when his own father needs him most. As Carole Marie Engelhardt points out, Luke's newly bankrupt father needs a son who will "struggl[e] in the masculine world to restore the family's fortune and honour" (46). Luke's desire for passivity and yearning for a powerful maternal figure to comfort and control him is an implicit betrayal of his own sire. The healthy and manly alternative to Luke's cowardice comes in the stinging words of Lancelot Smith, Luke's cousin and the hero of the novel: "I am not a child, but a man; I want not a mother to pet, but a man to rule me" (259).

Other passages of Kingsley's confirm the idea that masculine strength—indeed, masculine sternness—is the crucial component of spiritual authority. Thus, in one of his private letters, Kingsley deplores the advice of a Roman Catholic priest to a distraught woman that she should seek comfort from the Virgin Mary. Kingsley writes,

Ah! Thought I, if your head had once rested on a lover's bosom, and your heart had known the mighty stay of a man's affection, you would have learned to go now in your sore need, not to the Mother but to the Son—not to the indulgent Virgin, but to the strong man, Christ Jesus—stern because loving—who does not shrink from punishing, and yet does it as a man would do it, "mighty to save." (*Letters* 1: 228).

This emphasis on fierce masculine strength as crucial for spiritual as well as physical salvation suggests that the punitive father, not the tender mother, will be Kingsley's icon of the protective parent. Certainly the celebration of stern strength as a necessary component of a parent's protective role would make it easy to emphasize the male figure, since both strength and severity have traditionally been more associated with men than women. Yet, astonishingly, the authority that Kingsley takes away from female figures with one hand he more than gives back with another. At the height of his celebration of the robust masculinity of "Esau," he writes, "Esau has a birthright; and this book, like all books which I have ever written, is written to tell him so" ("Preface" xvi). Kingsley continues, however, with a stunning reversal of what one might expect.

But it is not this book, or any man's book, or any man at all, who can tell Esau the whole truth about himself, his

powers, his duty, and his God. Woman must do it, and not man. His mother, his sister, the maid whom he may love; and failing all these (as they often will fail him, in the wild wandering life which he must live), those human angels of whom it is written—"The barren hath many more children than she who has an husband." ("Preface" xvi).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this passage is that Kingsley not only insists upon the spiritual primacy of women in molding men but also on the primacy of the very feminine qualities that men supposedly should not over-cultivate in themselves. Thus, one of the "human angels" to whom Kingsley refers is Florence Nightingale, regarded in her own day as an icon of compassion.

This ambivalence over whether male or female figures are to be central in forming masculine identities that are at once manly and moral appears throughout Kingsley's writings. Kingsley does not merely display the typical Victorian tendency to have orphaned heroes, although he certainly boasts a high proportion of heroes with dead or absent fathers. Occasionally, a father is worse than dead to his son: in *Hereward the Wake* (1865), Hereward's father is notable mostly for his collusion in his own son's banishment. Even more strikingly, the fathers Kingsley shows in more detail tend to be brutally ineffective parents, and often, surprisingly enough, their ineffectiveness arises from their allegiance to coarse and rough models of masculinity: the distortions of maleness that Kingsley denounced when he denounced the term "Muscular Christianity." Thus, in *Yeast*, Bracebridge, the army colonel who is the book's most powerful example of "keen self-confident" masculinity (294), fails miserably at fatherhood as a result.<sup>4</sup> Having unknowingly sired a bastard child during an exploitative and cold-blooded liaison with a desperate working-class woman, Bracebridge is driven to despair and suicide by the revelation that his discarded lover has murdered their son. Although the woman commits the act of infanticide, Kingsley leaves little doubt that the responsibility for the child's death lies at least as heavily with the "[c]ruel man" who was "[m]urdering dumb beasts in foreign lands" while the woman he had impregnated "was coming nearer and nearer to [her] shame" (297). What more damning indictment of a father could there be than that he had contributed to the death of his child?

The failures of these brutal fathers accentuate the ascendancy of women whom it is hard to distinguish from the Virgin Mary Kingsley supposedly dismissed. In *The Water Babies* (1863), the young chimney-sweep Tom's biological father is a transported convict while his surrogate father is the brutal master Grimes. Grimes can do nothing to assist Tom in his maturation and he himself is a role model only of what to avoid rather than of what Tom should become. Indeed, it is a sign of Tom's initially benighted state that he

begins the book aspiring to nothing more than to grow up to be like Grimes. What he must learn instead is to shun his master's example and to learn the lessons of what he should do and be from the teachings of various supernatural and divinely benignant females. Tom encounters manifestation after manifestation of a divine femininity variously identified as "Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby," "Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid," "Mother Carey" (note the maternal honorific!), among other names, and in the inspiring presence of this powerful figure not only is Tom redeemed but the formerly feisty Grimes is reduced to being "as meek as a drowned worm" (321).<sup>5</sup>

Other Kingsley novels illustrate this same ultimate reliance on female influence, rather than on paternal example, to mold young men. Even in *Yeast*, Lancelot Smith's allegiance to the mystic prophet Barnakill is only a hasty device with which Kingsley brought the novel to a premature close when objections arose to it during its serialization. More typical is the shift in *Alton Locke* (1850) when Alton transfers his utmost faith from the irascible Scot Sandy MacKaye (a figure many believe was based loosely on Thomas Carlyle) to the all-but-infallible Eleanor. Although the young and beautiful Eleanor could, in another novelist's hands, have seemed a romantic possibility, rather than a mother-substitute, for Alton, Kingsley stresses her inaccessibility to Alton as anything but a guide and mentor: a surrogate mother, in short. Indeed, in Kingsley's fiction the single most powerful and positive father-son relationship—that between the elder and younger Tom Thurnall in *Two Years Ago* (1857)—actually overturns the pattern of paternal rule and modeling of rugged masculinity that Kingsley insists elsewhere is the ideal of father/son relations. In *Two Years Ago*, the elder Thurnall is a man as gentle, nurturing, and as physically vulnerable as a stereotypical Victorian lady. Compassionate toward the lower-class John Briggs, tender toward his own son, stricken by blindness and thenceforth dependent on others, the senior Thurnall is adored by his son and namesake even though the latter's tough robustness is the antithesis of the father's gentleness. Given the ambivalence about masculine toughness that Kingsley's treatment of maternity and paternity betrays, perhaps it is not really surprising that his heroes, after arduous narratives in which they are called upon to prove themselves ferociously male through acts of physical bravado, usually end up either dead and survived by strong, maternal women, or infantilized and helplessly dependent on the care of such women. Thus Raphael in *Hypatia* (1853), Hereward in *Hereward the Wake*, and Alton in *Alton Locke* die while triumphantly strong women—Victoria in *Hypatia*, Torfrida in *Hereward the Wake*, and Eleanor in *Alton Locke*—live on to nurture others. In *Westward Ho!* Amyas is stricken blind at the end of the novel and must end his days "a great blind ox . . . fed and tended like a baby for the rest of his lazy life"

<sup>4</sup>It is significant that Bracebridge is an army man, since Kingsley's letters and life show how strongly he was attracted to the overt virility of military men. One army officer who became friendly with Kingsley wrote that the latter "loved men and manly pursuits and perhaps liked soldiers as being a class among whom manly feeling and manly virtues were cultivated" (*Letters* 2: 79). In ultimately condemning Bracebridge, then, Kingsley is condemning a figure who in some ways simultaneously represents the martial masculinity Kingsley most admired.

<sup>5</sup>For a more detailed discussion of fatherhood in *The Water Babies*, see my article, "The Failure of Fatherhood: Maleness and Its Discontents in Charles Kingsley." In that article, however, I focus primarily on Kingsley's discomfort with feminine qualities as a threat to masculine identity rather than on the other side of his ambivalence: his attraction to them as a solace for the considerable pain that accompanies that masculine identity.

<sup>3</sup>Carol Marie Engelhardt's fascinating essay, "Victorian Masculinity and the Virgin Mary," provides additional context for Kingsley's attitude toward the Madonna.

(633) by the devoted Ayacanora. Most striking of all, the ferociously self-sufficient Tom Thurnall is reduced to trembling existential terror at the conclusion of *Two Years Ago*. After an agonizing experience of enforced passivity as a prisoner, Tom "dare hardly stir about now, lest some harm should come to" him (2: 405). Desperate, Tom knows that his only hope lies with Grace, the woman who has assumed the responsibility of caring for Tom's disabled father and now must be Tom's caretaker and teacher as well. As Tom tells Grace, his prayer "in that prison, and all the way home" had been "If I can but find her!—let me but see her—ask her—let her teach me" (2: 405). Grace, then, becomes Tom's mentor and spiritual instructor, and in his submission to her, "the old heart passed away from Thomas Thurnall: and instead of it grew up a heart like his father's; even the heart of a little child" (2: 406).

We notice, then, that rather than a stern father serving as judge and role model for his son—the model Kingsley claims to proffer as a healthy alternative to effeminizing indulgence—here father and son are joined in a shared child-likeness and docility before a supremely wise and spiritual female. Kingsley could hardly do more as a novelist to overturn the very ideal of stern fatherhood that he accepts in theory. No matter how much Kingsley might want to promote a hyper-virility in which a powerful and sometimes punitive father raises up a son in his own image, his imagination consistently turns instead toward the all-encompassing maternal tenderness whose effeminizing tendencies he supposedly deplors.

#### Works Cited

- Adams, James Eli. *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.
- Chitty, Susan. *The Beast and the Monk: A Life of Charles Kingsley*. New York: Mason/Charter, 1975.
- Girouard, Mark. *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1981.

## Jane Eyre, Eros and Evangelicalism

Laura Haigwood

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë uses religious discourse to advance Jane's quest for both spiritual and sexual fulfillment in her marriage with Edward Rochester.<sup>1</sup> Brontë's imaginative challenge is to make Victorian, Christian marriage a viable choice for her heroine by addressing the economic inequities and gender ideologies that support an imbalance of power and render the condition of married women, as Maryanne C. Ward and others point out, metaphorically comparable to that of slaves (Ward 14, Meyer 91)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For this view of the novel as a marriage quest, I am indebted to Maria Lamonaca, who suggests *Jane Eyre* may be a revision of Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (248).

<sup>2</sup>The problematic racial politics of this metaphor are analysed in depth by Susan Meyer in "'Indian Ink': Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*" in *Imperialism at Home*: 60-95.

Engelhardt, Carol Marie. "Victorian Masculinity and the Virgin Mary." *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture*. Ed. Andrew Bradstock, Sean Gill, Anne Hogan, and Sue Morgan. Houndsmills: Macmillan P, 2000. 44-57.

Fasick, Laura. "The Failure of Fatherhood: Maleness and Its Discontents in Charles Kingsley." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 18 (1993): 106-111.

Hall, Donald E., ed. *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

Hartley, Allen John. *The Novels of Charles Kingsley: A Christian Social Interpretation*. Folkestone: Hour-Glass P, 1977.

Kingsley, Charles. *Alton Locke*. 1850. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Charles Kingsley: His Letters, and Memories of His Life*. Ed. Frances Kingsley. 2 vols. New York: De Fau, 1899.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Hereward the Wake*. 1865. 2 vols. New York: De Fau, 1899.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Hypatia*. 1853. 2 vols. New York: De Fau, 1899.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Preface to the Fourth Edition." *Yeast*. New York: De Fau, 1899. vii-xvii.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Two Years Ago*. 1857. 2 vols. New York: De Fau, 1899.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Water Babies*. 1863. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1966.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Westward Ho!* 1855. London: Dent, 1906.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Yeast*. 1848. New York: De Fau, 1899.

Nelson, Claudia. *Invisible Men: Fatherhood in Victorian Periodicals 1830-1910*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1995.

Sussmann, Herbert. *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculinity Politics in Early Victorian Literature and Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.

Tosh, John. *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1999.

Minnesota State University—Moorhead

Ward and others have insightfully discussed the relationship between Brontë's religious rhetoric and her feminism, and I hope to contribute to that conversation by emphasizing the subversive potential of Brontë's evangelical discourse and its empowerment of Jane's sexuality. Contrasting an unordained but credible feminine spiritual authority with a discredited masculine one, as Susan VanZanten Gallagher puts it, Jane "[c]ounter[s] the oppressive masculine images of God so prevalent in her own society" (67).<sup>3</sup> In the process,

<sup>3</sup>I am greatly indebted to Gallagher's thoughtful research and analysis regarding Brontë's Christian feminism, as when she "suggest[s] that although the Christianity professed by the powerful males in the novel is destructive to, and exploitative of, women, the novel might embody a Christian feminism that sees God as both masculine and feminine and advocates the values of love, sexuality and a marriage of partnership" (67).

Brontë constructs a quest toward happy marriage, recognizing also the role that both societal values and original family conflicts play in structuring her heroine's intimacy needs.

Brontë is well aware of the threat that economic dependence poses to women's pleasure, as when simmering resentments cause Jane to lose all delight in her lover's caresses during their post-betrothal shopping: ". . . the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation" (338). This flush of "annoyance and degradation" clearly diverts both mood and blood flow from sexual receptivity to the frigidly defensive withdrawal of self-protection. Understandably, Jane retreats mentally to her family of origin in order to fortify her threatened sense of self:

As we re-entered the carriage, and I sat back feverish and fagged, I remembered . . . the letter of my uncle, John Eyre, to Mrs. Reed: his intention to adopt me and make me his legatee. "It would, indeed, be a relief," . . . I thought, "if I had ever so small an independency. . . ." And somewhat relieved by this idea . . . I ventured once more to meet my master's and lover's eye; which most pertinaciously sought mine, though I averted both face and gaze. . . ." (338-39)

But the imaginative prospect of future independence is not in itself sufficient to remove the present threat; moreover, imaginative "relief" for Jane does not change Rochester himself:

He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might . . . bestow on a slave . . . I crushed his hand, which was ever hunting mine, vigorously, and thrust it back to him with the passionate pressure . . ." (339)

While anger seems the appropriate "passion" for a sense of "enslavement," it is clearly not the passion most conducive to intimacy. The self-protective "system" she adopts for the remainder of their courtship reflects her understanding that unresisting intimacy with an unreformed Rochester threatens both her integrity—psychological, as well as moral and spiritual—and her prospects for lasting marital happiness.

For a Victorian, Christian feminist like Charlotte Brontë, however, the context for good sex must be sacramental as well as egalitarian, and this requires bringing the Byronic Rochester to repentance for his two major sins. The first is impiety—that is, his willful determination to be a law unto himself by, as Marianne Thormahlen points out, "arrogat[ing] a power with which the divine and perfect alone can be entrusted" (Brontë 169, Thormahlen 209). The second is sexism—a sin against both God and women, represented theologically by Rochester's defiance of the seventh commandment and interpersonally by his unequal relationships with women. In all such relationships prior to Bertha's death he devotes his relational energies primarily to maintaining power, using money, manipulation, deception, incarceration and condescension—the last descending readily into contempt toward Bertha, Celine, Giacinta and Clara. Jane accurately discerns that she must break out of this pattern or repeat it: "I drew . . . the certain inference, that if I

were . . . to become the successor of these poor girls, he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory" (398). For Brontë, sex outside her ideal of egalitarian, monogamous, Christian marriage is not merely abstractly wrong but bad sex in itself, degraded and degrading. Thus, saving Rochester as a viable lover for Jane requires conversion of his relationship to women, as well as to God. Jane wants a relationship characterized by equality, honesty, mutual respect and interdependence. If we wonder whether Rochester can actually change enough to meet Jane's expectations, we find Jane's answer in the concluding chapter:

. . . I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. . . . We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him; all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result. (576)

For Jane, sexual and spiritual fulfillment in a marriage with Edward Rochester also requires at least two additional things. First, she must resolve conflicts from her family of origin, particularly those concerned with connection or disconnection between touch and love. Second, she must recreate her family of origin in a version that will support her desired social identity. For Jane is determined to be fully equal to Rochester before she marries him, and not merely to be elevated by association through marriage. Specifically, this means that she must overwrite her oppressive Aunt and cousins, and the self-image they have imposed on her, with a more generous Uncle and more admirable, affectionate cousins. Although her Christianity requires that the road to good sex cannot be paved merely with psychological wellbeing earned through revisionary encounters with the past, such wellbeing is nonetheless essential to her assertions of happiness at the novel's end. To adequately revise her family of origin, then, Jane must take more than one trip "home." Even after her promotion to teacher at Lowood signals her transition to adult self-sufficiency, Jane's marriage quest zig-zags between scenes of adult sexual exploration and scenes of original family conflict.

Jane's return to Gateshead, to forgive and be unforgiven by the dying Mrs. Reed, at least partially removes Jane's unloving childhood as an obstacle to satisfying adult sexuality. Thoroughly resigned to the fact that she will never have Mrs. Reed's maternal love and acceptance, Jane at last might seem entirely free to focus on other relationships. But, as her abortive first engagement to Rochester dramatizes, only half of her family of origin conflicts have been resolved by her deathbed encounter with Mrs. Reed and her final, positive assessment of herself in comparison to her Reed cousins, especially Eliza and Georgiana.

While John Reed has met the fate he deserved, Jane still has not confronted him as an adult nor decisively defeated all that he represents: the bullying, unfilial, morally corrupt, mentally inferior and yet unduly privileged brother-figure who stands as an emblem for patriarchy generally. And she has not yet met those "possibly . . . poor, low relations called Eyre," as they are dismissively described to Jane in

early childhood by her aunt (24). While inflexibly withholding her own acceptance, Mrs. Reed does at last reveal that there is another "side" to Jane's family and to Jane's social identity, represented by her Uncle John Eyre. At Moor House Jane will at last achieve material independence—traditionally the father's gift to his female dependents upon their coming of age—to complement the adult emotional independence she has partially achieved in relation to her mother's "side." By directing her away from her Reed and toward her Eyre kin, Jane's return to Gateshead leads her ultimately to Moor House, where the conflict between her childhood longing for a secure place in the family "group" (3) and the complementary drive toward psychological self-preservation must be played out again, this time with a male relative who attempts to claim ownership of her sexuality. The novel's crisis must occur at Moor House because that is where Jane's two quests—her quest for family love and her quest for sexual love—collide, in St. John's incestuous bullying.

## I

## Jane the Evangelist

To accomplish Rochester's much-needed conversion, Brontë must cut a rhetorical path for her heroine through orthodoxy to happiness. As Robert Merrett points out in his thorough documentation of Brontë's many lapses from orthodox theology, Brontë fails "to respect the traditional meaning of [Christian] emblems consistently" (15). Rochester's ultimate conversion illustrates the efficacy of Jane's Evangelicalistic preaching, which insists on a direct and unmediated relationship between the individual soul and God. Rochester must have his own, unmediated revelation, just as Jane insists on her right to her own—despite his efforts (again, illuminatingly detailed by Maria Lamona [249]) to co-opt even Jane's religious faith for his own ends. Belatedly, but ultimately, Rochester turns directly to God, just as Jane has insisted that he do throughout their relationship, both in their early repartee in Chapter 14, and in her refusal to succumb to his later pleas that she "be [his] comforter, [his] rescuer" (406). As Mary Ellis Gibson points out, Jane's "reformation of Rochester is . . . grounded in evangelical assumptions about duty and the individual conscience or inner voice" (436). Resolutely, Jane leaves him, referring him to the Comforter located within a triune Anglican God: "What shall I do, Jane? Where turn for a companion, and for some hope?" "Do as I do: trust in God and yourself" (403). After she has left him, seemingly forever, he does: "I began to experience remorse, repentance, the wish for reconciliation to my Maker. I began sometimes to pray: very brief prayers they were, but very sincere" (571). Only when left alone with God—the essential condition of each individual, from an Evangelical Christian perspective—can he finally grasp the point of Jane's preaching. In a parallel manner, Helen Burns's imminent death first raises for Jane the questions that only Helen's faith can answer.

No longer spiritually dependent on Jane, Rochester is finally ready to meet Jane on equal terms; no longer financially dependent on Rochester, Jane is at last his equal, as well. These changes are necessary, even though Jane and

Rochester both affirm their essential equality when they are first betrothed:

" . . . I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: It is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal—as we are!"

"As we are!" repeated Mr. Rochester— (318)

Jane's vision of Heaven is radically egalitarian. But, as long as Rochester and she are "of mortal flesh" then "custom and conventionalities" still have power to distort their essential equality on earth. As Lorna Ellis reminds us, "the core of the whole Bildungsroman tradition [is] the protagonist's search for a compromise between the desires of the self and the expectations of society" (167). Only by the end of the novel has Jane and Rochester's equality—located in heaven and the afterlife in the quotation above—become socially, economically and spiritually real on earth. Thus, their shared home becomes an egalitarian heaven on earth because of Rochester's conversion and, just as importantly in this material world, because of Jane's economic and social ascent. Rochester's spiritual coming of age is so necessary a condition of good sex for Jane, making him a Christian husband with a sacramental view of marriage, that the instant his religious conversion is complete their spiritual union is consummated by divinely facilitated instant messaging, followed rapidly by physical reunion. With Christian marriage the only acceptable scene for fulfillment of heterosexual desire, Brontë applies her most strenuous imaginative efforts to meeting the conditions her beliefs make necessary in order to render the inherently hostile institution of nineteenth-century English marriage conducive to good sex and happiness for a heterosexual Christian feminist like Jane. This imaginative feat includes the construction of an unofficial but nonetheless authoritative female priesthood to effect the needed spiritual changes in men, changes which the male priesthood presumably could never effect nor even see as needful.

Helen Burns is clearly the most important mentor in Jane's development into an Evangelical preacher able to facilitate such a miraculous conversion as Rochester's. Helen, whose own preaching initially converts Jane herself, offers a subversively domestic and feminine interpretation, not merely a docile imitation, of Christ. Her answers to Jane's theological questions emphasize God's love for humankind as that of an ideal "father" (96) and heaven as "home" (95). Having experienced a characteristically Evangelical, direct, individual revelation herself, Helen asserts a "creed; which no one ever taught me, and which I seldom mention; but in which I take delight, and to which I cling; for . . . it makes Eternity . . . a mighty home" (67). Later, when Helen elaborates on God-as-parent, this domestic model persists: "God is my father; God is my friend; I love him; I believe he loves me. You will come to the same region of happiness: be received by the same mighty, universal Parent, no doubt, dear Jane" (96).

But Jane is no more passive and compliant as Helen's disciple than she is in any other relationship. Instead of taking all Helen's words as unchallengeable gospel and striv-

ing to imitate her by cultivating a similar detachment from the world, Jane adapts Helen's theology to her own equally heterodox but also material and heterosexual purposes, with the characteristically Victorian, middle-class project of making home itself into heaven. Jane's susceptibility to catching fire sexually (e.g., "Strange energy was in his voice; strange fire in his look. . . . I regained my couch, but never thought of sleep. . . . Too feverish to rest, I rose as soon as day dawned" [187- 88]) is just one aspect of the earthly physicality that enables her to respond to Nature with both sensual and spiritual delight.

Shortly before Helen's deathbed homily, Jane pauses to savor the beauty of the evening in the lush Lowood garden now redolent with spring fragrance. She muses: "How sad to be lying now on a sick bed, and to be in danger of dying! This world is pleasant—it would be dreary to be called from it, and to have to go who knows where" (93). By the end of this same chapter, Helen has upliftingly explained to Jane "where" one may be called to go from this world, yet Helen's eloquently developed vision still does not inspire Jane with any urgent, emulative aspiration to leave this "pleasant" world at once for that "home" in "heaven." Jane's eros and attachment to life oppose Helen's thanatos and resignation to a premature death. For even—or rather especially—at her most sublime, Helen is sinking toward the grave. Earlier, when Helen is giving Jane the vital gift of faith in her individual conscience (80), Jane's ambivalence toward Helen's detachment is apparent:

"Hush, Jane! You think too much of the love of human beings. . . . Why . . . should we ever sink overwhelmed with distress, when life is so soon over, and death is so certain an entrance to happiness: to glory?"

I was silent: Helen had calmed me; but in the tranquility she imparted there was an alloy of inexpressible sadness. I felt the impression of woe as she spoke. . . . (81)

Similarly, those "human tears" (578) that fill Jane's eyes as she anticipates her cousin St. John Rivers' imminent death reveal her own essential difference from the two Christian martyrs she has known most intimately. Thus, while Jane learns from Helen both spiritual perspective and rhetorical skills that will serve her well in future trials, she also revises Helen's teachings along the more worldly lines suggested above: If heaven is home, then home may be heaven. Brontë goes even further, in fact, suggesting, through Jane, that working to make home a heaven on earth may be the most faithful response to a God envisioned as reaching out to humankind through incarnation, with a love encompassing both body and soul; martyrdom, by contrast, may actually be "monstrous," as Jane reflects when St. John Rivers first proposes to her a loveless marriage of missionaries (517).

Appropriately, it is precisely his proposal of a monstrous martyrdom for Jane that cancels St. John's spiritual authority in her eyes, an experience for which her

<sup>4</sup>In a clear projection of his own anxieties, misreading Jane's own feelings and character, St. John argues ". . . though you have a man's vigorous brain, you have a woman's heart, and—it would not do" (521). The dash

initiation into the subversive feminine priesthood has prepared her. As Lamona puts it, "Helen models for Jane an independence of thought on matters of theology and doctrine" (253). This includes independent assessment of men within the Church hierarchy, as when Helen calmly annihilates Reverend Brocklehurst's clerical mystique: "'Mr. Brocklehurst is not a god; nor even a great and admired man'" (80). In keeping with the temptation toward bad sex that characterizes even the best men in this novel at times, it is appropriate that Brocklehurst, one of its worst, is pointedly exposed as a hypocrite by the ostentatious packaging of his female relations as both conspicuous consumers and objects for sexual consumption, intimately truthful mirrors of his own all-too-worldly tastes. Similarly, St. John's sexualized aggression toward Jane exposes the "corrupt man" whose desires are ". . . unimpacted to and unshared by, the pure Christian" (524). It is Helen who first alerts Jane to this important distinction between man and clergyman, a distinction that will ultimately help Jane to save herself, body and soul. His proposal of marriage to Jane reveals everything that is corrupt and fallible in St. John. Like the unreformed Rochester, he objectifies women, viewing them solely and selfishly in terms of his own "devices and desires" (BCP 3); like John Reed, he assumes entitlement to dominate his female kin; and finally, his own peculiar lack of feeling enables him to conceive of marriage solely as a means of furthering his own ambitions, while maintaining a hypocritical silence about the purely physical sexual drives he apparently fears may overwhelm if left alone with Jane in India.<sup>4</sup> Therefore Jane is able to reflect:

I had silently feared St. John till now, because I had not understood him. He had held me in awe, because he had held me in doubt. How much of him was saint, how much mortal, I could not heretofore tell; but revelations were being made in this conference . . . I understood that, sitting there where I did, on the bank of heath, and with that handsome form before me, I sat at the feet of a man, erring as I. The veil fell from his hardness and despotism. Having felt in him the presence of these qualities, I felt his imperfection, and took courage. I was with an equal—one with whom I might argue—one whom, if I saw good, I might resist. (519)

Like Helen—and most like the Evangelical Helen in not being precisely the same as Helen in her "revelations"—Jane also carries her own individual creed to those who require conversion—particularly her two suitors who, among their other errors, seem entirely too willing to settle for bad sex. The worst sex of all, Rochester opines, is the "degrading" association with "inferiors"—which all heterosexual sex must be under terms of entrenched gender inequality (398). And if it is degrading "to live familiarly with inferiors," it is surely even more degrading to be one. Yet sex with an inferior is precisely what both Rochester and St. John seem particularly anxious to procure—until, that is, they are converted by Jane.

represents what St. John cannot name about himself; his own physical drives. Jane has no such doubts about herself, however, responding "'I have a woman's heart; but not where you are concerned.'"

Despite his impressive appearance of heroic virtue, St. John is no less in need of correction on this point than Rochester, and Jane is "[a]s hard beset . . . in a different way" (534) by him. In responding to St. John's proposal Jane must resist a different but equally compelling temptation that, if yielded to, will doom her quest. St. John demands the debasement of her sexuality as a condition of the fraternal love and acceptance that she craves from him almost as much as she longs sexually for Rochester. Laurence Lerner states that "Rivers quite consciously represses his sexuality, knowing his love for Rosamond Oliver, and putting it aside in order to be a missionary and demand a wife toward whom he feels no sexual attraction. Jane similarly repressed her own sexuality in placing duty before her love for Rochester" (qtd. in Thormahlen 204). But in speaking of St. John's "love for Rosamond Oliver," Lerner rejects the authority of St. John himself, who makes a sharp distinction between his feeling for her and what Brontë is constructing as love: "'When I colour, and when I shake before Miss Oliver, I do not pity myself. . . . I know it is . . . a mere fever of the flesh: not, I declare, a convulsion of the soul'" (478). Although Jane uses "love," as Lerner does, to describe St. John's "fever of the flesh," she, too, makes a distinction: "I understood, as by inspiration, *the nature of his love for Miss Oliver*; I agreed with him that it was *but a love of the senses*. . . . how he should mistrust its ever conducing permanently to his happiness, or hers" (501-02, italics mine). Brontë takes care to distinguish love comprised of sexual attraction that also convulses the soul (such as the love between Jane and Rochester) from a "love" that is exclusively "of the senses," "a fever of the flesh," devoid of mutual esteem or respect. She also clearly distinguishes another kind of passion: the desire for sexual mastery of "inferiors"—that is, the will to dominance, control and possession. Close attention to these distinctions can help us understand Brontë's view of what mutually satisfactory sex requires. Although he repudiates the woman who most attracts him because she is inadequate to the demands of his ambition, it is clear that St. John, far from repressing his sexuality, is determined to take a sexual partner with him to India. As Jane reflects, "Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt not he would scrupulously observe)?" (517). It is clear that she is repelled by the prospect of such "forms" and such a "sacrifice": again, "such a martyrdom would be monstrous." Finally, it is both clear and disturbing that St. John is undeterred, even "charmed," by her lack of reciprocal desire.

Before making his formal offer, he experiments sexually with the unwilling Jane: ". . . his was an experiment kiss. . . . I felt as if this kiss were a seal affixed to my fetters. He never omitted the ceremony afterwards, and the gravity and quiescence with which I underwent it seemed to invest it for him with a certain charm" (509). But while St. John may be "charmed," Jane isn't. The "charm" for him of sealing her fetters satisfies no masochistic craving for bondage in Jane herself. Moreover, the incestuous nature of this sexual "experiment" is underlined by its context: "Diana . . . exclaimed: 'St. John! You used to call Jane your third sister,

but you don't treat her as such: you should kiss her too'" (509). Compelled by the sister she loves into the arms of the brother she also loves, and on the grounds that this kiss will confirm a fraternal—not sexual—bond, well might Jane feel "fettered" or entrapped to discover that St. John is appropriating her sexually by manipulating her desire for "kindred."

Jane's craving for non-sexualized kinship is so intense that it eclipses her pleasure in inheriting a fortune. When St. John first informs Jane of her inheritance, he has not yet been tempted to manipulate Jane's sororial generosity and vulnerability toward the service of his own ambitions. Therefore, when she asks him to "'Say again you will be my brother: when you uttered the words I was satisfied, happy; repeat them, if you can repeat them sincerely'" he readily responds "'I feel I can easily and *naturally* make room in my heart for you, as my third and youngest sister'" (495, italics mine). St. John's subsequent willful disruption of this "natural" relationship leads not so much to a "repression" of sexuality as to a perversion of it.

Jane's erotic acumen is shown throughout her many descriptions of St. John's touch, but particularly at the moment when she is most at risk of agreeing to marry him: "He pressed his hand firmer on my head, as if he claimed me: he surrounded me with his arm, almost as if he loved me (I say *almost*—I knew the difference—for I had felt what it was to be loved. . .)" (535, italics Brontë's). Even under such pressure, however, Jane recognizes the master/slave dynamic of the relationship, and knows what to expect if she succumbs: "I should not be made the less to repent . . . of my former rebellion" (535).

St. John's drive to dominate Jane is no more "a convulsion of the soul" than is the "fever of the flesh" he feels toward Miss Oliver. Therefore, he still misses the spirit of Christian marriage and would be sinning profoundly in marrying Jane. In rejecting him, Jane makes the correct choice for his soul as well as for her own (Thormahlen 208-9). True to herself in rejecting both Rochester and St. John, Jane insists on a sexual self-expression compatible with her integrity. Only then can she experience sexual intimacy as something that completes rather than diminishes her.<sup>5</sup>

## II

### Healing Touch

The desire for loving human touch is a dominant theme of *Jane Eyre*, established in the opening chapters, where the relentless physical brutality of Jane's childhood is illustrated by several representative instances: her cousin John hurls a book at her, opening a wound in her head (8); servants remove her by force to the red room, threatening to bind her with garters (9); when Jane becomes hysterical with fear, her Aunt Reed violently pushes her back into the room and locks her in (16). Later, this same aunt "crushe[s] [Jane] down on the edge of [her] crib . . . sh[akes her] most soundly and boxe[s] both [her] ears" (28). Even the comparatively kindly Bessie has a habit of "push[ing Jane] about" (30), though of

life of duty without sexual passion (becoming St. John Rivers' wife). . . (54).

all the residents of Gateshead she is the only one, apart from Jane's long dead Uncle Reed, who ever "pitie[s]" Jane (26).

Years later, on her return to Gateshead, the chill isolation of Jane's unilateral forgiveness of Mrs. Reed is also emphasized by touch: "I approached my cheek to her lips: she would not touch it. She said I oppressed her by leaning over the bed. . . . the feeble fingers shrank from my touch—the glazing eyes shunned my gaze" (300). But Jane's desire for loving touch persists, along with her equally persistent determination to remain capable of love herself. This is illustrated most poignantly in her description of her doll:

. . . human beings must love something, and in the dearth of worthier objects of affection, I contrived to find a pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow. . . *half fancying it alive and capable of sensation. I could not sleep unless it was folded in my night-gown; and when it lay there safe and warm, I was comparatively happy, believing it to be happy likewise.* (29, italics mine)

Despite what she must yet endure at the hands of Rev. Brocklehurst, we know Jane's situation has improved when, in her first moments at Lowood, Miss Temple "place[s] her hand on my shoulder," kindly attends to her physical comfort (perceiving that Jane is both tired and hungry), then "touch[es Jane's] cheek gently with her forefinger" while expressing her hope that Jane may be a "good child" (47). Miss Temple's loving maternal care recognizes the needs of both body and soul, in contrast to Rev. Brocklehurst's exhortations that one must be starved to feed the other: "'Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into these children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies. but you little think how you starve their immortal souls!'" (72). Some hours after Brocklehurst's public accusations, at the end of her almost eucharistic tea party with Jane and Helen, "Miss Temple embraced us both, saying, as she drew us to her heart:—'God bless you, my children!'" (86). Seed cake, hugs, intellectual stimulation and blessings: body, heart, mind and soul are alike nurtured by this ideal mother-figure.

For all her ethereality, Helen is similarly warm and tactile in relation to Jane. On her deathbed, Helen extends a loving concern for Jane's bodily as well as spiritual comfort: "'Jane, your little feet are bare; lie down and cover yourself with my quilt.' I did so: she put her arm over me, and I nestled close to her" (96). Here Helen mirrors Jane's own loving treatment of her doll, but with a "worthier object." Significantly, then, Helen's sermon on God as loving parent and heaven as home is delivered from within a warm, close, physical embrace. Both Miss Temple and Helen consistently embody Christian love through healing touch. And Jane learns this ministry well: her love for her doll, and the desperately lonely conditions in which it flourished, are mirrored yet again when Jane gives Adele both a kiss and a doll before departing on the fateful walk to Hay (134). When the maternal power is in her own hands, Jane ensures that even the little French girl for whom she feels no specially profound affinity has a "worthier"—that is, a responsive and demonstrative—"object of affection." The walk to Hay, of

course, brings Jane into physical contact with Rochester immediately, and her willingness to put her body into service for him, as a prop for his lameness, initiates their relationship.

In choosing Rochester's Christian name, with its connotations of healing touch, Brontë further develops this theme. She also marshals a shrewd criticism of the ambition-driven heroism that characterizes such men as St. John Rivers. St. Edward the Confessor, King of England, learned through "[e]arly misfortune the folly of ambition. . . . His reign was one of almost unbroken peace. . . . He undertook no wars except to repel an inroad of the Welsh, and to assist Malcolm III of Scotland against Macbeth. . . . Being devoid of personal ambition, Edward's one aim was the welfare of his people" (Phillips 1). As described by Mrs. Fairfax, Edward Rochester resembles King Edward in his thoughtful attention to domestic affairs: "'a just and liberal landlord'" and "'a very good master'" (126-27). Brontë would have known about St. Edward from many sources, including the references to him in *Macbeth* ("most pious Edward" and "holy King" [III.vi.24, 30]).

But St. Edward is most remarkable as "the first King of England to touch for the 'king's evil,'" and "many sufferers from the disease were cured by him" (Phillips 2). By referencing the healing touch of St. Edward, Brontë associates Jane and Edward Rochester's relationship with health and wholeness, as well as holiness. Their healing is mutual, moreover. Jane's ministrations contribute to Rochester's wellbeing at Ferndean, but his healing effect on her begins almost as soon as they meet, affecting many levels of health. Already basking in the warmth of Rochester's regard in Chapter 15, Jane is "[s]o happy, so gratified . . . with this new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred. My thin crescent-destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were filled up: my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength" (180-81).

For good reason, some readings of *Jane Eyre* have disregarded heterosexual desire as a positive motivating force, interpreting marriage as a tragic capitulation to patriarchy aborting the heroine's quest for self-fulfillment. But if we do consider heterosexual desire positively, we may see reasons to argue that the novel's conclusion is also positive. It is relevant to note here that disappointment is also the keynote of readings that focus on Rochester's symbolic castration. But perhaps this emphasis on symbolic castration, as opposed to actual castration, may sometimes divert our gaze too much from what remains so potently intact, through all Rochester's other bodily sufferings, and which represents so many levels of fulfillment for both himself and Jane. The sexual energy of their union is emphatically demonstrated by the birth of their son. Moreover, it further reminds us of the physical and emotional pleasures of holding a baby, yet another variation on the novel's theme of loving touch. Although he can now see perfectly well, Rochester is initially introduced to his "firstborn" by having its tiny warmth and softness "put into his arms" (577), a tactile gesture completing the circle of Jane and Rochester's sexual give and take. By such rhetorical strategies and images the novel challenges us to imaginatively revisit the idea of a woman's desire for heterosexual sex—on terms her mind and self-respect can accept—as a

<sup>5</sup>Marylu Hill nicely articulates Jane's choice: "Jane . . . eschews a life of passion which denies selfhood (becoming Rochester's mistress) as well as a

potentially positive, self-fulfilling drive, an important aspect of that "creation of herself" that Adrienne Rich declares Jane's marriage has accomplished (483).

### III

#### Closing the Family Circle

A number of critics thoughtfully doubt Jane's ultimate happiness<sup>6</sup> often citing the opening pages of Chapter 12 as proof that her life at the end of the novel is a self-diminishing detour from her original aspirations. Susan Zlotnick offers perhaps the most chilling assessment of Jane's married life with Rochester: ". . . the crippled Rochester's dependency on Jane ties her down as effectively as governessing did" (40). Perhaps such doubts may be qualified somewhat by yet another reading of the opening pages of Chapter 12 in context with the novel's conclusion.

What Jane laments in Chapter 12 is that her "new servitude" (101) at Thornfield has only helped her to clarify her desires, not to satisfy them. Identifying these desires with some precision is essential if we are accurately to assess her claims of happiness:

I longed for a power of vision . . . which might reach the busy world. . . . I desired more of practical experience . . . more intercourse with my kind . . . acquaintance with [more] variety of character, than was here within my reach. I valued what was good in Mrs. Fairfax, and what was good in Adele; but I believed in the existence of other and more vivid kinds of goodness, and what I believed in I wished to behold. (132)

The "power of vision which . . . might reach the busy world" does not necessarily indicate that Jane wants to live in a "busy" urban setting, and therefore could never be happy in the rural retirement of Thornfield, Moor House or Ferndean. Her emphasis on "power of vision" suggests that she wants mainly to see imaginatively, to learn about the wider world. And she gets what she wants only three chapters later, where she describes her conversations with Rochester:

I heard him talk with relish. It was his nature to be communicative—he liked to open to a mind unacquainted with the world glimpses of its scenes and ways. . . . I had a keen delight in receiving the new ideas he offered, in imagining the new pictures he portrayed, and following him in thought through the new regions he disclosed. . . . (180)

The potential for a "more vivid kind of goodness," as well, is clearly present in the intelligent and articulate Rochester, the "just and liberal landlord" and "good master" mentioned above.

After leaving Mr. Rochester, Jane has further experience of highly intelligent, articulate people who are perhaps even more "vividly good." She thrives in the company of Diana and Mary. Adele and Mrs. Fairfax are "good" people

but limited in the "power of vision" they can impart. Perhaps they, and not the rural location of Thornfield, or the English countryside generally, or domesticity itself, are the problem. Jane can live happily in the country—her Romantic appreciation of natural beauty seems to make it preferable to her. And at Ferndean she has companionship, sexual pleasure, and an intellectual equal with whom she can "talk . . . all day long."

Zlotnick's and others' concerns about the caregiving and domestic drudgery at Ferndean that may be consuming Jane's life and thwarting her aspirations must be answered. In Chapter 12 Jane states that women

need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation. . . . it is narrow-minded to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags . . . to condemn them . . . if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

(133)

The qualifiers "too" and "more" suggest that the human condition inevitably includes a degree of both restraint and stagnation, for "brothers" and "sisters" alike: but women should not be compelled to suffer more of it than their "more privileged fellow-creatures" (133). Jane already has at least one wider field—her painting and drawing, which are serious, artistic work for her, not a conventional lady's accomplishment. Her "autobiography" proves her mastery of yet another "field"—authorship. With Diana and Mary she studies a foreign language—German—which is in no way "necessary for her sex," but which is essential to the life of her intellect and imagination. Could it be that Jane's desire is primarily for these and similar intellectual and imaginative "fields," plus more freedom (and leisure, which costs money) to explore them?

Brontë's use of "confine" is also significant. Jane states that women should not be limited to "making puddings and knitting stockings"; she does not say that such work should never be done. Thus, the "field" remains open for Jane to cook and do needlework as well as to draw, paint, read and discuss. Further complicating our picture of Jane's desires and aspirations is the fact that she apparently relishes an occasional fling with homemaking, particularly of the celebratory kind. With her first home of her own, she gleefully immerses herself in domestic work, alongside her servant, with little regard to the class (or the gender) prestige maintained by standing aloof from domestic work: "Happy at Moor House I was, and hard I worked; and so did Hannah . . . charmed to see . . . how I could brush, and dust, and clean and cook. . . . it was delightful, by degrees, to invoke order from the chaos ourselves had made" (500). Diana and Mary accept Jane's domestic labor of love appreciatively: "I had the pleasure of feeling that my arrangements met their wishes exactly; and that what I had done added a vivid charm to their joyous return home" (503).

If, as twenty-first century feminists, we are still disappointed at Jane's pleasure in homemaking, it can be disconcerting to notice whose company we have joined. St. John, predictably, is both contemptuous and judgmental toward such matters, oblivious to their interpersonal function, their emotional and spiritual significance as gestures of love and hospitality: ". . . he feared, indeed, I must have bestowed more thought on the matter than it was worth" (501). To him, such work itself and the domestic love that informs it are alike worthless. But note how the "hero" suffers by comparison with the more domestic man of feeling, as Jane observes,

The humanities and amenities of life had no attraction for him, its peaceful enjoyments no charm. Literally, he lived only to aspire—after what was good and great, certainly: but still he would never rest; nor approve of others resting round him. As I looked at his lofty forehead, still and pale as a white stone—at his fine lineaments fixed in study—I comprehended all at once that he would hardly make a good husband: that it would be a trying thing to be his wife. . . . I saw he was of the material from which nature hews her heroes—Christian and Pagan—her lawgivers, her statesmen, her conquerors: a steadfast bulwark for great interests to rest upon; but, at the fireside, too often a cold cumbrous column, gloomy and out of place. (501-02)

It can be tempting for those of us who want to liberate women from "confinement" to menial drudgery to side with St. John against Jane when assessing the value and meaning of housework in this or any female bildungsroman. But St. John—whose agenda does not include any form of liberation of women—represents a radically Romantic, in some respects even Byronic, construction of the self as an utterly free and autonomous individual, never resting, always questing, most self-realized when least "tied down," entirely liberated from emotional interdependence with others, and thus easily able to view those others merely as means to an end—whether the end be sensual gratification, artistic or scientific achievement, imperial expansion, or religious imperialism. Such an ideal inevitably favors the more "great," traditionally masculine, "fields" of "effort." But this heroic ideal also fuels the very imperialism that feminist readings of *Jane Eyre* also, often, strongly deplore. If this model of the ever-aspiring, autonomous self may be rooted in masculine Romanticism, then it may be appropriate to counter it with an example of what Anne Mellor has helpfully termed "feminine romanticism," exemplified by the following passage from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*:

. . . if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquility of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved, Caesar would have spared his country, America would have been discovered more gradually, and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed. (40)

Shelley's portrayal of domestic life—for men as well as women—as a necessary check to imperialist aggression sug-

gests that there may be political as well as personal validity to Jane's choice of domestic, artistic and intellectual over more "heroic," foreign "fields" of "effort." Susan Meyer thoroughly discusses Brontë's indictment of St. John's complicity with imperialism throughout the conclusion of the novel (87-90), also citing Carolyn Williams's important article: "The novel's critique of St. John's dubious mediation is thus also intrinsically a critique of his missionary imperialism: his desire to 'hew down' others' 'prejudices of creed'" (Williams 578, qtd. in Meyer 88).

It might be argued that the sheer amount of text devoted to St. John, in the emphatic concluding paragraphs, suggests an unresolved tension or desire on Jane's part, a crack in the golden bowl of her marriage to Rochester. But it is helpful to recall the power that feelings other than sexual, vocational or even religious can also have over Jane's heart and mind. For example, it isn't necessary to conclude that Jane is in love with St. John to explain his emotional importance to her. The fact that Jane doesn't desire St. John sexually doesn't diminish his psychological importance to her as a "brother." This importance—shrewdly manipulated by St. John himself—is illustrated, among other places, in Chapter 35, as she describes her grief at his punitive emotional withdrawal, so much like Mrs. Reed's, but so much more a "refined, lingering torture" for Jane because it is such an unexpected and crushing reversal of his recent promise to accept her as his "sister":

He experienced no suffering from estrangement—no yearning after reconciliation; and though, more than once, my fast falling tears blistered the page over which we both bent, they produced no more effect on him than if his heart had been really a matter of stone or metal.

But Jane, still "caring too much for the love of human beings" cannot give up so easily on this relationship:

. . . happening to see him walking in the garden. . . and remembering, as I looked at him, that this man, alienated as he now was, had once saved my life, and that we were near relations, I was moved to make a last attempt to regain his friendship. (525)

This attempt does not succeed, but the feeling that inspires Jane to make it persists to the end of the novel.

Fundamental to her sense of self as Rochester's equal within the "customs and conventions" of the world (and equally important to her emotional wellbeing) is a loving and also socially respectable family who will affectionately own her, admitting her fully into "the group" from which Mrs. Reed habitually excludes her (3). Jane's longing for such "kindred" is sufficient in itself to explain her desire to be reconciled with St. John before her life story ends—if it were possible to be reconciled to him without sacrifice of herself. What a fantasy come true, if it were! But no more fantastic than the conversion of Rochester, and Charlotte Brontë is fully equal to imagining it.

Ending her life story with St. John reveals more self-congratulation than regret on Jane's part because it also proves that Jane's return to Rochester was "right" for St. John, too, because she knew more precisely what God was

<sup>6</sup>E.g., Susan Zlotnick, Maria Lamonaca, John Sutherland.

calling him to do than he did himself. Despite his confidence that "My prayers are heard!" Jane's direct appeal to know God's will succeeds where his prayers ultimately fail because she is more genuinely and humbly receptive, less blinded by pride and willfulness at the critical moment (535). The climactic scene with St. John, so dramatically elevated and intense in itself, also requires a formal, aesthetic balance which these two solemnly scriptural paragraphs provide. They also remind us of the high emotional value Jane places on family reconciliation. Mrs. Reed could not forgive Jane for resisting her tyranny, but St. John, it appears, can, engaging in a regular, brotherly correspondence with her from India.

But perhaps most significantly for Jane's quest, the final St. John paragraphs mirror, reverse and correct the novel's opening event—Jane's physical assault by her other cousin John—healing one of the deepest wounds of her past to enable present happiness. At Moor House, Jane's childhood misery at the hands of the bullying John is re-enacted in even more sinister form through St. John's sexual and spiritual bullying. But unlike her battle with John Reed, her conflict with St. John is finally resolved in adult reconciliation: she is able both to stop the abuse and to keep the "family" intact. Jane's happiness with Rochester is enhanced by knowing that St. John is happy because she does still love St. John, but in the only way she ever has, as a brother: "My Edward and I, then, are happy: and the more so because those we most love are happy likewise" (577-78). With less natural affinity for St. John than for Diana and Mary, Jane is thrown back on a rhetoric of formal piety to express her regard. But the most satisfying element of the conclusion is its structural symmetry in closing the abusive brother-figure frame, and thereby mending Jane's broken family circle. The dissipated thug, John Reed, who, Judas-like, hangs himself—an act of indirect matricide, precipitating his own mother's death (Thormahlen 207)—is replaced by a saintly cousin John, whom Jane can proudly love.

In addition to her quest for a viable sexual partnership, Jane's primary quest for a family of origin she can claim with love and admiration, and who will own her in return, has also been fulfilled—a prerequisite for her happiness in the family she creates as an adult. Jane has not veered from the path she embarked upon when she fled St. John's tyrannical embrace. Rather, St. John has had to bend toward acceptance of her choice, if not explicit recognition that she chose rightly for both of them. Thus St. John, like Rochester, has undergone a religious conversion, demonstrating a capacity for Christian humility and forgiveness such as he seemed incapable of before. Yet his transformation from patriarchal tyrant to saintly martyr would never have occurred if Jane had not wisely rejected him in pursuit of both sexual and spiritual fulfillment, on her own terms.

## Works Cited

- Book of Common Prayer of 1662, The. Standard Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Ed. Jane Jack and Margaret Smith. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975.
- Ellis, Lorna. *Appearing to Diminish: Female Development and the British Bildungsroman, 1750-1850*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1999.
- Gallagher, Susan VanZanten. "Jane Eyre and Christianity." *Approaches to Teaching Jane Eyre*. New York: MLA, 1993.
- Gibson, Mary Ellis. "Henry Martyn and England's Christian Empire: Rereading *Jane Eyre* through Missionary Biography." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27, no.2 (1999): 419-42.
- Hill, Marylu. "'I Am Afraid of My Will': Romance and Feminism in A.S. Byatt's *Possession* and Jane Campion's *The Piano*." *The Mid-Atlantic Almanack* 11 (2002): 43-66.
- Lamonaca, Maria. "Jane's Crown of Thorns: Feminism and Christianity in *Jane Eyre*." *Studies in the Novel* 34 (Fall, 2002): 245-63.
- Merrett, Robert James. "The Conduct of Spiritual Autobiography in *Jane Eyre*." *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 37, no.1 (1984): 2-15.
- Meyer, Susan. *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction*. Reading Women Writing Series. Ed. Shari Benstock and Celeste Schenck. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996.
- Phillips, G.E. "St. Edward the Confessor." (Transcribed by Ann Waterman.) *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, on-line edition. Volume V. Robert Appleton Company: 1909, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/O5J22a.htm>.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of MacBeth*. The Riverside Shakespeare, second edition. New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1997. 1355-1387.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. 1818. New York: Bantam, 1981.
- Sutherland, John. "Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?" in *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?: More Puzzles in Classic Fiction*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000: 68-80.
- Thormahlen, Marianne. *The Brontës and Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Ward, Maryanne C. "The Gospel According to Jane Eyre: The Sutte and the Seraglio." *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*. 35: 1 (2002): 14-24.
- Williams, Carolyn. "Closing the Book: The Intertextual End of *Jane Eyre*," in *Victorian Connections*. Ed. Jerone J. McGann. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1989.
- Zlotnick, Susan. "Jane Eyre, Anna Leonowens, and the White Woman's Burden: Governesses, Missionaries, and Maternal Imperialists in Mid-Victorian Britain." *Victorians Institute Journal* 24 (1996): 27-56.

Saint Mary's College

The Professional Adrift in the Victorian Novel (1) *Agnes Grey*

Robert D. Butterworth

Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*, an unusual novel in that it puts work center stage, presents us with a professional world that might be thought to be safer than that of the Victorian factory or mine, but is presented as a dangerous one in which work seriously threatens health. Agnes is presented as a professional adrift in inimical circumstances and the novel anatomizes what happens to the human personality caught up in such a predicament. Away from the immediate physical danger of the factory or mine, the peril the heroine is prone to is psychological, a drip-drip wearing down of her well-being and health.

What makes her susceptible to such a threat to mental and physical health is the very nature of professional work itself, a nature which makes the professional very vulnerable in a hostile environment. In industry, workers and management may or may not be working purely for money; they may or may not be totally emotionally uninvolved with the work and suffer Marxian alienation. Traditionally, none of this applies in the case of the professional. The heart of a profession is service, not profit; professionals do their work for its intrinsic value and meaning; no professional could make a more self-damning remark than to declare being "only in it for the money." Good professionals work sincerely and committedly, not just efficiently, and certainly not cynically; they believe in what they are doing. This, furthermore, involves that, for the professional, work is so intimate with the personality that there indeed *should* be no alienation; professionalism is continuous with the rest of the individual. When Mr. Weston gives such kind, patient and attentive help to Nancy Brown, is he being a dedicated professional or simply a good, religious man? To a large extent, the question posits a false distinction: his professional character springs out of, and is continuous with, his personal nature. Outside the clergy too, it is common for professionals to be inspired not even just by idealism and public spiritedness but by their deepest, often religious, beliefs. Florence Nightingale, for instance, wrote of how "to do that part of this world's work which harmonizes, accords with the idiosyncrasy of each of us is the means by which we may . . . render this world the habitation of the Divine Spirit in Man . . . The Kingdom of Heaven is within us" and of her sense of mission to provide for women in particular "an organisation in which they could be trained to be the 'handmaids of the Lord,'" eventually manifested itself in the Nightingale School for training nurses at St. Thomas's Hospital in London (cited in Holcombe (73-74).

Such characteristics of professionals may, in the best circumstances, make them admired; the very same qualities, though, in less sympathetic conditions make them vulnerable. The higher ideals at the heart of the professions make them actually quite frail and fragile: being driven by ideals rather than the profit motive means professionals are susceptible to disillusionment and demoralization in ways workers who

drudge merely for money are not. To rob professional work of its intrinsic value is to remove the meaning of that work; to frustrate the service professionals offer, even if the job is remunerative, knocks the heart out of the work being performed. Professionals can, then, be de-motivated in ways which are connected to the very nature of the professions. Furthermore, given the intimacy of personality and work in their case, professionals are potentially susceptible to the feeling that the rejection of their professional commitment, dedication and sincerity is tantamount to the rejection of the person.

Such are precisely the things that happen to Agnes Grey. In an environment in which her professional status is not acknowledged, she is left struggling to maintain her values in adverse conditions. Professional life degenerates into a losing battle between work and the human spirit, which costs her her well-being and health. The picture of professional work we might expect as fulfilling, meaningful and enjoyable is confounded and it emerges, in these circumstances, as poisonous.

*Agnes Grey* is set, and was written, at a time when professionalism was on the up-and-up. Not only were the older professions thriving—it was the period of the re-professionalisation of the clergy (O'Day 185) for example—but new professions were being established, as professional bodies were set up by such groups as architects in 1837, pharmacists in 1841 and mechanical engineers in 1847 (Perkin 255). As Harold Perkin points out, selection to the professions was on merit, and merit—"ability and diligence in one's chosen field of expertise"—was to be measured by other professional experts in the same field, principally through exams (Perkin 258). At the period of the novel, though, the professional status of the governess was uncertain. The sort of professional training Perkin refers to had begun, if rather falteringly. The first training school for governesses, St. Mary's Hall, Brighton, was set up in 1836 and soon had a long waiting list for its hundred places (Renton 65); the Governesses' Benevolent Institution, established in the early 1840s, was to begin running training courses for governesses at Queen's College, London, in 1848 (Renton 92; Goreau 42). Traditionally, though, as Alice Renton says, the governess had had no qualifications and did the job from no higher a motive than the need for money (1).

All this left the governess's entitlement to professional status very uncertain; and much of the suffering of Agnes Grey arises out of the conflict between her self-conception as a professional and the denial of that status to her by her employers. In turn, the latter means that her attempts to operate professionally are frustrated, with a consequent lack of fulfillment, demoralisation and then descent towards illness.

In "The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society," M. Jeanne Peterson points out the many tensions and contradictions in the position of the governess in Victorian society, including that she would

claim to be a lady, yet one who worked, in an age when the mark of the lady was that she was a woman of leisure (Peterson 10-11). Paid employment thus threatened her position (Peterson 5). Agnes is, of course, herself genteel and yet, owing to family misfortunes, ventures out into the world of work, and critics such as Betty Jay, in the relevant chapter of her study *Anne Brontë* (6-33), have explored this aspect of her predicament. Yet what is striking is that Agnes shows neither of the typical reactions of such women to the situation that Peterson discusses (13): she displays neither self-pity for the decline in her fortunes nor an excess of touchy pride (though she is justifiably hurt by some of the treatment she receives). Agnes goes into the world of work in a manner that potentially would resolve the contradictions of her position: for she goes as a professional and is expecting to be accorded respect not just because she is genteel but in accordance with the "dignity and social standing" Herbert Blumer notes a job that has become a profession gains (xi). As Daniel Duman puts it, with reference to Victorian males, "professional men were respectable and even gentlemanly, but they worked for a living" (113); they "were not subservient" to other social classes for "the ideal of service allowed the professions to reconcile the concept of the gentleman with the necessity to work for a living" (Duman 114). She is to be disappointed, though, and suffers, in incident after incident, a disheartening sense that she is not regarded as a professional; and in her work itself her attempts to maintain her professional identity have near disastrous consequences. The cluster of qualities and attitudes already identified as belonging to professionals are largely summed up, and extended, in Rosemary O'Day's list of concepts associated with the professions: "altruism," "sense of vocation," "service," "close relationship between professional and client," "code of practice" and "absences of the cash nexus" (186). The close relationship O'Day refers to might be said to involve good will, a genuine wish to help, on the part of the professional, and trust and reliance on the part of the clientele. Ernest Greenwood also notes the "impulse to perform maximally" as characteristic of professional conduct (15). Furthermore, professionals have autonomy—the freedom to use professional judgment in the exercise of professional skills. Though Agnes is untrained and belongs to no professional body with its accompanying code of practice, otherwise she is a thoroughgoing professional who displays the appropriate attitudes and qualities of character.

As she is about to become a governess she discusses her motives (68-9). One of these is certainly to earn money to assist the family in its financial difficulties, though this is not presented as any important part of the meaning of her working life; significantly, Brontë makes sure that Agnes later tells us that by the time she returns home with what she has "so carefully saved" she finds that "our debts . . . were nearly paid" and her father will take none of her money (109). (The money Agnes earns is later used to effect a partial rescue from her profession by the setting up of the school she runs with her mother.) All her other motives are spiritual: "to go out into the world" with all the adventure implied; to gain independence; to test herself and her "unknown powers"; to impress her parents and gain the self-respect of demonstrating that she is not a "helpless, thought-

less being" (69). Above all, though, she is driven by professional desires, to serve others. This is both the first motive she expresses—"I could teach little ones. . . and I should like it so much . . . I am so fond of children" (68)—and the one she dwells on at greatest length—"to be entrusted with the care and education of children! . . . To train the tender plants and watch their buds unfolding day by day" (69). At bottom, she has deeply spiritual, religious motives for taking on the job: she is confident that she will know how to achieve what she sees as central goals and purposes, "how to make Virtue practicable. . . and Religion lovely and comprehensible" (69). Essentially, she becomes a governess not with reluctance but with idealism, full of "bright hopes and ardent expectation" (70).

Once she takes up her posts, she shows all the qualities one might expect of a professional. There is much evidence of her dedication and commitment: as she tells Tom Bloomfield she is "'determined'" to inculcate the right moral attitudes into him (79), and employs "great labour and patience" in her attempts to educate Mary Ann (81). She displays a professional self-discipline and discretion—when she works for the Murrays, she remarks that she is the only person in the house who "endeavoured to make inclination bow to duty" (121). These qualities are seen in action when she suppresses her distaste at Tom's stories of his cruelty to birds, listening "'as complacently as I could'" in the hope of establishing an educationally useful rapport with him (79) or avoids criticizing her employers or going along with criticisms made by the senior Mrs. Bloomfield (96). Behaving with "unremitting firmness and integrity" (91), she declines to do herself good by unscrupulous flattery of the elder Mrs. Bloomfield, thus, she suspects, bringing on herself "much secret injury" (97). Her sincere, uncynical approach to the job and to the children in her charge contrasts starkly with that of the nurse who doesn't "'vex myself o'er 'em as you do'" (101). Despite her experiences with the Bloomfields, she retains her altruism when she goes to work for the Murrays, looking forward to older children being "more teachable" (114).

Agnes is doomed, however, to have to exercise her professional skills in highly unpropitious circumstances. Time after time, both the Bloomfields and the Murrays reveal that far from respecting her as a professional, they regard her as little more than a servant. Mr. Bloomfield's pointed references in his conversation with Agnes to his children as "'Master Bloomfield'" and "'Miss Bloomfield'" (82) are intended to underline that Agnes should be deferential even to these young children, in a way a social inferior such as a servant would. Hence too her offhand receptions on arrival at both Wellwood and Horton Lodge. Agnes's professional status is, ironically, only ever acknowledged when it can be used as a stick to beat her with, when she can be accused of failing to live up to the impossibly high standards her employers seem to expect of a professional: faced with Agnes's relative lack of success with Matilda in very difficult circumstances, Mrs. Murray takes it on herself to tell Agnes that a governess "'to prosper in her vocation. . . must devote all her energies to her business . . . it is just the same as any other trade or profession; they that wish to prosper must devote themselves body and soul to their calling'" (206-7).

Generally not thinking of her as a professional, they grant her neither respect nor professional autonomy; while she works for these families Agnes is forced to struggle on, both feeling undervalued and unable because of the restrictions on her autonomy to gain the private satisfaction and fulfillment available to a professional of seeing her work bear fruit—the "psychic satisfactions" Greenwood argues are the primary motive for professional work (17). As we follow Agnes's career, Brontë anatomizes the disintegration of a professional.

Agnes is a young and quite naïve woman when she begins her career—like many a novice teacher, she imagines that her pupils will be interested and amenable in the way, perhaps a little inaccurately, she remembers herself as being. Before taking up her first post, she says that she will use "the clear remembrance of my own thoughts and feelings in early childhood" as her "guide" in how to teach and treat them (69) and even after her experiences at Wellwood she tells her mother that "'I'm sure all children are not like theirs; for Mary and I were not; we always did as you bid us, didn't we?'" (111). What happens to Agnes, though, is much worse than a growth of sophistication as she gains experience. The adverse circumstances in which she has to work threaten her professional and even her personal identity.

She arrives to take up her post in the Bloomfield home strongly-motivated to do a good job by altruistic notions of service, hoping to "benefit the children" (86), and by the wish to gain self-respect by demonstrating to "my friends at home" (86) that she has the ability to hold down a job. Neither of these spiritual aims is to be fulfilled. Her problems in this post are that she is unable to be effective in educating the children because she is not allowed to use effective methods; she is then criticized by the family for not succeeding even though they themselves deprived her of the means. Agnes is unable to tempt the children with rewards and is not granted the professional autonomy to punish them, for "the parents reserved that privilege to themselves" (84). However slyly intended, there is a lot of truth in the senior Mrs. Bloomfield's comments about the "injudicious conduct of their mamma in so restricting my power, and neglecting to support me with her authority" (96). The job quickly turns sour. Agnes's idealistic wish to do a good job is frustrated by lack of means and she ends up having daily to witness, helplessly, her own failure. Her inability to make progress with the children speedily turns the job into "torment" (86). She may "long for success," but every day her efforts are "baffled" (93). The frustration of the job begins to affect her: despite her strictness with herself, Agnes cannot resist "the luxury of an unrestricted burst of weeping" (94). She is ever more strongly confronted with the futility of her work: as if it were not difficult enough to have any sense of achievement, during Uncle Robson's visit he undoes "in a few minutes, the little good it had taken me months of labour to achieve" (102). Furthermore, like any teacher, she serves two clienteles: on the one hand, the pupils she teaches and on the other her employers. If only one of these groups had appreciated her efforts, her morale might have been sustained; in practice, neither does, for the children "set at naught" (93) all her efforts and their parents "unjustly censured and misjudged" her (93).

It is, of course, Agnes's very professionalism that causes her to suffer so much in these circumstances. If she were doing the job cynically she could shrug off the children's lack of progress and the damage Uncle Robson does; it is only because she sincerely cares about her charges and takes a professional pride in her work that the lack of improvement in them causes her such distress. Equally, it is her genuine wish to serve that makes the rejection of her service by both her pupils and her employers so hurtful. Her dismissal, incredibly on the grounds of her lack of professional commitment (she is accused of not showing "diligent, preserving care" [107]), corrosive in its injustice. In her demoralized, discouraged state, she falls physically ill. Subsequently, Agnes thinks she has learned from experience: that her professional care and commitment were in excess at the Bloomfield's and that that made her ill, "for I was in a constant state of agitation and anxiety" (111); next time she will show professional detachment and "take things coolly" (111). She is to learn that such tensions within professional life are not resolved so simply. In practice it is not easy to remain detached when similar situations to those that arose at Wellwood recur at Horton Lodge, where once again it is quickly apparent that she is not going to be viewed as a professional. As Agnes ironically puts it, Mrs. Murray "honoured me with a visit" (119) and thinks that she has been "delightfully condescending" (120). Again she is expected to call her charges "Master" and "Miss."

She arrives still entertaining hopes of the work's being meaningful, even despite herself, with "some feeling of curiosity" (118) about her pupils, in spite of her fears of the worst which leave her with "no remarkable eagerness" to join them (118). It quickly becomes apparent that while the young Murrays would benefit from precisely the kind of training that Agnes, the religiously-inspired professional, would be most keen to provide for them—Rosalie, for instance, has many moral faults, all connected with the fact that "she had never been properly taught the distinction between right and wrong" (122)—all Agnes's dedicated attempts at meaningful work will be doomed. She is once again to be frustrated in her sincere intentions, for the Murray children are to be indulged, given "the tenderest treatment" (120), and not, for example, "the least exertion" to be demanded of Matilda (124). This inevitably means that there is no outcome to her education and thus no sense of achievement or fulfillment for Agnes. Deprived once again, and even more severely, of professional autonomy, Agnes is told that only Mrs. Murray herself is allowed to remonstrate firmly with the children, and even her teaching methods are prescribed for her:

"His minute portions of Latin grammar, etc., were to be repeated over to him, till he chose to say he knew them; and then, he was to be helped to say them: if he made mistakes in his little easy sums in arithmetic, they were to be shewn him at once, and the sum done for him. . . ."

(125)

Despite her avowals of cool detachment, Agnes is too much the caring professional to follow these rules constantly, because "it was against my conscience to do so" (125-6),



though when she does not, it leads only to reprimands from her employer and she is eventually forced to let her pupils go on in the same pointless ways. She can only watch despondently as Matilda "slurred over" her work, in a way "least satisfactory to me" (123).

Robbed of all self-respect— "degraded" as she puts it (128)—in a household where she has no authority even over the hours of study, Agnes, perhaps even worse off here than at Wellwood, quickly slips towards a professional and personal crisis. Her pupils show no signs of respect or care for their governess: Rosalie "seldom lost sight. . . of my being a hireling, and a poor curate's daughter" (121); when it comes to the times of meals and the hours of study, they treat Agnes very much as a hired hand: "my judgment or convenience was never once consulted" (127). Such thoughtless, inconsiderate behavior towards her, the lack of any reciprocity for her genuine concern for them, begins to undermine Agnes's will to care about her pupils; her altruism and dedicated service even under difficult circumstances being unvalued, she begins to think herself "a precious fool for caring so much about them" (129). To make matters worse, at the same time that they are showing a demoralizing contempt for her as a professional and disrespect to her as a person, by yawning or looking out of the window during lessons, they expect her professional commitment to be total, and she is "rebuked for inattention" at the slightest sign of lack of wholehearted focus on them (128). She begins to wonder whether her character is such that she is temperamentally unsuited to her job, lacking sufficient "Christian humility" (129). Agnes thus finds herself in a professional crisis. She is in a cleft stick: aware that she is a "fool for caring" she is nevertheless aware that cool detachment is not the simple option it seems. Indifference and a mere businesslike attitude to her work would be a healthier option, but even if achievable by a truly committed professional, it would thus undermine her whole status as a professional, and deprive the work of all meaning. On the other hand, professional duty and a sense of vocation involve a commitment to her pupils which in turn, because they are so unresponsive and unappreciative, causes her much pain. There seems to be no way in which the professional can function without considerable personal cost in such inimical conditions.

Having brought her heroine to this crisis, the author now begins to rescue Agnes. At this point her pupils start, for the first time, to show some appreciation of her, however grudging—"some symptoms of esteem" such as saying that "her approbation was sincere" and that "she was very obliging, quiet and peaceable in the main" (129). More importantly, it is now that she encounters Mr. Weston.

In the short term, Weston provides her with vital moral support. He is the first person in Agnes's working life to show respect for her: in circumstances in which she knows that she would have been "invisible to Hatfield, or any other gentleman of those parts", Weston "acknowledged my presence by a slight bow," thus recognizing her as an equal, both as a human being and as a fellow professional (158). Equally, she recognizes in him a validation of her own professional values, noticing his dedication as a member of the newly re-professionalized clergy. Early on she is impressed by how "he read the lessons as if he were bent on

giving full effect to every passage" (138) and says prayers "earnestly and sincerely" (138), and she likes "the earnest simplicity" of his preaching manner (139). Later she is to remark on his commitment, describing him as a man "of firm purpose," and on the sincerity of his "firm faith," "ardent piety" and "true benevolence" (156). He is a man on the same wavelength as her, a kindred spirit when she has been without anyone before whom she could "freely speak my thoughts with any hope of sympathy or even comprehension" (154).

In the longer term Mr. Weston is to provide an escape route for Agnes from a professional life that has been an agony. By the time Agnes gets to know Weston, everything has gone wrong: the adventure has turned out to be a series of misadventures; the independence she has gained is grim and lonely; she has tested herself, but the process of proving herself to be dogged and to have strength of character has been a painful rather than an exhilarating one; far from impressing her parents, she is sacked from her first job; self-respect has been difficult to maintain, let alone bolster, when she is treated by no-one with respect and there is little visible result of all her efforts with her pupils; and all her professional desires have been frustrated. Her life as a governess has turned out to be one of "'toil, and trouble, and vexation'" (219). By the time she is teaching at the school she and her mother have opened, her motives for working have been reduced to the core: the external pressure of the need for money and, the last remnants of her enthusiasm for service, the core religious values out of which her professional attitudes sprang, now no longer manifesting themselves as spontaneous dedication but simply as duty:

"Should I shrink from the work that God had set before me, because it was not fitted to my taste? Did not He know best what I should do, and where I ought to labour? . . . No; by His help I will arise and address myself diligently to my appointed duty. If happiness in this world is not for me, I will endeavour to promote the welfare of those around me." (225)

Professional life having turned out to be so unfulfilling, it seems for a time that work must merely be tolerated as she begins to seek happiness and fulfillment instead in, private life: as she says, "'I could. . . be happy in a house full of enemies, if I had but one friend, who truly, deeply, and faithfully loved me'"—and if that friend were Weston, "'though toil, and trouble, and vexation might surround me, still . . . it would be too much happiness for me to dream of!'" (219). In her chapter on the novel in *Anne Brontë: The Other One* (Langland 96-117), Elizabeth Langland has examined how the novel traces Agnes's journey to independence; but having gained that independence, Agnes is then able to *choose* marriage as a happier alternative to her profession. Given Agnes's profoundly moral and religious nature, Weston is a soulmate not just professionally but personally. Having been assured that her mother can afford to hire an assistant at the school they have recently opened, Agnes leaves teaching and opts for the more congenial life of a wife and mother, a life of "comfort and contentment" (251).

Agnes Grey's story, then, is one of a woman who sets

out into the world dedicated to serving others through her work. She begins her work sanguinely, working conscientiously and with commitment, only to find her efforts wasted and unappreciated. She does her best but her endeavours are unacknowledged. All this depresses and disillusion her. In adverse circumstances, work comes to present a real, oppressive threat to her spirit; far from offering professional fulfillment, it also frustrates her quest for self-respect and her other spiritual aims and leaves her disillusioned, demoralized and on the path to being destroyed as a professional and a person until private life rescues her.

#### Works Cited

- Blumer, Herbert. "Preface" in *Professionalization*. Ed. Howard M. Vollmer and Donald L. Mills. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966: xi.
- Brontë, Anne. *Agnes Grey*. 1847. Ed. Angeline Goreau. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1988.
- Duman, Daniel. "The Creation and Diffusion of a Professional Ideology in Nineteenth Century England," *Sociological Review* 27 (1979): 113-38.

## The Professional Adrift in the Victorian Novel: (2) *New Grub Street*

Robert D. Butterworth

In "The Professional Adrift in the Victorian Novel: (1), *Agnes Grey*," I argued that Anne Brontë depicts her heroine as a professional who struggles in a society that does not recognize her as such, governessing not having been totally established as a profession. In *New Grub Street*, the problem is the opposite one. Another novel focussing on work, *New Grub Street* also presents the world of the professions as a health- and even life-threatening one. Again adrift in an adverse environment, the professionals portrayed are, too, engaged in an unequal battle between work and the human spirit, and find themselves preoccupied with how to cope with their predicaments as much as with the work itself. This time, though, the predicaments are reversed. Agnes Grey was a professional before governessing had been fully established as a profession; Reardon and his associates are professionals as writing is ceasing to be a profession. It is this that lies at the root of the central characters' misery, whether one sees them, as Markus Neacey does in his study of the novel (1-11), as people with "lost illusions," or as, in John Gross's words, "men and women who know that they are not being allowed to live the lives they deserve" (xii).

The reasons for their vulnerability are similar to those lying behind Agnes Grey's predicament. For reasons explained in the aforementioned article, the professionals' very sincerity, earnest commitment, integrity, idealism, altruism, their uncynical approach, the frequent deep spiritual dimension to their work, the good faith involved in

- Goreau, Angeline. "Introduction." *Agnes Grey*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1988: 7-47.
- Greenwood, Ernest. "Attributes of a Profession." *Social Work* 2 (1957) (44-55); reprinted in Vollmer and Mills (10-19).
- Holcombe, Lee. *Victorian Ladies at Work*. Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1973.
- Jay, Betty. *Anne Brontë*. Tavistock: Northcote House, 2000.
- Langland, Elizabeth. *Anne Brontë: The Other One*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989.
- O'Day, Rosemary. "The Clerical Renaissance in Victorian England and Wales" in *Religion in Victorian Britain*. Vol. 1. Ed. G. Parsons. Manchester: Manchester UP 1988: 184-212.
- Perkin, Harold. *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.
- Peterson, M. Jeanne. "The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society" in *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*. Ed. Martha Vicinus. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1972: 1-17.
- Renton, Alice. *Tyrant or Victim?: A History of the British Governess*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1991.

Open University

their relationship with their clientele and other professional qualities, all intimate with the personality itself, make them all the more susceptible to threats to their health and well-being.

As regards the circumstances in which they suffer, in commenting on the thriving of the professions and professional attitudes in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, Rosemary O'Day remarks on how "rather than being characteristic of industrialization, the professions can be seen as an anachronistic phenomenon existing in industrial, urban society" (186). The professions represent an alternative system of values to that of the dominant economic ideology, and history has shown that society's tolerance of such "anachronisms" is more fragile than it might appear. Harold Perkin analyses at length (II 472-519) nothing less than a "backlash against professional society" (II 472) in late twentieth-century Britain, and in, for instance, education and the National Health Service "anachronistic" professionalism was superseded by the values and practices of the market, in the process putting professional and public service values under severe pressure, perhaps even destroying them.

It is in the very nature of the professions to be vulnerable in this way. Perkin points out that in the case of the first profession, clergymen were granted a living in the form of a guaranteed income set aside by the laity. The money was "not as a reward for their service," and once they had been installed, they were free to be diligent or otherwise (Perkin I 253-4). With the indulgence of society, then, professionals by this model have had a great degree of

professional autonomy. This, however, lasts only as long as society views a particular profession in this tolerant light. Perception seems to be the vital thing. A profession comes under threat when the public stop seeing themselves as the beneficiaries of its members' special skills and expertise and start seeing themselves as the professionals' customers and paymasters; the relationship of trust and tolerance with the professionals is then broken. In terms of popular sayings, the change of perception is from "Doctor knows best" to "The customer is always right." At this point, society refuses to let the professionals operate in their own way and professional autonomy is lost. While society wants to continue to draw on the professionals' skills, the exercise of professional judgment is taken away or severely limited, and the professionals—if the term still applies—must follow the will of society. This process need not be malicious, nor even conscious: the public may impose such an imperative while being barely aware that they are doing so. Nevertheless, the scale of the change in professional life involved here is underlined by William Goode's comment that the "service orientation" at the heart of a profession "means that the professional decision is . . . properly . . . based on the need of the client. The practitioner defines, of course, what the client 'needs'; it may not always be what the client wants" (36).

This is precisely what is happening in *New Grub Street*. Writing had not been a full-blown profession for long when Gissing wrote his novel. As Perkin points out, in an earlier age, writing had been the province of gentlemen, such as Dryden and Pope, for whom it served as a "pastime" (I 255), and of low-paid hacks, such as Defoe or Johnson, in the original Grub Street. In the nineteenth century, though, writing had become a profession, with writers such as Walter Scott, Robert Southey and William Cobbett able to make a "comfortable living" out of it (Perkin I 255). On a "sublime level" (Perkin I 256) its status as a profession was marked by its prestige, as reflected for instance by Carlyle in "Heroes and Hero-Worship" in which he refers to the "Man-of Letters Hero" as "our most important modern person . . . the light of the world; the world's Priest:—guiding it like a sacred Pillar of Fire in its dark pilgrimage through the waste of Time" (qtd. in Perkin I 256). The world of *New Grub Street* is in bitterly ironic counterpoint, with its desperate, poverty-stricken writers, to this grand conception of the writer, but it is the practical factors behind its status as a profession that are most relevant to this study. By the twentieth century, writing was once more the province of hacks and people of independent wealth, for as Angus Wilson points out, serious writers "would need private means like James or Virginia Woolf or patrons like Joyce; even to get a start . . . would need, like Shaw, to marry money" (Wilson 124). The end of the period during which writing was a profession came at the time in which *New Grub Street* is set, and what Gissing portrays is precisely the disintegration of a profession, leaving Reardon and his associates as professionals adrift in an environment in which their values no longer obtain.

What is depicted as destroying writing as a profession is the emergence of what John Gross calls "the communications industry" in "its modern proportions" (vii), itself a product of the growth of mass literacy following the 1870 Education

Act. (By 1890, illiteracy was down to 5% [Keech 159]). The implications of this apparently benign social development are, from the professional writer's point of view colossal, as is evident from the novel. A new "'quarter-educated'" (496) audience requires a different kind of reading matter, as is exemplified by *Chit-Chat* as conceived by Whelpdale for an audience that "'can just read, but are incapable of sustained attention,'" and who "'want . . . the lightest and frothiest of chitty-chatty information'" (496). This has profound implications for the autonomy and integrity of professional writers. Writers are no longer to produce what their creative spirit dictates: they are apparently no longer entitled to write what they like and expect their audience to rise to the challenge of their work, however demanding. This would seemingly be impossible for the new, modestly-educated readers; instead the readers—or customers or market—begin to impose their imperative on writers. However indirect the process, the audience want writers to exercise their professional skills, but allow the readers to dictate what kind of pieces the authors will produce. This in turn presents a challenge to writers: will they maintain their artistic integrity or will they produce hack work for money? And so the assault on writing as a profession takes place as the values and attitudes of the market are introduced into the literary world.

This process of change is explicitly presented in *New Grub Street*, in which the language of the market is recurrent: literature has become "a commodity for the day's market" (137); a novel by Whelpdale is judged to have "'no market value'" (177); and men of the moment like Milvain consider themselves part of a "trade" not a "profession" (41). The market brings its values with it: the recurrent Darwinian language of the novel—as when Milvain talks about "'the struggle for existence among books'" (493) or when Marian tells Milvain that he is "'better fitted to fight your way'" (535) than either Reardon or Biffen were—reflects the ruthless competitiveness characteristic of the industrial world. And where the market takes over, there is no room for professional values and practices; as Robert MacIver suggests (50-51), the "ideal of service" is deeply at odds with the "ideal of profits" (51).

What *New Grub Street* depicts is a group of writers reacting to the collapse of a dispensation. Its central character, Edwin Reardon, is a thoroughgoing professional. He works with idealism, earnestness and integrity, as he says, "'shrinking from conscious insincerity of workmanship . . . I strive to make it as good as possible'" (83-4) and is repulsed by the notion that "'It's good enough for the market'" (83). His early work was done with complete integrity, for its intrinsic worth, not as a means to an end: "'I never asked myself what I should get for the book. . . . The work was done for its own sake.'" (234). He is inspired by a sincere love of literature: to read the *Odyssey* is "delightful" (155) and his books are "dear old friends" (170); and a real sense of vocation has brought him to the literary world despite his health always being frail and a job involving "open air exercise" being better for him (88). He sees making "'a trade of an art'" as an "'unpardonable sin'" (81) and even when he tries "'my efforts are utterly in vain'" (82). He hasn't got it in him to betray his own integrity even if he wants to: as Milvain puts it, "He won't make concessions,

or rather, he can't make them; he can't supply the market'" (38). Faced with a working environment driven by market forces, Reardon significantly recognizes that he could not succeed under these circumstances, but would need to be the man of independent means that writers in the age before or after his were: "'to have kept at my best, I must have been content to publish once every two or three years. The position was untenable with no private income'" (412).

In reality, he finds himself a professional man in totally adverse circumstances; and Gissing anatomizes the strategies he resorts to and the straits he is forced into in this inimical environment in which his life increasingly falls apart. He will indulge in resentment at the success of others less deserving, saying that "'if I speak bitterly, well, I am suffering from my powerlessness'" (84). He will vent his frustration in making harsh judgments on Amy, knowing "in secret" that they are unjust (375); or ease his anguish by subjecting Biffen's writing to harsh criticism, "suffering" having done away with "sensitive reticence" (376). "Sullen anger" (224) will occasionally surface, as when he lashes out at Milvain, whose talk in front of Amy, Reardon asserts, "'has cost me too much'" (299). He will take refuge in fantasy, imagining scenes in which Amy is "begging his forgiveness" (374) or in picturing what might have been if he had married "'the kind of wife indicated for me by circumstances'" (404). He will comfort himself with self-pity, and wallow in his suffering, regarding his seedy clothes "with pleasurable contempt" (377).

All the writers caught up in this situation have to decide on their response to it. One possibility is the one Reardon chooses: to leave the job. This intention is in Reardon's mind from the first time we meet him: "'it's all over with me. I don't think I shall write any more'" (79); and he repeatedly talks about leaving, toying with the idea of a job "'in a newspaper office'" (109) and eventually taking a hospital clerkship. Fatally, though, he does not actually leave the literary world behind until the exact mid-point of the novel, when he tells Carter that he is not using the clerkship to subsidize his writing (293); and by this time the damage has been done and Reardon's fate is effectively sealed.

There are two reasons for his delay. One is that it is difficult for him to accept that this environment really is unpropitious now for a man like him. Remarks of his repeatedly reflect his difficulty in accepting that the old professional world to which he naturally belonged is no more and that he must take a practical attitude towards finding a new niche for himself: it takes him a long time to get the bit between his teeth enough to engage seriously with the idea of finding alternative employment. While he will readily declare that "'I must cease to write altogether'" (196), practical proposals for what to do instead remain unformed: asked what his planned alternative occupation is he replies, "'I wish to Heaven I knew'" (196). Eventually he acknowledges that the plan for him to go off on his own to write was just another form of denial—"putting off the evil day" of recognizing he couldn't make a go of writing in the contemporary environment (263). He fools himself for a long time that he can make some accommodation with this market-led world without abandoning his professional values. "'I am quite

willing to do the kind of work that will sell'" he tells Amy (81), but the inner nature out of which his professional character springs is already in rebellion: "'power doesn't answer to the will'" (82). He makes himself write *Margaret Home* while "in passionate revolt against the base necessities which compelled him to put forth work in no way representing his healthy powers, his artistic criterion" (239). In the end he is simply unable to compromise enough to satisfy the market, and his next novel is rejected.

The other reason has to do with Amy. Reardon is an emotionally needy man who "hungered for sympathy" (95) and whose "nature demanded frequent assurance of affection" (226). These emotional needs are met, naturally enough, by his wife. He increasingly realizes, though, that he cannot be confident of such support through thick and (when he would need it most) thin: "so far from helping him to support poverty, she perhaps would even refuse to share it with him" (189). Amy married him for the prestige of being the wife of a distinguished writer: she married him on the basis that "'You will be a great man'" (95); she wants to "shine with reflected light" as the wife of a man of "distinction" (163). To hold his marriage together, Reardon must continue to try to achieve such status and earn the large sums of money she was also expecting; when they part, that "his pockets were empty" has been even more destructive of her love than his failure to make "a great name" (256).

The first of these factors preventing his seeing the urgency of leaving literary work and the second pressurizing him into persisting in it, Reardon continues to allow himself to be put through all an alien and hostile environment inflicts on him. The result is ultimately his destruction, worn down by poverty, his lack of success as a writer, the consequent compromises, the loss of his wife, not to mention the death of their son, all except the last the direct result of the de-professionalization of the literary world. (And Willie's death is indirectly linked to it, for he falls fatally ill because, as Amy tells Reardon, his mother has felt it "'impossible . . . to go on always living away from you'" (481), and in her misery, accepted an invitation to go to Brighton.) His health begins to fail, and, in his demoralized state he exacerbates the problem by not looking after himself: he continues to go to work when ill because "To what purpose spare himself? It was not as if life had any promise for him" (389), and travels to see his wife and son while shaking with illness, in the middle of winter. His death, ironically in the kind of seaside resort people visit for the sea air and other health-giving properties, is that of a professional man killed by his attempts to cope with the collapse of his profession.

The second depicted reaction among its members to the taking over of the literary world by the market is that of Alfred Yule: to try to carry on. At fifty, Yule has little realistic option. Aware he is a failure, he has no choice but to plod on, knowing both that it is too late for him to be anything but a failure and that it is too late to try to establish himself in another profession. Embittered, he cannot but persist grimly in the rut he is in, despite his dissatisfaction, and keep hoping for some redeeming development that will stop his career's being so crushingly disappointing.

The roots of his failure lie in factors pre-dating the changes in the literary world—a man who "could do nothing

light-handedly" (67), his work is "learned, copious, occasionally mordant in style; but grace had been denied him" (111)—but the literary world as it now is certainly is not more favorable to his qualities. His "pedantic individuality" is at odds with "unpropitious circumstances" (68) and his attempts to write a novel and a play have ended in failure because he had not "pliancy enough" to write for the market and achieve "mercantile success" (127); the works were marred by his professional qualities, the "sincerity" of his workmanship, and the integrity which makes him aim at "works of art" (127). "Tormented" (127) by his failure, he hopes that he "might even yet taste the triumphs" (127) of success and clutches ever more desperately at straws and the hope of "making himself a power in the world of letters" (127). In his clear-sighted moments, he knows that the tide of the times and of history is against him: in his heart of hearts, he knew in advance that he wasn't going to get the editorship of *The Study*, being too poor, lacking the social connections and being too old "in the face of energetic young men" (135). In truth, his moment is past, as Marian recognizes: "he was not in touch with the interests of the day" (350). Nevertheless, the importance to him of succeeding—it is so vital to him to achieve that he will never stop trying to make his name "unless he killed himself" (123) in the effort—that his lack of success, his "ever increasing sense of neglected merit" (125) merely ups the ante, making him all the more desperate to succeed. He is caught up in a vicious spiral in which his frustration leads to his "exciting the hostility" (126) of Polo, Fadge and other prominent men on the literary scene, ensuring his continuing lack of success. And if he takes out his bitterness on Marian by tyrannizing over her, his transparent, humiliating and embarrassing attempts to ingratiate himself with her when he wants to use her inheritance to set up a new magazine with himself as editor is perhaps a striking example of how "an embittered man is beset by evil temptations" (127). Already, at times, troubled by his conscience that he has blighted Marian's life and her marriage prospects, he is nevertheless willing to risk her money on such a magazine, for it would not only rescue him from "mere drudgery" (349), but would vindicate his life and give it meaning and justification: "If I could see myself as the editor of an influential review, all my bygone toils and sufferings would be as nothing; I should rejoice in them as the steps to this triumph" (351).

Pathetically needful of praise and encouragement—he is inordinately cheered up by praise even from Hinks, an author he regards as his inferior (122): he is equally pathetically bogged down in petty squabbles which he cannot rise above, nor feel as petty, even if his intellect tells him they are: "from a philosophical view, such things are unspeakably petty. But I am not much of a philosopher. . . . Defeat in life is defeat, after all; and unmerited failure is a bitter curse." (352). His disappointment and bitterness mean that he becomes mired in these petty slights, which become magnified, when every new affliction beats him further down and seems to drag him further back, even though, in truth, the battle is already lost. Without the cushioning of success, Yule is a man on his knees who feels keenly every new blow. Marian's efforts to point out that he shouldn't let "narrow-

minded" enemies "triumph over you" and that it is "much better to ignore your enemies" (352) are of no avail, and so his grudges are harbored indefinitely: his quarrel with Fadge pre-dates the start of the novel and is never resolved, and he is incapable of overcoming his essentially unfounded antagonism against Milvain. He also takes out his resentment on his wife. Yule was bold in marrying a woman socially beneath him, at a time when he was supremely self-confident (despite his lack of "brilliant parts," "No matter; his name should be spoken among men" [123]). If he had, as he expected, carried all before him, he would have been able to insist on her acceptance in social circles; as things have turned out, others call the tune, others sit in judgment, and she is an "embarrassment" (131) to be blamed for his lack of success, for without such a wife as Fadge had, "of good social position," he has found himself unable to go into society and establish contacts "among the people with whom I ought naturally to associate" (136); and this in turn has left him cut off from people who could have helped him to get on. Constantly envious of the triumphs of people he sees as less deserving, he and his fellow failures console themselves by deriding other writers, though Yule is privately ashamed afterwards of the unworthiness of such behavior (133).

There is to be no redemption for Yule. In competition, like everyone else, with *Anno Domini* to achieve what he wants in life, he is in the end emphatically defeated by a blindness brought on by age, an affliction that brings additional bitterness because it makes him inescapably aware that it will now be impossible to gain the success he so craved—"His life was over—and wasted" (446). After a lifetime of striving he is bitter that all his work has not yielded success: "'many long years of unremitting toil'" have led only to "'failure and destitution'" (460) and he ends the novel prematurely aged.

A third response to the entry of market values into the literary world is that of Biffen: defiance. Biffen represents *in extremis* the rejection of the loss of the writer's autonomy and the reduction of the professional to a mere functionary whose expertise is used to provide what the customer demands. At all times, he follows the dictates of his art. Biffen's writing is determined by creative and artistic considerations: he aims in his novel for "absolute realism" in a way that is a development of the tradition, a new twist on the approaches of both Zola and Dickens (173). Faced with a choice between wealth and success on the one hand and artistic integrity on the other, Biffen chooses artistic integrity; and if that involves, as he is only too aware that it does, utter poverty and worldly failure, so be it. His writing is an artistic enterprise, not a marketing exercise: he is perfectly aware that his novel will be "unutterably tedious" to "the ordinary reader" (174). His priorities are solely artistic—the work ends up "as good as he could make it"; the last thing on his mind is "coin of the realm" (463).

The fourth response Gissing depicts to the taking over of the literary world by the market is adaptation: the response of Whelpdale and Milvain. Neither man has the outlook of the professional. Little more than a hanger on in the literary world, Whelpdale is notable for his "insincerity" (246) and lack of integrity, unscrupulously presenting himself as a

"literary adviser" able to guide aspiring writers despite being "a man who can't get anyone to publish his own books" (195). That he eventually reaps rich rewards, with *Chit-Chat*, is entirely due to his adaptation to the new conditions of the literary world: it is shrewdly aimed at a specific and lucrative market.

Milvain too signally lacks the qualities that are the mark of the professional. The opening of the novel quickly indicates that this is a persistently self-centred man, from whom we are hardly to expect altruism: the death of a man by hanging he simply sees in terms of "'satisfaction . . . that it is not oneself'" (35). A facility for words is what has brought him into the literary world, but he has no belief in its values. He openly states that he has no sense of vocation and that writing has an extrinsic, not an intrinsic, value to him: "I shall never . . . write for writing's sake, only to make money" (150). No more than an "exercise" (214) and, as he openly says, composed with no eye on posterity, Milvain's writing has no spiritual motivation or dimension, but is merely "a business"; he scorns the idea of writing "at the dictation of the Holy Spirit" (43). He lacks the integrity of the professional: albeit benignly, he is able to reassure Reardon of "good notices" for Reardon's as yet unwritten book (109) and, at least according to Yule, will write "anything that's asked of him" (203). His lack of integrity and sincerity is soon after reflected in a laudatory review he writes of a book he really considers to be "pompous idiocy" (213). With regard to his readers he displays bad faith, baldly stating that "I shall always despise the people I write for" (105) and referring even to his more educated readers as people "'who can't distinguish between stones and paste'" (44).

On the other hand, he is very well attuned to the new conditions obtaining in the literary world. He is very market-orientated, opining that the "'successful man of letters . . . thinks first and foremost of the markets'" (38). Blessed with an ability to spot the way the market is moving—"people will write shilling books" (84)—he is too a keen advocate of market research, telling his sister who will need to "hit the taste of the new generation of Board school children," that he will "'inquire into the state of the market'" and will "'write a paper on the characteristics of that new generation'" (65). Books are commodities; writing "'is a business'" (43).

Milvain's *modus operandi* and qualities of character make him at home in this world. He has lots of "front" and is a shameless self-promoter, for "'modesty helps a man in no department of modern life. People take you at your own valuation'" (69); he understands well that not merit but the show of merit is what counts in this environment. He is a networking wheeler-dealer who does not "'neglect any acquaintance'" (65) and has the requisite exploitative attitude towards others. Having met Alfred Yule, he speculates on "'whether he could be any use to me or not'" (69). He is willing too to show the sort of ruthlessness that belongs to the competitive business world: "I shan't allow anything to come in the way of my material advancement" (150). Ironically enough, though, for all his apparent embracing of the cut-throat attitudes of this world, he himself is being feather-bedded, his mother indulging him as he tries to make his

way: as his sister Maud declares, "'we are sacrificed to him as we always have been. . . . we can't live on what he leaves us'" (41).

There will always be people who will, without conscience, spy the main chance for themselves as one dispensation is replaced by another, and Milvain is not portrayed straightforwardly as a villain. Nevertheless, we gain some disturbing insights into the kind of people who can behave as he does from what is revealed of his motivation and of aspects of his character that enable him to behave in the way he does. As we have seen Milvain does not even think of gaining fulfillment from the work itself; writing is a mere means to an end. His obvious motivation is money and success—his intention of making "'my thousand a year'" (38). Equally insistent, though, is a deep psychological need to feel superior to others. At the beginning of the novel, Maud's accusation to him is that "'you enjoy the prospect'" of Reardon's ruin (38), as if he enjoys a sense of superiority because he has been too clever to fall into the trap that Reardon has. He doesn't take kindly to the idea that, even so, Edwin might be rescued by an inheritance: "'No no . . . they won't get anything at all'" (39). He privately acknowledges there is truth in Reardon's accusations that he undermined Edwin with Amy, with "little depreciatory phrases, wrong rather in tone than in terms, which came of his irresistible desire to assume superiority whenever it was possible" (301). He feels very keenly that, in society, "'Want of money makes me the inferior of the people I talk with, though I might be superior to them in most things'" (363). Success is both proving himself, and proving himself to be superior, and making the money that will stop his being regarded as inferior.

Beyond this, it is his stunted moral and emotional development that enables him to act as he does. Morals always seem somehow disconnected from the core of Milvain's personality; they are not part of his integrity but in some way held in a detached form, as is evident when he kindly promises Reardon "good notices in a lot of papers" (109) for an as yet unwritten book. His attitude to evil seems equally detached, meaning that he can calmly announce that he will "'do many a base thing in life just to get money and reputation'" (149), apparently on the basis that morality doesn't count in some areas of life—all's fair in love and work. This moral and emotional immaturity is reflected in other ways too: he seems to have only a limited understanding of moral concepts such as sincerity. Expecting to gain credit with Marian for not adopting "a false tone," unlike other "'men who have their way to make'" (359)—his explanation for the unfortunate remarks he made to Amy about her husband—he is disconcerted when Marian is shocked. His honesty is apparently a tactic in his wooing of her, for he thinks "the unusual openness of his talk was attractive to her," and he immediately reassesses whether he should be sincere—"Ought he then to have dealt with her less frankly?" (359). His moral and emotional shallowness and superficiality are ultimately exposed in his affair with Marian, whose deep and sincere love is confronted by the "cold temperament" (364) of a man who experiences "relief" (367) when he can stop talking passionately—something

Marian herself, despite her intense longing to be passionately loved, "could not but observe" (368). Once it emerges that Marian is not going to be the heiress he thought she would be, she suspects only too accurately that "'if we agreed to part, your love would be at once a thing of the past'" (452); and despite conscience enough to feel that "to forsake her would be a baseness" (453), ultimately this is what he does.

This psychological make-up and this emotional and moral character explain a great deal about Milvain's success. Driven by ambition and the need to feel superior, and with a limited moral sense, he is a man capable of betraying anybody or any principle, and of showing no allegiance to any higher or nobler cause than himself. He lives for much of the time with morality put into abeyance while he pursues his career. In any conflict between ambition and morality, morality will always lose in the face of a dominant ambition and the insistent psychological needs which drive it. That this makes him one of the "fittest" in the new Darwinian literary world is no recommendation at all.

#### Works Consulted

- Gissing, George. *New Grub Street*. 1891. Penguin Classics. Ed. Bernard Bergonzi. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.
- Goode, William. "The Librarian: From Occupation to Profession?" *The Library Quarterly* 31 (1961): 306-18; reprinted in *Professionalization*. Ed. Howard M. Vollmer and Donald L. Mills. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966: 34-43.

## Fairies and Feminism: Recurrent Patterns in Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

### Warren Edminster

I have received it and told it anew. . . . I stand in the chain of narrators, a link between links; I tell once again the old stories, and if they sound new, it is because the new already lay dormant in them when they were told for the first time.

Martin Buber, preface to *Die Legende des Baal Schem*, 1908 (Trans. Maurice Friedman)

Literature is in one sense evolutionary, a series of voices co-opting and adapting what has been said and in turn being co-opted and adapted by those voices which follow. In our enthusiasm to study individual authors, we often forget the central influence that the tradition of literary development has had on their work—Dante's tendency to incorporate and use Virgil, for example, just as Virgil adapted the works of Homer. Victorian co-opting of medieval culture perfectly exemplifies this type of adaptive creativity. From the literature of Scott and Tennyson through the aesthetic philosophies of Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris, Victorian medievalism held up an ideal, mythical medieval world as a contrast to the soulless, rational industrialism of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Jane engages in just such an

Gross, John. "Introduction." *New Grub Street*. London: Bodley Head, 1967: v-xii.

Keech, James M. "Gissing's *New Grub Street* and 'The Triple-Headed Monster.'" *The Serif*, 1 (1970); reprinted in *George Gissing: Critical Essays*. Ed. J.P. Michaux. London: Vision, 1981: 155-61.

Maclver, Robert. "The Social Significance of Professional Ethics." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 297 (1955): 118-24; reprinted in *Professionalization*. Ed. Howard M. Vollmer and Donald L. Mills. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966): 50-55.

Neacey, Markus. "Lost Illusions and the Will to Die in *New Grub Street*." *Gissing Journal* 34, No. 4, (1998): 1-11.

O'Day, Rosemary. "The Clerical Renaissance in Victorian England and Wales" in *Religion in Victorian Britain*. Vol. 1. Ed. G. Parsons. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988: 184-212.

Perkin, Harold. *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969 (Perkin I).

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880*. London: Routledge, 1989 (Perkin II).

Wilson, Angus. "Lower Depths of Literature." *The Observer Review* (21 May 1967): 7; reprinted in *George Gissing: Critical Essays*. Ed. J. P. Michaux. London, Vision, 1981: 123-25.

Open University

idealization of the past, lamenting the passing of fairies and elves from the world. In fact, the passing of the fairies becomes symbolic of the flaws and corruption of Jane's world, and Jane is herself repeatedly identified as a fairy, out of place in the cold, rational, patriarchal society of Victorian England. Jane's lament is not novel, however; it echoes a similar lament for the passing of fairies and elves in Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Tale." Yet the echo is far from a passing resemblance. Both narratives treat women struggling to gain control and independence in a masculine world, and both use fairies and fairy magic as symbolic representations of that struggle. The number of close structural and thematic parallels is intriguing. They suggest the possibility that Brontë consciously adapts the symbolic structure of Chaucer's rape tale, perhaps the clearest literary expression of the female perspective up to that time, to her own examination of gender oppression and conflict within Victorian society. If, on the other hand, the parallels are not the result of conscious adaptation, we are left with an equally intriguing possibility—that these two authors, separated by time, cultural development, and sexual difference, nonetheless employ the same narrative components to reach the same narrative conclusions about the boundaries of gender and power in Western culture.

dle Ages that had become a tradition in literature served to remind men of a Golden Age. The Middle Ages were idealized as a period of faith, order, joy, munificence, and creativity" (1).

Not that Chaucer was in any way foreign to the Victorians. In the late eighteenth century, several scholars finally mastered and explained his metrical manner, which had been previously disparaged as "quaint" and "rough." Tyrwhitt brought out a reasonably correct text of the *Canterbury Tales* in 1775, and John Bell immediately pirated and popularized it in his 1782 *The Poets of Great Britain* (Brewer 37). Readers quickly rediscovered the original Chaucer and devoured his works as they had not for 400 years. Many nineteenth-century writers were heavily influenced by Chaucer. Blake, Scott, Lamb, Southey, the Wordsworths, Coleridge, Landor, Shelley, Hazlitt, Ruskin, and Hunt, among others, all read Chaucer and spoke glowingly of his work; Byron disliked him, but the number of times he mentioned Chaucer shows at least that he read him (Spurgeon lxii-lxv). Scholarly criticism of Chaucer also exploded. Writing in 1908, Caroline Spurgeon, author of the landmark *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion*, notes that "It would be impossible here to mention all the Chaucer scholars of the Nineteenth Century, for the study of our first great poet has been taken up with enthusiasm, not only in England, but also in Germany and America" (cxxxiii). Chaucer was everywhere and on everyone's mind.

Given the broad circulation of so many of Chaucer's texts, and given their popularity at the time, Charlotte Brontë most likely read Chaucer somewhere. If he didn't grace her father's library, she might have seen him at the Heaton's library at Ponden House, to which Gerin says the Brontë sisters "had early access"; or she might have found him in the "subscription volumes from the Keighley Mechanics' Institute Library" or in the library at Roehad (24). Brontë never mentions Chaucer by name in her famous letter to Ellen Nussey, but the Nussey letter is clearly prescriptive of what a young woman should read rather than descriptive of what she herself read.<sup>2</sup> At any rate, Brontë does mention Pope, many editions of whom included Pope's "modernization" of Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Tale."<sup>3</sup> It is thus likely that she read the tale somewhere in some version.

The importance of "The Wife of Bath's Tale" to a woman concerned with the treatment of women is clear. Chaucer's Wife was a common type in medieval literature, but the clarity of her argument and the skill of her storytell-

ing were unique in English literature.<sup>4</sup> In fact, until the period in which Brontë herself wrote, "The Wife of Bath's Tale" stood out as one of the most convincing literary apologies for the idea of feminine equality and independence. The fact that it was written by a man who was actually accused of "raptus" makes it a suspect document to modern feminists, but this controversy was absent from nineteenth-century discussion of Chaucer and wouldn't have influenced nineteenth-century views.<sup>5</sup> At any rate, the tale itself provided one of the few existing examples of how fiction could be used to express a feminine world view, something with which Brontë certainly seems fascinated. In writing *Jane Eyre*, arguably the first of the great feminist novels, and certainly a novel whose primary theme is gender equity and justice, Brontë would have found few models more appropriate to her topic than "The Wife of Bath's Tale."

Readers will recall that the Wife of Bath first gives a long prologue dealing with power politics between men and women in marital relationships, especially her own experiences in such matters. With each of her five husbands, the wife tells us, she had to win dominance before there could be happiness in the marriage. The tale then begins with a speech bemoaning the departure of fairydom:

In th'olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour,  
Of which that Britons speken greet honour,  
Al was this land fulfild of fayerye.  
The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,  
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede.  
This was the olde opinion, as I rede:  
I speke of manye hundred yeres ago.  
But now kan no man se none elves mo. (ll. 857-64)

*Jane Eyre* begins with a similar sentiment; even as Jane wonders about her surroundings and begins making her first references to her changeling-like orphanhood, she muses about the attractive but unbelievable world of fairies:

for as to the elves, having sought them in vain among  
foxglove leaves and bells, under mushrooms and beneath  
the ground-ivy mantling old wall-nooks, I had at length  
made up my mind to the sad truth, that they were all gone  
out of England to some savage country where the woods  
were wilder and thicker, and the population more scant.  
(17)

Armstrong-Browning Library for providing me with both cooperation and access to the library's rare book collection.

<sup>4</sup>See Noah's wife in the Wakefield cycle's *Processus Noe* for another example of the medieval type of the shrew, a domineering and independent woman. Noah's wife is a sympathetic figure, especially next to the abusive and quarrelsome Noah. Such wives are often found in medieval Dutch plays as well; see *Boss For Three Days*, Therese Decker's translation of *Drie daghe here*, in the Fall 1997 edition of the *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* for a good example.

<sup>5</sup>In "Biographical and Historical Contexts" in *The Wife of Bath*, Peter Beidler writes, "There is an ambiguous legal record in which a woman named Cecilia Chaumpaigne, in consideration of a payment of ten pounds, releases Geoffrey Chaucer from the charge of *raptus*. The import of the charge and the circumstances surrounding it are sufficiently vague that various scholars have attempted to clear Chaucer of the charge of sexual rape by pointing out that *raptus* might have meant something more like our modern 'abduction.' In fact, we know neither that he was guilty of raping, or attempting to rape, Cecilia, nor that he was not guilty." (6)

<sup>1</sup>For a fuller discussion of Victorian medievalism, see Alice Chandler's *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*. Chandler writes that "the partly historical but basically mythical Middle Ages

<sup>2</sup>The list in the Nussey letter is short, and in it Brontë shows a strong sensitivity to the moral appropriateness of some literature. She goes so far as to defend Shakespeare and Byron, for example, as if Nussey would have been shocked by these scandalous writers. And even though she defends them as "great," Brontë nonetheless tells Nussey to "Omit the comedies of Shakespeare and the Don Juan, perhaps the Cain, of Byron, though the latter is a magnificent poem, and read the rest fearlessly" (Gaskell 115). These words demonstrate her conscious sense of the propriety in the works on the list rather than her aesthetic sense of their greatness. Furthermore, Brontë recommends histories which she admits she herself has not read (115). Clearly, the list is one which aspiring young female intellectuals should read rather than what Brontë herself read. Since Chaucer was considered bawdy and risqué even by most Victorians who liked him, he clearly wouldn't have been included on such a list.

<sup>3</sup>*The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope* (London: Thomas M'Lean, 1821), for example, includes the full "modernization" of the prologue to "The Wife of Bath's Tale." It is perhaps appropriate for me to express here my appreciation to Cindy Burgess and the rest of the staff at Baylor's

Later, when Rochester teasingly accuses her of being an elf, she repeats her conclusion that fairies have left England:

"The men in green all forsook England a hundred years ago," said I, speaking as seriously as he had done. "And not even in Hay Lane, or in the fields about it, could you find a trace of them. I don't think either summer or harvest, or winter moon, will ever shine on their revels more." (107)<sup>6</sup>

These laments are not simple, random expressions of nostalgia in either story. In both *Jane Eyre* and "The Wife of Bath's Tale," the loss of the faery world is symbolic of a much larger problem, and the problems themselves are strikingly similar. In "The Wife of Bath's Tale," the central dynamic of the story, masculine oppression of women, is directly related to the cause of the fairies' departure. The current fairy shortage, as the Wife tells us, is caused by the prayers of thronging numbers of clerics and friars, "thikke as notes in the sonne-beem" (l.868). The intrusion of the friars, or "lymytours," in "every lond and strem" (l.867), in the "halles, chambres, kitchenes, boures,/ Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,/ Thropes, bemes, shipnes, dayeryes" (ll. 869-71), and in other places where "wont to walken was an elf" (l. 873) has made fairy magic scarce.

The replacement of fairy magic with the religious practice of friars ("lymytours") has caused a distinct change in the expectations of women, a change, as the wife sarcastically points out, not completely beneficial:

Wommen may go now sauffy up and down.  
In every bush or under every tree  
There is noon oother incubus but he,  
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour. (ll.878-81)

In other words, women are now "safe" from the enchantment of fairies; all they need worry about is the mild "dishonour," namely sexual dishonor, which lymytours will do to them if they catch them alone in the forest.<sup>7</sup> This early hint of rape foreshadows the upcoming crime by the knight; it also confirms an already established relationship between religious practice and male oppression. The ambassadors of the Church may sexually dishonor women, but, as the Wife's prologue has shown, the Church as a whole dishonors women spiritually, socially, and morally. The Wife's fifth husband, a clerk educated by the Church, is a raving misogynist. He brings to their marriage a text compiled and

copied within the Church. From this text, the clerk reads to the Wife stories about weak, unfaithful, and generally dishonorable women. These stories support and justify the clerk's oppression of the Wife and finally lead to the domestic violence between them. The Church is also exclusionary towards women. The Wife recognizes this in the prologue when she asserts that the books are slanted against women because only men write them. She says,

By God! if wommen hadde writen stories,  
As clerkes han withinne hir oratories,  
They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse  
Than al the mark of Adam may redresse. (ll. 693-96)

In the Wife's view, therefore, religion is a tool used by men to rationalize their oppression of women. The clerk may behave monstrously towards his wife as long as he has the religious stories in his book to justify his actions.

While religious practice is symbolic of male oppression, the world of faery is symbolic of the feminine. There is ample evidence of this gender split even in the introduction to the tale. Religion here is represented by the masculine "lymytour," who is called by the masculine pronouns "himself," "his," "his," "he," "his" and "he" in only seven lines. Fairy magic, on the other hand, is represented by the feminine elf queen and "hir joly compaignye" (l. 860). Moreover, the effect of the friars' religious invasion is specifically upon fairies and women; the fairies are banished, and the women are molested by holy men claiming to protect them from fairy enchantment. This enchantment, as we see in the story, actually benefits women and undermines the male power system. The tale thus establishes a clear dichotomy; masculine forms, which are represented by religion, are ranged against feminine forms, which are associated with faery. In the Wife's world, fairy magic and feminine expression have both been banished by the rationalization and limitation of a patriarchal religious value system. The Wife of Bath's choice to set her narrative back in the legendary times of fairy magic is an attempt to create an idealistic world where feminine expression and independence exist and can be brought to bear on the types of male oppression which are symbolized by the knight's rape.

*Jane Eyre* explores a similar lack of feminine expression and independence in a patriarchal world. From the beginning of the novel, women display a pitiful inability to maintain space or autonomy against male intrusion or control. John's brutal invasion of Jane's window nook, for

example, which sets the tone for the entire novel, is at least symbolically similar to the forced invasiveness of the physical rape in the Wife's tale. Like women in the Wife's world, women in *Jane Eyre* have no personal space which is not subject to male intrusion and control.

Yet as in "The Wife of Bath's Tale," male oppression isn't merely random meanness; it is enabled by a specific value system and thought process. Men justify their oppression of women through rationality and morality. For example, the Reverend Brocklehurst's holier-than-thou damnation of long-haired girls at Lowood is a mixture of twisted rationalization and religion which is curiously reminiscent of the clerk's use of religious stories. Both use a patriarchal value system to rationalize and justify oppressive and violent actions against women. Similarly, just as molesting friars can hypocritically congratulate themselves for saving women from the threat of fairy enchantment in "The Wife of Bath's Tale," Brocklehurst self-righteously saves the girls at Lowood from the self-indulgent sins of vanity and comfort by ordering that all their hair be cut off.

Similarly, just as the religious practice of friars has driven off fairies and elves, so too have the practical values of a patriarchal intellectual and moral system banished the possibility of fairy magic in *Jane Eyre*. Robert Martin notices this trend in the novel when he says that "In the world of the Patriarchy, the older system of knowledge and religion [i.e. the feminine world of faery] must go underground, as Christianity prevails and suppresses nature" (86). To the Brocklehursts and St. Johns of Jane's world, there is no room for the imaginative, romantic, or impractical. Helene Moglen notes that (much like the Wife's fifth husband) Brocklehurst "cloaks his greed, selfishness, and vanity in the hypocritical vestments of religious principles" (113). Brocklehurst sees no value in little girls feeling pretty or feminine; all such needs are unmeasurable, and he has rationally-determined proportions for all physical needs. Variety in the food at the school is not necessary for sustenance: burnt food will meet the girls' physical needs, so no deviation from the budget is necessary. By the same reasoning, St. John concludes that love is not as important to a marriage as is a practical helpmeet. Love is intangible and, therefore, irrelevant. He commands Jane to become his wife in mission work to serve himself and others even though he admits he does not love her. This value system of rigid, patriarchal morality and practicality repeatedly denies the existence of important intangibles such as beauty, love, imagination, and, of course, fairy magic.

Not that fiction can't exist in Jane's world. Jane is able to conceive of even such outlandish stuff as *Gulliver's Travels* because it explains its fiction in terms which relate to the factual, scientific practicality of the male intellectual system. Even though Lilliputians and Brobdingnagians are outrageously fantastic, they are related with sufficient mathematical measurements and scientific calculations to make them seem believable. Jane considers *Gulliver's Travels* to be "a narrative of facts," and as a factual narrative, it becomes "eerie and dreary" to her (17). Fairy tales, on the other hand, reject such pseudo-scientific pretensions. They speak of "once upon a time" and of spells and wonders which defy a rational world view. Consequently, they are unbeliev-

able within and banished from the patriarchal world in which Jane finds herself.

Thus, as in "The Wife of Bath's Tale," the loss of fairy magic parallels and is symbolic of the loss of feminine expression and independence which is so central to the dilemma in *Jane Eyre*. And as Jane begins to cope with and overcome this dilemma, fairy magic returns in her own person. In identifying Jane Eyre with the fairy world, Brontë too evokes an idealistic, extra-masculine and extra-rational world where female expression and independence can be used to address the problem of male oppression. Martin argues,

The appeal of the world of faery for Charlotte Brontë was the appeal of a poetic system which still believed in magic and which was still centered around the role of women. In the nineteenth century it was only in the fairy tale that Charlotte Brontë was likely to find traces of a non-patriarchal world. The divided world of her fiction has yet one more division, that between women's world of fairy tale, and the men's world of Christianity. (94)

Like Chaucer's Wife of Bath, Brontë uses this division to undermine patriarchal wisdom and establish a new set of feminine values.

The similarities in the tales go beyond general thematic and symbolic parallels, however. In the story of the relationship between Jane and the dominant male character, Edward Rochester, *Jane Eyre* develops many of the same specific plot elements that are found in "The Wife of Bath's Tale." For example, in the Wife's tale, male oppression is represented by the clearest example of such oppression, physical rape. The knight rapes a young virgin "by verray force," (l. 888) but the Wife phrases the deed in such a way as to imply far more than a physical crime. When she says, "he rafte hir maydenhed," (l. 888) she insinuates that the knight's actions, in addition to depriving the virgin (or maid) of her hymen, also deprive the "mayde" (or woman) of her self-identity, the very essence of what makes her what she is. The "clamour" caused by the knight's action attracts the attention of King Arthur, who condemns the young knight to die, a patriarchal punishment by which the knight—and by extension men in general—will learn nothing. The knight is given a chance to escape his doom by the queen and her ladies, however, who agree to pardon him if he can, within "twelf-month and a day," (l. 909) tell the court "What thyng it is that wommen moost desiren" (l. 905). Despite months of searching for a solution among women everywhere, the knight can find no acceptable answer, and he turns homeward towards his doom. Thus, the Wife presents us with a man guilty of a male crime against a woman, seeking to release himself from the damnation of that crime, who has exhausted all of his own resources and turned towards home without hope of salvation. At this point, he runs smack into the direct agent of fairy magic (and the central dispenser of female justice), the elf queen herself.

Male oppression takes many forms in *Jane Eyre*, but the central male character, Edward Rochester, parallels the knight in the Wife's tale in a number of ways. As John Maynard notes, Rochester "is simply male, the phallic force"

<sup>6</sup>In "Jane Eyre and the World of Faery," Robert Martin tells us that "One must not take Jane's 'serious' comments about the departure of the men in green too seriously" (92). Martin, however, has a vested interest in keeping faery in the novel; he does an excellent job of tracing the structural influence of such tales as "Cinderella," "Briar Rose," "Beauty and the Beast," and "Rapunzel" through the structure of *Jane Eyre*. Jane's comments might on the surface undermine his belief that "the world of faery" is an important part of the novel. I see no such contradiction. Jane's remarks clearly apply to the world around her, the rational, patriarchal world against which she finds herself struggling. She is herself the representative of "faery" in the novel, and it is precisely her reintroduction of the faery and female perspective which makes her story so profoundly meaningful. Jane's comments do not prevent "faery" from being a part of the novel, only from existing in the oppressive patriarchal system into which she is introduced and which she seeks to destroy.

<sup>7</sup>Chaucer ties into an established anti-clerical polemic with this reference. In the late medieval period, Friars are frequently portrayed as sexual predators who use their chastity and poverty as a front to lull their victims into a false sense of security. The anonymous author of *Preste, Ne Monke, Ne Yit Chanoun*, for example, warns his audience never to let a Friar into their homes unless he has been castrated (ll. 85-8), because Friars will sexually assault the women of the house:

For may he til a woman wyne  
In priveyte, he wyl not blyne  
Er he a childe put hir with-inne  
And perchaunce two at ones!  
Thof he loure under his hode,  
With semblaunt quaynte and mylde,  
If thou him trust, or dos him gode,  
By God, thou art bygylde. (ll. 89-96)

(112) that stands out most clearly in the novel. Rochester pursues his own fulfillment without regard for the consequences to women. Like the knight, he is guilty of selfishly using and then discarding a woman. By marrying Bertha without love to insure his wealth, and by carrying her away from her native land to keep her locked in an attic, Rochester has deprived her of her very identity and worth. Within an easily-outraged Victorian value system, these actions come about as close to rape as Brontë is able to come. Bertha's madness is Rochester's doom; for his selfish actions, he is now condemned to eternal union with a crazed wife, in his eyes a death in itself. Like the knight, he has searched for an escape from this doom among women across the European continent, but he has found only "a useless, roving, lonely life—corroded with disappointment" (275). Again like the knight, having exhausted all of his own resources trying to remove the curse on his head, Rochester turns homeward without hope, actually thinking of taking his own life, another solution by which he will learn nothing. Like the knight, Rochester at this point runs right into the joint symbol of female expression and fairy magic in the story, Jane Eyre.

In "The Wife of Bath's Tale," we know the woman who meets the knight is the elf-queen because she matches the description given at the beginning of the tale: "The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye, / Daunced ful oft in many a grene mede" (ll. 860-61). As the knight rides back towards the court, the Wife tells us,

And in his way it happed hym to ryde,  
In al this care, under a forest syde,  
Wher as he saugh upon a daunce go  
Of ladyes foure and twenty, and yet mo. (ll. 989-92)

When the knight approaches the dance, the ladies disappear, and only an old hag is left in their place. When the knight tells her his quest, the disguised elf queen assures him that she can answer the question and save him from his doom, but he must first agree to grant her whatever she asks whenever she asks it. The knight agrees, and they travel together to court. The knight gives the hag's answer, that women most desire "sovereyntee / As wel over hir housbond as hir love, / And for to been in maistrie" (ll. 1038-40). The queen and her ladies agree and release the knight from his doom.

The knight believes he has escaped without significant consequence to himself, but, as we see, the elf queen ultimately binds him within an appropriate punishment and brings him to a reluctant awareness of the importance of respecting women. Before the knight can leave, the hag leaps up and demands that the knight give himself to her in wedlock. The knight is shocked; here is a fate as bad as the one he has just escaped. The hag is hideous and old, the antithesis of the pretty young "maydes" he so impulsively desires. More importantly, however, the marriage represents

a loss of choice or self-determination for the knight. He begs the hag to take all of his goods but to "lat my body go" (l. 1061). He is horrified by the proposed disgrace of being married to such a disgusting and ignoble creature: "'Allas! that any of my nacioun / Sholde evere so foule disparaged be'" (l. 1069). The hag / elf queen refuses to relent, however. The marriage, and his resulting loss of choice, is her condition for his release from his own self-imposed doom. He must submit to her request, regardless, as the Wife tells us, of what he wishes: ". . . the ende is this, that he / Constreyned was, he nedes moste hir wedde" (ll. 1070,71).

The knight's submission is further emphasized by the final resolution of the story. On their wedding night, as the knight woefully bemoans his fate, the old hag points out that at least he need never fear being cuckolded, whereas if she was young and beautiful, he could never be sure of her faithfulness. She then allows him the choice of having her beautiful and unfaithful, or foul and faithful. After thinking it over, the knight submits to her "maistrie" and asks her to choose for him: "'My lady and my love, and wyf so deere, / I put me in youre wise governance; / Cheseth youereself'" (ll. 1230-32). She then asks him if he has thus given her mastery over him, and he answers, "'Ye, certes, wyf'" (l. 1238). For this control, the elf queen gives him both: she becomes beautiful and pledges her faithfulness to him.<sup>8</sup> Through his submission to her mastery, and by learning to respect the wishes of women, the knight has finally achieved that which he always sought. Thus, the Wife uses fairy magic to address male crime. The man who is condemned by his crime is offered a chance of escape. Initially, he sees the old woman as a means of delivering himself from his doom without any major change to or impact upon himself. He soon finds out, however, that he can escape the consequences of his crime only by giving up his choice, independence, and "maistrie" to the representative of women, the elf queen. In his submission, he becomes a candidate for redemption and is hence allowed the best of all possible outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

*Jane Eyre* follows a similar development. The story contains multiple references to fairies, and Jane is clearly a fairy figure from the beginning of the novel. She is physically small and ethereal. She is attracted to birds and nature, and she feels oppressed by the walls and locks of Gateshead. She feels out of place among her adopted family, much as a changeling might feel out of place in a human family, and the Reeds feel the same way about her. Jane says,

I was a discord in Gateshead Hall: I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them. They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathize with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities. (12)

Loathly Lady" or Edward Vasta's "Chaucer, Gower, and the Unknown Minstrel: The Literary Liberation of the Loathly Lady."

<sup>9</sup>The eventual happy ending for the rapist knight is the most controversial element of the Wife's tale for many feminists. Elaine Turtle Hansen gives a representative perspective: "The knight is not only spared and reformed but eventually rewarded, it seems, for his crime" (281).

Not until the encounter with Rochester, however, do Jane's elfish qualities become obvious. The circumstances parallel those in the Wife's tale. Jane is alone in the countryside for the first time in the story. Meanwhile, returning from his fruitless search for release among European women, Rochester is riding to his doom on a horse, sounding much like a knight himself. Jane describes his approach as "a positive tramp, tramp; a metallic clatter" (98). Suddenly the faery world bursts into the novel. Jane is reminded of fairy tales: "As this horse approached, and as I watched for it to appear through the dusk, I remembered certain of Bessie's tales, wherein figured a North-of-England spirit, called a 'Gytrash,' which, in the form of a horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travelers" (98).

Ironically, Jane herself performs the "Gytrash" role. As Rochester rides past, his horse slips and throws him, apparently because of a sheet of ice, but coincidentally nearby the fairy-like Jane. Although he does so jokingly, Rochester suspects supernatural agency. When he formally meets Jane, he tells her, "When you came on me in Hay Lane last night, I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand if you had bewitched my horse" (107). Rochester then asks her pointed questions about her parents, emphasizing Jane's changeling nature. When Jane tells him significantly that she has no parents and cannot remember any, Rochester draws the conclusion that she is in fact a fairy: "I thought not. And so you were waiting for your people when you sat on the stile?" (107). When Jane asks him what he means, he says, "For the men in green: it was a proper moonlight evening for them. Did I break through one of your rings. . .?" (107). This reference to breaking fairy rings, while minor, directly parallels the knight's intrusion upon the elf-queen's dancing ring at the beginning of the Wife's tale. Jane denies these half-joking accusations that she is a fairy, but Rochester continues to refer to her fairy-like nature throughout the book. He calls her "elfish," a "sprite," "a fairy . . . from elfland," an "elf," and many other fairy-like names (229, 230, 235, 275).<sup>10</sup>

Like the knight in the Wife's tale, Rochester believes that he has finally found in Jane a way to escape from his doom without paying for his crimes or changing his lifestyle. He hides his marriage from her and intends to wed her in an illegal ceremony. These actions demonstrate a continued disregard of the consequences of his actions upon women. Maynard argues that "there is no question that [Rochester's] way of overcoming [Jane's] scruples is in itself a kind of attempted rape" (112). Like the knight, he thinks he has cheated the consequences of his crime. Even when Jane discovers his secret, Rochester continues to pressure her into intimacy, hoping that she will still provide the escape from Bertha, the bane of his existence.

Contrary to his hopes, however, Jane refuses to release him from his responsibilities. Like the knight, Rochester admits he is wrong but resists his obligations because he is horrified by the disgrace of a mad, disgusting wife. His dismay over relinquishing Jane and his accompanying horror of remaining bound in marriage to Bertha creates a compelling parallel to the knight's reluctance to marry the hag / elf queen in the "Wife of Bath's Tale." Both men obstinately seek to ignore circumstances and return to their own choice, their own self-determination. Jane's refusal to marry Rochester and her decision to flee foils Rochester's attempt to avoid the consequences of his actions. As Pat MacPherson points out, "female flight" is, in Jane's world, the one way to tame "impetuous male desire" (38). When Jane leaves, she leaves Rochester in misery, married, like the knight, to a woman with whom he is disgusted. This harsh treatment forces him, as it forces the knight, to come to terms with what he has done and honestly evaluate his situation.

Rochester's dilemma echoes the choice given to the knight in other ways as well. He is forced to choose between a repulsive Bertha, with whom a relationship would be legitimate, or an attractive Jane, with whom any relationship would be illegitimate. This is not so different, in Victorian terms, from a beautiful but unfaithful wife and an ugly but chaste one. Furthermore, much in the story suggests that, like the two possible wives between whom the knight must choose, Jane and Bertha are alter egos, merely different sides of the same coin. After noting the innkeeper's parallel references to "witch" (Bertha) and "bewitchment" (Jane), Martin argues that within the context of a fairy tale, "One can only suggest that both Jane and Bertha are witches, that they are two sides of the same self. Jane is the attractive young witch. . . ; Bertha is the hag . . ." (92). As in the Wife's tale, it is the choice between enchanted feminine alter egos that brings resolution to male crime. In both stories, men guilty of crimes against women wrestle with a dilemma imposed upon them by fairy women, and in both tales, the men must abandon their independence and self-determination for the dilemma to be resolved.<sup>11</sup>

Later, while trying to save Bertha in a fire, Rochester is crippled and blinded. This act signals both his acceptance of obligation and his loss of self-determination. By trying to save Bertha, he accepts his duties as a husband. If he simply let her die, then he could remarry. At the same time, by sacrificing his eyesight and by becoming crippled, he loses self-control and independence. He thus symbolically and literally relinquishes self-determination at the same time that Bertha dies and he is accordingly released from his doom. It is only in this state, when he has given up his self-determination, that Rochester becomes a candidate for redemption. Richard Chase argues correctly that reconciliation can be made in the novel only "after the spirit of the

<sup>10</sup>Moglen notices this as well, although she marks a different set of terms. She writes, "[Rochester] enjoys this sense of her, insists upon it: repeatedly describing her as 'elfin,' a 'nonnette,' 'a fairy,' 'his god genii,' 'a dream or shade,' a 'strange . . . almost unearthly thing.'" (118).

<sup>11</sup>In their classic feminist text, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, (a title apparently taken from Bertha's character in *Jane Eyre*) Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar notice this very similarity between the stories, although they do not speak of the larger structural and thematic similarities. They

write, "When [Chaucer] gave the Wife of Bath a tale of her own, he portrayed her projecting her subversive vision of patriarchal institutions into the story of a furious hag who demands supreme power over her own life and that of her husband: only when she gains his complete acceptance of her authority does this witch transform herself into a modest and docile beauty. Five centuries later, the threat of the hag, the monster, the witch, the madwoman, still lurks behind the compliant paragon of women's stories" (79).

<sup>8</sup>The Wife's tale is one of a series of tales that use the theme of the "loathly lady" and the choice that turns her into a beautiful maiden. Perhaps the most famous is "Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell," in which the secret to the transformation is simple courtesy. Chaucer's version shares much with these tales, but it differs from most in that the enchantment is voluntary. For more discussion of the "loathly lady" form, see G. F. Dalton's "The

masculine universe is controlled" (110). Like the knight, Rochester finds the answer to happiness only in his submission.

Rochester and Jane are reunited at Femdean, an environment that reeks of Faery. Jane tells us that it is "deep buried in a wood," and that "Even when within a short distance of the manor-house you could see nothing of it; so thick and dark grew the timber of the gloomy world about it" (378). As she approaches the house, she says, "The darkness of natural as well as sylvan dusk gathered over me" (379). It is in this fairy-like environment that a just resolution to the male crime takes place. Brontë emphasizes Rochester's loss of self-determination. When Jane sees him, she calls him a "caged eagle" and "sightless samson" (379). She speaks of "the subjugation of that vigorous spirit" and calls him "a lamp quenched, waiting to be relit" (386). Like the knight, Rochester has given up self-control and independence. He is now dependent upon the Jane's mastery, and Jane readily welcomes the task. She says, "It was not himself that could now kindle the lustre of animated expression: he was now dependent on another for that office" (386). And like the knight, Rochester welcomes his dependence and doesn't regret his loss of self-determination. He says to Jane, "Hitherto I have hated to be helped—to be led: henceforth, I feel, I shall hate it no more. . . . Jane's soft ministry will be a perpetual joy" (392). At the same time, Rochester significantly points out again the fairy-like nature of Jane's existence. As they are reconciled, and as he expresses his joy, he calls her a "mocking changeling—fairy-born and human bred" (386). This and other references reemphasize the notion that fairy-magic has prompted this resolution. Jane accepts his dependence (her mastery) and promises him the happiness which he has sought. She tells him, "I love you better now. . . than I did in your state of proud independence" (392), and she promises to marry him. Like the knight, Rochester gets the best half of each choice; he has his beloved Jane, and he has her in a legitimate relationship. With an attitude of sincere penitence which might just as easily be evinced by the knight in "The Wife of Bath's Tale," Rochester ends his role with the following words and actions: "I humbly entreat my Redeemer to give me strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done hitherto! Then he stretched out his hand to be led" (395). Thus, Brontë also uses the world of faery to address male crime. Condemned by his crime against a woman, Rochester is tempted by what he thinks is a chance of escape. Initially, he sees the fairy-like Jane as a means of delivering himself from his doom without any major changes to his lifestyle. He soon finds out, however, that he can escape the consequences of his crime only by giving up his choice, independence, and "maistrie" to Jane, his elfish mistress. As with the knight in "The Wife of Bath's Tale," his submission alone allows him the best of all possible outcomes. Like Chaucer's wife, Brontë finds in the feminine world of faery a powerful tool for undermining dominant patriarchal values. In *Jane Eyre*,

she uses the same powerful symbolic structure as Chaucer's medieval rape story to illuminate her own concerns about the more subtle, yet equally damaging, gender oppression of the nineteenth century.

## Works Cited

- Beidler, Peter. "Biographical and Historical Contexts." *The Wife of Bath*. Ed. Peter Beidler. New York: Bedford Books, 1996. 3-27.
- Brewer, Derek. *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Ed. Richard J. Dunn. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1987.
- Buber, Martin. *The Legend of the Baal-Shem*. Trans. Maurice Friedman. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Chandler, Alice. *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1970.
- Chase, Richard. "The Brontës: or Myth Domesticated." *Forms of Modern Fiction*. Bloomington: Midland Book Edition, 1959. 102-19.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Canterbury Tales*. Ed. A. C. Cawley. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958.
- Dalton, G. F. "The Loathly Lady." *Folklore* 82 (1971): 124-31.
- "Drie Daghe Here." Trans. Therese Decker. *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*. XVIII: ii (Fall 1997): 19-31.
- Gaskell, E. C. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1857.
- Gerin, Winifred. *Charlotte Brontë*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.
- Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. "'Of his love dangerous to me': Liberation, Subversion, and Domestic Violence in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale." *The Wife of Bath*. Ed. Peter Beidler. New York: Bedford Books, 1996. 273-89.
- MacPherson, Pat. *Reflecting on Jane Eyre*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Martin, Robert. "Jane Eyre and the World of Faery." *Mosaic* 10 (1977): 85-95.
- Maynard, John. *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.
- Moglen Helene. *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1976.
- "Preste, Ne Monke, Ne Yit Chanoun." *Medieval English Political Writings*. Ed. James M. Dean. Kalamazoo: Western Michigan UP, 1996. 45-52.
- Pope, Alexander. *The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope*. London: Thomas M'Lean, 1821.
- Spurgeon Caroline F. E. *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1960.
- Vasta, Edward. "Chaucer, Gower, and the Unknown Minstrel: The Literary Liberation of the Loathly Lady." *Exemplaria* 7:2 (1995 Fall): 395-418.

Murray State University

## Rhetorical Punctuation in *Vanity Fair*?

Daniel P. Deneau

In his edition of *Vanity Fair*, Peter L. Shillingsburg insists that Thackeray "tended to punctuate rhetorically rather than syntactically" (660),<sup>1</sup> a point of major importance. The first purpose of Shillingsburg's edition is "to present the text as much as possible as Thackeray produced it, free of the unnecessary interference of the publishers and printers" (ii). This presentation is possible for only twelve chapters (1-6, 8-13): the manuscript for these chapters survives and is used as Shillingsburg's copy-text, thus allowing readers to experience, more or less, Thackeray's original punctuation. Shillingsburg admits that rhetorical punctuation "often corresponds to our syntactically based form of punctuation" (ii) but its "primary function" is to guide readers in "oral presentation" (661)—more specifically, "to indicate pauses of varying length,"<sup>2</sup> a comma representing "a short pause," "a semicolon a pause twice as long as a comma," "a colon a pause three times as long as a comma" (ii), and a period the longest of all. Shillingsburg is not specific about the period; he merely includes it as the fourth in a list of marks requiring pauses "of increasing length" (661).<sup>3</sup> He also seems evasive when he adds that "dashes surround interruptions and come closest to performing the syntactical function of modern punctuation" (661)—a comment which does not explain how the many dashes are to be treated in an "oral presentation."

In its earliest form punctuation was in part a physiological device; marks signified places for breathing, and were also guides to "sense." Gradually the marks came to be considered elocutionary guides; they signified pauses for effect, not merely breath. After a complex evolution in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, by the end of the 1840's punctuation was generally explained in terms of grammar and sentence structure.<sup>4</sup> As early as 1795, Lindley Murray in his well-known *English Grammar* still expressed a belief in pauses, but he also explained his rules with grammatical terminology—for example, Rule X for the use of the comma: "The case or nominative absolute, and the infinitive mood absolute, are separated by commas from the body of the sentence. . . ." (376). Samuel Rousseau's approach is indicated by his title: *Punctuation: Or, An Attempt to Facilitate the Art of Pointing, on the Principles of Grammar and Reason* (1813). However, he too acknowledged pauses—relegating them to brief references in footnotes! By 1844, for the influential John Wilson pauses had become

irrelevant; he declared unequivocally that "the art of Punctuaion is founded rather on grammar than on rhetoric" (15). Such notations prove nothing definite about Thackeray, but they do suggest that he was writing in a period when elocutionary or rhetorical punctuation, the careful regulating of pauses for "oral presentation," was by no means the invariable rule.

It seems highly improbable that Thackeray read aloud as he wrote and carefully determined minute pauses to which he expected his readers to be sensitive, and nearly as improbable that he had an "inner voice" finely attuned to pauses in hundreds and hundreds of pages of writing. Unlike poetry and drama, which are truly "realized" only when presented orally, novels are written for the eye, not the ear, and the eye does not measure duration. Of course, writing may be read aloud, and I for one have tried to read portions of *Vanity Fair* aloud, pausing according to the system outlined by Shillingsburg. The experiments have been unsuccessful: I was distracted as I tried to measure different pauses for different marks, and I found myself shifting to my normal reading voice and giving equal pauses for commas and semicolons and sometimes for colons,<sup>5</sup> and slightly more measurable pauses for dashes and terminal marks.

In spite of the different emphases theorists and grammarians have given through the centuries, the basic reasons for punctuation may have remained hopelessly mixed or overlapping, perhaps because written expression is always potentially spoken expression and vice versa. With reference to the Middle Ages, Walter J. Ong explains that the "dual purpose of the marks" (that is, "oratorical breath" marks and guides to sense) "was really incipient in their very early use" (353; also see 358). Today we use the terms rhetorical (elocutionary, interpretative) and syntactical (structural, grammatical), but they may not designate two separate, independent systems. The outspoken Eric Partridge warns: "To attempt a rigid dichotomy of rhetorical and grammatical uses of the comma would be crassly stupid: and this condemnation . . . applies to punctuation in general" (14). We have one set of written marks which serve a double purpose—that is, as guides to sentence structure for silent readers and as indicators of pauses, as well as sentence structure, for oral readers. Indeed, there is no denying that when prose is read aloud, punctuation in individual sentences or in brief pas-

<sup>1</sup>Shillingsburg uses the words "tended to" and "basically," but his comments give the impression that he has no great reservations—for instance, "the basic principle of rhetorical punctuation, which Thackeray clearly intended to follow . . ." (660-61).

<sup>2</sup>In 1981 Shillingsburg made the same claim: "Perhaps it should be reiterated that the semicolon was not, in the mid-nineteenth century, primarily a division between semantic units, but a rhetorical pause of slightly longer duration than a comma and slightly shorter than a colon" ("Final" 46).

<sup>3</sup>Shillingsburg cites no source for his scale of pauses, but he may have been influenced by one of the numerous nineteenth-century printers' manuals—say, Charles H. Timperley, whose scale is the same as Shillingsburg's. For the period, Timperley calls for a pause "double that of a semicolon"—thus, a pause four times as long as the pause for a comma. Although Timperley borrowed heavily from earlier manuals and from Mur-

ray's important *Grammar*, he actually shortened the length of the pauses required by Murray, who wrote: "The Comma represents the shortest pause; the Semicolon, a pause double that of the comma; the Colon, double that of the semicolon; and the Period, double that of the colon" (369)—thus, if one counts, the comma, 1; the semicolon, 2; the colon, 4; the period, 8. It seems that historically there was no one system establishing the length of rhetorical pauses.

<sup>4</sup>The history of punctuation is complex. See the important articles by Ong and Honan. In "Pointing" I add information on the colon. Partridge notes that ". . . the grammatical or constructional or logical [system of punctuation] . . . has always predominated in prose. . ." (6).

<sup>5</sup>At times colons seem to require significant pauses, as dashes generally do. The subject matter and the structure of a given sentence influence how long one may pause for a colon or colons.

sages may be translated into pauses which may be rhetorically necessary or effective (much, punctuation, however, may be rhetorically "neutral"). On the other hand, I must repeat that I am skeptical that Thackeray worked with an elaborate system of pausing in order to prepare his text, a long novel, for "oral presentation," and equally skeptical that oral interpreters of novels, what few there may be, can work with a system of carefully and minutely graduated pauses.

Shillingsburg's assertion that Thackeray's was a "basically rhetorical punctuation" (ii) is not explained through illustration, though, admittedly, it is difficult to envision the form convincing illustration could take (perhaps a recording?). Shillingsburg concentrates on a single sentence (described, not quoted), containing four independent clauses, the first two separated by a comma, the second and third by a semicolon, the third and fourth by a colon. The manuscript version, Shillingsburg argues, achieves "balance," which is lost in the first edition where the sentence is punctuated with a series of semicolons. Without knowing the subject matter of the sentence, I speculate that "balance" would have been better achieved (at least visually) by the sequence of comma, semicolon, comma. Moreover, could a listener actually perceive "balance" in a sentence by hearing three pauses of different length? By chance, the manuscript sentence is an example of the "step" system, a method of punctuation explained, with variations, by several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century grammarians.<sup>6</sup> Thus, in Shillingsburg's example, marks of different ranks logically follow one another. Generally, the lack of evidence makes one wonder how Shillingsburg has arrived at the degree of certainty that he exhibits.

The Garland Edition is by no means an exact printed version of manuscript punctuation. Shillingsburg has "emended silently" "routine inadequacies" (732) in eight categories—for instance, regularizing quotation marks, as well as adding commas for some appositives and some series.<sup>7</sup> According to my count, in at least two hundred and fifty additional cases (chapters 1-5, 8-13) he has relied on the first edition rather than the manuscript, adding marks missing in the manuscript and changing others. As far as I can determine these emendations have no effect on meaning but do illustrate a moderate degree of carelessness on Thackeray's part.

If there were no rules or customary procedures and if one punctuated only according to patterns of spoken English, pauses definitely would be required following initial subordinate clauses, verbal phrases, long prepositional phrases, and absolute constructions. In approximately thirty cases (a noteworthy though not great number), Thackeray does not signal the necessary pauses. Please try, if possible, to read the following aloud without pausing at my additions, the bracketed marks:

—"This letter completed [,] Miss Pinkerton proceeded to write . . . ." (3).

—"As the majestic Jos stepped out of the creaking vehicle [,] the crowd gave a cheer. . . ." (47).

—"If mere parsimony would have made a man rich [,] Sir Pitt Crawley might have become very wealthy. . . ." (76).

—"Taking her accustomed drive one day [,] she thought fit to order that 'that little governess' should accompany her to Mudbury: before they had returned [,] Rebecca had made a conquest . . ." (93).

Of course, in many instances, Thackeray does punctuate similar sentences with commas, sentences in which syntactical and rhetorical consideration are indistinguishable.<sup>8</sup>

In several other cases punctuation is omitted in the Garland Edition. Shillingsburg has allowed some series to stand without punctuation because "it has seemed pedantic, or obtrusive" to add commas (676); thus, we read: "excessively foolish trivial twaddling and ultra-sentimental" (5); "good for nothing honest lazy fellows" (72). Some appositives unpunctuated in the manuscript have been changed; others have not: "Jos that fat gourmand drank" (50); "Mrs. Bute Crawley the rector's wife refused" (73). There are a few sentences in which marks absolutely needed for "oral presentation," and perhaps even for silent reading, are missing: "In consequence of Dobbin's victory, his character rose prodigiously in the estimation of all his schoolfellows and the name of Figs which had been a byword and reproach became as respectable and popular a nickname as any other in use in the school" (39) (we cannot totally escape from the ancient practice of supplying "breath marks"). Even the following would be improved with an additional mark: "But when Miss Rebecca Sharp and her stout companion lost themselves in a solitary walk similarly straying, they both felt that the situation was extremely tender and critical and now or never was the moment Miss Sharp thought to provoke that declaration which was trembling on the timid lips of Mr. Sedley" (48).

In many cases it seems that Thackeray used commas, semicolons, and colons indiscriminately. In the following example the three marks separate four independent clauses, but the marks easily could have appeared in different positions: "So she gave him her hand kindly and gratefully: and he crossed the Square; and she waited and waited, but George never came" (99). If the final comma had been a dash or a colon, one might argue that a lengthy pause was appropriate and rhetorically effective. Here the punctuation is erratic:

He carried his taste for boxing and athletic exercise into private life: there was not a fight within twenty miles at which he was not present; nor a race: nor a coursing match nor a regatta nor a ball nor an election nor a visitation-dinner nor indeed a good dinner in the whole county but he found means to attend it. (84)

One might guess that Thackeray started but did not finish punctuating the sentence. And here particularly arbitrary: "He never was well dressed: but he took the hugest pains to adorn his big person: and passed many hours daily in that occupation" (19). Given the undramatic subject matter, com-

mas or slight pauses would have been sufficient.

What must be emphasized, however, is Thackeray's extraordinary use of colons, both in number and in manner (and sometimes in odd places). Thanks to Shillingsburg's edition, we know that the colons are indeed Thackeray's and not composers' additions. As many as eleven colons may appear on a single page (106), as many as seven in a single sentence (59). Thackeray particularly liked colons to separate items in an enumeration or series—sometimes an enumeration with repeated key words or parallel structure.

—"If they are good and kindly, to love them and shake them by the hand: if they are silly, to laugh at them confidentially in the reader's sleeve: if they are wicked and heartless, to abuse them in the strongest terms which politeness admits of" (72).

—"He was her Europe: her Emperor: her allied Monarchs and august Prince Regent: he was her sun and moon. . . ." (102).

—"She never had seen a man so beautiful or so clever: such a figure on horseback: such a dancer: such a hero in general. . . ." (102).

—"Mrs. Bute who knew how many days the sirloin of beef lasted at the Hall: how much linen was got ready at the great wash: how many peaches were on the South Wall: how many doses her Ladyship took when she was ill. . . ." (85).

The turkey carpet has rolled itself up, and retired sulkily under the sideboard: the pictures have hidden their faces behind old sheets of brown paper: the ceiling lamp is muffled up in a dismal sack of brown holland: the window-curtains have disappeared under all sorts of shabby envelopes: the marble bust of Sir Walpole Crawley is looking from its black corner at the bare boards and the oiled fire-irons, and the empty card-racks over the mantle-piece: the cellaret has lurked away behind the carpet: the chairs are turned up heads and tails along the walls: and in the dark corner opposite the statue, is an old-fashioned crabbed knife-box, locked and sitting on a dumb waiter. (59)

The extraordinary "turkey carpet" sentence exemplifies what Partridge calls the "cumulative" or "progressive" colon: the sentence presents "a series of related acts," and achieves "a linked succession, a chain of events" (59).

As I have concluded elsewhere, "for Thackeray, colons often seem to have been both grammatical and rhetorical markers—that is, emphatic marks signifying equality" (113). Today it seems to me that Thackeray "coloned" sentences are a distinctive feature of his prose style; some of these sentences can be visually interesting (in part at least because

the punctuation is unexpected) and orally effective insofar as the punctuation determines tempo and emphasis.

In all the chapters of *Vanity Fair* for which the manuscript is not the copy-text, the punctuation seems as acceptable as one could hope to expect. In the twelve chapters focused on here, my guess is that 90% of the punctuation is more or less conventional; that 5% is individualistic but acceptable (including some colons); and that only 5% is inadequate—that is, excessively peculiar or simply missing. But a guess is obviously not a convincing proof.

The same may be said about Shillingsburg's assertion that Thackeray punctuated "rhetorically rather than syntactically." The unproved assertion may be an excuse for Thackeray, a way of trying to defend him against the charges of punctuating carelessly and erratically: if, the argument might go, a writer does not care to follow conventions and wishes to mark where he prefers pauses of different length in an "oral presentation" of his work—a subjective procedure—no one can object and say that he is wrong.

Finally, though it may not be possible to reach very far beyond assertions and guesses, I hope that the question posed in my title can be answered with "doubtful," at least "doubtful" if "rhetorical" means the consistent use of graduated pauses.

#### Works Cited

- Deneau, Daniel P. "Pointing Theory and Some Victorian Practices." *REAL* 4 (1986): 97-134.
- Honan, Park. "Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Punctuation Theory." *English Studies* 41 (1960): 92-102.
- Murray, Lindley. *An English Grammar*. 1795. New ed. Vol. 1. London: Longman, 1808.
- Ong, Walter J. "Historical Backgrounds of Elizabethan and Jacobean Punctuation Theory." *PMLA* 59 (1944): 349-60.
- Partridge, Eric. *You Have a Point There*. 1953. London: Routledge, 1977.
- Rousseau, Samuel. *Punctuation: Or, An Attempt to Facilitate the Art of Pointing, on the Principles of Grammar and Reason*. London: Longman, 1813.
- Shillingsburg, Peter L. "Final Touches and Patches in *Vanity Fair*: The First Edition." *Studies in the Novel* 13 (1981): 40-50.
- Thackeray, William Makepeace. *Vanity Fair*. Ed. Peter L. Shillingsburg. New York: Garland, 1989.
- Timperley, Charles H. *The Printer's Manual*. 1838. London: Gregg, 1965.
- Wilson, John. *A Treatise on English Punctuation*. 1844. 2nd ed. enl. London: John Wilson, 1850.

Professor Emeritus—Minnesota State University System

## Thomas Meyrick, Jesuit Madness, and Hopkins

Ernest Fontana

During the period of his Professorship of Greek at University College in Dublin, 1884-1889, Hopkins feared he

was going mad; Martin writes that "[a]fter his arrival in Dublin [Hopkins] wrote to Bridges in a vain effort to

<sup>6</sup>Generally, once a comma was used as a mark of separation, a semicolon was required for the next separation, and the next after the semicolon, the colon.

<sup>7</sup>These emendations are "recorded in deposited files" (732) at Mississippi

State University. For a list of the eight categories, see *Vanity Fair* 661-62, 676.

<sup>8</sup>If we were to test the other standard uses of the comma, we might find the same type of correlation; that is, the conventions or rules may be codifications of natural pauses.



understand his own case, 'I think that my fits of sadness, though they do not affect my judgment, resemble madness' (381). In 1886, he wrote to Baillie that "when I am at the worst, though my judgment is never affected, my state is much like madness" (*Further Letters* 256). Martin reports that "[m]ore than two decades after Hopkins's death another member of the [Jesuit, Dublin] community said. . . that he 'was thought by most to be more or less crazy'" (375). Indeed Hopkins feared he would cross over the edge mentally. After a fortnight vacation in 1888 to Scotland, he wrote to Bridges that "I can not always last like this: in mind or body I shall give way" (*Letters* 282).

Hopkins's fear of madness was, I believe, augmented by the fear of confinement to a mental asylum. In 1880, a former English Jesuit, Thomas Meyrick, had published a pamphlet entitled *My Imprisonings; An Apology for Leaving the Jesuits*. Modelled to some extent on Silvio Pellico's *Le Mie Prigioni*,<sup>1</sup> Meyrick records his commitment, against his will, by the Jesuits to a private asylum in Fulham in 1873 for four months and in 1879, for 10 months, to a private asylum in Drumcondra near Dublin. In 1879, Meyrick had served as an instructor in Greek and Italian at Clongowes Wood College, which Hopkins visited for his New Year's holiday in 1885 and "his annual eight-day retreat" in August of 1885 (White 404). It was Fr. Thomas Keating, Fr. John Connee's immediate predecessor as Rector of Clongowes Wood, who had Meyrick committed to Drumcondra.<sup>2</sup> Connee became one of the few Jesuits in Ireland with whom Hopkins established a close friendship (White 390).

Although there is no direct reference to Thomas Meyrick in Hopkins's letters or in either of White's or Martin's biographies, it is very probable Hopkins knew of Meyrick and his tribulations. Martin observes that the English province of the Jesuits "was a loose family, and most of its members knew of each other" (377). The older Meyrick often preceded Hopkins at various Jesuit institutions by durations that varied from twenty-five years at St. Bueno's in Wales to two years at Manresa House at Roehampton.<sup>3</sup>

	Meyrick	Hopkins
St. Buenos	1848-49	1873-75
Stonyhurst	1850, 1853, 1866-62, 1867	1870-73
Manresa House, Roehampton	1867, 1872-73, 1877	1868-70
Liverpool	1854-57	1879-81
Clongowes Wood College	1879	1885

It is most probable that Hopkins had learned of the eccentric Meyrick at Roehampton in 1868 and during his visits to Clongowes Wood in 1885.

Hopkins was also interested in the trial of the Tichborne Claimant to the extent of attending the Lord Chief Justice's summation in 1873 (White 218). This wealthy Catholic fam-

ily with ties to the English Jesuits rejected the claimant to be its lost, putatively dead heir, Richard Tichborne, as an imposter. Meyrick, against the interest of the Jesuits,<sup>4</sup> testified on behalf of the claimant who claimed to have attended Stonyhurst where Meyrick had taught him Latin in 1856. Meyrick testified that the young Lord Tichborne "had no chance in making any progress in Latin," thereby explaining why the claimant knew no Latin (Atlay 252-53). Meyrick writes in his *My Imprisonings* that among the Jesuits "[t]his appearance for the Claimant cost me dear" (11-12).

Moreover, the subject of the Welsh Saint Winifred, virgin and martyr, interested both Meyrick and Hopkins. Hopkins had begun his incomplete drama *St. Winifred's Well* in 1879 and Meyrick had published his *Life of St. Winifred* in 1878, a work that given the closeness of the English Jesuits, Hopkins probably consulted in preparing his drama. However, it is my further contention in this paper that Meyrick's *My Imprisonings* influenced the imagery and metaphors of two of Hopkins's dark Dublin Sonnets "I wake and feel the fell of dark" and "Carrion Comfort."

A brief digression is warranted here in regard to the career of Thomas Meyrick. Prior to Meyrick's 18 months (1846-48) in Italy among the Italian Jesuits and his ordination in England in 1850, Meyrick was one of the young disciples of Newman who had accompanied him to Littlemore in 1843. Meyrick was a problem for Newman. In 1845, Meyrick "rushed home in a state of nervous breakdown, making all sorts of accusations against Newman, among them that he extracted a promise from him not to join the Church of Rome" (Trevor 346). In 1846 Newman visited Meyrick in Rome and presciently wrote that "[H]e is a very amiable and very clever fellow, but it is impossible to say how he will turn out" (Trevor 346).

Earlier Meyrick had been one of the collaborators in the writing of the *Lives of the English Saints*, a project initiated by Newman at Littlemore in 1843-44. Meyrick wrote *The Life of St. Walpurga* in which considerable emphasis had been placed on the medicinal oil which allegedly had flowed from her relics. In his "Essay on Miracles," appended to the *Apologia*, Newman defended the "verisimilitude" of this miracle (Newman 1: 227), though Kingsley had selected Meyrick's *Life of St. Walpurga* for special ridicule in his provocative pamphlet *What Does Dr. Newman Mean?* "I can quote no more. I really must recollect that my readers and I are living in the nineteenth century" (Newman 1: 323).

## II

I return to my main argument—the influence of Meyrick's *My Imprisonings* on the imagery of "I wake and feel the fell of dark" and "Carrion Comfort." In 1873, at the asylum in Fulham, from which he eventually escaped, Meyrick likens "the horrors" of the asylum to the Ignatian "Meditation on Hell," which "was very efficiently represented: there was the stench, which in our close rooms was insupportable, the blasphemy from the madmen most

horrible, and the hopelessness" (13). The analogy between the stench and hopelessness of the asylum and Ignatius's "Meditation on Hell" from *The Spiritual Exercises* is echoed in the concluding lines of Hopkins's sonnet. "The lost are like this, and their scourge to be / As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse." Meyrick's "hopelessness" and Hopkins's "lost," Meyrick's "stench" in "close rooms" and Hopkins's "sweating selves" are telling correspondences.

In the Drumcondra asylum near Dublin, Meyrick was cut off from family and friends; "I asked to write letters, and I wrote several, none of which were sent" (24). When he discovers "that all his letters were stopped and no one came or intended to come to see me," "[t]he agonies of mind I endured" were "beyond description" (25). These unsent letters may be the source of the powerful metaphor in "I wake and feel the fell of dark" for the speaker's laments, as "cries countless, cries like dead letters sent / to dearest him that lives alas! away."

Read as a confession of the temptation of suicide (Martin 386), "Carrion Comfort," written in Dublin in 1885, is a poem whose central metaphor is a wrestling match between the speaker and a "terrible" overmastering opponent, "an animal force capable of cruelty" (Harris 100), who at the end of the evolving present tense sonnet, is discovered, upon reflection, to have been God: "That night, that year / of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God) my God."

Although the obvious source of this metaphor is "Jacob's night-long wrestle with the man / angel who was somehow also God," (*Works* 457n.), another probable immediate source that may have reinforced the Biblical source, appears to be derived from Meyrick's *My Imprisonings*. After his first unsuccessful attempt to escape from the Fulham asylum in 1873, Meyrick was "quickly seized and collared" by the asylum keepers, the shortest of whom proceeded to subject the helpless Meyrick to what he later described as a "wrestling match" (13).

Five times he threw me; but in vain. I fell always on my side. The last time I thought my hip-bone was broken. I was so disabled that they thought I had enough, and they pushed me into a padded cell, where I lay like one dead.

(14)

Curiously, like Hopkins at the conclusion of "Carrion Comfort," Meyrick grows fond of his primary antagonist: "I learned afterwards to like best the stout, broadshouldered man who flung me" (14). This "stout, broadshouldered" keeper is transformed by Hopkins to "the hero whose heaven-

handling flung me," to the feral God who wrestles with the speaker's resisting heart in order to strengthen, cheer, and rescue it from the "carrion comfort" of despair.

It is, therefore, my contention that Meyrick's *My Imprisonings* likely exacerbated Hopkins's fear of madness and its consequences (could the asylum at Drumcondra await him?). Meyrick eventually found peace and solace, cared for by nuns in Italy (Newman 2: 583n.). Although his *My Imprisonings* may have been the source of some of the key metaphors for two of Hopkins's dark Dublin sonnets, Meyrick in his attempt to justify himself and reclaim his character, after leaving the Jesuits, does not go beyond the portrayal of himself as a victim of Jesuit insensitivity, and hardheartness as well as the brutality of Victorian mental asylums. Hopkins in "Carrion Comfort" and "I wake to feel the fell of dark," in contrast, transmutes the fear and experience of extreme mental distress into poems of profound and intense self-interrogation in which Meyrick's binarism of victimizer/victim is radically disturbed.<sup>5</sup>

## Works Cited

- Atlay, J. B. *Famous Trials of the Century*. London: Grant Richards, 1899.
- Harris, Daniel A. *Inspiration Unbidden, The 'Terrible Sonnets' of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1982.
- Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Including His Correspondence with Coventry Patmore*. Ed. C. C. Abbott. London: Oxford UP, 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*. Ed. C. C. Abbott. London: Oxford UP, 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ed. Norman H. Mackenzie. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- Martin, Robert Bernard. *Gerard Manley Hopkins, A Very Private Life*. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1991.
- Meyrick, Thomas. *My Imprisonings; An Apology for Leaving the Jesuits*. London: Privately Printed, 1880.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Life of St. Winifred, Virgin, Martyr, Abbess*. Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1996. Reprint of 1878 edition.
- Newman, John Henry. *Apologia Pro Vita Sua and Basic Texts of the Newman-Kingsley Controversy*. Ed. David DeLaura. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Ed. Martin Svaglic. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.
- Sheil, Michael. Letter to Writer, Clongowes Wood, 29/4/03.
- Trevor, Meriol. *Newman, the Pillar of the Cloud*. New York: Doubleday, 1962.
- White, Norman. *Hopkins, A Literary Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

Xavier University—Cincinnati

<sup>1</sup>Pellico's account of his imprisonment by the Austrians was classic of the Italian *risorgimento* and a book Meyrick taught English and Irish students (*My Imprisonings* 19).

<sup>2</sup>Letter of Fr. Michael Sheil, S.J., Rector of Clongowes Wood College, 29/4/03.

<sup>3</sup>The following chart is adduced from White and Martin and also Meyrick's *My Imprisonings*.

<sup>4</sup>The supporters of the claimant charged there was a "vast Jesuit conspiracy" against him (Atlay 353).

<sup>5</sup>See especially Harris 97-101. White notes that Hopkins avoided the word *madness* in his poems "possibly because he considered poems more

deliberated, formal, and accountable self-expressions than letters," 405.

## Books Received

- Alexander, Lynn M. *Women, Work, and Representation: Needlewomen in Victorian Art and Literature*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2003. Pp. 257. \$44.95. "As I continued to document the longevity of the seamstress in Victorian literature and art I came to realize that such a study presented the unique opportunity to study the evolution of a symbol, from its beginning as a literal presentation, to its symbolic manifestation, to its acceptance as a cultural commonplace. But in order to understand the semiotic life cycle, we must focus on the symbol itself, how it first appeared and then how it developed and changed. First we need to investigate the occupation of seamstress and its representation in Victorian periodicals, literature and art; then we need to examine how the portrayal changed and what such changes indicate about occasion, audience, and purpose" (2).
- Allen, Emily. *Theater Figures: The Production of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2003. Pp. viii + 254. \$69.95 (cloth); \$22.95 (paper); \$9.95 (CD). "In the pages that follow, I focus specifically on the relationship between theater and the novel, and I explore the crucial role played by popular theater in the formation and reformation of the novelistic field over the course of the British nineteenth century. I argue that theater and theatricality not only enabled the field's continual process of self-definition, but they also gave novelists and critics a set of tropes through which to understand and regulate the nineteenth-century's rapidly changing literary market. Realist novels were both the market's most brilliant success story and its most vexed cultural products, offering as they did an apparent *retreat* from market forces in their construction of private, emotional space and privatized family values. Theater, on the other hand, appeared to embody market forces at their most raw, offering the public spectacle of undisguised and unregulated consumption" (3).
- Archibald, Diana C. *Domesticity, Imperialism, and Emigration in the Victorian Novel*. Columbia & London: U of Missouri P, 2002. Pp. xiv + 214. \$34.95. "During the nineteenth century as millions of British citizens left England for the New Worlds [America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand], hearth and home were physically moved from the heart of the empire to its very outskirts. This dispersal, however, does not result in any overt ideological movement away from the imperial center. Home remains fundamentally English. And though the ideal of the domestic woman is most certainly affected by these mass movements, in most texts the definition of her becomes rather more narrow and unattainable than otherwise, for she must not only be an 'angel [in the house]' but she must also be English" (6).
- Colby, Vineta. *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography*. Victorian Literature and Culture Series. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2003. Pp. xiv + 387. \$39.50. "This is a literary biography, reading her life in terms of the large body of writing she produced. . . . I have read Vernon Lee to discover what she read and what influences, personal and intellectual, shaped her mind. Although she never published an autobiography, she left a wealth of material in her published work and in the unpublished letters, journals, and essays that survive. . . . My book is an attempt to read her entire work in its fullest context—biographical, literary, and intellectual. In the end Vernon Lee fits into no single category. She was too late to be a Victorian, too early so to be a Modernist. She was a non-militant feminist, a sexually repressed lesbian, an aesthete, a cautious socialist, a secular humanist" (xi-xii).
- Davidoff, Lenore and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*. Rev. ed. London & New York: Routledge, 2002. (first printed 1987) Pp. 1 + 576. \$29.95 (paper) "Based on a study of middle class individuals, families and organisations in two localities—the rural counties of Suffolk and Essex and the industrial commercial town of Birmingham,—*Family Fortunes* is in three parts. The first is about the mental and spiritual worlds of provincial middle-class men and women; the second about the economic and material activities which provided their livelihoods, the third about their daily lives, family, and kinship relationships, homes and gardens, and the public activities with which they engaged" (xiv).
- Goldstone, Lawrence and Nancy. *Out of the Flames: The Remarkable Story of a Fearless Scholar, a Fatal Heresy, and One of the Rarest Books in the World*. New York: Broadway Books, 2003. Pp. 353. \$14.95 (paper); \$22.95 (Canada, paper). "What is a book? Paper, cardboard, vellum, calfskin, glue, ink? The embodiment of our ideas, the corporeal representation of our souls?
- This is the story of one book—Michael Servetus's book [*Christianismi Restituto (The Restoration of Christinity)*—an old book, a rare book, a book that contained the mystery of a great scientific discovery [a description of pulmonary circulation]. But unlike other old, rare books, this book was attacked almost from the moment of its publication, viciously and systematically, with the goal of total eradication, by forces of overwhelming power.
- And yet, somehow, with no commensurate organized defense operating on its behalf, three copies survived" (4).
- Johnston, Anna. *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. Pp. xii + 262. \$65.00 "Across the Empire, British missionary commentators sought, by their 'zeal', to remake colonial projects in the image of religious conversion. In doing so, missionaries constructed an ambiguous, ambivalent position for themselves within colonial cultures, a position negotiated in the many texts they produced. . . . This book maps this ambiguous position through the texts which constitute the London Missionary Society . . . archives, texts which provide a fascinating commentary on the complexities of colonial cultures and open up a place where the contradictory discourses of nineteenth-century colonialism can be clearly seen.
- British Protestant missionaries were prolific writers. Diaries, reports, letters, memoirs, histories, ethnographies, novels, children's books, translations, grammars and many other kinds of texts spilled from their pens. . . . Missionary texts were a foundational and influential part of this 'imperial archive', and they are the focus of this book. Because missionaries inhabited such complex, ambivalent, and uncertain positions within colonial cultures I look closely and critically at the textual archive of missionary endeavours, in order to trace the way these texts complicate traditional linear histories of imperial conquest and invasion" (2-3).
- Joyce, Simon. *Capital Offenses: Geographies of Class and Crime in Victorian London*. Victorian Literature and Culture Series. Charlottesville & London: U of Virginia P, 2003. Pp. viii + 267. \$39.50. "Fantasies in which crime is fully contained recur endlessly in nineteenth-century crime fiction, but even Sherlock Holmes has to return time and time again (eventually even out of retirement) to fight new menaces. The nature of the threat is not constant, arising at different times in the East and West Ends, among the destitute poor and the dissolute rich. As the nature of criminality shifts, so too do the presumed and the actual responses of readers, who might be asked at various times to sympathize with criminals, to condemn them, to endorse the tactics of the police, to bemoan their incompetence (especially in contrast to a private detective like Holmes), or to push for legislative change. If such appeals depend upon historical context, they are also articulated through a precise attention to geographical specificities: not just those that are represented in texts, but those of the readers themselves" (11).
- Levine, Caroline. *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt*. Charlottesville & London: U of Virginia P, 2003. Pp. xi + 237. \$39.50. "This book makes the case that Victorian writers and readers understood suspenseful narrative as a stimulus to active speculation. For a startling array of nineteenth-century thinkers—from John Ruskin and Michael Faraday to Charlotte Brontë and Wilkie Collins—the experience of suspense was not a means of
- social regulation, but a rigorous political and epistemological training, a way to foster energetic skepticism and uncertainty rather than closure and complacency. Suspense fiction was all about teaching readers to suspend judgment. And I will argue, here, the nineteenth century was not wrong about suspense: the classic readerly text was indeed far more writerly—dynamic, critical, questioning, and indeterminate—than Barthes ever tempts us to imagine" (2).
- Lewis, Linda M. *Germaine de Staël, George Sand and the Victorian Woman Artist*. Columbia & London: U of Missouri P, 2003. Pp. xii + 278. \$24.95. "In this book I undertake an analysis of nineteenth-century literary figures who began seriously to question [male] assumptions by means of their fictional portraits of brilliant female artists. Germaine de Staël and George Sand and their English disciples Geraldine Jewsbury, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, and Mrs. Humphry (Mary) Ward. The French novelists Staël and Sand created the female myth that was to become the counterpart of Romantism's Prometheus/Icarus myth of artistic manhood. It is fair question to ask. Why these particular Victorian writers? My answer would be that all four were serious artists who consciously adapted the Corinne/Consuelo myth of Staël and Sand to embody English women's artistic endeavors—chiefly of course their own literary endeavors—and that they deliberately invoked their esteemed artistic foremothers in creating these fictional portraits" (3).
- Malthus, Thomas Robert. *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Ed. Philip Appleman. Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 2004. Pp. xxxiii + 317. \$?. Includes "Influences on Malthus (6 entries); "An Essay of the Principle of Population" (1798) and "An Essay of the Principle of Population from the Revised Edition (1803-); "Nineteenth-Century Comment (9 entries); "Malthus in the Twentieth Century" (23 entries) + "Selected Readings" and index.
- Schacker, Jennifer. *National Dreams: The Remaking of Fairy Tales in Nineteenth-Century England*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2003. Pp. 198. \$39.95; £28.00. "A large readership still exists for what were once known as 'popular and traditionary tales'—what we might today call fairy tales, folk tales, wonder tales, or *Märchen*. From the early Victorian period to the present, written versions of such tales have been mainstays of popular and children's literature. Celebrated as imaginatively liberating, psychologically therapeutic, or as windows onto particular cultures, fairy tales are generally embraced as products of something larger than an individual consciousness, older than the medium—writing—in which we experience the stories. But we have inherited more than a taste for 'popular tales' from our nineteenth-century predecessors. We have also inherited a set of ideologically charged textual practices and interpretive frameworks

that reveal as much about Victorian literary culture as they do about oral folk cultures" ([1]).

Silver, Anna Krugovoy. *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. Pp. x + 220. \$55.00. "Anorexia nervosa, I argue, is deeply rooted in Victorian values, ideologies, and aesthetics, which together helped define femininity in the nineteenth century. Given the clear parallels which exist between the symptoms of this disease and Victorian gender ideology, I argue that the normative model of middle-class Victorian womanhood shares several qualities with the beliefs or behaviors of the anorexic girl or woman. One can thus 'read' Victorian gender ideology through an anorexic lens. Briefly the qualities that many (though, of course, not all) Victorians used to define the ideal woman—spiritual, non-sexual, self-disciplined—share what Leslie Heywood has called an 'anorexic logic.' The anorexic woman's slender form attests to her discipline over her body and its hunger, despite the persistence of that hunger, and indicates her discomfort with or even hatred of her body and its appetites, which may or may not include her sexuality. If one reads the disease *metaphorically*, then, it becomes evident that the pathology of anorexia nervosa and predominant Victorian constructions of gender subscribe to many of the same characteristics" (3).

Slinn, E. Warwick. *Victorian Poetry as Cultural Critique: The Politics of Performative Language*. Victorian Literature and Culture Series. Charlottesville & London: U of Virginia P, 2003. Pp. x + 217. \$39.50. "This book analyzes the performance language of a series of Victorian poems. The project was conceived, however, in terms of a broader academic context where poetry has become something of a neglected genre in literary studies, where the intensive use of language in poetry appears to have become marginalized amidst thematic approaches to the politics of social discourse. If, however, we are to understand fully the function of figurative language in cultural processes (of which poetry is the most sophisticated form), we need to restore attention to that language, no matter how specialized its use—without losing sight of its continuity with social and historical contexts. With this study I aim to redress the balance by analyzing poetic content and process in order to show how poetry may enact a cultural critique through its self-conscious formalism, its foregrounding of just those language acts that many of the literary scholars most sympathetic to cultural critique have seemed least to take into account" ([1]).

Warwick, Andrew. *Masters of Theory: Cambridge and the Rise of Mathematical Physics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003. Pp. xiv + 572. \$29.00, £20.50 (paper). "Taking Cambridge University as my example, I contend in this study that mathematical physics has a necessarily rich culture which is most effectively made visible through the history of training, the mechanism

by which that culture has been reproduced and expanded for more than two hundred years. . . .

My approach is naturalistic in that it explores theory not in terms of method or logic but through the experience of the student struggling to become its master. Nor do I treat theorizing as a uniquely cerebral process. . . . Cambridge undergraduates in the late eighteenth century found it very odd that they were being required to learn by sketching and writing rather than by reading and talking, and to display their knowledge by solving mathematical problems on paper instead of disputing in Latin. Their testimony highlights the peculiarity of mathematical knowledge made using hand, brain, paper, and pen. It is part of my task to understand how these new skills were taught and learned, and to explore the relationship between drawing, writing, and knowing. I also contend that *how* and *by whom* students were taught is as important as *what* they were taught. . . . The mathematician's body, gender, and sexuality were also implicated in the making of the modern theoretician. Those who would master celestial mechanics in Victorian Cambridge believed that competition on the playing field was as important as competition in the classroom, that irregular sexual activity sapped a man's strength, and that women's minds and bodies could not withstand these trials. I want to understand how these embodied values contributed to what contemporaries characterized as the industrialization of the learning process" (ix-x).

Zorn, Christa. *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2003. Pp. xxxi + 213. \$49.95. "Vernon Lee published more than forty books on aesthetic, historical, philosophical, and social issues. She was a regular contributor to some of the foremost critical journals: from the liberal *Contemporary Review* and the popular *Blackwell's Magazine* to the more elitist *Fortnightly Review*, *Athenaeum* and the *Nation*." (xviii). "Chapter 1 of this book introduces Lee as a European rather than wholly British writer, with a unique upbringing between cultures in an intellectually ambitious home" (xxviii). "Chapter 2 investigates how Lee sought to transcend her individuality by posing as a mediator of sorts between different cultures, genres, identities, and ages" (xxix). "[C]hapter 3 [discusses] Lee's relationship to feminism" (xxix). "Chapter 4 explore[s] how she evokes a lesbian dimension by both activating and redefining classic forms of masculine homoeroticism" (xxx). "Chapter 5 presents Vernon Lee as a novelist in *Miss Brown* (1884), which attracted enough public attention to have been called a bestseller" (xxxx). "Chapter 6 covers three of Vernon Lee's better-known fantastic tales—'Dionea,' 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady,' and 'Amor Dure'—whose narrative structures combine the traditional ghost story with aesthetic symbolism" (xxxx).

## Notice

The number on your address label is the number of the last issue covered by your subscription. Renewals should be made at the rate of \$5/yr. or \$9/2yrs.—\$6/yr. foreign and Canada.

Back issues of VN, at \$4 per copy (\$5 for Index) are available for the following numbers: 8, 20, 23, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83m 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, Index (1952-1988), Index2 (1988-2001).