

# The Victorian Newsletter

Editor

Ward Hellstrom

Managing Editor

Louise R. Hellstrom

---

Number 65

Contents

Spring 1984

---

Page

Looking Backward—Victorian Poetry and Prose* by Jerome H. Buckley	1	19	Chaos and Cosmos: Carlyle's Idea of History by Lowell T. Frye
Looking Backward: The Victorian Novel* by George H. Ford	3	22	George Eliot: Feminist Critic by Carol A. Martin
Looking Forward: American Feminists, Victorian Sages* by Elaine Showalter	6	26	"Muscular Christianity" and Brutality: The Case of Tom Brown by Henry R. Harrington
The Mesmerizing of Dorian Gray by Kerry Powell	10	29	Rossetti's Use of the "Great Mother" Mythos in "A Last Confession" by Nathan Cervo
Dicken's War against the Militancy of the Oppressed by Atta Britwum	15	32	Books Received

\*Paper delivered at English X, MLA, New York, Dec., 1983.

Cover Illustration: On the 100th anniversary of the Third Reform Bill we show William Ewart Gladstone from a sketch by Phil May, 1893.

The VICTORIAN NEWSLETTER is sponsored for the Victorian Group of Modern Language Association by the Western Kentucky University and is published twice annually. Editorial and business communications should be addressed to Ward Hellstrom, FAC 200, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY 42101. Please use *MLA Stylesheet* for form of typescript. Manuscripts 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 payable to *The Victorian Newsletter*.

## Looking Backward – Victorian Poetry and Prose

Jerome H. Buckley

At the first MLA convention a hundred years ago, the papers were few and philological – and as unvictorian in subject matter as the “genitive in Old French,” the “factitive” in German, and “the conjugation of the Wallonian dialect.” By 1883 all the principal Victorian poets, except Hopkins, had completed all their major work (though the indefatigable Tennyson, Browning, and Swinburne still had several volumes to publish), and the most memorable Victorian prose, except Ruskin’s *Praeterita* and Pater’s *Appreciations*, had already long since appeared. But none of the convention’s papers as printed in the first issue of *PMLA* touched on Victorian literature.

Fifty years later, with the strong encouragement of MLA members, Victorian scholarship and criticism were emerging vigorously from the anti-Victorianism of the Stracheyan ’twenties. *PMLA*, to be sure, still published only the occasional Victorian article, but there were now other journals concerned with the period, notably *Modern Philology*, which in May of 1933 carried the first of our admirable annual Victorian bibliographies. A glance at the first seven years of the latter indicates that the prose masters received far more devoted attention throughout the ’thirties than the poets or the novelists and that the approach to their essays and histories was far more frequently social and intellectual than rhetorical or stylistic. Carlyle, Newman, and Arnold were sedulously examined and appraised as prophets and ideologues rather than as artists in persuasion. Among the poets Hopkins was being patiently elucidated, and Browning was being extolled for solid substance and philosophical profundities, while Tennyson, apart from the faithful stewardship of his grandson and one perceptive essay by T.S. Eliot and another by Douglas Bush, was being disdainfully ignored or summarily dismissed.

At the 1939 MLA meeting the Victorian Group proposed a survey of new directions in scholarship and desiderata for further study. After long delays the volume appeared in 1950 as *The Reinterpretation of Victorian Literature*, consisting of eleven well-informed essays on the Victorian sense of humor, educational theory, “the tradition of Burke,” Victorians abroad, and the need to relate Victorian literature even more closely than before to society and the history of ideas. But by 1950 some of the essays seemed already outdated, unnecessarily tentative, unduly measured and apologetic in tone, for by that time High Modernism had perished, along with much else, in the Second World War, and a new receptivity to the multiple purposeful vitality of the nineteenth century was everywhere apparent. As a student of Victorian literature, I for one could sense the excitement of a new young generation of interpreters eager to explore new or forgotten territories, and I could happily join in their voyages of discovery.

The next fifteen or twenty years witnessed a tremendous expansion of Victorian scholarship: an acquisition of new primary sources, a greatly increased sophistication of critical awareness, the preparation of new texts, the meticulous editing of unpublished letters, new full-scale biographies based on data

released at last from the protective custody of family attics and archives, the recovery of unknown minor writers and the corrected view of major ones, the revival of Clough and Meredith, a quickened interest in the Pre-Raphaelites, the triumphant return of Tennyson, and, taking account of all these, the launching of the splendid MLA guides to research and of new journals – *Victorian Studies* and *Victorian Poetry*, pre-eminent among many others.

With the impetus of such activity and concern, the *new* reinterpretation of Victorian literature has continued on many levels into the 1980’s. As David DeLaura’s magisterial guide testifies, scholars have by no means slighted Victorian prose. Still the poetry, I believe, has yielded more conspicuously to new critical strategies. For the moment, therefore, I shall consider briefly some of the new approaches to the poets in general and then turn more specifically to some revised views of Tennyson.

In the “post-modern” era the Victorian poets have seemed closer in spirit to the modernists of the early twentieth century than critics before 1950 could imagine – that is, more obsessed with alienation and the tyranny of subjective knowledge, more conspicuously in search of objective correlatives, more likely to invoke a wasteland imagery to register a sense of social betrayal. And correspondingly they have seemed more remote from the Romantics – especially, as Pauline Fletcher has recently argued, in their unwordsworthian and unbyronic response to natural landscape. Yet we learn also of lingering debts to the Romantics, of an alleged, though not very demonstrable, anxiety of influence, and of “intertextuality” (which is, I gather, a modish euphemism – or is it dysphemism? – for what was once called literary echo or allusion). But whatever its relation to the periods before or after, Victorian poetry has been subjected to the same methods of analysis that were once applied only to later literature. Marxist criticism, I should judge, has dealt less effectively with the verse than with the prose fiction. Genre studies, on the other hand, have succeeded in casting new light on the Victorian idyl, elegy, and monodrama. Psychological readings, at first directed to the problem of compensation and sublimation in the poet, have dwelt more and more frequently on the sexual imagery of the poem, or with what the fertile imagination of the critic can construe as its masculine or feminine symbols. (One explicator of *In Memoriam*, for example, sees the trees laying their dark arms about the field as a clue to some darkly oedipal hidden message.) We have heard increasingly of “self-referentiality,” as if the poem could have no proper subject but itself. We may, however, recognize the fact that many Victorian poems do indeed confront the problems of aesthetic means and structure, without denying that many others quite properly aspire, as Arnold demanded, to a broader criticism of life itself. We are also told that the monologue is simply the speaker’s – or else the composing poet’s – act of self-creation. And to a degree we should assent to that assumption; surely Browning, who did most to

refine the monologue form, expected us to identify the fantasies and delusions of his characters as they seek to project themselves. But Browning also, I submit, would have us believe that the self-deluder has existed before he begins to fabricate a new self-image – which is to say, that poetry works with objective entities as well as with subjective verbalizations.

Nonetheless, renewed emphasis on language and style has animated some of the most rewarding criticism of Victorian poetry in the past twenty years. We must now regard every poem, whatever its intention or effect, as first of all a verbal construct, must try to relate each lonely word to its grammatical context, seek to detect, if we can, the poet's characteristic syntax, discover the implication of recurrent rhetorical patterns, the truth of Tennyson's contention that "words, like Nature half reveal / And half conceal the Soul within." Yet we do both poem and poet a disservice if we insist on the unreliability of language rather than on its wondrous flexibility, if we impute to every statement an imprecision and a constant punning ambiguity, or if we blindly follow the deconstructionist to a shadowy undertext, where there are no fixed meanings and ultimately perhaps no meaning at all.

Among all the Victorians, Tennyson has gained most decisively from the recent interest in poetic genre and the more positive aspects of attention to language. Many pieces that once seemed embarrassing are now to be approached with new sympathy. Even "Enoch Arden" and the *English Idylls*, long spurned as sentimental narratives, are now analyzed as skillful exercises in the domestic idyl. Stylistic measurement has also, however, encouraged confusing or at least paradoxical readings of long admired familiar poems. "Tears, Idle Tears," for example, has been defended out of context as a tender lyric remarkable for its generalized imagery and somewhat abstract diction, and alternatively, seen in its setting as a deliberately ineffectual nostalgic song deserving the rebuke it receives from the aggressive Princess Ida. "Ulysses" is another striking case in point. Through analysis of speech rhythms, images, and rhetoric, the self-depicted Ulysses has become a bundle of contradictions; to many he is no longer the hero, magnanimous and indomitable; instead he seems selfish and condescending, or frightened beneath his blustering assertion, or pathetically mad, or merely tired, seeking release in death beyond the western stars, or perhaps already dead speaking as a shade from the underworld – or from some deep undertext. Yet the poem "Ulysses" remains, perhaps more engrossing than ever in its newfound elusiveness.

*In Memoriam* has likewise invited or received various interpretations. By generic critics it has been praised both for its adherence to the pastoral tradition and also for its rejection of pastoral artifice, and, again, for its consistency as an extended domestic idyl and for its transcendence of a "somewhat sinister" domesticity. Its sacramental diction, drawn from Hallam and the Cambridge Apostles, is said to have driven the doubting poet almost in spite of himself to a positive spiritual resolution. From one point of view *In Memoriam* seems deliberately to have dispensed with elegiac unity to develop its themes "in divers tones"; and from another, as an all-comprehending computer demonstrates, it achieves a thorough unity of tone through a recurrent consistent syntax and "a formulaic approach to

meter."

Most of all, more even than the elegy, *Idylls of the King* bears the burden, or the accolade, of recent criticism and the changed status of the poet's reputation. Each of the only two significant general books on Tennyson from 1920 to 1950 sharply discounted the *Idylls*: Harold Nicolson found the sequence remote from his taste and "intellectually insincere," and Paull Baum declared the poem as a whole "wanting in unity and coherence of structure . . . and ultimately wanting also in unity and coherence of meaning." Since 1960 scores of articles have reviewed the *Idylls*, and among at least thirty book-length studies (in English alone) of Tennyson's life and works, eight have centered exclusively on that poem. Drawing on several of the latter, we find Philip Eggers assured that "it is not likely that the *Idylls* will ever again be dismissed as an ornate exercise," Clyde Ryals appraising the *Idylls* as "Tennyson's *magnum opus*, . . . the artistic embodiment of Tennyson's most mature thought," and John Rosenberg concluding that the *Idylls* is "one of the four or five indisputably great long poems in our language." In 1980 J.M. Gray asked us "to accept, at the outset, [his] conviction that these are fine poems and the work of a master craftsman," and in 1982 David Staines lauded the *Idylls* for re-establishing once and for all the "literary eminence" of the Arthurian legends.

But despite the enthusiastic recovery of the *Idylls of the King*, there is little consensus to be found, in recent books and articles, about the role of the nominal protagonist. Arthur appears in unsuspected new guises, no longer as simply the heroic "flower of kings" that Tennyson thought him, but as a paradoxical hero-villain, as "a spiritual absolute" in a sadly relativistic world, as the "scapegoat of the Order," as a sun-god or a culpable "monomaniac" or "a comic artist," and most recently, in the October 1983 *PMLA*, as Tennyson's "female king," dominating a Camelot, where "the female energy of myth substitutes for the male energy of history." Tennyson himself declared that his poetry would lend itself to diverse interpretations. And surely a major poem, the *Idylls* or any other, does deserve every insight we can bring to it. At the same time, I should argue, it must transcend the ingenuity of any reader-response that is patently arbitrary or needlessly restrictive.

\* \* \*

Looking backward not a century or even half that time, what are we to make of the explosion of Victorian scholarship and criticism in the past twenty or thirty years? How are we as teachers of literature to avail ourselves of materials so multitudinous, so provocative, so bewildering? We should all be grateful for the close and plentiful research devoted to the poetry and intellectual prose. But we should also, I believe, be alarmed at the extent to which both have yielded ground to a livelier concern in our classes with nineteenth-century fiction. The shift to the novel may in part be a corrective to an overemphasis before 1950 on the other two genres, though I should hope that all three modes might work together as related parts of a balanced literary education. Perhaps, on the other hand, we have not sufficiently valued such balance. I suspect that our own critical methods and commitments have served only to increase the disproportion and disenchantment. Most of our

students, including some of the brightest, have an understandably small regard for the bloodless formalism of an ahistorical/critical analysis. However intently we may seek to deconstruct a novel or insist that its characters have no existence beyond the marks on the page, and its themes no non-aesthetic reference, our students still find in Victorian fiction a plenitude of life and a commentary on their own condition as human beings. The poetry and the non-fictional prose may lack the obvious attractions of dramatic plot, but each, approached with widened

perspective, may recover its proper place in the curriculum, for neither has ever really lost its capacity to present human emotion and idea in memorable form. As we now look forward to a newer criticism and scholarship, we must retain our recently acquired sensitivity to language and structure. At the same time, as responsible Victorianists, we must reassert the priorities of meaning, for in literature as in life there can be no true style without significant content.

Harvard University

## Looking Backward: The Victorian Novel

George H. Ford

Before taking our time-trip back to the olden days of the 1940's and reconstructing how the Victorian novel was faring at that time, I'd like to say something first about its status nowadays. To reinforce my own impressions I turned for help to those useful surveys, published annually in *Studies in English Literature*, in which some heroic scholar-critic reads one hundred or two hundred books that have been published during a single year and then sums them all up for us so that we know what has been going on in our field. Bless them for their help! What struck me, in looking through these surveys over the past ten years, was how most of them made the same overall assessment of what has been happening. What they report is that more is being written about Victorian literature than about the Romantics, and that within the Victorian field itself much more was being written about the novel than about the other genres. As Stuart Sperry observed in 1981, because of its generating "interest in form and artistry," the Victorian novel "fairly overwhelms the attention" given to other forms.<sup>1</sup>

If we jump back now some thirty-five years to 1948 and imagine a scholar-critic at MLA making such assertions about the importance of the Victorian novel and its "artistry," you can guess what would have happened; some official would have come in with a straight-jacket and hustled the speaker off to Bellevue.

For back in 1948 and earlier, both of the words in our topic here, "Victorian" and "novel" were fraught with problems. Our panel-director, Coral Lansbury, has recommended us to indulge in personal recollections in our papers, and her suggestion prompts me to recall my experience as a maladjusted undergraduate. My maladjustment derived from my having acquired a strange and seemingly inexplicable liking for Victorian poets and prose writers, a liking which impressed my friends and contemporaries as perverse. When I admitted to them that I liked Ruskin and Browning as well as I liked Sir Thomas Browne and Auden, they were both embarrassed and alarmed. I am sure they would have been less alarmed if I had admitted

to having robbed a bank.

In the 1940's, of course, this word "Victorian" continued to arouse the expected hostile response in most quarters. I had a vivid reminder of this after World War II when I had been assigned to take over teaching a course at Cincinnati which carried the title of "Nineteenth-Century Literature." The title was in large print in the catalogue, but in small print I learned which authors I was to cover. They were Tennyson, Ruskin, George Eliot, and Browning, but there was no mention of Byron or Lamb or Jane Austen. This seemed rather odd to me, so I enquired from the department chairman why my course was not titled "Victorian Literature" – which is what it was. "Young man," he replied, "do you want any *students* to sign up for your course? Can you imagine attracting any if you use the word 'Victorian' in your title?"

Well, I suppose the old boy was right at that time. A contributing factor throughout the 1940's was that one of the required texts in most freshman English courses used to be Lytton Strachey's biography of *Queen Victoria*, and it would be a long time before the impression would wear off of the fatuousness of all things Victorian.

It would also take some time to wear off the unfavorable associations of the second of our terms, the term *novel* – at least in the groves of academe. In a good university, in those days, a serious preoccupation with novel-reading and novel-criticism was regarded as somewhat frivolous – not quite a vice but certainly not adequately disciplined and respectable.

Let me cite a case-history close to hand. I myself have written a fair amount on novels and taught them often, but all the way through my undergraduate years and through Yale's graduate school I never had a course involving novels. Keats and Browning I studied but not Dickens or the Brontës. I really didn't become interested in The Novel until several years after completing my Ph.D. The low status of novel-reading has of course a long history as we are reminded by Jane Austen's sharp little exchange in *Northanger*: "What are you reading

1. Stuart Sperry, "Recent Studies in the Nineteenth Century," *SEL* 21 (1981), 716. See also G. B. Tennyson's survey (1980), p. 715. Concerning the number of books reviewed see John Jordan's survey (1983), p. 685: "In 1975 I had more than 80 titles to consider; this year I had more

than 175." For an overall report on the topic of change, see Richard Altick's "Victorians on the Move" in *Dickens Studies Annual*, 10 (New York: AMS Press, 1982), 1-20.

Miss —?" . . . "Oh! It is only a novel!" — And suppose the young lady had replied: "Oh! It is only a Victorian novel!" Worse and worse!

The attitude I'm touching on crops up in many places as, for example, in Virginia Woolf's essay in honor of *Middlemarch*, which Woolf praises as "one of the few English novels written for grown-up people." Good for *Middlemarch* of course! But the sentence sounds (does it not?) as if most other Victorian novels are, in effect, kid stuff. It was this assumption that had to be surmounted before we could shift from contempt for the Victorian novel to affectionate respect — a development which has been the most heart-warming event over this thirty-five year period we are reviewing. By 1975, a lifetime Shakespearian, Alfred Harbage, published his fine book on *The Shakespeare-Dickens Analogy* in which he unblushingly linked a Victorian novelist to the work of the Master.

Change of status has operated in tandem with the extraordinary expansion of publications devoted to this formerly neglected field. And quantitative expansion has been aided, in turn, by the development of research-tools that facilitate such proliferation of production.

To dramatize this change, let's reconstruct what it was like, thirty-five years ago, if you were putting together a course on a Victorian novelist or writing a book about him or her. In what ways would it differ from 1983? One major difference would be the relative lack of good tools to facilitate the tasks of research. By "tools" I am referring to such time-saving devices as guides to research but also to supplements for critical study such as editions of letters, biographies and such like.

Thirty-five years ago what did we have? Probably the most useful such item then available was the *Annual Bibliographies of Studies in Victorian Literature*, a pioneering contribution to scholarship that helped to keep us informed about what was being done in our field. But many other tools were not yet on hand. For example, we'd have to wait sixteen years for *Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research*, edited by Lionel Stevenson, and we'd have to wait until 1978 for the *Second Guide* edited by George Ford. There was no *Wellesley Index to Periodicals* and no volumes of that useful series, *The Critical Heritage*, with their compilations of materials for anyone interested in reader-response criticism for Hardy, Wilkie Collins, Eliot, and others. And to mention the *Critical Heritage* series is a reminder how the production of some of these time-saving tools has been facilitated by time-saving machinery, the computer for example, but most obviously by the invention of the blessed Xerox copiers which had not yet seen the light in 1948. We Victorian people are good Arnoldians, conditioned to despise what Matthew called "mere machinery," but surely we must make an exception for the Xerox machine, which appeared on the academic scene first in the early 1960's, — in good time for Philip Collins to use it when compiling his *Critical Heritage* volume on Dickens in 1971, a volume that ought to have been dedicated (says Collins) to what he called "Mr. Xerox . . . this notable benefactor of all academics."<sup>2</sup>

A second kind of research-tool is any resource that enlarges our understanding of the person who wrote the novels; that is biographies and editions of letters. In both categories the resources in 1948 were certainly inadequate except for Thackeray, who had the good fortune, two years earlier, to have four volumes of his letters lavishly edited by Gordon Ray. This Harvard Press production can be seen now as having anticipated the future boom in editions of letters by other Victorian novelists such as the Brontës, Eliot, and Hardy, and especially the superbly annotated Clarendon Press volumes of Dickens' letters that have been appearing since 1965.

And with biographies the developments have been similar. Thirty-five years ago anyone writing about Dickens' life, for example, would have had to rely almost entirely on the official biography by Forster written seventy-five years earlier, and would have been unaware of the fresh perspectives to be provided by Ada Nisbet and Edgar Johnson. Similar improvements could be illustrated by biographies of other novelists such as Meredith, Thackeray, Eliot, and Hardy.

Let's consider now the situation of edited texts of our novels. Here it must be said that if biographical tools in 1948 seem to have been from the dark ages, then the textual tools were from the stone ages. Kathleen Tillotson made a similar point in 1957 and followed up her criticisms with demonstrations of how to edit the texts of Dickens' novels.<sup>3</sup> And in her wake have been others who seek to bring light into the editorial darkness surrounding the novels of Thackeray and Hardy and the Brontës.

A further development here has been the grudging recognition that not only do we need texts which have been accurately prepared in accordance with modern editorial principles; we also need annotations for these texts. There was a time when I myself used to regard explanatory footnotes for a Victorian novel as an embarrassing excrescence; such notes were pap for the semi-literate sophomore. Later I began to realize that not only did my ill-informed sophomore need help but that I, too, needed help. For example, when Sylvere Monod and I were editing *Bleak House* for Norton, I was frequently humiliated to discover that I had been teaching that novel for years without having realized how many of its passages were fuzzy in my mind. It became evident that I had not really understood even its opening sentences.

This remark takes us back to the issue of critical studies with which my report began. It is here that have occurred the most dramatic changes in thirty-five years. During this period we have witnessed the building up of a shelf-full of important critical studies such as Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* in 1961 and Dorothy Van Ghent's *The English Novel: Form and Function* in 1953. The historical importance of Van Ghent's critical study has been memorably assessed in an article by Daniel Schwarz appearing in *Diacritics* five years ago.<sup>4</sup> But let me focus on the *quantity* of criticism, rather than quality, and quantitatively the differences between 1948 and today are simply extraordinary.

Consider, for example, George Eliot. In 1948 her novels

2. Philip Collins, *Dickens: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. xx.

3. See John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work* (London: Methuen, 1957), p. 10.

4. See Daniel R. Schwarz, "'The Idea Embodied in the Cosmology': The Importance of Dorothy Van Ghent," *Diacritics* 8 (Fall, 1978), 72-83.

seemed to be at the bottom of a well, and the authoritative *Literary History of England* stated that "no other Victorian novelist of major rank is so little read today."<sup>5</sup> But 1948 was not only a nadir for Eliot; it was a turning point. Among other signs was the publication that year of *The Great Tradition* by Dr. Leavis, a work in which Eliot is the only Victorian novelist to earn a clear grade of "A" (Dickens, we must remember, rated only a discussion of *Hard Times* in an Appendix – a C minus perhaps, and Thackeray got a clear "F"). For Eliot, however, everything after 1948 went up like a rocket. As U. C. Knoepfelmacher noted five years ago, more was written about Eliot during a period of only fourteen years, from 1960 to 1974, than in the whole one hundred years between 1859 and 1959.<sup>6</sup> And almost all of this massive output was literary criticism.

Of course there are drawbacks to such an exceptional success-story, drawbacks which become especially evident if one has to read all such critical pieces, as poor Knoepfelmacher had to do when he was reviewing it for a *Guide to Research*, where we find him lamenting the publication of what he calls "so much redundant criticism."

Knoepfelmacher's exasperation about quantity of interpretations can be readily sympathized with, for we all know how irritating it is when we confront a critical analysis written by someone who hasn't done his homework. Yet no matter how fatiguing such proliferation may be, let's return again to our memory-game and reconstruct what it would have been like back in 1948 if we were trying to peddle a long article on *The Mill on the Floss* (let us say), and what hard work it would have been! For one thing, several of the journals that encourage such articles did not then exist: *Novel*, for example, or *Victorian Studies*. But more discouraging would have been the relative lack of interest in the topic. Let us consider, for a moment, some statistics about doctoral dissertations. In 1947 there were 144 Ph.D. theses on English and American literature completed in this country. Of this total how many were on the topic of Victorian novels? The answer is: none at all! Last year, by comparison, there were 817 theses completed and no less than 47 of them were on Victorian novels.<sup>7</sup> It seems we have a famine or feast situation here, but if a choice must be made, surely we'd prefer the feast.

About how to avoid redundant literary criticism one other suggestion should be mentioned in passing. This is the recommendation by the late Robert Lee Wolff of Harvard that we ought to shift attention to minor Victorian novelists instead of major ones. Wolff used to recommend shooting down any proposal by a graduate student who planned to write "another" critical analysis of *Middlemarch*. Instead the student should be urged to make a study of G. W. M. Reynolds, let us say, or of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, about whom Wolff himself wrote

a fine book.<sup>8</sup>

Wolff's proposal is an interesting side-road, I suspect, but there has been a great deal more traffic on a different road: the study of novel-theory, which has grown like Topsy in various quarters of late. Oddly enough this attention to theory originated in 1948, the year in which Wellek and Warren published their now classic book, *Theory of Literature*, a book inspired by Wellek's having noticed, at that date, there was no interest in literary theory in the United States<sup>9</sup> – incredible as that observation may sound to us today! Thirty-four years later, Professor Wellek is somewhat appalled by the total turn-around that has occurred here. Contemplating the mighty torrent of theories flowing from Paris to New Haven, Wellek seems today rather like the Sorcerer's apprentice trying to quell the flood. Perhaps some critical Sorcerer will appear some day, and the flood may then abate or dry up. However, my assignment is not to predict the future but to report on what has happened.

At this point I must admit that I do not have any satisfactory conclusions to offer about how a preoccupation with theory is affecting the status of Victorian novels. A *TLS* reviewer recently likened critical controversies today to a revived debate between the Ancients and Moderns,<sup>10</sup> and in such a debate we'd expect to line up the Victorian novelists under the banner of the Ancients. Yet it is odd how adaptable they seem to be and usable by both camps. I have room for only one example. About three years ago there was a gathering of theorists to discuss the elusive topic of Narrative (or Narratology as it has come to be called), and the papers were afterwards published in an issue of *New Literary History*. The longest essay of all is devoted to analyzing one novel, and that novel is not by Thomas Pynchon or Samuel Beckett, but instead by Charles Dickens. This essay on *Great Expectations* is by Peter Brooks of Yale and employs the critical methods (Brooks says) of Todorov.<sup>11</sup> It seemed to me a brilliant discussion and one that both Ancients and Moderns would enjoy.

As I draw to my conclusion I fear I can foresee objections that my review has been too rose-colored, and that instead of sooth-sayings I have been offering soothing-sayings. Such objections are probably sound ones, for what we might properly expect from this topic would be an elegiac evocation of the good old days and a castigation of our failings today. Well, I could, of course, have readily provided the expected laments about what was happening in our field recently. I could have talked about books and articles that depress us with their bad writing, their discussions featuring a vocabulary so jargon-ridden as to render the whole piece both boring and unintelligible, discussions so loaded down with a freight of theoretical apparatus that the small point to be floated sinks from our sight.

But I must decline this easy gloom-doom way of reviewing the developments of the past thirty-five years. Overall, I think,

5. Cited by U. C. Knoepfelmacher, in *Victorian Fiction: A Second Guide to Research*, ed. George H. Ford (New York: Modern Language Assoc., 1978), p. 234.

6. See Knoepfelmacher, p. 234.

7. See *Doctoral Dissertations Accepted by American Universities 1946-1947* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1947), pp. 80-85, and *American Doctoral Dissertations 1980-1981* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilm, 1982), pp. 295 ff.

8. See Robert Lee Wolff, *Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of*

*Mary Elizabeth Braddon* (New York: Garland, 1979).

9. See Wellek's "Respect for Tradition" in *TLS* (December 10, 1982), p. 1356, on how "the proliferation of theories has . . . led often to a neglect of the older necessary . . . tasks: the contact with texts, the concern for history."

10. Imre Salusinszky in *TLS* (October 18, 1983), p. 1178.

11. See Peter Brooks, "Repetition, Repression and Return: *Great Expectations* and the Study of Plot." *New Literary History* II (Spring, 1980), 503-26.

when one looks back over that long road, surely there is an exhilarating sense of our having come a long distance from the situation in 1948 when we students of the Victorian novel were regarded as poor relations, as scholarly hill-billies permanently doomed to eat below the salt at the academic feasting table – persons that the Chaucerians and Miltonists regarded with lofty condescension. Even the Wordsworthians looked down on us!

And with my metaphor of poverty and riches, let me conclude with an amusing illustration. In the 1950's a colleague of mine at Rochester in our Classics Department happened to inherit a small legacy of a couple of thousand dollars and chose to invest it in a new local company which he believed might have a future. Every financial expert told him that he must be mad,

and that he'd lose every penny, and that instead he should invest in one of the established blue chip stocks. But my colleague persisted in what seemed to be his folly. The name of the company was Xerox (or, at that time, Haloid-Xerox), and he purchased his shares for a few pennies each. When he sold out in the 1970's, he was very certainly a millionaire.

It seems to me that all of us lucky ones who have had the faith (and the intelligence of course) to invest, early and late, in George Eliot and Dickens and Hardy and the rest, have likewise become, in effect, millionaires too!

University of Rochester

## Looking Forward: American Feminists, Victorian Sages

Elaine Showalter

One of the most bizarre recent examples of the powerful ties between American feminism and Victorian literature appears in a book called *Growing Up Underground*, the autobiography written by Jane Alpert, the terrorist fugitive of the 1960's. In 1974, after four years of running from the FBI for her part in various bombings, Alpert was holed up in a furnished room in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, trying to decide whether to surrender. She had cut her ties to the radical left, denounced her former lover Sam Melville as a male supremacist after his death in the Attica riots, and joined the women's movement. In this moment of spiritual crisis, Alpert records in a chapter called "Renunciation," she turned for guidance, not to feminist or political manifestos, nor to American classics such as *Moby Dick*, which had been written in Pittsfield, and in honor of whose author her lover, born Samuel Grossman, had renamed himself; but to *Daniel Deronda*. As Alpert writes, "A bit of George Eliot's dialogue kept echoing in my mind. 'If you determine to face these hardships and still try,' the composer Herr Klesmer says to the heroine, 'you will have the dignity of a high purpose, even though you may have chosen unfortunately.' . . . I decided – and George Eliot had as much to do with my choice as anyone else – that I would take the high road. I would turn myself in."<sup>1</sup>

Although the surrender of a fugitive woman bomber may not have been the sort of high purpose George Eliot had in mind, there's something predictable about the fact that Alpert should have chosen Eliot as a model and looked for inspiration to Eliot's stern moralism, making Pittsfield a place of as much allegorical resonance in her narrative as Middlemarch or St. Oggs had been for Eliot's feminist readers a century before. Alpert's case is an extreme instance of the passionate identification feminists of all persuasions have felt towards the great Victorian women novelists, an identification which was part

of the reason that feminist criticism began in Victorian studies, that it continues to define itself often in terms taken from Victorian critical discourse, and that its impact on the discipline should have been so great as to represent, in Flavia Alaya's words, "nothing less than the current state of the art."<sup>2</sup>

The phenomenon I wish to explore, the particular feminist perspective I want to bring to bear on the transformation in our understanding of Victorian literature, is precisely this interaction of feminism and Victorianism. We know that over the past fifteen years nearly all of the major works of feminist theory and criticism have been Victorian and that, to a considerable degree, the most renovative and influential recent work in Victorian studies has been feminist. In an essay in the October *PMLA*, Eliot Gilbert calls Tennyson's Arthur a "female king" whose coming signals a sexual apocalypse, the replacement of patriarchal history by female mythological energies;<sup>3</sup> and in a sense we might say that Victoria herself figures in the feminist account of Victorian literary history less as a queen than as a female king, an emblem of the powerful feminization of Victorian patriarchal culture.

Nina Auerbach's recent *Woman and the Demon*, the boldest and most thoroughgoing feminist revision of Victorian conventions, sees in the familiar stereotypes of the angel, the old maid, the fallen woman, and the queer, the Victorian elevation of woman-worship to a central and pervasive secular faith. "As a feminist criticism gains authority," she observes, "its new sense of power involves not the denial of mythology, but the impulse towards it."<sup>4</sup> And in the wake of Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic*, George Levine's definitive study of *The Realistic Imagination* redefines classical Victorian narrative realism as that which includes the romantic, the monstrous, and the irrational – which incorporates, in other words, the

1. *Growing Up Underground* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), p. 355.  
2. Flavia Alaya, "Feminists and Victorians, 1974-1984," unpublished paper, Humanities Division, Ramapo College, Mahwah, N.J. Thanks to Professor Alaya for sharing this paper with me.

3. "The Female King: Tennyson's Arthurian Apocalypse," *PMLA*, 98 (October 1983), 863-78.  
4. *Woman and the Demon* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983), p. 12.

essence of what was formerly marginalized as the *feminine*.

The titles of the two volumes of essays on Victorian women edited in the 1970s by Martha Vicinus on behalf of the journal *Victorian Studies*, *Suffer and Be Still* and *A Widening Sphere*, also allude to the changing role of the feminist scholar. If women critics before 1970 did not quite suffer and keep still about their feminist concerns and complaints, as the Victorian Mrs. Ellis had said was women's highest duty, nonetheless they were often more uneasy and apologetic about advancing them than we would think natural today. Even so fierce a person as Queenie Leavis admitted after F. R. Leavis's death that she had in fact "written in large parts" of her husband's books "without acknowledgement." "I didn't mind at all," she told an interviewer from the *Cambridge Evening News*; "he was very grateful of course. I was more scholarly than he was, perhaps because I like ferreting about in libraries. He didn't have time to go to libraries."<sup>5</sup> Not even Mrs. Ellis could have outdone this piece of domestic self-effacement. Furthermore, the first wave of historically-oriented feminist criticism which stresses women's suffering and oppression has been succeeded by a second wave influenced by psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theory, which stresses pleasure: the pleasure of mother-daughter relationships, the pleasure of the female body and the freeing of repressed sexual and linguistic desires.<sup>6</sup>

As contemporary feminist criticism has established its own widening sphere in the profession, it has forthrightly staked a claim, not just to the women writers, but also to Hardy, Dickens, Gissing, Trollope, Tennyson, the Pre-Raphaelites, Wilde, Mill, Ruskin, the very shape and mythology of the century. And this devotion to Victorian culture has also made a difference to the voices and structures of feminist texts. Many of these books explicitly reflect the struggle of strong American daughters to reread and revise strong Victorian literary fathers, fathers whose kingdoms they can never quite inherit. We should remember, for example, that Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* began as a Victorian dissertation at Columbia and that it takes much of its quality of massive argument from the prose of the Victorian sages it attacks. The title of my book, *A Literature of Their Own*, comes from John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women*, and I take as a historical reality female literary tradition Mill saw as Utopian. In *Woman and the Demon*, Nina Auerbach candidly acknowledges her intention to write as a feminist prophetic Carlyle – and she means Thomas rather than Jane: "My vision of this book is Carlylean . . . ; like him, I want to recover a new mythos, one with which male and female Victorians alike countered a crisis of faith, and one which may provide women today with an unexpectedly empowering past."<sup>7</sup>

And although Auerbach repudiates Matthew Arnold's ideal critic as "abstract and hypothetical," American feminist criticism has long been at war with Arnold's views of disinterested-

ness and has used Arnold's metaphor of the critical wilderness as a contrast to its own aspiration to a critical motherland.<sup>8</sup> I think we see this revisionary imperative even in American feminist writing. Adrienne Rich, whose father Arnold Rich tutored her at home until she was nine and trained her as a young poet by having her read "Tennyson, Keats, Arnold, Rossetti, Swinburne, Carlyle, and Pater," titles the central poem in her most recent collection "CULTURE AND ANARCHY" and makes it a commentary on the lost culture of nineteenth-century women.<sup>9</sup>

Geoffrey Hartman has argued that every literary theory is based on the experience of a limited group of texts or generalizes strongly from a particular text-millieu;<sup>10</sup> and if feminist criticism has developed theoretically in a dialog with Victorian patriarchal precedents, from Mill, Carlyle, and Arnold to the honorary Victorians Marx and Freud, it has also been marked by a clear preference for the texts of the great nineteenth-century women novelists. George Eliot's perennial attraction for feminist thinkers and activists is a case in point. The feminist allegiance to Eliot stayed firm even when her work went out of critical fashion in the early twentieth century; and interestingly, over the century, feminist responses to Eliot have emphasized different novels at different eras, reflecting not only transformations in feminist ideology, but also the theoretical relations between feminism and criticism in each period. In her diary for April 27th, 1913, the idealistic young suffragette Vera Brittain ardently exclaimed: "The reading of *Romola* has left me in a state of exultation! It is wonderful to be able to purchase so much rapture for 2s6d. . . . It makes me wonder when in my life will come the moments of supreme emotion in which the lesser feelings are merged, and which leave one's spirit different for evermore."<sup>11</sup> Looking backward to a Victorian valorization of female self-sacrifice, Brittain wrote these words on the brink of a war which would sadly grant her this desired experience, at a cost much more terrible than she could imagine. Ten years later, the fifteen-year-old Simone de Beauvoir, having lost her faith as a Catholic and already rebelling against the strictures of her bourgeois family, read *The Mill on the Floss* and felt her heart "blaze with sympathy" for Maggie Tulliver, who confirmed her own religious apostasy and intellectual ambition. Later, Beauvoir would structure her autobiography, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, in imitation of Eliot's novel; and we might say that she had modelled her life on Eliot's as well.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1960's and early 1970's, American feminists in the dawn of the women's liberation movement turned to *Middlemarch* as the novel which became, in Lee Edwards words, "a talisman for young women," a "sacred text" which posed the "woman question" in painfully relevant terms. Feminist criticism in this phase developed self-consciously out-

5. P. J. M. Robertson, "Queen of Critics: The Achievement of Q. D. Leavis," *Novel*, 16 (Winter 1983), 141.

6. See Mary Jacobus, "The Difference of View," in *Women Writing and Writing About Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 11-12.

7. *Woman and the Demon*, p. 4.

8. See, for example, Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 9-36.

9. Adrienne Rich, "Culture and Anarchy," in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* (New York: Norton, 1981).

10. Geoffrey Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980), p. 5.

11. Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Gollancz, 1948), p. 36.

12. See Elaine Showalter, "The Greening of Sister George," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 35 (December 1980), 299-302.



side of the critical mainstream, both as an oppositional discourse and as an effort to construct a literary history and tradition. *Middlemarch* seemed to represent the cautionary tale of women's intellectual subservience to male vocations and traditions, the disappearance of the female epic life.<sup>13</sup> The separatist tendencies implicit in much of the early feminist criticism of *Middlemarch* came to their apogee, I think, in the celebrations of the Eliot centennial in 1980, where at some meetings male and female scholars clashed over the ownership of the Eliot legacy, and over her definition as woman novelist, or as one historian called her, "man of ideas."

But since 1973 there has been a shift away from *Middlemarch* to *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot's most contradictory and divided study of women in patriarchal culture. Although a few women, like Jane Alpert, have continued to read *Deronda* as a moral guidebook, in general the new interest has reflected the effort to situate feminist criticism within the broader milieu of contemporary literary theory. The relation between the two stories of *Daniel Deronda*, the plots of the hero and the heroine, can stand metaphorically for the relation between the ongoing stories of poststructuralism and feminism. It's striking that while women critics, including Gillian Beer, Cynthia Chase, Catherine Belsey, Dianne Sadoff, and Mary Wilson Carpenter, have been producing these revisionist studies of *Deronda*, in each case their feminist interests are balanced or outweighed by other theoretical concerns, drawn from Darwinian determinism, Freud, Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault. These double-readings indicate the awareness of contemporary feminist criticism of its own double voice, its inevitable interaction with both dominant and muted intellectual traditions.<sup>14</sup>

In the second half of the 1980's, I would predict, *Deronda* too will be replaced by *Silas Marner* and its treatment of the male mother, a text which picks up the fascination with sex role reversals characteristic of the fin-de-siecle. U. C. Knoepfelmacher has remarked in an essay that Eliot's narrative voice is often a mixture of tender authority, that of the male mother; I think these elements of gender and genre will be of considerable interest over the decade.

The sort of identification feminists have felt with regard to George Eliot extends to include other women writers of the period. Helene Moglen, in the preface to her important book on Charlotte Brontë, tells how she discovered that "to diagram the process of Brontë's growth was also to explore . . . formations of the modern female psyche . . . As we too strive for autonomous definition, we see ourselves reflected in different aspects of Brontë's struggle."<sup>15</sup> Phyllis Rose's book *Parallel Lives*, a study of five Victorian marriages or at least pairings, explicitly calls for this kind of projection and asks us to consider these Victorian lives as parallels to our own questionings of marriage.

And yet, I would like to argue, these identifications, while

necessary, are not in themselves sufficient to have drawn a whole generation of American feminist critics into the field of Victorian studies. We can find equally powerful heroines, more radical feminist themes, even more adventurous marriages, in nineteenth-century America. Why Brontë rather than Stowe, Eliot rather than Fuller? It is quite a shock for a Victorianist who has been patiently decoding the feminist subtexts of Victorian women's novels, accepting the anguished self-interrogation of Victorian heroines, and tracking Dorothea Brooke from prelude to finale, to turn to American women's novels of the same period and discover their extraordinary boldness and commitment.

In the very first paragraph, for example, of Louisa May Alcott's adult novel, *Work*, (1872), (two years after *Middlemarch*) the heroine Christie proclaims: "There's going to be a new Declaration of Independence . . . Being of age, I'm going to take care of myself, and not be a burden any longer. If I'd been a boy, I should have been told to do it long ago."<sup>16</sup> The novel goes on to take Christie through most of the kinds of work open to women in the 1870's, including acting, nursing, marriage, and finally feminist activism.

Obviously Alcott's feminist romance is not in the same aesthetic league with *Middlemarch*, and yet if feminist criticism gravitated primarily to feminist themes, it would find more radical precursors in American literature than among the Victorians. Why, then, did a generation of American feminist critics look across the ocean to find a literature of *their* own rather than a literature of *our* own? The reason, I believe, had less to do with ideological interests than with critical structures. The aggressive canon-formation which characterized American literary history after 1940 did not have a counterpart in Victorian studies, which has developed as a more flexible, liberal, and canonically open field, receptive to feminist criticism and to women's writing.

Critical theories of the American Renaissance, the American Adam, the myth of American male individualism, have defined nineteenth-century American literature on a model so quintessentially masculine as to exclude women writers from any serious consideration. As Nina Baym has demonstrated, theories of the American romance define it as a story of the confrontation between the socially undefined American individual "with the promise offered by the ideal of America." In this mythology, women appear as representatives of the society that drags the hero down, and women writers are the authors of the bad best-sellers against which serious novelists had to struggle for self-definition. In short, as Baym notes, the American woman writer has "entered literary history as the enemy." The myth of the American Adam as fictional hero has by extension become the myth of the American male novelist, energetically fashioning himself in his language; and today it is also becoming the inspiring myth of the American male

13. On feminist critics and *Middlemarch*, see "The Greening of Sister George," pp. 305-10.

14. Gillian Beer, "Beyond Determinism: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf," in *Women Writing and Writing About Women*, pp. 80-99; Catherine Belsey, "Re-reading the Great Tradition," *Re-Reading English*, ed. Peter Widdowson (New York: Methuen, 1982), pp. 121-35; Cynthia Chase, "The Decomposition of the Elephants: Double-reading *Daniel Deronda*,"

*PMLA*, 93 (1978), 215-27; Mary Wilson Carpenter, "The Apocalypse of the Old Testament: *Daniel Deronda* and the Interpretation of Interpretation," *PMLA*, 99 (1984), 56-71. See also Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (New York: Methuen, 1982), pp. 133-35.

15. Moglen, *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived* (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 14.

16. *Work* [1872] (New York: Schocken, 1977), pp. 1-2.

critic, who in his need for the illusion of originality and social autonomy, engages in what one scholar calls "self-fathering."<sup>17</sup>

Such is not the case, however, in Victorian studies. Critics of Victorian literature have always had to acknowledge the influence of strong female precursors, not only the great women novelists, but also, in the years before feminist criticism emerged, of such powerful women scholars and critics as Kathleen Tillotson, Ada Nisbet, Barbara Hardy, and Dorothy Van Ghent. Even Leavis's *Great Tradition*, formed, like the American theories, in the years of strong nationalistic feeling after the second world war, includes equal numbers of male and female writers in its pantheon; and in any case, its impact upon American scholarship and syllabi was never as dramatic as it was in England. Insofar as the critical discourse in a field defines what is visible, what can be seen and interpreted, Victorian studies had made the subject, as well as the subjection, of women available long before feminist criticism began. And in the United States, the great collections of Victorian fiction, the Sadleir Collection at UCLA, the Parrish Collection at Princeton, Gordon Ray's Collection at Urbana, Robert Lee Wolff's at Harvard – provided the materials for research on hundreds of women novelists.

When we look at the canonical resources of Victorian studies, we will find that even when they were unsure or wrong about women writers' position, they did not exclude women from serious consideration. The mild sexism of Leavis's *Great Tradition* (we remember he said that George Eliot's mind was in no way disabled by her being a woman) is pale besides the virulent sexism of his Americanist contemporaries. And the research guides to Victorian literature published by this group of the Modern Language Association are strikingly encouraging to a feminist enterprise *avant la lettre*. The volumes on the novelists of course always included women, and the second edition edited by George Ford has sections of "studies related to feminism" and "the woman question" not only for Eliot and the Brontës, but also for Trollope and Dickens. Insofar however as the novel was the form of public discourse in which Victorian women were most able to participate, and since the marriage plots of Victorian fiction confined them in unthreateningly feminine roles, we should not be surprised to find that women are relatively absent in the canons of Victorian poetry and

prose. The poetic canon has been most powerfully transformed over the past decade by the rediscovery of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti. Yet even in 1956, when Howard Mumford Jones and A. McKinley Terhune were calling them poetesses, they were also calling for more imaginative studies of the texts; and in 1969 Michael Timko foresaw the need for perceptive and discriminating critical treatments of Barrett Browning's longer poems.<sup>18</sup> The fact that Emily Brontë is not mentioned in either volume suggests to me that it is time for a third revised edition, one which will also take into account the stunning results of fifteen years' feminist work on these women poets. I think we can expect too that in the coming decade we will see significant additions to the canon of Victorian prose. The current research guide mentions only two women in this vast field: Jane Carlyle and Vernon Lee. But we may hope that by the next edition, they will have been joined by Harriet Martineau, Barbara Bodichon, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird, Eliza Lynn Linton, Frances Power Cobbe, and most important, Florence Nightingale, whose letters, now being edited by Martha Vicinus, and whose three-volume work on religion, should earn her a place next to Newman.

I would be unwise to end this optimistic look forward without some caveats. There is always the risk that the male-oriented theories of writing generated in American literary theory could be extended to the Victorians, recapturing the field for fathers and sons. Nina Baym has warned that "just at the time that feminist critics are discovering more and more important women, the critical theorists have seized upon a theory that allows women less and less presence." Edward Said's *Beginnings*, according to Baym, is a chronicle of the nineteenth-century British novel in terms of filiation and male authority, and thus omits Austen, Eliot, Gaskell, and all three Brontës.<sup>19</sup>

But I think it's more likely that the swing will go the other way. American feminist critics nurtured in the green and pleasant land of Victorian studies will expand some of our revisionary energies to the American wilderness as well. Victorian studies has been a good place for a feminist critic to grow up and the strength of the Victorianist daughters is in part a tribute to those who taught us and who also heard us.

Rutgers University

17. Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Literature Exclude Women," *American Quarterly*, 33 (1981), 131, 138.

18. Frederic E. Faverty, ed. *The Victorian Poets: A Guide to Research*

(Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1956), pp. 89, 190; and the second edition, 1969, pp. 122-36.

19. Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," p. 139.

## The Mesmerizing of Dorian Gray

Kerry Powell

"The ordinary shilling tales of 'hypnotism' and mesmerism are vulgar trash enough, and yet I can believe that an impossible romance, if the right man wrote it in the right mood, might still win us from the newspapers, and the stories of shabby love, and cheap romances, and commonplace failures."

— from Andrew Lang, "The Supernatural in Fiction"

Few nineteenth-century novels below the first rank are as widely read today as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Its electric paradoxes and brilliant chatter have given Oscar Wilde's book an enduring popularity without winning it admission to the select group of fictional masterpieces of the age. Among the transgressions which have joined to deny the novel a higher estimate have been a melodramatic plot, a derivative story formula, and — perhaps above all — a hero whose motivation and behavior sometimes seem incredible. "Nemo repente fuit turpissimus," wrote Julian Hawthorne, quoting Juvenal, in an early review generally sympathetic to the book — "No one ever became evil overnight."<sup>1</sup> Yet that is precisely what happens to Dorian Gray. At first a paragon of innocence, he is ready to sell his soul to the Devil after a few minutes' conversation with Lord Henry Wotton awakens him to the existence of "exquisite temptations." Dorian soon is launched on a career of vice and crime which, because of his domination by Wotton, seems oddly somnambulistic. "Is that really so?" he asks upon hearing one of Lord Henry's typically outrageous axioms. "It must be, if you say it." Dorian, as Wilde himself points out, is "like one under a spell."<sup>2</sup>

But the trouble with Dorian is not, I believe, entirely aesthetic. His almost mechanical, involuntary subservience to his mentor Wotton puts him in the company of a host of nineteenth-century characters who move through their own stories with dazed acquiescence. Dorian Gray, like his fellow sufferers, must in fact be numbered among the victims of *mesmerism*. In stories by Hawthorne and Poe, Hoffmann and Gautier, the basilisk eyes or occult gestures of the mesmerist plunge his susceptible medium into a trance in which the exercise of will is severely constrained or denied. Acting with frigid detachment yet exhilarating over his remarkable hold on another person, the mesmeric operator (often termed a "hypnotist" by the 1880's) displays an ability to project his own soul out of his body, to reorganize the very identity of his subject, even sometimes to read minds, foretell the future, and cure illness.

The relation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to such a scenario has never been suggested, although the existence of a "mesmeric" tradition in American and continental fiction has recently

been well-documented. Those who have written on the subject have noted the waning of mesmerism as a subject of public interest in the later nineteenth century and pointed to Henry James' *Bostonians* (1886) as marking the end of the "mesmeric" tradition in fiction.<sup>3</sup> In reality, however, the 1880's and 1890's produced a now long-forgotten eruption of mesmeric novels and stories, mostly subliterate in quality. George DuMaurier's *Trilby* (1894), with its spellbinding Svengali, is only the tip of an iceberg. Oscar Wilde, frequently a reviewer of popular novels in the years preceding the publication of *Dorian Gray* in 1890, was intimately acquainted with this aftershine of a long tradition in modern fiction. His only novel would be the mutant child of it.

*Helen Davenant*, a mesmeric novel published in 1889 when *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first contemplated, earned Wilde's praise in a review he wrote for *The Woman's World*. The story by Violet Fane described a murder committed under hypnotic compulsion, an occurrence which appealed to the reviewer because the novelist managed to envelope it in an atmosphere of probability. "This is the supreme advantage that fiction possesses over fact," Wilde writes in his review of *Helen Davenant*. "It can make things artistically probable . . . [and] by force of mere style, compel us to believe. The ordinary novelists, by keeping close to the ordinary incidents of commonplace life, seem to me to abdicate half their power."<sup>4</sup> Wilde, therefore, was drawn to the subject matter of the mesmeric novel because it coincided so well with his antirealistic aesthetic — a fact which probably explains his own too generous valuation of mesmeric tales whose names are now lost even to literary history. He regarded a merely competent mesmeric story by his friend Walter Herries Pollock, one-time editor of the *Saturday Review*, as a major achievement evoking comparison with E. T. A. Hoffman.<sup>5</sup> And two sordid potboilers with mesmeric ingredients, *Dorinda* and *The Vasty Deep*, offered but little offense to his usually alert critical organs.<sup>6</sup>

When *Dorian Gray* appeared in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in July 1890, it exhibited — in a number of ways — many of the salient features of the mesmeric stories Wilde had read or reviewed in the recent past. The novel, seen against this background, must be regarded as the subtlest and by far the most successful work in a forgotten deluge of mesmeric novels and stories appearing near the end of the nineteenth century. And while we can never be sure of the number of such works known personally to Wilde, it is demonstrably true that many were. They came to him for review at *The Woman's World*, they were written by his own friends (Violet Fane, W. H. Pollock, Edward Heron-Allen), and they carried on a mesmeric tradition which had been shaped by Hoffman, Hawthorne, Gautier, and others among the brightest in Oscar Wilde's own constellation of literary heroes.

1. Julian Hawthorne's review of *Dorian Gray* appeared in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, 46 (September 1890), 412-15. The novel had been published in the same magazine two months earlier.  
2. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Isobel Murray (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 23, 41, 56. All references to the novel will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.  
3. See Maria M. Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978). Tatar does not deal directly with English literature, which is treated, but fleetingly, in Arno

L. Bader's "Those Mesmeric Victorians," *Colophon*, 3 (Summer 1938), 335-53.

4. The review is quoted from *The First Collected Edition of the Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Robert Ross (London: Methuen, 1908), XIII, 413.  
5. The comment on Pollock's "An Episode in the Life of Mr. Latimer" appears in a letter to A. G. Ross. See *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, [1962]), pp. 240-41.  
6. *Works*, XIII, 439-41, 509-13.

In all these works the dominating influence of the mesmerist over his subject is vividly expressed. When Dorian Gray regrets aloud that he has told Wotton the secret of his love for Sybil Vane, the response of Lord Henry echoes the magnetic authority of similar characters in fiction of the period. "You could not have helped telling me, Dorian," he says. "All through your life you will tell me everything you do." Dorian mechanically agrees: "I cannot help telling you things. You have a curious influence over me" (p. 51). Wotton's "influence" – a word as intrusive in mesmeric stories generally as in *Dorian Gray* specifically – has almost nothing to do with the powers of rational persuasion. It is rather the effect of an inherent force of will which instantaneously overwhelms any impressionable person at whom it is aimed. Dorian is like the mesmerized heroine of *Helen Davenant* as she feels her personal autonomy melt away in the presence of the man who has mastered her. "A strange sensation, as of passive subjection to the power of a superior will, seemed to come over me as I listened to [his] calm and somewhat monotonous voice," Helen says.<sup>7</sup> Another mesmerized heroine of the late 1880's, Edmie in *The Mesmerist's Secret*, by Daniel Dormer, is "powerless to resist [the] influence" of the man who has gained ascendancy over her. "The power I wield is irresistible," the mesmerist announces with an air of command. "I – I will do anything you wish me to," his subject says faintly.<sup>8</sup>

Such toneless responses are characteristic of the mesmerized victims in these novels and stories. One who bows to another's influence becomes, in the words of Lord Henry Wotton, "an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that was not written for him" (p. 17). The imagery had been similar in *Helen Davenant*, where susceptibility to "influence" was said to make one person "a puppet in the hands of another" (p. 71). Thus in a novel by the popular author Rita, *The Doctor's Secret* (1890), the mesmerized hero detects his voice responding to his master "without my will – outside and apart from any conscious effort of my own."<sup>9</sup> And *Hypnotized*, a novel by Margaret Brandon which appeared at about the same time as *Dorian Gray*, portrays a trance-bound heroine who speaks "in slow measured tones, so unlike her own."<sup>10</sup> Dorian's speeches are often similarly unreal, mere echoes of Lord Henry Wotton that seem strangely unsynchronized with any independent point of view. "I always agree with Harry," says Dorian late in the novel. "Harry is never wrong" (p. 197).

So complete is the domination wielded by the person with mesmeric powers than he can bring his hapless medium to do almost anything – even to commit acts that would repel him in a waking state. The subject becomes, in the words of one contemporary writer on hypnotism, a "living automaton" whose

will is "abolished, suspended, or enfeebled" in a hypnotic sleep.<sup>11</sup> In her fabled *Key to Theosophy* – a book Wilde owned – the occultist H. P. Blavatsky suggested that able practitioners could "do almost anything with [hypnotism], from forcing a man, unconsciously to himself, to play the fool, to making him commit a crime."<sup>12</sup> Says one of the characters in DuMaurier's *Trilby*, "They get you into their power, and just make you do any blessed thing they please – lie, murder, steal – anything!"<sup>13</sup> Thus Dorian Gray, under the domination of Lord Henry Wotton, sleepwalks his way in an instant from boyhood innocence to dedicated hedonism. That sudden conversion leads him into behavior – including murder, finally – which would have been inconceivable to "the real Dorian Gray," as the artist Basil Hallward fondly remembers him before he fell under the sway of Lord Henry. Dorian has become the "living automaton" of mesmerism, the inhabitant, as H. G. Wells described it, of a "land of dreams where there is neither any freedom of choice nor will."<sup>14</sup>

This utter domination of another person frequently rouses in one who exercises it a feeling of exhilaration. To Lord Henry Wotton, for example, "there was something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence. No other activity was like it." Merely talking to Dorian becomes, for him, "like playing upon an exquisite violin. He answered to every touch and thrill of the bow" (pp. 35, 36). Just as Wotton's influence transforms a vapid youth into an instrument – "an exquisite violin" – upon which wonderful music can be played, so in *Trilby* the mesmerist Svengali makes a tone-deaf, weak-willed heroine into "a singing machine – an organ to play upon – an instrument of music – a Stradivarius" who captivates concert audiences all over Europe (p. 438). Thus for Wotton as for Svengali, the reward of dominating another person derives partly from the aesthetic potential in such a relationship. The inert but susceptible mesmeric subject becomes the raw material from which a dazzling artistic performance can be fashioned. Also a factor is the aboriginal satisfaction that arises from forcing another to do one's bidding without a murmur. His ability to make Dorian "a Titan or a toy," just as he pleases, contributes in large measure to the elation Lord Henry feels. Similarly, in Margaret Brandon's *Hypnotized*, the mesmeric hero feels a "glory and pride" in his subjection of a young woman, and in a magazine story of 1880 the hypnotist experiences "a cold, cruel, hard triumph" and "a desire to strain my mastery to the utmost."<sup>15</sup> And for the title character of "Caterina: A Story of Mesmerism" (1890), the "chief interest" in her friendship with the susceptible Teresa "arose from her power over her."<sup>16</sup>

But if the psychology of *Dorian Gray* is practically identical with that of mesmeric fiction of the time, Wilde has so expertly

7. Violet Fane, *The Story of Helen Davenant* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1889), I, 71. Violet Fane was the pen name of Mary Montgomerie Lamb, a friend of Wilde. All references to *Helen Davenant* will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.  
8. Daniel Dormer, *The Mesmerist's Secret* (London: Maxwell, [1888]), pp. 125, 150, 174.  
9. Rita, *The Doctor's Secret* (New York: Lovell, 1890), p. 130. Rita was the pseudonym of Eliza Margaret J. Humphreys.  
10. Margaret Brandon, *Hypnotized; or, The Doctor's Confession* (London: Hutchinson, n.d.), p. 58.  
11. Ernest Hart, *Hypnotism, Mesmerism and the New Witchcraft*, 2nd. ed.

(London: Smith Elder, 1896), p. 22.

12. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (London: Theosophical Publishing Co., 1889), p. 26.  
13. George DuMaurier, *Trilby* (New York: Harper, 1895), p. 75. All references to *Trilby* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in text.  
14. H. G. Wells, "A Story of the Days to Come" (1897), is reprinted in *Science Fiction Stories of H. G. Wells* (New York: Dover, 1952), p. 741.  
15. *Hypnotized*, p. 53; "An Experiment in Mesmerism," *Temple Bar*, 60 (November 1880), 341.  
16. Laetitia McClintock, "Caterina: A Story of Mesmerism," *Argosy* (London), 49 (March 1890), 202-03.

muted and even altered the features of the hypnotic tale that his indebtedness has escaped notice. For this deft cover-up, moreover, Wilde deserves his reader's thanks. The mesmeric tale, even in the hands of Wilde's much-admired Gautier, had typically strained its credibility with overdoses of melodrama, parapsychology, and spiritualism. The mesmerist, like Dr. Cherbonneau in Gautier's *Avatar*, typically wore a grotesquely sinister expression set off by glittering lynx-eyes which could transfix their victim at a glance. If such a gaze alone were not enough, the hypnotist might resort, like Svengali in *Trilby*, to mysterious "passes" of his hands over the subject's body in order to induce mesmeric sleep. He might be able to read minds or see clairvoyantly, like a character in Mrs. Henry Wood's story "A Mesmerist of the Years Gone By" (1883).<sup>17</sup> He might conduct real or bogus seances, like the mesmerist in Cumberland's *Vasty Deep*. He might even, like the hypnotist with the strange accent in F. Anstey's *A Fallen Idol* (1886), be able "to leave my body . . . to materialize objects out of the cosmic dustbin . . . to transport things in one instant many thousand miles."<sup>18</sup>

With these extremes of the theatrical occult *Dorian Gray* has little to do. Oscar Wilde has subtilized the broad brushstrokes of the mesmeric tale, refining away its more exotic excesses without depleting the assets of wonder and strangeness which he had ranked so highly in his review of *Helen Davenant*. Instead of giving Lord Henry Wotton the portentously luminous eyes of most fictional mesmerists, Wilde simply bestows on him an "absolutely fascinating," musical voice which exercises an irresistible attraction on Dorian Gray. Instead of making Wotton's hands execute the stagy "passes" common to story-book mesmerists, he merely gives him "cool, white, flower-like hands" which move "like music, and seemed to have a language of their own" (p. 21).<sup>19</sup> And instead of portraying the mesmerist as Satan or his agent, as, for example, his friend W. H. Pollock had done in "An Episode in the Life of Mr. Latimer" (1883), Wilde makes Lord Henry a very human society dandy who talks in clever paradoxes. The Mephistophelean shading of his character depends on a suggestively pointed beard and his "temptation" of the hero in a garden before Dorian bargains away his soul for the immutable beauty of his own portrait. Finally, as for occult elements of mesmeric lore like clairvoyance and converse with the dead, these find only the faintest of reflections in *Dorian Gray* – such as can be gleaned, for example, from the expressive name of Dorian's lover *Sybil Vane*.

Thus *The Picture of Dorian Gray* engages the leading characteristics of mesmeric fiction, often modulating its more outrageous features, without anywhere mentioning the word "mesmerism" itself. Wilde consequently enweaves his story in an aura of the marvelous and curious which attracted him to mesmeric fiction in the first place, but at the same time excludes much of the sensational claptrap which had gone into the making

of most hypnotic tales. Nowhere is this more evident than in Wilde's adaptation of a prominent trait of many such stories – the mesmerist's occult manipulation of his own or his subject's soul. In *Avatar*, for instance, Gautier's mesmeric Dr. Cherbonneau can separate the bodies of his subjects from their souls, which then become visible in the shape of – luminous *bees*. The action of the story turns on Cherbonneau's successful attempt to transfer the soul of his hero into the body of another man, and vice-versa, with the hypnotist ultimately dispatching his own spirit from his aging body into a more vigorous frame. The mesmerist in *The Princess Daphne* (1888), a novel by Wilde's friend Edward Heron-Allen, transports the soul of dark, passionate Mahmoudé into the body of his heroine Daphne. "I'm not myself," Daphne announces from a hypnotic sleep. "I don't care – it please me to be someone else for the time."<sup>20</sup> In Madame Blavatsky's little-known "A Bewitched Life" a character under mesmeric domination finds his soul rising out of his body to visit scenes in a faraway country, and in Conan Doyle's "The Great Keinplatz Experiment" (1886) the hypnotic Professor Baumgarten conveys his soul into the body of a student.

It is this transmigration of the spirit – a transcendence of bodily self – which primarily inspires Lord Henry's wish to dominate Dorian Gray. To influence him, Wotton says, would be "to project one's soul into some gracious form, and let it tarry there for a moment; to hear one's own intellectual views echoed back to one with all the added music of passion and youth; to convey one's temperament into another as though it were a subtle fluid or a strange perfume: there was a real joy in that – perhaps the most satisfying joy left to us in an age so limited and vulgar as our own, an age grossly carnal in its pleasures, and grossly common in its aims" (p. 35). But in *Dorian Gray* the motif of soul-transference remains at the level of suggestion rather than dramatically realized fact. Dorian Gray never rises from a mesmerist's couch in the flesh of another person, nor does his own body ever become literally the habitation of Wotton's soul. Lord Henry "projects" his spirit into Dorian's body in a way that does not disdain credibility, yet challenges a "grossly carnal" and "grossly common" world with a somewhat blurred reflection of the miraculous events which so often imbued stories of hypnotism.

The mesmeric motif of transferring one's soul into new bodily forms was naturally suited to express Dorian's – and Wilde's – conviction that a chief aim of life is to find some method "by which we can multiply our personalities." A human being potentially can experience "myriad lives and myriad sensations," and the soul-projecting methods of the mesmerist provide at least an imaginative model for transcendence of the narrow limits of one's selfhood. So changed is Dorian after his short colloquy in the garden with Lord Henry that his friend Basil Hallward longs wistfully for the "real Dorian" whom Wotton's influence has dislodged. Finally the hero becomes,

17. Mrs. Wood's story appeared in *Argosy* (London), 36 (December 1883), 519-34.

18. F. Anstey, *A Fallen Idol* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1886), pp. 161-62.

F. Anstey was the pen name of popular novelist Thomas Anstey Guthrie. References to *A Fallen Idol* will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

19. The captivating "musical" quality of Wotton's voice and gestures recalls the musical tones sometimes instrumental to inducing the hypnotic state in Hoffmann's tales.

20. Edward Heron-Allen, *The Princess Daphne* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1888), p. 115.

through Lord Henry's influence, so multiform a personality that all of history seems to have been "merely the record of his own life" (pp. 142-44). As for the personality of Dorian's dominator, it undergoes a strange expansion too. Lord Henry is Dorian Gray, psychologically if not substantially. The hypodermic operations of his influence have driven out the "real Dorian" and commensurately enlarged the personality of Wotton, whose temperament has been conveyed into his subject "as though it were a subtle *fluid* or strange perfume." Now mesmerism had always supposed the existence of an "imponderable fluid" – vital to all things – which the hypnotist could project from himself to his subject with the assistance of magnets, a piercing gaze, or eloquent passes of the hands.<sup>21</sup>

In *Dorian Gray* the "multiplication of personalities" is more an act of imagination and will than the result of manipulating an occult "fluid," but once again Wilde has called on the language and concepts of mesmerism to contribute to an atmosphere of the marvelous. Indeed the very notion of expansive identity – the possible existence of twin or even of *many* selves – is deeply infused in mesmeric literature, perhaps because the hypnotic trance was believed capable of making one behave in ways totally inconsonant with his ordinary or "real" self. Wilde, for example, might have read in his copy of Madame Blavatsky's *Key* that "as flitting personalities, to-day one person, to-morrow another – we are."<sup>22</sup> Surely he noticed in his review copy of *Helen Davenant*, at about the time he was beginning *Dorian Gray*, the assertion that "we can scarcely designate a person as 'an individual' when so many opposing individualities are making war in his blood!" (I, 282-83). So unstable, indeed, is the identity of one fictional mesmerist of the 1880's that as he crosses the room his face "undergoes as many as three successive changes, which make, as it were, three entirely different countenances of it, one scarcely recognizable in the other."<sup>23</sup> But like those passages in *Dorian Gray* which contrast the hero's unblemished face with his putrefying image on canvas, mesmeric stories sometimes portray a specifically dualistic identity – often, like Wilde's novel, contrasting one's surface good nature with an underlying evil self. In a *Blackwood's* story called "A Magnetic Mystery" (1887) the hero discovers in a mesmerist's library a magic heptagon which, when he opens it, clicks sharply and decants an apparition, "habited as I was, and, as far as I could judge, the counterpart of myself."<sup>24</sup> In *The Doctor's Secret*, however, the two faces of the hypnotic heroine, like Dorian Gray's, are drastically unlike each other – one benign, the other a "terrible *evil* face" which displaces the other whenever "some dreadful passion or desire has seized her."<sup>25</sup>

This motif of soul-shifting, resonant with suggestions of mysticism and the East, is probably responsible for the introduction into mesmeric novels of a host of vaguely mysterious, non-Western characters and exotic drugs associated with the Orient. In Gautier's story, for example, the reader is told of an Indian yogi who bestowed on Dr. Cherbonneau the secret

of projecting the soul out of its body. The medium of the hypnotic operator in Heron-Allen's *Princess Daphne* is Mahmoudé di Zuletta, pointedly described as "a supple Eastern woman." One of the stories in Madame Blavatsky's *Nightmare Tales* features a wizened "old Yambooshi" who grants the European hero the gift of clairvoyance. Everywhere, in fact, oriental idols, opium pipes, Arab sages, and ominous "Hindoo" servants form part of the peculiar atmosphere of mesmeric fiction. Thus the crouching Malays in the seedy drug emporium which Dorian Gray visits, like the opium-tinted cigarettes smoked by Lord Henry, represent just the kind of background detail one comes to expect in mesmeric fiction.

Other notable characteristics of the genre have been instilled, if only subtly, into *Dorian Gray*. Just as Dorian dominates Basil Hallward before he is himself brought to heel by Wotton, so the characters in mesmeric fiction often appear to possess magnetic powers at first – only to be overwhelmed in their turn by characters even more forceful. In a story called "A Latent Power" (1889), for example, the mesmerist actually falls under the control of his own medium during a public performance.<sup>26</sup> Even the mesmerist's traditional claim to the role of healer finds its echo in *Dorian Gray* as in much other fiction of the hypnotic kind. Svengali's experiments on Trilby began as an attempt to cure her painful neuralgia. A bearded, brilliant-eyed figure in *The Mesmerist* (1890) relieves the "dreadful attacks" of a sufferer with a few mysterious passes of his hands.<sup>27</sup> And Lord Henry Wotton, his hands moving eloquently in a spell-binding speech to Dorian, adopts the perspective of a physician. "Nothing can *cure* the soul but the senses," he advises, "just as nothing can *cure* the senses but the soul" (p. 20, emphasis added).

Some prominent features of Wilde's novel might seem at first glance to have nothing to do with hypnotic fiction, but on closer inspection turn out to be deeply rooted in its traditions. The sharp contrast in *Dorian Gray* between age and youth – the hero's unwrinkled face versus the withered, ugly countenance in the portrait – has numerous precedents in mesmeric stories and novels. In Gautier's *Avatar*, for example, the ravages of time upon one hypnotic subject are instantly repaired when the sunken lines of her face and figure fill out with the bloom of youth – a situation the reverse of Dorian Gray's sudden aging at the end of Wilde's novel. But Dr. Cherbonneau, Gautier's mesmerist, exchanges his wrinkled body for a younger one at the end of the story, whereupon his own uninhabited frame collapses at once under the signs of extreme old age. In Heron-Allen's *Princess Daphne* the dark Eastern woman Mahmoudé regains not only her health, but her *youth*, through the hypnotic trances induced by her mentor. The hair-raising experiences of the mesmerized narrator of Madame Blavatsky's "A Bewitched Life" [make] him a wreck, a prematurely old man, looking at thirty as though sixty winters had passed over my doomed head."<sup>28</sup> And an elixir of youth rejuvenates the aged mesmerist Louis Grayle in Bulwer's *A Strange Story*

21. See Tatar, pp. 5-10, for a discussion of the "imponderable fluid."

22. *Key to Theosophy*, p. 85.

23. *The Mesmerist's Secret*, p. 59.

24. "A Magnetic Mystery," *Blackwood's*, 141 (May 1887), 641.

25. *The Doctor's Secret*, p. 117.

26. Marie de Mensiaux, "A Latent Power," *Theatre*, 13 (February 1, 1889), 85-92.

27. E. H. C. Oliphant, *The Mesmerist: A Novel* (London: Remington, 1890), p. 63.

28. "A Bewitched Life," p. 64.

(1862), while the reverse process – that of rapid aging – occurs in such tales as Rita's *Doctor's Secret* and Pollock's "An Episode in the Life of Mr. Latimer." The latter, published seven years before *Dorian Gray* and praised by Wilde, describes a moment in which a character's eyes "kept their piercing blackness and youth, while the skin shrivelled into wrinkles and grew to a dull parchment hue."<sup>29</sup>

These motifs of sudden aging and perennial youth are welcomed by the mesmeric novelist not only because they are appropriately sensational, but because they satisfy another demand of the genre – the portrayal of many varieties of occult experience which transcend the normal limits of human identity or light up hidden depths of the mind. Such concerns furnish the "wonder" which initially attracted Wilde to mesmeric fiction, and they include, in addition to the device of miraculous rejuvenation or decline, the idea at the very heart of Wilde's novel. Magic portraits and enchanted mirrors, in fact, turn up frequently in the inventory of mesmeric fiction, particularly in stories appearing near the end of the century. In "The Strange Case of Muriel Grey" (1891), for example, an innocent-looking young woman under a mesmeric spell draws a picture which reveals her as the murderer of her husband.<sup>30</sup> Of the two stories published by Wilde's friend W. H. Pollock in *The Picture's Secret* (1883), one concerns a magic picture and the other a man who repeatedly encounters a mesmeric Mephistopheles determined to bargain for his soul. Madame Blavatsky describes in "A Bewitched Life" a "magic mirror" of polished steel in which the mesmerized subject can glimpse terrible truths not accessible to the waking mind. Like *Dorian Gray's* magic picture, this enchanted mirror convinces a materialistic, skeptical hero of the soul's reality. Both *Dorian* and Blavatsky's first-person narrator discover in the ghastly disclosures of portrait or mirror what each recognizes, in identical phrasing, as his "soul-life."<sup>31</sup>

But in F. Anstey's 1886 novel *A Fallen Idol* the treatment of the portrait is most startlingly similar to Wilde's. The heroine (named Sybil as in *Dorian Gray*) is in Anstey's book painted in the full bloom of youthful innocence. When the painting is hung at the Grosvenor Gallery, however, the artist is awestricken by changes in it nearly as inexplicable and ominous as those which would later degrade the portrait of *Dorian Gray*:

Was he mad or dreaming, or *what* was this thing that had happened to it? The bewitching face on which he had bestowed such loving labour, he now saw distorted as by the mirror of some malicious demon, yet without losing a dreadful resemblance to the original. Gradually he realized how subtle and insidious the alterations were, how the creamy warm hue of the cheeks with the faint carmine tinge had faded into a uniform dull white, and the delicately accented eyebrows which, combined with the slightly Oriental setting of the eyes, had given such piquancy to Sybil's expression, were inclined at an ultra-Chinese angle, while the wide, innocent-guileful eyes were narrowed now and glittering with a shallow shrewdness. Worst of all, the smile with its sweet pretence of mutinous mockery, had spread into a terrible simper, self-occupied, artificial, and fatuous (p. 130).

But that is not all. In Anstey's book, as in *Dorian Gray* later, an increasing viciousness in the model's character matches the foreboding changes in the portrait. And in *A Fallen Idol* the pictured face returns finally to "the bloom of youth and health," although by means much different and less artistic than those employed by Wilde to restore *Dorian's* portrait to its original appearance. In Anstey's book a mesmerist, the shadowy Nebelsen, discovers that an Indian idol has bewitched Sybil's portrait and uses his telepathic powers to blast it out of existence with a well-aimed bolt of lightning!

The conclusion of *Dorian Gray* is cut from the same fabric that furnished endings for other tales of mesmerism. When such stories close with a character's renunciation of mesmeric arts, or with the sudden end of a trance, that dramatic reversal is sometimes signaled or even caused by a loud crash of breaking crystal or the shattering of a "magic mirror" which has been instrumental to the hypnotic state. In Hoffman's "Der goldne Topf," for example, the enchanted mirror which enabled Veronica to dominate Anselmus breaks in two when the spell is broken. In "An Episode in the Life of Mr. Latimer" and *The Vasty Deep*, both familiar to Wilde, the mesmeric trance is snapped by "a crash of falling glass." And in *Dorian Gray*, when Wilde revised it for book publication, the hero takes a "curiously carved" mirror – a gift from Lord Henry Wotton which reflects the unaging product of his influence – and crushes it into silver fragments beneath his foot. The portrait of course is a kind of "mirror" as well – "the most magical of mirrors," the narrator calls it. When *Dorian* stabs it, a terrible crash and cry accompany his release from the spell woven by Lord Henry, and from life.

To push these similarities too far, of course, would be a mistake. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the best of mesmeric novels, infinitely superior to the tide of now-forgotten hypnotic fiction in which the late Victorians were awash, largely because it is so *different* from works which in various ways inspired it. Declining to fit out his novel with telepathically guided lightning bolts and hypnotic eyes glowing eerily like coals, Oscar Wilde sought rather the shadow than the substance of what had typically been done in this popular and often subliterate genre. By rejecting the element in mesmeric fiction which Andrew Lang called "vulgar trash," Wilde retained enough of the mood and motifs of his predecessors to capture the air of wonder he admired in their works. One might do worse, in fact, than regard *Dorian Gray* as the "impossible" but artistic romance which Lang wistfully imagined the mesmeric tradition was capable of yielding.

Essentially, therefore, the mesmerizing of *Dorian Gray* was a metaphorical, not an actual, proceeding. Interested in evoking an atmosphere rather than describing hypnotism as such, Wilde found for himself and his characters more freedom of action than they could have enjoyed within the patented formula of mesmeric fiction. *Dorian's* utterances, for example, are indeed curiously flat and often orchestrated by Lord Henry, who is suggestively linked with such standard trance-inducing devices as the magnetic fluid, the magic mirror, and mysterious "pass-

29. W. H. Pollock, "An Episode in the Life of Mr. Latimer," in *The Picture's Secret* (London: Remington, 1883), p. 277.

30. Ross George Dering, "The Strange Case of Muriel Grey," *Temple Bar*, 93 (November 1891), 397-409.

31. *Dorian Gray*, p. 223; "A Bewitched Life," p. 62.

es" of the hands. But Dorian, because he is "spellbound" figuratively more than literally, comports himself with greater independence than, say, the mesmerized Mahmoudé di Zuletta in the novel by Wilde's friend Heron-Allen. Dorian can argue with his mentor about the significance of Sybil Vane's death, or maintain, against Lord Henry's decided opposition, the reality of the soul. Finally he can destroy both the portrait and himself in a despairing act of rebellion against what Lord Henry's influence has made him. As for Wotton, he too is changed from previous models in hypnotic fiction. Although tales of murder committed under hypnotic compulsion were commonplace, only in Wilde's novel is the "mesmerist" incapable of conceiving what his influence has wrought. Even Dorian's tentative confession to murder does nothing to enlighten Wotton about how thoroughly his injunction to "be always searching for new sensations" has been put into practice.

If one of the strengths of *Dorian Gray* is its flexible adaptation of the mesmeric format, perhaps its chief weakness arises from

copying that format too closely at times. Lord Henry's influence is too irresistible, and Dorian's capitulation too sudden, to appear convincing even to sympathetic readers like Julian Hawthorne. An alertness to the novel's mesmeric texture throws a fascinating light on the relationship between Lord Henry and Dorian without really answering fundamental objections to it. Yet Wilde demanded that fiction embrace the wonderful, strange, and curious, pointing out in "The Decay of Lying" that novels can be so lifelike that no one could possibly believe in them. This was the aesthetic prejudice which originally attracted Wilde to the mesmeric novel, but to his credit he knew where to draw the line against it. In carefully modulating the most sensational improbabilities of mesmeric fiction, Wilde concedes something to despised realism but rises above the defects of a host of novelists who doomed themselves to oblivion through their own crude excesses.

Miami University

## Dickens's War against the Militancy of the Oppressed

Atta Britwum

Charles Dickens first caught the attention of England's literary public in 1833 when his very first sketch appeared in *Old Monthly Magazine*. Between this time and when he died still composing *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* in 1870 he kept himself actively productive as an artist. This period is also a very crucial one in our world's history. Europe's bourgeoisie had already wrested from its aristocratic enemy its hegemonic place in society, but was having to face from its working class victims very formidable threats to its newly won hegemony. Strikes, riots, revolts, "revolutions" were rife: as also the marginal activities of lumpen proletarian elements like prostitutes, "thieves," "robbers," which too were subversive of the new bourgeois order.\* The bourgeoisie triumphed over these threats to its power, and has since succeeded in holding up, for a period which has not ended, Europe's proletarian revolution. Dickens's literary career fits within the framework of the bitter class struggles that the development of industrial capitalism engendered at this time in England especially, but generally in Europe.

This paper is intended as a contribution to the debate on which of the classes in conflict Dickens's work served, taking off from the notion that "in class society every man lives as a member of a given class and [that] there is no thinking which does not bear the imprint of a class" (Mao Tse-Tung, *On Art and Literature*). Indeed Marx's study of human society identifies a material or economic base, i.e. the manner in which production to meet material needs is organized; and a superstructure or the "social, political and intellectual life pro-

cess in general."

The superstructure, Marx establishes from his study, develops out of the material base, is conditioned by it, though the latter acquires in turn its own dynamism thanks to which it is able to protect the material base and enhance its development. This is saying that art, culture, ideas don't just exist in a vacuum; they have links with the material base. So that in studying the work of Dickens we are studying also an aspect of the superstructural struggles that were being waged at the time to conserve or destroy the bourgeois material base: capitalism. These struggles were themselves linked with others in the material base. I intend to focus, eventually, on *A Tale of Two Cities*, in which Dickens achieves artistic success in representing the very actual class wars that pitted the working class against the bourgeoisie.

\* \* \*

The most authoritative description of Dickens's work that I know of is Everett Knight's, done in the framework of his theory of the classical novel. Knight posits the classical novel as a bourgeois genre in the sense that its very structure is fashioned out of the essence of bourgeois ethic, is directly protective of the economic base of bourgeois society. The classical novel, he says, hinges structurally on identity, good or bad, which needs to be proven, confirmed by, respectively, accession to wealth or a descent into poverty. And indeed one of the surest guarantees of social stability in the era of capitalism is the acceptance by the poor that their misery is something they have deserved. Yet it is not possible to contemplate without nausea the manner in which wealth is acquired. Hence the need for the bourgeois to lie about his real intentions, to separate

\* See notably Marx's study of the casualties of the primitive accumulation of Capital in Vol. 1 of his *Capital*, Part VIII.



deeds from motivations, to exhibit his attachment to use value while he pursues exchange value. More concretely this produces the businessman who strives to enrich himself while pretending to be pursuing only the good of the community, providing jobs for the boys. The classical novel betrays the same kind of ambivalence: on a superficial "explicit" level it condemns bourgeois society while on a deeper "implicit" level it reinforces it.

Dickens, as a child born to chronically impecunious parents, had to work for some time as a child laborer in a blacking factory while the rest of the family went through a spell in the debtor's prison at Marshalsea. An error of Providence? Whatever it was he never reconciled himself to it. He works it out in the following manner into the mouth of the autobiographical David Copperfield: "I know that I worked from morning until night with *common* men and boys." (Emphasis added). This attracts the following comment from A. E. Dyson in his work *The Inimitable Dickens*: "David's reaction in the warehouse is not snobbery. It is fear, the fear of being wasted! Who then is cut out for work in a factory, to be 'a shabby child'? Those who deserve it, those with bad identity."\*

For it is not true that Dickens sympathized with the condition of the working class. He despised it. Pip: "What I dreaded was that in some unlucky hour, I being at my *grimmest* and *commonest* should lift up my eyes and see Estella looking in at one of the wooden windows of the forge." (Emphasis added). It is a hard condition, almost unfit for humans, as George Orwell seems to imply in an essay on his experience in a coal mine. There is no wisdom in choosing to be the anvil if you can be the hammer. Though when you are the hammer it is easy to romanticize (lie about) the "dignity" of being the anvil. As Pip does: "And now . . . I complicated [my mind's] confusion fifty-thousand-fold, by having states and seasons when I was clear that Biddy was immeasurably better than Estella, and that the *plain honest working life* to which I was born had nothing in it to be *ashamed* of, but offered me sufficient means of *self-respect and happiness*." (Emphasis added). But unless one romanticized it, the "plain honest working life" in the context of capitalist society is not possible. Or rather it cannot offer "means of self-respect and happiness." It needs to be fought, changed, humanized. But Dickens's vision excludes the humanization of the working class condition. To humanize it is to ask for revolution, working class power, which is destructive, undesirable and especially unnecessary since it can be conjured away by thinking and making believe that the "poor shall always be with us"; or by repeating after Plato and Voltaire that society achieves stability by having the common majority submit to being governed by the "smart" few, and having them, the former, do the mean but necessary jobs of society. The commons are those with bad identity. They are others, not Dickens, not Oliver Twist, not David Copperfield, not Pip. These latter are the elects of the bourgeoisie whom some inexplicable error classifies among the mass of misérables. But only temporarily. Identity cannot

be mistaken. So every one of them gets bailed at least out of the scum, if not necessarily (as it was not, in the case of Dickens) into the ranks of the wealthy where they truly belong. The system is self-correcting, as it is self-perpetuating. All of which is very reassuring.

Except, of course, that it is unwise to take things for granted, assume that the poor will know the right thing to do, i.e. stay away from agitation, from revolution. This is why Dickens's career is so useful, so purposeful. Especially *Hard Times*, which provides us the model worker, Stephen Blackpool, the honest conscientious worker, dedicated more to work and less, or preferably not at all, to complaints about working conditions. (A bad workman quarrels with his tools.) He sticks dutifully within the limits of his condition and does not try what he knows (persuades himself) he cannot achieve: for instance destroying, through collective effort, his enslaved condition as a working man. And he is quick to identify mischief-making in "so-called" working class leaders, urged on by the author as in the following representation of Slackbridge addressing a union meeting:

Judging him by Nature's evidence, he was above the mass in very little but the stage on which he stood. In many great respects he was below them. He was not honest, he was not manly, he was not so good-humored; he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense.

A way become standard of discrediting the militancy of the oppressed. Dickens attacks here the strike action about to be undertaken by attributing a certain falseness, *mauvaise foi*, to the leadership. This *mauvaise foi* he traces to certain moral deficiencies which he discerns readily by merely looking at Slackbridge! All of which keeps Blackpool out of the strike action of his fellow working men. He is the antidote for the disruptive agitations of "misdirected," "disgruntled" laborers. A multiplication of this is achievable through a little benevolence, humanism on the part of the masters of industry. For it is not true that we do not know the sources of social unrest. As Dickens explains in *Household Words*: ". . . should pauper and outcast infants be neglected *so as to become pests to society* . . .? Common sense asks, does the state desire good citizens or bad?" (Emphasis added). Otherwise "society" asks for and obtains the situation depicted in *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. The two novels are rooted in actuality and raise a lurid scare of working class power as a manner of combating it.

*Barnaby Rudge*, the critics are agreed, appears like a preparation for the more artistically successful *Tale of Two Cities*. (Indeed it moves very slowly, painfully slowly, to the center of its plot, the "rioting." It distinguishes itself further by a certain looseness, lack of rigor in the composition.) Three main movements are discernible in it. In the first, Dickens shows, in a manner, the condition of the miserable, thereby showing also the necessity, the justification for some kind of amelioration of this condition. In the second he portrays a militant collective reaction of the popular classes against their condition, sketching in his own furious fight against it. The uprising which he names "rioting" is presented as the manifestation by the popular classes of a particularly primitive political consciousness. Its principal actors are all tainted, unwholesomely moti-

\* Or put differently, Dickens's purpose, which Dyson endorses here, is to work out an a posteriori justification for private wealth. Without some such justification, private wealth, necessarily acquired at the expense of others, the laboring majority, stands too strikingly immoral.

vated. The Bull Dogs, the organization that covers it, is a misdirected trade union which sells itself to the maniac Lord George Gordon. Sim Tapertit, the leader, is motivated by his resentment of his state as apprentice. Hugh is the misused assistant at Maypole Tavern too ready to strike back at his master and family. And so on. Then he identifies the "rioters" as "sundry ruffians," "the scum of London." In short he manipulates our sentiments against the "rioters." The third movement takes the tearful softness off the humanism of the reformist Dickens, laying bare the hard-heartedness of the defender of "law and order." The reformist's point of departure is the intrinsic soundness of the status quo. So that no measure is too harsh for eliminating threats esteemed fundamental to it especially in periods of crisis as depicted in *Barnaby Rudge*. Here it is no longer a question of Union leaders trying to raise the level of proletarian consciousness of their members as in *Hard Times*. Rather we are faced with a violent onslaught on the bourgeois order. The state's instruments of coercion are brought heavily to bear and Dickens keeps within the tradition of reformism as he celebrates in this third movement the predictable victory of the bourgeois order over the counter-violence of the oppressed. Most of the propertied men recover their losses, the state aiding in that. Then most of the "rioters" are brought to heel in the most definitive manner: numbers of them get consumed in the fire they raise; the rest are hanged or imprisoned for interminable periods. Worse, the lot of the classes they represent does not get improved. Rioting, like seeking change through violent means, does not pay. "In a word, those who suffered . . . were for the most part the weakest, meanest and most miserable among them."\* Good for them! But the threat of fundamental change, collapse of bourgeois power is still with us. Hence for instance Kathleen Tillotson's introduction to the 1968 Oxford University Press edition of the novel, which adds to similar commentaries by numerous other critics:

What most often repeats itself in history is the fear that history will do so. Dickens was responding not to enlightened historical analysis, but to the *average man's* horror of looted chapels and distilleries, armed robbery in the streets, prisons and mansions ablaze – sights imprinted ineffaceably upon the memories of many living individuals, and the family memories of thousands more. (Emphasis added.)

Who is this 'average man' who is horrified by the sight of mansions set ablaze? Let's seat the above quotation beside the following from the novel:

. . . an infectious madness, as yet not near its height, seized on new victims every hour, and *society* began to tremble . . . (Emphasis added.)

. . . the general alarm was so apparent in the faces of the *inhabitants* and its expression was so aggravated by want of rest, *few persons with any property to lose* having dared go to bed since Monday. (Emphasis added.)

Kathleen Tillotson meets Dickens in the defense of "persons with property." Their "average man," "inhabitants," "society" count out those members of society who participate in the uprising as well as those who support it. Ruling classes tend to substitute themselves for their society. We encounter this three-tiered structure and the same kind of preoccupation in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Dickens writes the novel specifically against the popular element in the French Revolution. The Storming of the Bastille and the various excesses that followed (historically orchestrated by the bourgeoisie) are seen and presented as popular. Of the contradictions that brought down aristocratic dictatorship in France, he elects to portray only those that opposed the popular classes to the aristocracy. The characters involved in this French drama are principally of these classes. When we encounter personages of bourgeois stock (for example Mr. Darnay, the aristocrat who has committed class suicide, identified with the bourgeoisie, and Dr. Manette) we do not see how they relate as bourgeois to the aristocratic order, except in so far as they affect to sympathize with the common people when they fall victim to the aristocratic order. Dr. Manette, for instance, spends eighteen years in solitary confinement in the Bastille for having stood up for two peasant youths. Yet historically the bourgeoisie's part in the Revolution was not just altruistic. But then we are dealing here with a case of the artist's class position determining the choice and use he makes of his material. Dickens focuses here on the popular classes of middle nineteenth century, not those of 1789.

In its first movement the very "human," spineless resentment of weak commoners against oppression is depicted as merely gathering and so sufficiently attractive (i.e. not frightening, harmless) for the pure at heart to sentimentalize about. Even Madame Defarge appears here quite human. Of course those sympathetic feelings for the suffering disappear when, as during Roger Cly's "burial," they constitute themselves into a mob, which for the bourgeois, is inevitably a popular phenomenon. Cly's "burial" supplies a foretaste of the "popular lawlessness" that was to follow July 14th.

But past wrongs do not justify contemporary ills. So in the second movement when the quake happens, the reaction against oppression, Dickens hurries to strip Madame Defarge, for instance, of her humanity, making her into a simple "revolutionary," a monster uniquely plugged into a line that leads infallibly to the destruction of human lives, "grinding to pieces everything before" her. Her husband is also a revolutionary, which is to say, in many ways just as despicable. Except that he is capable of sentiment, pity. He recognizes old loyalties to former masters. Therefore a bit, if only a bit, human.

All in all, the impulse that drives the Revolution feeds on capricious rage and a "fitful" desire for vengeance against former oppressors. Too often it gets perverted further into a simple thirst for blood. Chance selects victims. As a rule they are seldom former oppressors defined here as Marquises and other lords who have *personally* perpetrated acts of inhumanity on the people. (Naive conception of guilt, of oppression.) Rather the victims are mainly innocent, helpless women, men and even children. Darnay is a model victim, innocent like nearly all of the others, and through him, also Dr. Manette

\* *Barnaby Rudge* was serialized between February 13 and November 27, 1841 against, Kathleen Tillotson tells us, the background of "the Poor Law riots, the chartist risings at Dervizes, Birmingham, Sheffield, the mass meetings on Kersal Moor and Kennington Common, and most pointed of all, the Newport rising of 1839 with its attempt to release Chartist prisoners . . ."

and his daughter and grand-daughter, Mr. Lorry, Mr. Carton, Miss Pross and Mr. Cruncher. These pitted against Madame Defarge (leading the *enragés*), assume the center of the plot towards the end. Madame is at the controls, supreme. For her, the Revolution is a moment for settling personal scores. She makes it so. Her sister and brother were humiliated and killed by the Marquis Evremonde and his brother, Darnay's father and uncle. Darnay has to pay for that. Blinded by sentiment, she misconstrues in toto, Dickens will have us believe, the little humanness in her husband. It is *her* brother and sister not *his* whom the Evremonde brothers killed. Dr. Manette is *his* former master, not *hers*: " 'In a word . . . my husband has not *my* reason for pursuing this family annihilation and I have not *his* reason for regarding this Doctor with any sensibility. I must act for *myself* therefore' " (emphasis added). The Republic gets pushed behind these personal, base considerations, the interests narrowly defined of those who personally control power. It is possible after all, in spite of the fickle-mindedness of the mob, to read some logic into its operations. But what logic! The historical significance of what was enacted as the French Revolution is lost on Dickens. Or rather he sets it aside. He makes other choices, also derived from the Revolution: to fight against working class dictatorship, already *à l'ordre du jour*, at the time he was composing this novel.

And, as in *Barnaby Rudge*, throughout this movement Dickens piles scorn on the common people, the "populace," "ruffians," "low," "noisy," "coarse," "capricious," "fickle," "bad," "cruel," "devilish," "terrors," when they present themselves as a militant corpus. Not a single representative of the bourgeoisie is sketched into this tableau of the demolition of the aristocratic state machinery.

The third movement is enacted as the "final struggle between Madame Defarge and Miss Pross . . . a contest between the forces of hatred and love." (George Woodcock's introduction to the 1975 Penguin edition). Miss Pross and Mr. Cruncher, as servants of the Manette-Darnay household and Mr. Lorry respectively, are of the popular classes, but they identify with the interests of their bourgeois masters who are opposed to the revolution. Which revolution, according to our thesis, is not the bourgeois revolution of 1789 at all. Rather the threatening proletarian revolution which was to start winning important victories half a century later in the Soviet Union. In this "final" struggle Madame Defarge, representing the popular forces, loses out to Miss Pross, who has been manipulated into risking her life to establish the wrongness of proletarian power. Miss Pross' victory is an affirmation of Dickens's faith in the perpetuity of bourgeois dictatorship. The justification for it is expressed in Sydney Carton's terminal vision:

I see Barsad, and Cly, Defarge, the Vengeance, the juryman, the judge, the long ranks of the new *oppressors* who have

risen on the destruction of the old, perishing by this retributive instrument before it shall cease out of its present use. I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats through long years to come. I see the evil of *this time* and of *previous* time of which this is the natural birth gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out. (Emphasis added).

The ancien is equated with its successor and with evil, each one of them distinguishing itself by its own brand of oppressors. So what is the point of it all, of the revolution? Yet a change, some kind of change, is desirable. Hence the vision of "a beautiful city and a brilliant people." Dr. Manette, Mr. Darnay, Mr. Lorry, Dickens, truly 'brilliant' people, would solidarize with the common people only when they grovel in powerlessness.

Humphrey House says of *Oliver Twist* that it was written at a time when "the possibility of armed revolution was constantly before men's mind . . ." It is difficult to misconstrue Dickens' project. Arnold Kettle attempts it in a "Marxist" tour de force, "Dickens and the Popular Tradition" (in David Craig, ed., *Marxists on Literature*), which makes Dickens into a popular writer who operates from the view-point of 'the class-conscious working class.' Knight in *A Theory of the Classical Novel* makes the following remark about *A Tale of Two Cities*:

The bourgeois looks upon his own revolution with those mixed feelings so well exposed in *A Tale of Two Cities*. He is satisfied with the results, but appalled by the means.

If indeed the novel is about the French Revolution then Dickens's representation of the events would be a lot more cynical. For he would be saying that the dirty work of concretely destroying the old and ushering in the new was the affair of the militant poor, those he calls the scum. The bourgeois presumably only waited with clean hands to take delivery of the new power. But we have been arguing that *A Tale of Two Cities* is not just "a fictional tract on the evils of Revolution" (George Woodcock's introduction), it is specifically a statement against proletarian power, carrying Dickens's class dread of it and his concern, as a reformist, to save the bourgeois status quo.

Dickens's efforts anticipate those of Orwell, Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn and those others who opportunistically settle on the excesses (avoidable or otherwise) of a revolution to reject the validity of what it ushers in: the qualitative development of human society. Of course what stands out in all this is the class allegiance of the artist. Dickens is a defender of the bourgeois order.

University of Cape Coast

# Chaos and Cosmos: Carlyle's Idea of History

Lowell T. Frye

"History recommends itself as the most profitable of all studies," Thomas Carlyle wrote in 1833,<sup>1</sup> but he had subscribed to this sentiment since the years of his youth. The histories of Hume, Robertson, Gibbon, and Voltaire had formed the core of his own education, and since his earliest letters he had urged upon nearly all of his correspondents – his brothers, his friends, Jane Baillie Welsh – a similar course of study.<sup>2</sup> But prior to 1830 he had not set before the public an extended, considered exposition of his views on history. Nor had he himself succeeded in writing a historical work, though the ambition had burned within him as early as 1822, when he contemplated writing an account of the English civil wars.<sup>3</sup> By 1830, however, Carlyle had begun to support his sense of the importance of the past with more systematic reflection on history and on the cognitive operations essential to historical research; and between 1830 and 1833 he strove to formulate a methodology of history that would serve as theoretical underpinning for the practical work of historical investigation and narration. Two essays of this period develop his ideas on history: "On History" (1830) and "On History Again" (1833).

The years bounded by these two essays witnessed the flowering of Carlyle's abilities. After an apprenticeship stretching through years of self-doubt and frustration, Carlyle at last discovered a voice to match his message, and in 1831 delivered himself of a full-scale work: *Sartor Resartus*. During the early years of the new decade Carlyle also deemed his developing historical thought ready for public presentation. Not that his thinking was rigidly codified in the early 1830's; in fact, his ideas on history changed significantly between the writing of "On History" and "On History Again." What remained constant during these years was Carlyle's desire to develop previously inchoate, nebulous conceptions of history into a systematic form, and to clarify for himself and for the public his understanding of history both as the general field and the product of human endeavor, and as intellectual discipline.

In his essay "On History" Carlyle struggles toward a definition of history comprehensive enough to serve as the basis of a historical methodology. In the process of definition he considers three meanings of the word 'history': first, history as the domain of human events in time, the subject matter of study; second, as a set of cognitive operations, the craft of the historian; and third, as the results of research, the narrative statement on the domain under investigation.<sup>4</sup> Considered as the domain of human action, history is not, for Carlyle, merely the sum of past events: "it is a looking both before and after." History encompasses the whole of human existence in time; it is a complex interweaving of past, present, and future.

Man in the present, poised between the "two eternities" of past and future, "warring against Oblivion," strives to fix his

place in the flux of existence, to drive back the shadows hovering on either side of the thin edge of the present. But since the future is shrouded in mystery deeper than that obscuring the past, "our whole spiritual life" is founded on understanding the past. History lies at "the root of all science," and all knowledge is "but recorded Experience, and a product of History." The goal of history as an intellectual discipline, therefore, is to produce a written work that maps the course of human existence through time. But it is precisely the second and third meanings of the word 'history' – history as craft and history as written product – that trouble Carlyle. He does not doubt the objective existence of the past, nor does he question the potential value of historical study as a means of understanding man and his place in the universe. But as he considers the epistemology of historical reconstruction, the cognitive operations essential to historical research, his confidence in history evaporates. History, claimed Thucydides, is "Philosophy teaching by Experience." Unfortunately, man can never possess the philosophy (a framework of interpretive generalizations) nor the experience (empirical data) needed for an accurate reconstruction of the past. History is a jumble of multitudinous phenomena; it is "an ever-living, ever-working Chaos of Being, wherein shape after shape bodies itself forth from innumerable elements. And this Chaos, boundless as the habitation and duration of man, is what the historian will depict, and scientifically gauge, we may say, by threading with single lines of a few ells in length!" Man cannot assimilate the jumble, nor can he accurately record it, because "Narrative is *linear*, Action is *solid*." Restricted by the modes of human perception and cognition, man falsifies as he records, simply because he is human.

These inherent limitations of the human mind forced Carlyle to doubt the effectiveness of historical writing. History, he believed, should be profitable; it should teach man about himself. But if the historian cannot accurately reconstruct and explain the past, what value the teaching? A necessity prior to pragmatic instruction is an apragmatic commitment to the truth. And Carlyle in 1830 required such a commitment; inheritor of the Enlightenment and influenced by its historians, yet bereft of their assumptions about an unchanging human nature that would facilitate the search for historical truth, Carlyle attempted to construct a new model of history that would achieve the goal of truth by faithfully rendering past events, the existence of which he did not doubt, and by striving to identify the underlying regularities that order those events, the existence of which he did doubt. He desired a history that united the "eruditional" accumulation of data and the "philosophical" identification of regularities.<sup>5</sup> In practice, these two functions diverged in the nineteenth century: working historians of the first half of the century strove to accumulate historical facts;

1. Thomas Carlyle, "On History Again," *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. H. D. Traill (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1899), XXVIII, 167.

2. See *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. Charles Richard Sanders and K. J. Fielding (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1970), I, 121; I, 355; II, 185, 266.

3. *Letters*, II, 84, 94.

4. Jerzy Topolski, *Methodology of History*, trans. Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1976), Synthese Library 88, p. 30.

5. Topolski, p. 64.

philosophers sought explanation and overall pattern.<sup>6</sup> But Carlyle wanted history both to reconstruct historical events and to explain the meaning of those events with reference to an overarching historical pattern. The essay "On History" represents his failure to integrate these two models into a working methodology of historical research: equally contemptuous of deductive *a priori* philosophical history and eruditionist Dryasdust antiquarianism, Carlyle as he wrote "On History" could not see his way to a history that ordered the complexity of the world of experience without at the same time losing the sense of that complexity.

But Carlyle chose not to close his reflections in despair. Instead, he sketched out a program of scholarly specialization. If universal history could not be written, then let each historian choose his plot and cultivate it. Let men write innumerable histories – of politics, morals, economics, art, religion – in the hope that "by running path after path, through the impassable, in manifold directions and intersections," man collectively might find it possible to secure "some oversight of the Whole." Carlyle here advocates what proved the major pattern of nineteenth-century historiography, the accumulation of information in circumscribed fields. Yet although Carlyle respected such erudition, the practical suggestions of "On History" ring hollow, despite the hortatory rhetoric, because he spent the first half of the essay portraying an ideal historian who integrates description and explanation. Carlyle asks the reader to accept what he could not. He did not believe that universal history is the sum of infinite smaller histories. But he lacked, in 1830, any practical advice other than this mechanistic program. Committed to a true history, yet anxious to make manifest the regularities in history, and thus to affirm its meaningful direction, he found no effective compromise: only diminished expectation, the rejection of universal history and of the search for overarching patterns, wards off despair.

By 1833, however, and the writing of "On History Again," Carlyle's diminished expectation gives way to hope for a successful historiography. Rather than a disappointing failure, history is now "the only *articulate* communication . . . which the Past can have with the Present, the Distant with what is Here." Apparent is a new certainty: Carlyle in "On History Again" presumes that man can unite himself "in clear conscious relation" with the past, rather than merely desire such a union. Not that he underestimates the fragmentary nature of the historical record; from the past "our 'Letter of Instructions' comes to us in the saddest state; falsified, blotted out, torn, lost and but a shred of it in existence; this too so difficult to read or spell." Nonetheless, between 1830 and 1833 Carlyle struggled with the problem of man in the midst of Immensity, and arrived at a solution. "On History Again" does not end in perplexity, nor in moral exhortation masking a methodological failure. Instead, the essay presents a rationale for successful historiography, which Carlyle used to surmount the epistemological difficulties that had mastered him in 1830.

Rather than lamenting man's inabilities, Carlyle in "On History Again" defends man's considerable mental powers. He admits that the perfect history is "clearly a faultless monster which the world is not to see," but insists that nature has

endowed man generously for the task of investigating the past: speech, writing, printing, though not flawless, guarantee that man will always have abundant access to the past. Instead of decrying the arbitrariness of memory as a means of selection, he praises its serviceability: "what cannot be kept in mind will even go out of mind; History contracts itself into readable extent." No longer does Carlyle object that unconscious selection, haphazard, accidental, distorts the past; instead, he observes – with resignation? with relief? – that "History must come together not as it should, but as it can and will." In the end, he rationalizes, accident corrects accident, and "in the wondrous boundless jostle of things . . . a result comes out that may be put-up with." By means of epistemological juggling Carlyle transforms the limitations of human perception and memory into positive methodological instruments: those events remembered, he implies, possess moral and intellectual importance greater than those forgotten.

But if selection and narration pose no insurmountable barriers, why then does no universal history enlighten man with the map of his existence? The fault lies, Carlyle maintains, "not in our historic organs, but wholly in our misuse of these, say rather, in so many wants and obstructions, varying with the various age, that pervert our right use of them; . . . especially two . . . : want of Honesty, want of Understanding." This statement marks a radical shift in Carlyle's views on history: the inadequacy of historiography is not the result of an epistemological failing, but of a moral failing – and moral failings man can to an extent ameliorate. Universal history has become an intellectual possibility because it is now a moral possibility. Carlyle has no further need for his program of eruditionist histories, for the accumulation of evidence within circumscribed fields. Instead, he affirms the possibility of a grand Universal History, a "magic web" that encompasses the range of human existence in time and also explains it. The task of writing and rewriting such a history is tremendous, never-ending, but possible, and potentially profitable. In "On History Again" Carlyle had developed a theoretical position that would allow him to write history; in the months to follow he wrote "The Diamond Necklace" and began *The French Revolution*.

The confident Carlyle of "On History Again" seems almost too sure of himself: how in three years did Carlyle manage such an about face? The headnote to "On History Again," informing us that the essay is part of a lecture delivered "didactically, poetically, almost prophetically" by Diogenes Teufelsdröckh to a skeptical English audience, gives us a clue. The work of Teufelsdröckh we cannot accept without reservation. Hence the headnote. The doubtful audience dips snuff and listens in silence, not utterly convinced by Teufelsdröckh's eloquence. As in *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle achieved a confident tone by splitting his personality into the didactic-prophetic and the skeptical. The certainty of "On History Again" is the result of playing fast-and-loose with the epistemology of historical reconstruction – and Carlyle knew it. But he desired that certainty, and removed his skepticism, at the center of "On History," to a subsidiary position in "On History Again." Goethe taught him that the only way to rid the self of doubt is to act – and in the later essay Carlyle decided to act.

The differences between "On History" and "On History

6. Topolski, p. 98.

Again" demonstrate a significant change in Carlyle's perception of the primary aim of historiography, a movement away from the goal of truth and toward that of practical instruction. This change reflects the major shift of Carlyle's intellectual career, from disinterested speculation to resolute preaching. Carlyle emerged from the psychological turmoil of the early 1820's determined to battle the forces of mechanism and materialism, armed with the willed conviction that existence was ultimately spiritual, that the phenomenal world merely clothed the ideal behind it. But without empirical evidence to support his interpretation of the universe, Carlyle could not affirm with real belief his doctrine of natural supernaturalism, nor could he legitimately serve as prophet to his age. He turned, therefore, to the past; if he could truthfully reconstruct the past, and in the process discover the objective existence of spiritual patterns in the seeming chaos of experience, then he could prove, if only by analogy, that faith in order and spirit was possible in the modern world. He could free himself from spiritual paralysis, unite the quest for truth and the desire to teach in a meaningful vocation.

Unfortunately, Carlyle found the past no more tractable than the present, and his decision to link the struggle between belief and unbelief to the writing of history ensured the persistence of fundamental doubt as to the nature of man and the universe. Ultimately, Carlyle felt that only willed action could conquer the impotence of doubt; but to pass on this lesson learned from Goethe, Carlyle himself needed to progress from speculation on historical epistemology to the activity of writing. And so he compromised. In his writing he asserts that existence is spiritual, is moral, and that the past reveals spirit and morality if we study it aright; but he also and always qualifies that assertion: embedded in the best of his prose – in *Sartor Resartus*, *The French Revolution, Past and Present* – is the knowledge that every reconstruction of the past is a reduction of the past, that every statement on the nature of man is a distortion.

Despite – and to an extent because of – the overt dogmatism of Carlyle's works, doubt lingers beneath the surface of his prose: especially in his works of historical reconstruction Carlyle expressly states epistemological uncertainty. Repeatedly in these works Carlyle laments the multiplicity of data and man's inability to collect enough of it. Paradoxically he also regrets, despite its multiplicity, the incompleteness of the historical record. More frequently, however, and more powerfully, Carlyle evokes a sense of uncertainty indirectly by means of metaphor and irony. He describes the historical record as a torn shred, the selection of evidence as the editing of paper scrapheaps. He represents explanation as the decoding of nearly unintelligible ciphers, as the reading of a faded, tattered

palimpsest. His occasional use of a stable irony reduces the labors of previous historians to dryas dust siftings or metaphysical fancy-flights devoid of cognitive value, and ironic juxtaposition of voluminous source materials with paltry narrative synthesis and explanation repeatedly belittles the success of historical research.

But the epistemological doubt rouses in Carlyle an ontological uncertainty more fundamental, more threatening. The universe, and in narrower focus the human past, resist human efforts at comprehending the spiritual nature that orders them: perhaps man cannot identify pattern because none exists. Such doubt, at odds with his conscious conviction of the spirituality of being, creeps inexorably into his writing. Beneath all the political, social, moral themes that form the conscious programs of *Sartor Resartus*, *The French Revolution, Past and Present*, an ontological drama, the conflict of cosmos and chaos, belief and unbelief, unfolds in metaphor and a romantic irony that transcend mere rhetorical instrumentality. Metaphors of vision and discovery contest with metaphors of creation and construction, each group dependent on radically opposed understandings of the universe and man's place in it. Does man see and interpret an objective pattern and order in history, or does he create the patterns that order chaos with only the authority of the human imagination? As historical thinker, Carlyle wished to demonstrate the transformation of chaos into cosmos, and to prove that this transformation had validity beyond the reaches of the human mind. But in the most enduring of his works Carlyle did not forget the tumultuous fires that burn beneath the peasant as he tills the crust of the soil; he did not forget that chaos too is eternal. His mode, therefore, in *Sartor Resartus*, *The French Revolution, Past and Present*, is that of ironic drama: always the battle of cosmos and chaos, never-ending, though punctuated by temporary successes on either side.

More often than not, however, in Carlyle's writing chaos in both its positive and negative realities – the richness and fecundity of existence as opposed to the horrors of disorder – seems to elude the restraints of regularity and order. In the earlier works of the 1820's and 1830's Carlyle seemed to accept complexity with tolerance, and even expressed fascination with the richness of experience. But as he aged, and as contemporary social and moral problems increasingly burdened his conscience, his tolerance evaporated, the fascination turned to fear. No less aware of the presence of chaos beyond the fringes of fragile order, he saw primarily its negative aspect, and responded with the stridency of moral, and then social and political, authoritarianism.

Hampden-Sydney College

## George Eliot: Feminist Critic

Carol A. Martin

Among women students and feminist critics alike, it is a continuing source of dismay and regret that George Eliot did not write at least one novel about a woman like herself, a woman who achieved international fame as an artist, who translated German philosophers, who defied the sexual mores of mid-Victorian England. From the subordination of Caterina Sarti's musical talents to her love for a man in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, to the sinking into marriage of Catherine Arrowpoint and Mirah Cohen or the only partial and temporary artistic fulfillment of Madame Alcharisi in *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot's fiction seems to focus on obstacles to woman's achievement; this focus provokes George Levine to posit that Eliot views sacrifice of the self as "quintessentially the woman's vocation," or even that "there is a strain of misogyny in George Eliot closely parallel to the misogyny implicit in, say, Dicken's idealization of women and his cruelly comic portraits of such disastrous mothers or foster mothers as Mrs. Nickleby, Mrs. Clennam, Miss Havisham, and Mrs. Wilfer."<sup>1</sup>

To defend against such charges, critics have most often cited Eliot's role as a realistic novelist. Like George Levine, in his later comments in the same essay just quoted, Zelda Austen takes the stance that Eliot "could not allow Dorothea Brooke to do what she had done" because Eliot "was a genius, one in a thousand, and Dorothea was not."<sup>2</sup> Of course that's true even if a "thousand" is a little low. And Austen is right too in her second line of defense, when she asserts that fiction which shows only what *ought to* or *can be* becomes polemic.

But it is not solely realism that determines Eliot's decision not to present women characters whose successes match their aspirations. Rather the converse: it is part of her own feminism that she writes realistically. "Polemical" is certainly too pejorative a term for Eliot's approach, but, as often observed, she is an intensely "moral" writer, who imposes on her fiction a strong moral imperative. Her strategy in addressing the evils of her society is neither to treat, as Gaskell and Dickens do, very specifically the "condition-of-England" or the place of fallen women or the failures of the legal system, nor to write what Eliot herself called the "oracular species" of novels – those "most pitiable of all silly novels by lady novelists."<sup>3</sup>

To see Eliot's feminism, one need only examine her critical approach to women writers and works about women and compare this with her fictional practice. Doing so, one finds her feminism not limited by the convention of realism but rather, realism acting in the service of her feminism.

George Eliot came to fiction writing late in life, publishing her first novel when she was 38. Before that, she had been a translator, an editor, and, frequently, a critic for *Westminster Review*, *Leader*, *Saturday Review*, *Fortnightly Review*, and

other prominent British periodicals of her time. In these publications, Eliot speaks in a personal voice, not unlike the one Jean Kennard notes in contemporary feminist critics,<sup>4</sup> not only about the artistic merits but also about the social efficaciousness and truthfulness of the books she reviews. In her comments on Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft, on Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederika Bremer, Geraldine Jewsbury, Julia Kavanaugh, and Mme. de Sable, her essays reveal that her fiction is founded securely upon a theory of art that serves the cause of women's liberation no less than that of human liberation.

To be sure, one is faced immediately with realism, with the question of "ought" vs. "is," in contemplating Eliot's critical essays. In "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," satirizing the "oracular" species, she seems to suggest that realism is the sole duty of fiction writers:

Great writers, who have modestly contented themselves with putting their experience into fiction, and have thought it quite a sufficient task to exhibit men and things as they are, (the oracular lady novelist) sighs over as deplorably deficient in the application of their powers. 'They have solved no great questions' – and she is ready to remedy their omission by setting before you a complete theory of life and manual of divinity. (*Essays*, pp. 310-311).

However, Eliot's observations in "The Morality of Wilhelm Meister," published fifteen months before "Silly Novels" and in "The Natural History of German Life," only three months before, affirm a connection between realism and morality and broaden the writer's task and responsibility. In the former, she attacks the supposed morality of poetic justice: "far from being really moral is the so-called moral denouement in which rewards and punishments are distributed according to those notions of justice on which the novel-writer would have recommended that the world should be governed if he had been consulted at the creation" (*Essays*, p. 145). And in the latter, she calls Art "the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellowmen beyond the bounds of our personal lot." In delineations of peasant or rustic life, "The thing for mankind to know is, not what are the motives and influences which the moralist thinks *ought* to act on the labourer or artisan, but what are the motives and influences which *do* act on him. We want to be taught to feel, not for the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant, but for the peasant in all his coarse apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness" (*Essays*, p. 271).

In her praise for Mary Wollstonecraft and Margaret Fuller in another essay, she makes a similar point about women's lives: "Their ardent hopes of what women may become do not prevent them from seeing and painting women as they are" ("Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft," *Essays*, p. 205). To produce that understanding of women's lives, of what motivates and influences them, Eliot anticipates Virginia Woolf; in her essay "Women in France: Madam de Sable," she notes that

1. George Levine, "Repression and Vocation in George Eliot: A Review Essay," *Women & Literature*, 7 (Spring 1979), 4.

2. "Why Feminists Are Angry with George Eliot," *College English*, 37 (February 1976), 553.

3. "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," in *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas

Pinney (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), p. 310. Subsequent references to Pinney's edition are cited in the text as *Essays*.

4. Jean E. Kennard, "Personally Speaking: Feminist Critics and the Community of Readers," *College English*, 43 (February 1981), 140-145.

women writers of the seventeenth-century French salons "wrote what they saw, thought, and felt, in their habitual language, without proposing any model to themselves, without any intention to prove that women could write as well as men, without affecting manly views or suppressing womanly ones" (*Essays*, p. 54). Similarly, Woolf, whose feminist credentials are undeniable, argues that women's "creative power differs greatly from the creative power of men . . . . It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only?"<sup>5</sup> For both Eliot and Woolf, to write as a woman is to write about the concerns of women, to record those "infinitely obscure lives" (Woolf, p. 93), to raise them from obscurity and to create a literary tradition for women.

Eliot seems too to share Woolf's vision of androgyny as the ideal state:

Women become superior in France by being admitted to a common fund of ideas, to common objects of interest with men; and this must ever be the essential condition at once of true womanly culture and of true social well-being. We have no faith in feminine conversazioni, where ladies are eloquent on Apollo and Mars; though we sympathize with the yearning activity of faculties which, deprived of their proper material, waste themselves in weaving fabrics out of cobwebs. Let the whole field of reality be laid open to woman as well as to man, and then that which is peculiar in her mental modification, instead of being, as it is now, a source of discord and repulsion between the sexes, will be found to be a necessary complement to the truth and beauty of life. Then we shall have that marriage of minds which alone can blend all the hues of thought and feeling in one lovely rainbow of promise for the harvest of human happiness. (*Essays*, pp. 80-81).

As Carolyn Heilbrun has noted in *Towards a Recognition of Androgyny*, George Eliot is a prime example of the androgynous person, allowing "both her masculine and feminine traits to have sway within her personality"<sup>6</sup>; Eliot's criticism is a manifestation of that side of her personality, her comprehensive intelligence and wide vision, which is often stereotyped as masculine. Though she was neither "tall" nor "supercilious" she was that "magisterial critic" who, Sandra Gilbert posits, "is and always was implicitly male . . . for in our culture disembodied intellect is traditionally masculine."<sup>7</sup>

If, however, as Gilbert suggests, the typical male-magisterial

critic looks at women's writing and women's concerns with a certain smug condescension, Eliot, despite her "masculine" mind, fails to qualify. Her intense interest in women's issues is evident in the quotation above regarding French writers and in her essay on Wollstonecraft and Fuller, in which she asserts: "we want freedom and culture for women, because subjection and ignorance have debased her, and with her, Man."<sup>8</sup> Eliot's criticism and fiction unite in affirming that it is worse than foolish to think otherwise and to believe instead that women who are kept ignorant are appropriately sheltered from life's problems and prevented from attempting to dominate their spouses, the latter a typical Victorian supposition. One with Wollstonecraft in deriding the idea that women should "be ladies, Which is simply to have nothing to do, but listlessly to go they scarcely care where, for they cannot tell what" (*Essays*, p. 204), Eliot perceives the damage this effects for both sexes. Her critical analysis here, in 1855, applies precisely to the Rosamond-Lydgate relationship that she delineates seventeen years later in *Middlemarch*:

Men pay a heavy price for their reluctance to encourage self-help and independent resources in woman. The precious meridian years of many a man of genius have to be spent in the toil of routine, that an 'establishment' may be kept up for a woman who can understand none of his secret yearnings, who is fit for nothing but to sit in her drawing-room like a doll-Madonna in her shrine. No matter. Anything is more endurable than to change our established formulae about women, or to run the risk of looking up to our wives instead of looking down on them . . . . [M]en say of women, let them be idols, useless absorbents of precious things, provided we are not obliged to admit them to be strictly fellow-beings, to be treated, one and all, with justice and sober reverence. (*Essays*, pp. 204-205).

With this essay in mind, the reader can see Rosamond as a study in the destructive effects of the woman on the man who has chosen her to be his idol, the ornament of his drawing room. The paradox of the idol who looks up to the man is clear in Lydgate's meditation on the kind of woman he *would* marry if he chose to marry at all and the view he has of Rosamond after they are engaged. The hypothetical wife "would have that feminine radiance, that distinctive womanhood which must be classed with flowers and music, that sort of beauty which by its very nature was virtuous, being moulded only for pure and delicate joys."<sup>9</sup> After their engagement,

article on French women demonstrating her ability to develop a similar subject successfully, we can only regret that Chapman did not respond positively to George Eliot's proposal to write "Woman in Germany." (Wiesenfarth, p. xx.) Numerous other entries demonstrate her continued awareness of negative attitudes toward women – from her observation on Petrarch's misogyny (entry 125) to her quotation from Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*,

"For is it a grief to you that I have part,  
Being woman merely, in your male might & deeds  
Done by main strength? yet in my body is throned  
As great a heart, & in my spirit, O men,  
I have not less of godlike" (entry 247).

9. *Middlemarch*, ed. W. J. Harvey, rpt. 1979 (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), ch. 16, p. 193. Cited subsequently within the text by chapter and page.

5. *A Room of One's Own*, rpt. 1957 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929), p. 91. Cited subsequently in text as Woolf.

6. Rpt., 1974 (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 83.

7. "Life Studies, or, Speech After Long Silence, Feminist Critics Today," *College English*, 40 (April 1979), 853.

8. Joseph Wiesenfarth observes Eliot's concern with women's issues in *George Eliot, a Writer's Notebook, 1854-1879, and Uncollected Writings* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1981): "George Eliot's interest in the condition of women is frequently manifested in the notebook beginning with her early entries on Egyptian women . . ." (p. xix.) He adds that the notebook reveals some of the material that Eliot might have used in the article she proposed to John Chapman in 1855 on "Woman in Germany," planned as a companionpiece to her essay "Woman in France." Though the former essay was not written, the notebook indicates the direction it might have taken; "With her notebook containing the makings of a lively essay and with the earlier



Rosamond is, for Lydgate, "an accomplished creature who venerated his high musings and momentous labours and would never interfere with them; who would create order in the home and accounts with still magic, yet keep her fingers ready to touch the lute and transform life into romance at any moment; who was instructed to the true womanly limit and not a hair's breadth beyond – docile, therefore, and ready to carry out behests which came from beyond that limit" (*Middlemarch*, ch. 35, p. 387). By the novel's end Lydgate has learned to bear her "dumb mastery" (ch. 73, p. 797). One can see the seeds of this development in Eliot's comment on Fuller and Wollstonecraft: that "both write forcibly [on] the fact that, while men have a horror of such faculty of culture in the other sex as tends to place it on a level with their own, they are really in a state of subjection to ignorant and feeble-minded women" (*Essays*, p. 201).

This text also provides a gloss on Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, where Mr. Tulliver says that he chose Bessy, of the Dodson sisters, because she was not overly acute, to prevent "be[ing] told the rights o' things by my own fire-side."<sup>10</sup> Though Tulliver gets his wish in generally not being directed by his wife, the one interference she does make in his business affairs, her visit to Lawyer Wakem to dissuade him from buying the Mill, produces an opposite and fatal result. Both Rosamond and Bessy exemplify Eliot's critical text, that the subjection of women is disastrous for both sexes.

Eliot's review of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, embodies this theory, that fiction should show the destructive effects of social oppression by delineating the weaknesses and not merely the strengths of individuals in an oppressed group. Eliot faults Stowe for "the absence of any proportionate exhibition of the negro character in its less amiable phases" (*Essays*, p. 328). By depicting the negro as so much superior to the white, she argues, Stowe defeats her purpose of attacking the opinion that slavery is a "Christianizing institution." In fact, her characterization seems to support this "cant." Furthermore, by "this one-sidedness, Mrs. Stowe loses . . . the most terribly tragic element in the relation of the two races – the Nemesis lurking in the vices of the oppressed." This is the same Nemesis that lurks in the vices or shortcomings of women like Bessy Tulliver, Rosamond Vincy, Mrs. Transome, Gwendolen Harleth, and even in Dorothea Brooke and Romola Bardi, a Nemesis springing from the limitations of the social and educational system and conventional attitudes toward women.

Along with reviewing their works and assenting to the positions of earlier British and American feminists, Eliot aligns herself with a strong feminist position in her criticism of contemporary novelists Geraldine Jewsbury and Fredrika Bremer. For instance, lamenting Jewsbury's unrealistic characters ("there is not a man in her book who is not either weak, perfidious, or rascally, while almost all the women are models of magnanimity and devotedness," *Essays*, p. 135), Eliot adds:

"we care too much for the attainment of a better understanding as to women's true position, not to be sorry when a writer like Miss Jewsbury only adds her voice to swell the confusion . . ." (*Essays*, p. 136). In contrast, Eliot lauds Julia Kavanaugh's *Rachel Gray* for not being "a story of a fine lady's sorrows wept into embroidered pocket-handkerchiefs." It neither "har-row[s]" nor "abash[es]" the reader, but tells simply of a dressmaker and a small grocer, "Very vulgar, and not at all heroic . . . [I]t occupies ground which is very far from being exhausted, and it undertakes to impress us with the every-day sorrows of our commonplace fellow-men, and so to widen our sympathies, as Browning beautifully says –

Art was given for that  
God uses us to help each other so,  
Lending our minds out."<sup>11</sup>

Eliot's assertion that the ground is "very far from being exhausted" points to the place she occupies in literature about women. Rather than being aloof from women's issues of her day, as some have alleged, Eliot maintains the closest touch with the foundations of those issues: the struggles and strivings of ordinary women, women who cannot rise, like Marian Evans, above the political and social limitations of women's position, but whose rise is dependent upon a change in the political and social order. This is the center of her critical theory: before change can occur, there must be imaginative sympathy, "a better understanding as to women's true position." It is true, as Gillian Beer asserts, that

George Eliot chose always to imprison her most favoured women – Dinah, Maggie, Dorothea. She does not allow them to share her own extraordinary flight, her escape from St Oggs and from Middlemarch. She needs them to endure their own typicality.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, it is the responsibility of the artist to produce an imaginative sympathy for that typicality; the artist focuses on the obstacles which prevent these women, and others like them, from realizing their aspirations. Patricia Beer's otherwise perceptive analysis of Eliot's women characters misses this point:

What is fatally hampering to George Eliot's heroines is not society, not even provincial society, but their own lack of creativity, which includes creative intellectual powers. Obstacles of all kinds are put in their way, it is true, and George Eliot makes us feel so sorry for them that we overlook the fact that in real life, given the motivation and the talent, women could and did overcome them. George Eliot herself triumphed over greater handicaps than any of her women characters are faced with.<sup>13</sup>

The last statement may be true, but Eliot had a rare talent; and the whole argument smacks of the illogic of the woman who says, "I made it in a hostile society; so can you." This is not

10. *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), I.3, 17. Cited subsequently within the text by book and chapter and by page number.

11. Wiesenfarth, p. 249.

12. "Beyond Determinism: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf," in *Women*

*Writing and Writing About Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979), p. 88.

13. *Reader, I Married Him, a Study of the Women Characters of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974), p. 181.

a premise Eliot would have accepted. In the same number of *Westminster Review* in which she attacked "silly novels by lady novelists" for expounding "the writer's religious, philosophical, or moral theories" (*Essays*, p. 310), Eliot reviewed three novels, Mrs. Stowe's *Dred*, one by Charles Reade, and *Hertha*, by popular Swedish novelist Fredrika Bremer. In her essay, Eliot praises Bremer, who "long ago won fame and independence for herself," for "devot[ing] the activity of her latter years to the cause of women who are less capable of mastering circumstance" (*Essays*, p. 332).

This cause is hindered, not helped, by unrealistic treatment of their problems. Thus, Eliot objects that *Hertha* "surrounds questions, which can only be satisfactorily solved by the application of very definite ideas to specific facts, with a cloudy kind of eloquence and flighty romance" (*Essays*, p. 334). Eliot "cannot help regretting that [Bremer] has not presented her views on a difficult and practical question in the 'light of common day,' rather than in the pink haze of visions and romance"; the former is a phrase from Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," whose use here points up Eliot's Wordsworthian stress on the significance of the common person and looks ahead to Woolf's emphasis on women writers' recording all those "infinitely obscure lives."

In Eliot's fiction, her narrators' comments reinforce the importance of understanding even the most prosaic human lives — even those, like the Tullivers' and the Dodsons,' that give us a "sense of oppressive narrowness," for, as the narrator in *The Mill on the Floss* affirms,

it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie — how it has acted on young natures in many generations that in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts. The suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind, is represented in this way in every town and by hundreds of obscure hearths: and we need not shrink from this comparison of small things with great; for does not science tell us that its highest striving is after the ascertainment of a unity which shall bind the smallest things with the greatest? In natural science, I have understood, there is nothing petty to the mind that has a large vision of relations, and to which every single object suggests a vast sum of conditions. It is surely the same with the observation of human life. (*The Mill on the Floss*, IV.i, 238)

In *Felix Holt*, the narrator more succinctly makes a similar observation when he outlines the story to come: "there is seldom

any wrong-doing which does not carry along with it . . . some tragic mark of kinship in one brief life to the far-stretching life that went before, and to the life that is to come after . . ."14

These passages illustrate the evolutionary rather than revolutionary nature of Eliot's world-view. Women's lives and liberation cannot be disengaged from the lives of those with whom they share a place in the "historical advance[s] of mankind." The coalescence of her theory of human development, her code of tolerance, and her demand for social change, is clear in "The Antigone and its Moral." There Eliot posits that tragedy arises in the conflict of good with good, not good with evil. A position or situation may be good even if it involves wrong principles or wrong-headedness. The struggle in *Antigone*

represents that struggle between elemental tendencies and established laws by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with his inward needs. Until this harmony is perfected, we shall never be able to attain a great right without also doing a wrong . . . Wherever the strength of a man's intellect, or moral sense, or affection brings him into opposition with the rules which society has sanctioned, *there* is renewed the conflict between Antigone and Creon; such a man must not only dare to be right, he must also dare to be wrong — to shake faith, to wound friendship, perhaps, to hem in his own powers. Like Antigone, he may fall a victim to the struggle, and yet he can never earn the name of a blameless martyr any more than the society — the Creon he has defied, can be branded as a hypocritical tyrant. (*Essays*, pp. 264-265.)

Eliot's sympathy with the weak, the narrow-minded, the intolerant, which is part of the greatness of her fiction, has led to the charge that she is lukewarm about women's plight. Not so. Her criticism explains and confirms the feminist thrust of her fiction. Her vital interest in women's concerns does not give her the right to wield her pen with a "vengeance" as she accuses Geraldine Jewsbury of doing (*Essays*, p. 135); rather as she says in "The Antigone and its Moral," "our protest for the right should be seasoned with moderation and reverence" (*Essays*, p. 265). If Dorothea Brooke, "struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state," never achieves "widely visible" effects, the very depiction of the impediments that prevent such effect contributes to the "growing good of the world" which will include better opportunities for women (*Middlemarch*, "Finale," p. 896).

Boise State University

14. "Author's Introduction," *Felix Holt, The Radical*, ed. Peter Coveney, rpt. 1979 (New York: Penguin, 1972), p. 83.

## "Muscular Christianity" and Brutality: The Case of Tom Brown

Henry R. Harrington

The phrase "muscular Christianity" gained currency in England following the publication of Thomas Hughes' novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in 1857. Sometimes the phrase connoted approval of athletics, more often disapproval, but always there was present in its use the sense that athletics had to be taken seriously. "Muscular Christianity" was the perfect phrase to suggest such seriousness because it implied an actual and specific creed of faith in muscles. But nowhere in the literature of the Victorians are the articles of that creed ever given definition; they were simply assumed to be informing the work of Hughes, his close friend Charles Kingsley, and Thomas Carlyle, to whom both were indebted for some of their ideas. The absence of a precise and agreed-upon meaning for a phrase as common as this one suggests that it was a mid-Victorian buzz word, virtually without content, but capable of evoking the same kind of visceral response as the phrase "cult worship" in our own day. Associations cluster around such phrases as they are used and overused, stimulated by a culture-wide anxiety. In the case of "muscular Christianity," the cause of the anxiety is not difficult to determine; in practically every discussion of or allusion to "muscular Christianity" the word or idea of "animality" or "brutality" appears. The debate over "muscular Christianity's" value turned largely on the question of whether or not, in promoting sports, it also promoted "animality." Was it possible, in other words, to appeal to man's "higher" ethical nature through sports and games? In his first novel, Hughes minimized the competitive threat of sport by giving it ritualistic significance and emphasized the democratic principle of "good sportsmanship." But in the sequel, *Tom Brown at Oxford*, after his principles had been attacked as "muscular Christian," sport takes place against the backdrop of brutal class conflict, not ritual conflict, and the democracy it advances has a revolutionary cast to it.

### I

When Hughes wrote *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, he had no idea that after its publication he would have to defend the novel and its hero in the name of "muscular Christianity." Published over the signature "An Old Boy," it is primarily a work of nostalgia, not of dogmatism. The didactic purpose of the novel, such as it is, is to demonstrate that "boyishness in the highest sense is not incompatible with seriousness."<sup>1</sup> The reviewer who coined the phrase "muscular Christianity," however, took exception to the manner in which "boyishness" was made to seem "serious" by Hughes: "The logic of the thing is this, that by black eyes and bloody noses you settle the right and wrong of a case."<sup>2</sup> This reviewer's rendering of "muscular Christianity's" logic was to be repeated many times in discussions of

"muscular Christian" athletics.<sup>3</sup>

In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, physical prowess appears to be a reliable measure of moral prowess because the characters breathe the clear air of a fairy tale. Rugby's violence, such as it is in the novel, does not reflect the world's as, for example, the violence of Mr. Squeer's Dotheboys Hall does. Rules, boundaries, codes of sportsmanship turn Rugby's violence into ritual.

[Rugby] was no fool's or sluggard's paradise into which Tom had wandered by chance, but a battlefield ordained from old, where there are no spectators, but the youngest must take his side, and the stakes are life and death (*Tom Brown's Schooldays*, p. 143).

In Rugby School's charmed setting, sports and games redefine and give outward form to the action of the human soul expressed in terms of combat – the exercise of will, strength, and faith to overcome resistances which stand in the way of the attainment of one's aim. Like the fairy tale hero who resists temptation or outwits the giant at his own game, Tom Brown's victories are measures of his moral character.

The moral case Hughes creates for Tom Brown's heroism is predicated upon a democratic social order. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays* that order is reinforced by the moral presence of Thomas Arnold. Under Arnold Rugby School becomes a democratic "world" unto itself, and there is very little evidence provided to suggest that that "world" is out of joint with the rest of England. Arnold is the instrument of democratic change within Rugby.

The turning point in the novel occurs when Hughes' Arnold simultaneously corrects Tom Brown's moral truancy and the shyness of a new student named Arthur by assigning Tom to look after Arthur and give him "some Rugby air, and cricket" (*Tom Brown's Schooldays*, p. 278). Under Arnold's guidance, sport, which up to this point had been primarily a form of escape from authority for Tom, becomes a moral activity. Tom reflects on Arnold's wisdom, wondering "if the Doctor knew that his visits to Bilton Grange were for the purpose of taking rooks' nests . . . , and those to Caldecott's Spinney were prompted chiefly by the conveniences for setting night lines." He guesses that Arnold did know but made "noble use" of his knowledge by making Tom feel he "was of some use in the little school world, and had a work to do there" (*Tom Brown's Schooldays*, p. 278). The significance of Arnold's transforming gesture is not to be underestimated. By it, anti-social sport (poaching) is changed into morally vested "work" directed toward the good of "the little school world."

By treating poaching and work as complementary rather than antithetical human activities, Hughes was asserting that both

1. Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1869), p. xv.

2. "Muscular Christianity," *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* XXV (Feb. 1858), 102.

3. Most recently in Mark Girouard's *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981). The novel, according to Girouard, asserts "the best way to moral prowess was physical prowess, in actual fighting or in sport," p. 166.

arise from the same desire – “the sporting instinct.” And since all (males) share in it, this “instinct” provides the basis for a kind of sportsman’s democracy where the son of a squire could “play with the village boys without the idea of equality or inequality (except in wrestling, running and climbing) ever entering his head” (*Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, p. 51).<sup>4</sup>

But Hughes was not so naive as his critics have taken him to be. He recognized that sports and games, once removed from the fairy tale moral order of Rugby, lose the uncomplicated value that they were assigned there. When Tom Brown matriculates at *Tom Brown at Oxford*, he enters a world governed by unjust laws and economic necessity, not by democratic rules of fair play. The optimistic “Old Boy” narrator of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* matures into a skeptical witness to the moral complications that attend an unreflecting faith in efficacy of sport and good sportsmanship.

## II

In his first year at Oxford, Tom Brown devotes most of his time and energy to rowing in the St. Ambrose College boat. He is given his first rowing lesson by a servitor named Hardy, who feels his poverty too keenly to ask to row for the College although he is one of the best oars at Oxford. This is Tom’s introduction to the class distinctions that affect sports outside the perfect sporting democracy of Arnold’s Rugby. In this instance, however, these distinctions are bridged by the fact that Hardy is an Oxford student, his poverty notwithstanding. He is eventually accepted in the University boat; and after he becomes a tutor at St. Ambrose’s, he builds the College crew into the center of the College’s life. So, essentially, Tom’s relationship with Hardy merely extends the argument for the democratic levelling effect of sports begun in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*. It is not until later in the novel, when Tom’s relationship with another lower class character, Harry Winburn, climaxes that the radical, revolutionary thrust of this argument surfaces.

In the meantime, Hardy becomes the chief apologist for “muscular Christianity” as the code of Victorian chivalry. After he has begun to introduce sporting reform into St. Ambrose’s, Hardy is accused by the president of the College of “teaching the boys to worship physical strength, instead of teaching them to keep under their bodies and bring them into subjection”<sup>5</sup> (*Tom Brown at Oxford*, p. 547). But Hardy tells Tom that he countered the president “with tremendous effect,” and the president is converted to his view. Hardy’s argument is not included here, but it is anticipated in an earlier chapter entitled “Muscular Christianity,” in which a number of distinctions about the value of sport are made which were missing in *Tom Brown’s School-*

*days*.

The narrator admits “only a slight acquaintance with the faith of muscular Christianity, gathered almost entirely from the witty expositions of persons of a somewhat dyspeptic habit,” but nevertheless defends the phrase and Tom Brown according to his own definition of it. He warns his readers not to mistake “musclemen” for “muscular Christians,” the only point in common between the two being that they both “hold it to be a good thing to have strong and well-exercised bodies, ready to be put at the shortest notice to any work of which bodies are capable, and to do it well.” The musclemen, however, worship physical strength for its own sake, while “muscular Christians” are directed by moral principles. The “muscular Christian” sets himself to the chivalrous tasks of “the protection of the weak, the advancement of all righteous causes, and the subduing of the earth which God has given to the children of all men” (*Tom Brown at Oxford*, p. 130). There is in this explanation no note of anxiety, but the very fact that Hughes felt called upon to defend Tom Brown in this manner suggests he felt that his character had been misunderstood.

The “musclemen” for whom Tom Brown had been mistaken were the creations of G. A. Lawrence. Lawrence’s heroes were humorless avatars of the Regency strong man, tragically out of place in Victorian England. Lawrence described them, however, as “muscular Christians,” and this was what bothered Hughes.<sup>6</sup> The failure of these characters to evidence the kind of morality which Tom Brown acquires at Rugby left them with nothing but “those fierce and brutal passions which [the “muscleman”] seems to think it a necessity, and rather a fine thing than otherwise, to indulge and obey” (*Tom Brown at Oxford*, p. 130). The charge of “animality” that Hughes directs against Lawrence’s “musclemen” does not, however, carry over into a renunciation of sport.

In 1870 Wilkie Collins wrote a novel which exploited the connection between “animality” and the athlete. Lawrence’s “musclemen” were not athletes or sportsmen; they were merely strong, but Collins directed his sensationalism toward athletics because he felt they were directly responsible for the “recent spread of grossness and brutality among certain classes of the English population.”<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Delamayne, the villainous athlete of the novel, belongs to “the Christian-Pugilistic Association.” But Collins does not limit his attack on “muscular Christianity” to boxing. “The highest popular distinction which modern England can bestow,” he remarks with contempt, is to “pull the oar stroke in a University boat race” (*Man and Wife*, I, 77). His argument hinges on the assumption that sports encourage the “inbred reluctance in humanity to submit to the demands which moral and mental cultivations must inevitably

4. Hughes’ faith in “the sporting instinct” was no doubt nurtured by the sporting literature of R. S. Surtees, Pierce Egan, and Charles James Apperly (“Nimrod”), who eulogized a variety of sportsman known as the “Regency buck.” Grocers, aristocrats, and clergymen shared equally in the life of that literature. See Coral Lansbury, “Sporting Humor in Victorian Literature,” *Mosaic*, IX, No. 4 (Summer 1976), 65, and Virginia Woolf, *The Second Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1932), p. 132.

5. *Tom Brown at Oxford* (Chicago: Donohue, Henneberry, 1907), p. 547. Mark Pattison accused Benjamin Jowett of much the same thing several

decades later when he said Jowett was “turning Oxford away from the ideal of a ‘home for higher research and advanced learning’ . . . into a super public school, with . . . its juvenalia, [and] . . . its masculine Christianity.” V. H. H. Green, *Oxford Common Room* (London: Edward Arnold, 1957), p. 285.

6. E.g., “The same spell that subdued the Demigod, Assyrian, and the Jew, are woven round many muscular Christians in this our day,” writes Lawrence about the hero of *Maurice Dering: or the Quadrilateral*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge and Sons, 1864), I, 112.

7. *Man and Wife*, 3 vols. (London: F. S. Ellis, 1870), I, vii.

make on it" (*Man and Wife*, I, 328-30).<sup>8</sup>

Hughes shared Collins's Victorian fear of the "inbred reluctance in humanity," but he resented Collins's sensationalizing the connection between sport and "animality." In an address to Harvard undergraduates on "Muscular Christianity" the year Collins's novel was published, Hughes counterattacked:

You may have seen a popular novel, teaching that every man who has trained his body is a brute and a villain. It was written by a Cockney, whose authority on that question is equal to mine on higher mathematics; he simply knows nothing about the subjects on which he writes.<sup>9</sup>

Collins did not enter the "muscular Christian" debate, of course, until several years after the publication of *Tom Brown at Oxford*, but he belongs to a discussion of Hughes' novel insofar as Hughes was able to anticipate his argument that the sporting instinct could lead to lawless behavior. But what was mere grist to Collins's sensational fiction mill was to Hughes a tragedy following upon the absence of true democracy in England. While Tom Brown's relationship with Hardy appears to uphold the democratic vision of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, a much darker and more complex relationship with Harry Winburn, an agricultural laborer, undercuts it.

### III

Through Harry Winburn, Hughes registers his awareness of Victorian England's full-scale demolition of traditional values. Harry is an unwitting victim of the "new poor law," the mechanization of agriculture, and the Corn Laws, all of which conspired against the Tory vision of pastoral England with which Hughes had been raised.

Squire Wurley, Harry's master, still reads Egan's *Boxiana* and *The Adventures of Corinthian Tom*, hanging onto a way of life that disappeared following the Regency. As an anachronism, he would be harmless except that he has abandoned the "old sporting farmer's" respect for the "yeomanry," insulating himself and his game from the poor, like Harry Winburn, who are dependent upon him. He is a "bad master in every way, unthrifty, profligate, needy, and narrow-minded." Not only is Harry saddled with an uncaring master, but he also has been made redundant by the new threshing and winnowing machinery of the agricultural revolution.

As children, Harry and Tom wrestled equally well, and Tom, therefore, held Harry to be his social equal. But when Tom meets Harry again, Harry is homeless, jobless, and loveless. Tom, seeing his friend's plight, tries to set things right for him, putting the muscular Christian credo, as Hardy has outlined it, into action. But away from Rugby, Tom's muscular Christian actions lose their ritual grace. In Harry Winburn's world, Tom Brown stumbles clumsily upon the political and

economic barriers separating him from Harry.

Hughes may have set out to use this relationship purely as a vehicle for some fairly easy social criticism, but as it develops, the relationship is more than this. Wherever Tom turns, there is Harry Winburn embarrassing his naive confidence in sporting democracy, in the sporting instinct, and even in love. Harry Winburn becomes Tom's psychological double, the "brutish" side of Tom over which he has no control despite his best intentions. First, without realizing she's Harry's girlfriend, Tom flirts with Paddy Gibbons; afterwards she will not have Harry because she has known a better class of man. Then he tries to intercede for Harry with Squire Wurley only to antagonize the Squire further against Harry. Then, in the critical scene, Tom sets a trap for a poacher who turns out to be Harry.

According to the argument implied in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, poaching is merely a slightly deviant sporting activity, perhaps differing in form, but not in substance from legitimate hunting and fishing. Certainly, there is no suggestion that its illegitimacy translates into brutishness because that would impute a brutish level to sport. But this argument is radically revised in *Tom Brown at Oxford* when Tom, fishing in the Wurley stream, loses a lunker trout after his line is cut on a trap for poachers.

The trap is a large block of upright knives and razors set under the water to impale poachers as they wade. Neither Tom nor the reader can pass by this sinister image without difficulty. Tom, shocked by this inhuman way of dealing with poachers, is moved to volunteer to catch the poachers single-handedly. The reader, for his part, is suddenly aware of a dangerous, predatory level beneath the well-ordered surface of muscular Christian sport. Although he is still acting out of gentlemanly motives, Tom is drawn down to this level as he finds himself waiting by the stream to catch not a fish but a human being.

Although he tries to rationalize his position by denying the humanity of poachers as "pests of society," Tom is forced by the situation to confront his own guilt: "If all poachers were to be caught, he would have to be caught himself" (*Tom Brown at Oxford*, p. 455). In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, this guilt posed no particular threat because Hughes treated "the sporting instinct" as a good, social one. Here, however, "the sporting instinct" opens onto a murderous, brutish level of behavior, and a recognition of his own guilt leads Tom to acknowledge the criminal poacher, Harry Winburn, as the one upon whom "his own Fate hung" (*Tom Brown at Oxford*, p. 509). As he is dropped by Harry with a wrestling hold from their boyhood together, Tom recognizes that Harry is not simply similar to him but is his "destiny."

In a novel in which the action frequently evaporates into the clichés of the English *bildungsroman*, this scene with Harry Winburn is extremely important. Hughes continues to cling to the abstract principle of sport in which all men are equal; but

8. Matthew Arnold, the son of Thomas Arnold and Hughes' classmate at Rugby, agreed with Collins, criticizing "muscular Christianity" as "mere belief in machinery and unfruitful," as if it were an expression of pure materialism. Arnold saw that the Victorian could not repudiate the body without ultimately denying life, but he looked on sports with the cynical eye of one who has seen them before: "Culture does not set itself up against games and sports," he wrote in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). "It congratulates the future, and hopes it will make good use of its improved

physical basis; but it points out our passing generation of boys and young men is, meantime, sacrificed." "Culture and Anarchy" in *The Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, ed. A. Dwight Culler (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 451.

9. "Mr. Thomas Hughes and His Address" ["Muscular Christianity and Its Proper Limits"], *Harvard Advocate Supplement*, X, No. 1 (Oct. 14, 1870), i-ii.

instead of elevating Tom, as it did the shy, poor Arthur in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the principle reduces Tom as he finds himself in the grip of the "least man" – the criminal double who, in his concreteness, shames the loftiness of Tom's muscular Christian moral pretensions.

The holds of wrestling, which pull Tom down into Harry Winburn's embrace, have no place among the laws of England. This is also the position to which Wilkie Collins would bring his villain, Geoffrey Delamayne; but Hughes's approach to that position was considerably more complicated than Collins's. Collins asserts that the competitiveness of sport breeds ungovernable "animality." Hughes acknowledges the "animal" passions that sport can arouse but restricts their appearance to situations of social inequality. In the class struggle between landlords and the yeomanry sport induces "brutality." And to the extent that sport is a levelling social phenomenon, it aims at revolutionary overthrow of the landed class. Tom's embrace of Carlyle's philosophy by which he becomes "little better than a physical force Chartist" (*Tom Brown at Oxford*, p. 480) is, therefore, perfectly consistent with the scene of moral recognition that occurs when Tom wrestles with and acknowledges his double. With Harry at his side, Tom steps out into the ethical and legal darkness beyond the sunny laws of England and gentlemanly values that illuminated *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. And for a time, following his encounter with Harry, Tom finds in Chartism a sport with players enough to involve all England – the sport of revolution.

Hughes's treatment of Tom Brown amounts to a concession to the critics of muscular Christianity that no serious Victorian could sustain the schoolboy life of sport and games without confronting his own and others' brutality in the adult world. In the end, as most of his contemporaries would, Hughes pulled back from appearing to condone revolutionary brutality as the means to achieving a democratic society. After he aids Harry in his escape from the local constabulary following a machine-breaking riot, Tom begins to doubt the muscular Christian principle which set him on the criminal course. Hardy crystallizes his friend's doubt by citing Carlyle against Carlyle: "You'll find it a rather tough business to get your 'universal democracy' and 'government by the wisest,' to pull together in one coach" (*Tom Brown at Oxford*, p. 509). Opting for "government by the wisest," Tom sees Harry Winburn shipped off to the Indian army, while he himself becomes a leader of an urban 'Young Men's Club,' "trying to bring the children together and civilize [them] . . . in the rudiments of cricket." (*Tom Brown at Oxford*, p. 572)

Hughes did not repudiate sports, but minimized their democratic (and brutal) value in the name of abstract (and civilized) morality. In other words, as Tom Brown matures into an Arnoldian figure, the lower, brutal side of himself and of life in England glimpsed through sports is largely repressed; and Tom Brown stabilizes into the gentlemanly, paternal model for other muscular Christians like Meredith's Richard Feverel and Harry Richmond and Bulwer-Lytton's Kenelm Chillingly.

University of Montana

## Rossetti's Use of the "Great Mother" Mythos in "A Last Confession"

Nathan Cervo

For Buchanan he was "fleshly"; for Nordau he was an "imbecile." Humid, sensuous, passionate, sultry, Italianate, and lush are other adjectives used to describe the great Victorian poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti. To my mind, such epithets result from remaining in the *selva oscura* of the cortex of Rossetti's poetic method rather than advancing to the nuclear threshold where one begins to see the larger patterns.

Rossetti's claim to the stature of stable and profound thinker has naturally suffered from bizarre events in his private life, too well known to repeat here. Nonetheless, he helped found The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (holding pronounced Early Christian ideas at the time which were overridden principally by the arguments of William Holman Hunt), was acknowledged "king" by a circle of noteworthy artists and writers, recovered

Blake from all but artistic and literary annihilation, penned the marvellously restrained and acute response to Buchanan, "The Stealthy School of Criticism," and created a number of remarkable paintings, drawings, and poems, the almost universal subject of which is woman. But woman, as I mean to show, was not the female of the species for the creative Rossetti but a ruse, a *senhal*,<sup>1</sup> by which Rossetti first projected and then contemplated psychic episodes and habits of perception, anxieties and revelations, illuminating for a captured moment the stormwrack of his volatile personality. The women he painted, drew, and wrote poems about anticipated both Yeats and Joyce's anima-figures by epiphanizing his spiritual condition. For the most part, each was a variation on salvation and damnation, Heaven and Hell, what Frye has called positive and

1. According to Gabriele Rossetti, Dante and his contemporaries ostensibly celebrate "*la donna amata*" in the love lyric but really use her to symbolize imperial power, the Ghibelline ideal. History meant little to Gabriele, and certainly not the fact that Dante was a professed Guelf. For Gabriele,

Beatrice never really existed; his son disagreed with him on this point. For *senhal* ("fanciful appellation," "pseudonym," "screen-lady"), see Robert Briffault, *The Troubadours* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 92, 122, 186.

negative apocalypse. Marian and Beatrician representations constellate around the former; Persephone and Mediterranean fertility cult goddesses cluster about the latter.

As a preamble to considering the Great Mother mythos in "A Last Confession," it should be noted that, although Rossetti wrote in English, he thought like a highstrung Italian: so associatively, so rapidly that the connections were often suppressed in effect by the celerity of shifting from one enthymeme to another as he pursued a kind of Lockean molecular sorites. He thought logically but mercurially. Inevitably, the impression a reader gets is that he is not thinking at all but intuiting or instinctualizing. Habitually, Rossetti approaches the work of art he is about to create with the "fundamental brainwork" already done. Hence, ironically, the charge of "primitivism." In fact, Rossetti was sophisticated in "the thought of Memphis and Eleusis, the thought of Dante,"<sup>2</sup> which his father, the Republican exile Gabriele Rossetti, expounded in several commentaries of controversial character on the *Divine Comedy* and, most alarming to "The Antique" (Rossetti's pet name for his mother), Beatrice.

"A Last Confession" is a masterpiece. It represents an extraordinary achievement by Rossetti. Ronnalie Roper Howard is correct when she writes: "the poet is committed to none of his materials but stays outside directing our judgment";<sup>3</sup> and so is Carl Peterson when he states that the poem is "lyric or 'operatic' in mode, rather than dramatic and argumentative."<sup>4</sup> However, neither statement goes far enough. Rossetti is not committed to his materials because he is writing autography and he is not committed to himself. The poem is "lyric" because Rossetti's psyche is the "lyre": it is resonating what Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi has called Rossetti's "'hysterical' illness,"<sup>5</sup> and the main conflict is between two archetypal powers: the animus (masculinity, rationality) and the anima (femininity, "projectiveness"). Though not specifically about this poem, what Gelpi writes may be applied to it: "in Victorian society the arts were becoming feminized,"<sup>6</sup> and "Rossetti struggled against his sense of himself as an effeminized victim dependent upon masculine capital." The Great Mother mythos, in this light, becomes a kind of womblike shelter to which a regressive Rossetti can safely retreat and still retain, if only rudimentarily, his masculinity. But the poem is still more than this: it is a pre-Jungian descent into the Collective Unconscious, an interior psychodrama in which the self is at war with itself.

The underlying pattern of "A Last Confession" is a ritual, "displaced," purely virtual rape of Proserpine by Dis. The *persona* gives the young foundling whom he has brought home (145) "A little image of a flying Love." We read (168-176):

Just as she hung the image on the nail,  
It slipped and all its fragments strewed the ground:  
And as it fell she screamed, for in her hand

The dart had entered deeply and drawn blood.  
And so her laughter turned to tears: and "Oh!"  
I said, the while I bandaged the small hand, –  
"That I should be the first to make you bleed,  
Who love and love and love you!" – kissing still  
The fingers till I got her safe to bed.

This is obviously a defloration scene, but it is conducted on an "imaginary" level. What he gives her is an "image" of "Love." The fact that the girl is so young here reinforces the Persephone source-myth, for Persephone was just a girl when abducted by Dis. Since this countervenes the real domination of the female by the male which the Greek story conveys, the relationship between animus and anima is destabilized and eventually inverted. The goddess aspect of the young girl is suggested early in the poem (55): "That heavenly child." The Kore myth, which features Persephone in the triple role of daughter, wife, and mother, is strongly hinted at in lines 201-2: "For now, being always with her, the first love/I had – the father's, brother's love – was changed." And the wife possibility is stated in lines 220-3:

she gazed at me with eyes  
As of the sky and sea on a grey day,  
And drew her long hands through her hair, and asked me  
If she was not a woman; and then laughed. . . .

Until Dis (*persona*) makes her his own in the Underworld, Persephone (the foundling) still belongs to the Upperworld: "sky and sea." As anima, however, the foundling belongs to the 'Underworld' of the Collective Unconscious, and the *persona* (animus) belongs to the "Upperworld" of "life," what Spengler called "the world of Waking Consciousness." Persephone operates in "A Last Confession" as a Lilithlike emissary from chthonic depths. Her mouth has tasted the pomegranate of Hell (Hades). We read (229-33):

She had a mouth  
Made to bring death to life, – the underlip  
Sucked in, as if it strove to kiss itself.  
Her face was ever pale, as when one stoops  
Over wan water. . . .

Rossetti uses the Narcissus myth here to corroborate his apperception that the self (anima) is attempting "to kiss itself" (animus); and that this is a permanent archetype of the integrated self. But the *persona* resists. He plunges himself into the "illusion" of revolutionary warfare; he commits himself to the "Upperworld" of "Waking Consciousness" (263-8):

till at times  
All else seemed shadows, and I wondered still

2. In his poem "Veggente in solitudine" (1846), Gabriele wrote:  
E te piu ch'altro, te con pena io lascio  
Che sei fra l'opre mie quasi gigante,  
D'elucubrate carte immenso fascio  
Cui l'ardito affidai, pensier di Dante,  
Pensier d'Eleusi e Menfi, alto e profondo,  
Ma forse è meglio che l'ignori il mondo.  
He is apostrophizing his commentary on Dante, published in several books.

3. "Rossetti's 'A Last Confession': A Dramatic Monologue," *Victorian Poetry*, 5 (1967), 29.  
4. "Rossetti's 'A Last Confession' as Dramatic Monologue," *Victorian Poetry*, 11 (1973), 28.  
5. "The Feminization of D. G. Rossetti," in Richard A. Levine, *The Victorian Experience: The Poets* (Athens, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 1982), p. 109.  
6. P. 108.

To see such life pass muster and be deemed  
 Time's bodily substance. In those hours no doubt,  
 To the young girl my eyes were like my soul, —  
 Dark wells of death-in-life that yearned for day.

The roles are beginning to be reversed. It is clear that "wells" is a feminine portent.<sup>7</sup> The *persona* sees his fate: "death-in-life," to be dominated by the anima to such a degree that "life" becomes irrelevant. But he tells us that he "yearned for day."

Religion is one way that the personality uses to cling to "day." It persuades us that "life" counts for something; that salvation is to be achieved by doing God's will in history. Seeing the foundling kneeling before the statue of the Madonna in the Duomo at Monza, he reassures himself that she is really *out there*: a flesh and blood woman. But the actual result of his reverie is that he "discarnates" both the Madonna and the foundling: they seem to him "two kindred forms" (352-65):

It chanced that in our last year's wanderings  
 We dwelt at Monza, far away from home,  
 If home we had: and in the Duomo there  
 I sometimes entered with her when she prayed.  
 An image of Our Lady stands there, wrought  
 In marble by some great Italian hand  
 In the great days when she and Italy  
 Sat on one throne together: and to her  
 And to none else my loved one told her heart.  
 She was a woman then; and as she knelt, —  
 Her sweet brow in the sweet brow's shadow there, —  
 They seemed two kindred forms whereby our land  
 (Whose work still serves the world for miracle)  
 Made manifest herself in womanhood.

*La patria*, patriotism, "our land," the *persona's* "day" is epiphanized ("Made manifest") in the "two kindred forms." This is anti-Incarnational, emanational language: that of a projective overriding Form. So "day" becomes purely virtual or "formalized." "Life" becomes a "formality."

When the *persona*, who has strayed to another part of the Duomo, returns, he finds that the foundling is now kneeling and praying (384-5) "Before some new Madonna gaily decked./ Tinselled and gewgawed, a slight German toy." Thematically, this may or may not refer to transalpine post-Reformational man for whom "the Old Madonna" yielded eventually to the interior psychodrama of German Idealism, to rampant Subjectivism; and, in our own day, to the flowering of early Kabbalistic and Gnostic ideas in the Gestalt psychology of Jung. That

Rossetti's father was steeped in both the Kabbala and Gnosticism, as well as in Swedenborgianism and Esoteric Alchemic Mysticism ("the thought of Memphis"), is certain. Perhaps the "new Madonna" is the pneumaticized zeitgeist. But the main point that Rossetti is making is that the Persephone-figure is, so to speak, trying to fit herself in her own mythos, with an active, vigorous "Dis" to abduct her and make her his bride. Since the *persona* is a dreamy loser, she turns in effect to the symbol of triumphant masculinity, the disparaged "slight German toy" that is actually the victorious Austrian presence in Italy.

Feeling himself emasculated, the *persona* eventually is deluded into feeling that he is getting some of his masculinity back by stabbing the foundling with an obviously phallic knife (5) "with a hilt of horn and pearl." But all he is doing is once again failing to deflower her and engaging in displaced, virtual pseudo-activity. When she dies, the foundling, first introduced as "That heavenly child" and then proffering herself to the *persona* as a wife, becomes in the 'Underworld' of the Collective Unconscious his chthonic mother. He himself, as it were, cuts the psychological umbilical cord which has been uniting two *animas* all along. An unnatural counterfeit of "That heavenly child," the *persona* may be called "that infernal child." His addressing the priest throughout underscores his craven childishness: "Father, Father." He has lost "*il bene dell' intelletto*" (Dante, *Inferno*), the power to know truth, to discriminate reality from his projections; and, as an "infernal child" (inversion of Persephone before her abduction, still in the meadow), he is in fact calling upon the most terrible Dis of all to "wed" him: this "Father" will not shriek in Hell. He already does (421-25):

I have seen pictures where  
 Souls burned with Latin shriekings in their mouths:  
 Shall my end be as theirs? Nay, but I know  
 'Tis you shall shriek in Latin. Some bell rings,  
 Rings through my brain: it strikes the hour in hell.

His brain resonates hell; the "bell" is the ruined psyche. His end will not be virtual, in a "picture." What has befallen the *persona* is real and more enormous than three-dimensional. It is a debacle of infinite, eternal consequence.

Franklin Pierce College

7. Barbara Gibbs, *Women, Men and Poetry* (Amherst, Ma.: 1973), p. 3: "As you will see, the 'well' in the poem stands somehow for self-definition. But it is also an image of hollowness, and of roots reaching into the subsoil, and of the 'welling up' of life within a rather private enclosure.

These latter are probably experiences that women relate to more readily than men." About her poem "The Well," in *The Well* (Alan Swallow, 1941).



# Books Received

- Colley, Ann C. *Tennyson and Madness*. Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1983. Pp. 176. \$20.00. Examines Tennyson's lifelong interest in madness and its reflection in his poetry.
- Buckler, William E. *Matthew Arnold's Prose: Three Essays in Literary Enlargement*. New York: AMS Press, 1983. Pp. xiv + 116. \$19.50. The essays are on *Literature and Dogma* and *Literature, Essays in Criticism, and Culture and Anarchy*. A version of one has appeared before – in the *Victorian Newsletter*.
- Davies, James A. *John Forster: A Literary Life*. Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1983. Pp. x + 318. \$29.50. The first full-length critical biography of Forster.
- Downes, David Anthony. *The Great Sacrifice: Studies in Hopkins*. Lanham, N.Y. and London: Univ. Press of America, 1983. Pp. xii + 120. \$18.75 cloth, \$8.25 paper. Four essays on Hopkins, on "The Wreck," the Hopkins Enigma, Counterpoise, Beatific Landscapes. Three of the essays have appeared in journals, in earlier forms. All are worth reading.
- Gemmill, Helen Hartman. *E.L.: The Breadbox Papers*. Bryn Mawr: Dorrance & Co.; Doylestown, PA: Bucks County Historical Society, 1983. Pp. [xii] + 275. \$22.95. Biography of Elizabeth Chapman Lawrence (1829-1905), wife and wealthy widow of mid-Victorian attache to the American legation at Court of St. James. She comments on the London, American, and European scenes.
- Hardy, Barbara. *Particularities: Readings in George Eliot*. Athens, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 1983. Pp. 204. \$20.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper. Ten essays (five on *Middlemarch*, one each on *Mill on the Floss*, *Rituals and Feelings*, *Objects and Environments*, the *Reticent Narrator*, *George Eliot on Imagination*). Seven essays have been previously printed, the other three read as papers at conferences.
- Harriet Martineau's Letters to Fanny Wedgewood*. Ed. Elisabeth Sanders Arbuckle. Stanford, CA.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1983. Pp. [xxx] + 329. \$29.50. 121 previously unpublished letters covering a period from May 1834 to July 1871, a collection unseen by any of Martineau's biographers. Includes a 15 pp. introduction and 18 pp. index.
- Quayle, Eric. *Early Children's Books: A Collector's Guide*. Newton Abbot, London: David & Charles; Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1983. Pp. 256. \$28.50. Covers a period from the Renaissance to the early twentieth century. Copiously illustrated with black and white photographs.
- Robert Louis Stevenson*. Ed. Andrew Noble. Critical Studies Series. London: Vision Press; Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1983. Pp. 232. \$27.50. Eight essays on *The Master of Ballantrae*, *Weir of Hermiston*, Stevenson and James, Dr. Jekyll and Nabokov, Stevenson and the Romance Form, Landscape with Figures, Scott and Stevenson, Forms of Evasion.
- Sagovsky, Nicholas. *Between Two Worlds: George Tyrell's Relationship to the Thought of Matthew Arnold*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983. Pp. xii + 192. \$39.50. An analysis of the validity of Henri Bremond's assertion that "a third of Tyrell was in Matthew Arnold, especially Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*" (p. 4). Sagovsky's "chief concern is Tyrell" though he provides what he hopes is "a coherent . . . account of Matthew Arnold's critique of religion which establishes some of its limitations as they show themselves to a theologian" (pp. 11-12).
- Slater, Michael. *Dickens and Women*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1983. Pp. xii + 465. \$28.50. A long section on "Dickens's own experience of women," and considerably shorter sections – a "survey of the women in his fiction" and "his basic conception of the womanly ideal" (pp. xi-xii). A careful scholarly work.
- Springer, Marlene. *Hardy's Use of Allusion*. Lawrence, KS: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1983. Pp. [x] + 207. \$22.50. An analysis of Hardy's allusions "predominantly attached to character rather than to action" (p. 5) as "comic elements, elevating devices and, most important, as ironic comments . . ." (p. 6). Concentrates on the novels and does not treat the short fiction or poetry.
- Staines, David. *Tennyson's Camelot: "The Idylls of the King" and Its Medieval Sources*. Foreword by Sir Charles Tennyson. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1982. Pp. xviii + 218. \$18.50. Staines "deals with Tennyson's poem chronologically, explaining the symbolism in the light of the poet's general views, and explaining why Tennyson dealt with the legends in the curious topsyturvy way he actually adopted; an Epilogue to this analysis deals with the effect of the *Idylls of the King* on the way in which the Victorian age regarded the Arthurian legends. This is the principal contribution of *Tennyson's Camelot* to the study of the *Idylls of the King* and it is of great value" – Sir Charles Tennyson, p. xiii.
- The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of PUNCH AND JUDY*, illus. George Cruikshank, forward Karl B. Leabo. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1983. Pp. 37. Paper \$5.95. Original engravings by Cruikshank.
- Thomas, John Birch. *Shop Boy: An Autobiography*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983. Pp. [x] + 181. \$13.95. Covers the years 1860 to about 1885 as Thomas moves from shop boy to assistant in a grocery shop.
- Women, The Family, and Freedom: The Debate in Documents. Vol. I, 1750-1880; Vol. II, 1880-1950*. Ed. Susan Groag Bell and Karen M. Offen. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1983. Vol. I, pp. xiv + 561; \$32.50 cloth, \$14.95 paper. Vol. II, pp. [xvi] + 474; \$30.00 cloth, \$13.95 paper. A collection of 263 primary source documents – European and American. There is a general introduction to each volume, an essay introducing each of 5 sections, and a "contextual headnote" for each of some 97 groups of documents. "Many of the documents have been translated into English for the first time"; many are not otherwise easily available. A very useful collection.

# Victorian Group News

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

The William Morris Society in the United States is seeking essays for a volume on Morris's socialist writings. The book will appear in 1985 and bear the title *Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris*. Papers are welcome on political aspects of any of Morris's writings – his poetry, essays, and romances, as well as his publications in *Commonweal*. They should be 15-25 pages (MLA style); two copies should be sent by December 1, 1984 to each of the co-editors: Carol Silver, Stern College for Women, Yeshiva University, 245 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10016, and Florence Boos, Department of English, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242.

The Robert B. Partlow, Jr. Prize is an annual award of \$250 for the year's best first article-length publication on Dickens (that is, more than five printed pages). Entries (three copies or offprints) of articles printed between June 1983 and June 1984 should be sent as soon as possible, but not later than 31 August 1984 to Sylvia Manning, Secretary-Treasurer, The Dickens Society, Department of English, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0354.

The Victorians Institute will hold its 1984 Conference on Oct. 5 and 6 at the Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina. Special features of the 1984 conference will include a tour of Victorian homes in Historic Charleston and a keynote address by Dr. Richard Altick. For further information contact Suzanne Edwards, Department of English, The Citadel, Charleston, SC 29409.

The Southeastern Nineteenth Century Studies Association meeting will be held in Atlanta April 11-13, 1985, on the theme of Utopian Idealism in the Nineteenth Century. Proposals for papers or for session themes should be sent to Robt. M. Craig by Nov. 1, 1984, c/o College of Architecture, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA 30332.

*Northeast Victorian Studies Association Conference: "Victorians and the Supernatural,"* 19-21 April 1985, Rhode Island College. Address Earl E. Stevens, Dept. of English, Rhode Island College, Providence, Rhode Island 02908.

## REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

For *A Feminist Companion to Literature in English* (that is, to the literature of the English-speaking countries) editors would welcome any newly uncovered or emended dates, attributions, or other matters of fact, in addition to the names and addresses of people writing works of feminist literary history or criticism. For the nineteenth century, contact Virginia Blain, School of English, Macquarie University, North Ryde, NSW 2113.

Anyone with information on the poetry of Mrs. Margaret Cameron (the photographer) please contact Brian Southam, Managing Director, Athlone, 44 Bedford Row, London WC1R4LY, England.

Back issues of *VNL*, at a cost of \$4.00 per copy, are available in limited quantities for the following numbers: 38, 41, 45, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63 and 64.