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Cover: On the anniversary of her death, Christina Rossetti, by Robert Ashwin Maynard, after a drawing by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*: A National *Bildungsroman*

Patricia E. Johnson

The authoress never seems distinctly to have made up her mind as to what she was to do; whether to describe the habits and manners of Yorkshire and its social aspects in the days of King Lud, or to paint character, or to tell a love story.

Thus George Henry Lewes criticizes Charlotte Brontë's industrial novel *Shirley* in an 1850 *Westminster Review*. This criticism has echoed for nearly 150 years and has troubled not only readers of the Victorian industrial novel by also literary critics interested in social questions from Marxist and feminist points of view. Ruth Bernard Yeazell reframes Lewes's critique more pointedly as a series of questions in her article, "Why Political Novels Have Heroines": "Why should a *Sybil*, *Mary Barton*, or *Felix Holt* subordinate its social and political story to a 'love interest'? What sort of 'cover'—to ask a more tendentious question—does the innocent heroine provide?" (126). Yeazell's answer is

Each of these novels entertains the possibility of violence, even half-sympathizes with it, only to take refuge at critical moments in the representation of female innocence, exchanging a politically dangerous man for a sexually unaggressive young woman, and a narrative that threatens drastic change for one that proves reassuringly static . . . Social and political anxieties are contained—and eased—in the narrative of such a courtship. (127)

Both critical questions and answers here are involved in a complex and problematic series of bifurcations of the issues involved, bifurcations that use gender as their axis. The poles are marked: masculine—social, economic, political, aggressive, active; feminine—psychological, sexual, personal, unthreatening, passive. Further, while the criticisms aim at pointing to the bifurcations active in industrial novels, they also tend to reinforce them by suggesting that any "heroine," any "love story," is only "cover" for the "real" issues and thus that Victorian women were not and could not be actively and importantly politically engaged at any level and that private life is somehow insulated from public life.

Works from both Marxist and feminist perspectives have attempted to undo these bifurcations or, at least, to show their underlying mutual interdependence. For example, as in Frederic Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, they have argued that political ideologies arise from psychological bases, and, as in Mary Poovey's *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, that the position of women, in particular, is a powerful, mobilizing ideological force. Yet these emerging insights have not been fully applied to the industrial novel. Such an approach would suggest, for example, that political novels have heroines precisely because they want to position themselves at the axis of power in the political unconscious, the place where ideologies are produced.

The effects of this critical bifurcation have been far-reaching. The industrial novels have been read largely in relation to male working-class history, not in relation to female working-class history or to the emerging nineteenth-century women's movement. The central questions addressed to the novels have been: what is their attitude toward Chartism, toward the union movement, toward strikes and / or working-class violence? The belief has been that by answering such questions the novels' political dimensions can be mapped. But by eliminating women from the historical dimensions examined, such questions also eliminate consideration of one of the prime mobilizing forces behind ideology itself. It was the ideological use of the position of women and children in factories and mines that stimulated Parliament to enact anti-*laissez-faire* legislation in 1842. Perhaps more pointedly, both the Chartist and union movements chose to eliminate women from their ranks by the late 1830s, indicating that male working-class movements could achieve success in part by adopting the patriarchal values of the middle and upper classes. A further level of complication is added by the emerging middle-class women's movement, illustrated by such events as the founding of the first training colleges for women in 1848, the debate over the Married Women's Property Bill in the mid-1850s, and the passage of the Matrimonial Causes Act in 1857. This concatenation of historical circumstances reveals how complicated the situation was in mid-century and how the industrial novels appear at a time when they resonate to important developments both in working-class and in women's history. The industrial novels appear first in the late 1830s and so are interrelated to both the working-class political movement of Chartism and to the paternalist Parliamentary legislation of Lord Ashley. They appear with some regularity throughout the 1840s and 1850s, coinciding, therefore, with both the strengthening union movement and with signs that a women's movement is imminent. The last industrial novel is George Eliot's *Felix Holt*, published significantly in 1866, the year before the Second Reform Bill marked the success of the male working-class political movement by a partial extension of the franchise as well as the year of the Contagious Diseases Act, which mobilized middle-class women and formed the basis for the women's suffrage movement. Thus working class and women's histories intertwine and demonstrate what Mary Poovey means by "uneven developments."

This consideration of Marxist and feminist issues in relation to the industrial novels forms a necessary background from which to consider the issues that Elizabeth Gaskell raises in *North and South* (1855). By placing her heroine, Margaret Hale, between North and South, Gaskell attempts to bring to the surface the unconscious bifurcations that produce class and gender ideologies. Additionally, Gaskell attempts, not just to examine these bifurcations but to effect changes in them. The very form of her novel reveals itself as a breaking down of dichotomies. For *North and South* is a *Bildungsroman* as well

as an industrial novel, and this gives it unusual dimensions in both categories.¹ The industrial novel / *Bildungsroman* fusion dramatizes the ways in which the public domain and the private sphere interpenetrate each other and make it impossible to separate social issues, such as class and gender roles, from psychological issues, such as sexuality and maturity. Gaskell's novel suggests, first, that many groups of people—men as well as women, working as well as middle classes—are struggling with the process of development, and, further, that each instance of individual *Bildung* is dependent on the growth of others in society for its success.

The individualism that might be seen as the central issue in certain forms of the *Bildungsroman*, therefore, is questioned and an emphasis on community emerges in its place. In order to achieve adulthood, *North and South's* central character, Margaret Hale, must come to terms with the new social realities represented by the Northern industrial city of Milton, realities that her previous experiences in London and in the country village of Helstone have not prepared her for. Similarly, all the characters in the novel must meet the changes life presents them with or face stagnation. Margaret thus represents England as a whole society. It, too, is on the verge of adulthood, but to achieve it, must come to terms with a changed reality. As an emerging industrial nation, it must reconsider its aristocratic, paternalistic past, and at the same time must take on new responsibilities in order fully to mature. To show the evolution of new social forms in *North and South*, Gaskell first criticizes and then discards ideologies that no longer accurately reflect the new social realities. Alongside Margaret, she places two other characters near the novel's center: the millowner, John Thornton, and the factory worker, Nicholas Higgins. These three begin the novel's debate as partisan representatives of opposing viewpoints: Margaret represents aristocratic, Southern paternalism; Thornton, aggressive Northern capitalism; and Higgins, working-class trade unionism. Through their interaction on equal terms Gaskell effects a modification of all three positions and suggests that through community new, more humane modes of social behavior can emerge. Thus Gaskell is attempting a *Bildungsroman* with national implications. Margaret's problems are not simply her own but reflect the attitude of a whole society which prefers to ignore the inevitable and thus loses the opportunity to shape the future. Lost in an idyllic and largely delusive dream of the paternalist, rural past, England, like Margaret, is in danger of missing a maturity that could offer it much more than that past ever could. In *North and South*, through the lives of her three main characters—Margaret, Thornton, and Higgins—Elizabeth Gaskell shows the struggle for growth and indicates the possibilities the future has to offer both her characters and society as a whole.

North and South is an open-ended *Bildungsroman*, where the maturing is still going on at the novel's end. Gaskell tries

to balance the claims of her three representative characters and to show how each must change in order to come to full adulthood. To accomplish this task, Gaskell first must deal with class relations and show how old ways of thinking about industrialists and workers and their roles in society are no longer valid.² As John Thornton points out near the novel's close,

"It is fine when the study of the past leads to a prophecy of the future. But to men groping in new circumstances, it would be finer if the words of experience could direct us how to act in what concerns us most intimately and immediately; which is full of difficulties that must be encountered; and upon the mode in which they are met and conquered—not merely pushed aside for the time—depends our future." (414)

Much of the novel, in fact, is concerned with external debate about these issues and with internal conflicts that point out which are most difficult for each character. The characters spend a lot of time arguing about word choices, definitions, and analogies. These arguments are not mere hair-splitting about vocabulary choices. In fact, every term that comes under debate is charged with class or gender ideological import. By being forced to articulate and defend their choices, the characters are also forced to bring their unconscious ideological biases to the surface for examination. It seems that a whole new set of social relationships between the working and upper classes and between men and women has been brought about by industrialization. Yet the vocabulary and, more importantly, the consciousness of the nation have not caught up to this fact; there is no language to communicate these new realities. And these problems in naming relationships are not merely superficial difficulties, but reflect the outmoded prejudices impeding the growth of new ways of thought.

Thornton and his mother use several outmoded analogies to explain and defend their attitudes toward and treatment of the millworkers. First of all, they define themselves as masters and their workers as servants. In explaining the nature of strikes to Margaret, Mrs. Thornton uses an exaggerated form of this analogy:

"If my son's work-people strike, I will only say they are a pack of ungrateful hounds . . . the truth is, they want to be masters, and make the masters into slaves on their own ground." (162)

With the strike at hand, Mrs. Thornton tells her son that in his place she would show the workers "that I was master, and could employ what servants I liked" (195). She sees the strike as his opportunity "to make them learn their place" (214). Thornton himself picks up this metaphor when asked

forms might be related by concluding with the seeming paradox that "[the voyage in] enacts a voyage out" (19).

²Critical discussion of *North and South* has centered on the question of how effectively Gaskell critiques such social programs as paternalism and industrial capitalism with some critics, such as Gallagher, arguing that Gaskell is mired in the very problems that she is attempting to solve.

why the masters do not simply explain the reasons for the wage reductions to their workmen: "Do you give your servants reasons for your expenditures, or your economy in the use of your own money?" (164). But the master / servant analogy never reflected the new reality of industrialism, and, in fact, it no longer fits any part of a world where class relations are changing so rapidly. The loyalty of Mrs. Hale's maid, Dixon, to the aristocratic past is clearly an anachronism. Thornton instinctively strikes home on this point because, with his challenging question—"Do you give your servants reasons for your expenditures?"—he suggests that the Hales, too, rely on class exploitation, though of an older form, for their few remaining comforts.

Margaret at first sees class relations as an exclusively industrial problem. "Now, in the South we have our poor," she admits, but because they are treated with some compassion, "there is not that terrible expression in their countenances of a sullen sense of injustice which I see here" (123). Margaret is used to a comfortable patronage of the working classes. She takes leave of her favorite Helstone servant, Charlotte, with these words: "You are a kind girl. I shall be sorry to leave you. You must try and write to me, if I can ever give you any little help or good advice. I shall always be glad to get a letter from Helstone, you know" (91).

But life in Milton brings about immediate changes in her complacency. Margaret quickly learns from Higgins that not all working-class people appreciate the patronage of their "betters." When she meets Nicholas Higgins and his daughter, Bessy, on the street, Margaret is confronted with change. She asks them their name and address, intending to visit their home as a charity: "At Helstone it would have been an understood thing, after the inquiries she had made, that she intended to come and call upon any poor neighbour whose name and habitation she had asked for" (112-13). But, to her surprise, Higgins responds, "Whatten yo' asking for?" Margaret immediately senses the blunder her assumption of class superiority has led her into: "It seemed all at once to take the shape of an impertinence on her part; she read this meaning too in the man's eyes" (113). Then Higgins takes the situation out of Margaret's hands, placing their relations on equal grounds:

"I'm none so fond of having strange folk in my house." But then relenting, as he saw her heightened colour, he added, "Yo're a foreigner, as one may say, and maybe don't know many folk here, and yo've given my wench here flowers out of yo'r own hand;—yo' may come if yo' like." (113)

Who is providing the charity here? Margaret's first reaction is to stand on her class's right to patronize: "She was not sure if she would go where permission was given like a favour conferred." She has learned her first lesson about life in Milton. An infusion of Southern *noblesse oblige* is not going to transform Northern class relations.

And, as John Thornton had hinted, class relations are not simply an industrial problem. The lengthy debate in the novel over the "servant problem" emphasizes this point. Women in Milton-Northern prefer "the better wages and greater independence of working in a mill" to the below-stairs life (109).

Ironically, the Hales have to turn to Mrs. Thornton to provide them with a decent servant. But by the end of the novel there is a questioning of this role as well. Margaret no longer accepts servant-hood as a wholly natural state nor sees a person only in relation to herself as she did with Charlotte. She talks to the new servant, Martha, in an attempt to "find out what was below the grave, respectful, servant-like manner, which crusted over her individual character with an obedience that was almost mechanical" (426). Once back in London, she is uncomfortably aware that

there might be toilers and moilers there in London, but she never saw them; the very servants lived in an underground world of their own, of which she knew neither the hopes nor the fears; they only seemed to start into existence when some want or whim of their master and mistress needed them. (458)

Thus the problem with class relationships does not begin and end with Northern industrialism, but affects Southern paternalists as well. The problem is certainly not resolved in *North and South*, but the direction of change away from class status and toward more equality is clearly indicated.

Another revealing debate over words takes place between Thornton and Margaret, and again occurs the realization, on both sides, of problems with their original perceptions. Margaret makes it clear that she dislikes Thornton's habit of referring to this workmen as "hands." On his side, Thornton complains about Margaret's use of the term "gentleman." Each uses the particular term unconsciously, yet that fact only emphasizes the depth of the class bias that each term represents. Thornton obviously wants to see his workmen only as animated factory tools, while Margaret's ideal "gentleman" is clearly of the Southern aristocratic mold. Thornton at first sees his life history as a proof of his moral superiority over his workmen:

"It is one of the great beauties of our system, that a working-man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behaviour; that, in fact, every one who rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our ranks." (125)

Instead of recognizing his connection to his workmen, Thornton emphasizes a huge, qualitative gulf between himself and them: "I do not look on self-indulgent, sensual people as worthy of my hatred; I simply look upon them with contempt for their poorness of character" (126).

Margaret does not so bluntly avow her class allegiances, but she certainly communicates them nonetheless, as Thornton senses when he describes her as holding "herself aloof from me as if she had been a queen, and I her humble, unwashed vassal" (117). She is unconsciously anxious to assure herself that she has not lost social status because of the changes in her family's social position. When she does housework, she tells her mother, "I don't mind ironing, or any kind of work, for you and papa. I am myself a born and bred lady through it all, even though it comes to scouring a floor, or washing dishes" (116). After attending a party at Thornton's house with the

¹For major discussions of *North and South* as an industrial novel, see Catherine Gallagher's *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction* and Rosemarie Bodenheimer's *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction*. Both Patricia Meyer Spack's *The Female Imagination* and Patsy Stoneman's *Elizabeth Gaskell* discuss *North and South* as a *Bildungsroman*. The introduction to Elizabeth Abel, et al., *The Voyage In* suggests how crucially the two

wealthy Milton industrialists, she says, "They took me for a fine lady, I'm sure." And her father, albeit jokingly, reconfirms her status: "Even I was mistaken enough to think you looked like a lady, my dear" (222).

Both Thornton and Margaret gradually abandon at least some of these class pretensions, however, and this is demonstrated by their changing use of such class-related terms as "hands," "man," "gentleman," and "lady." Thornton at first corrects himself from "hands" to "men" simply in deference to Margaret's presence—"Miss Hale, I know, does not like to hear men called 'hands,' so I won't use that word, though it comes most readily to my lips as the technical term, whose origin, whatever it was, dates before my time" (166-67). Later, in a conversation with his landlord, Mr. Bell, he corrects himself in reverse manner from "men" to "hands": "I'm building a dining room—for the men. I mean—the hands" (444). Finally, at the novel's conclusion, he frankly avows his interest in the workmen as human beings: "[S]tarting from a kind of friendship with one, I was becoming acquainted with many. The advantages were mutual: we were both unconsciously or consciously teaching each other" (524). He never gives up his use of the term "hands"—it recurs even in the last pages of the novel—but again Gaskell shows the beginnings of a change and a direction for growth. And this individual change entails a change of more direct political application. Having moved far away from his opening view of the workmen as ungrateful servants, Thornton says, "And yet this last strike, under which I am smarting, has been respectable." "A respectable strike!" exclaims Mr. Bell, as if the phrase were an oxymoron (414). The gulf remains, but a bridge is being built gradually. Thornton now sees his workmen as "respectable" men, not moral reprobates, with reasons for their actions not dissimilar from his own.

Margaret similarly moves away from her fine ladyisms. She comes to see the strength in Thornton's argument that a "true man" is a higher being than a fine gentleman. She unconsciously uses his language in the crisis of the strike when she urges him to go down and talk to the protesting crowd: "If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man!" (232). Maintaining her position as a lady also becomes less important to her. When her mother dies, she asks her father to let her attend the funeral with him, saying in a way that shows that simply being a lady is no longer the highest ideal for her, "Women of our class don't go, because they have no power over their emotions, and yet are ashamed of showing them. Poor women go, and don't care if they are seen overwhelmed with grief" (336). The change is most marked when she returns to live with the Shaws in London near the novel's close. Now such concerns are seen as trivial; only Margaret's frivolous cousin Edith complains, "I should never dare to go down some of those streets without a servant. They're not fit for ladies" (520). Margaret has more important things to worry about. The engagement of Thornton and Margaret confirms and celebrates the struggles each has gone through to reach new awareness of the class values that they had previously simply unconsciously assumed. In the last lines of *North and South* they laugh together over the reactions of their variously-prejudiced families to the marriage of "That man!" to "That woman!" (530).

The most important debate over the use of language to symbolize social realities occurs in the chapter entitled "Masters and Men." Mr. Hale, Margaret, and Thornton canvass modes of government and metaphors of family life and growth in an attempt to come up with a description that will answer the present stage of industrial society. Ironically, after denying that the masters need any form of governmental control over their actions, Thornton argues that the working class needs not merely government but despotism to keep them under control. Margaret tartly points out his double standard to him: "I am trying to reconcile your admiration of despotism with your respect for other men's independence of character" (171).

Most of the debate, however, is centered on the idea of growing up as a metaphor for the changes in class relations that the industrial revolution has brought about. Margaret introduces the idea as one she had picked up from Higgins, so he too joins the debate, though not present. She says, "But he—that is, my informant—spoke as if the masters would like their hands to be merely tall, large children—living in the present moment—with a blind unreasoning kind of obedience" (166). While Higgins sees this as the masters' delusion and one convenient to their own purposes, Thornton sees it as a true metaphor for the current position of the workers. He expands on his viewpoint:

"Well, in the Platonic year, it may fall out that we are all—men, women and children—fit for a republic: but give me a constitutional monarchy in our present state of morals and intelligence. In our infancy, we require a wise despotism to govern us. Indeed, long past infancy, children and young people are the happiest under the unfailing laws of a discreet, firm authority. I agree with Miss Hale so far as to consider our people in the condition of children, while I deny that we, the masters, have anything to do with the making or keeping them so." (167)

Once Thornton adopts the analogy, it, of course, is used against him because children imply growth and change, and that is exactly what the masters are resisting in terms of their relationship to their workers. Mr. Hale takes a halfway position, suggesting that "the masses were already passing rapidly into the troublesome stage which intervenes between childhood and manhood, in the life of the multitude as well as that of the individual" and that they thus required some room for independent action (167-68).

This is a crucial passage in the novel, as Catherine Gallagher recognizes when she argues that, in contrast to Dickens's approach to the industrial question in *Hard Times*, Gaskell debates and discards the idea of social paternalism here. Gallagher concludes, however, that Gaskell simply shifts the locus of power from patriarchs to matriarchs by emphasizing the dominant importance of "woman's influence" in curing the novel's social ills. She describes Margaret as wanting Thornton to become "a mother to his workmen" (*Hard* 87). I agree that social paternalism is discredited, but it must be remembered that this is one of the early debates in the novel, and that, as has been shown, both Margaret and Thornton greatly modify their positions before the novel's end. Although the metaphor of the family remains near the center

of the novel, Gaskell, in using it, is careful to emphasize modes of growth, rather than of authority. For example, the image of the family that emerges from the novel is neither patriarchal nor matriarchal. Instead the family is made up of parents and adult children who interact, basically, as equals. The Hale family is the most fully represented, and all its members—both parents, Margaret, and her brother, Frederick—are sometimes weak and sometimes strong. Power is not distributed along gender lines. The family survives by understanding the weaknesses and leaning on the strengths of all its various members. This general model holds true for the Higgins family, made up of a father and his two working-age daughters, and the Thornton family, made up of a mother and her grown son and daughter, as well.

Gaskell, however, does not return to emphasize particular analogies of the family or even of human growth. Perhaps the debates on words and analogies—master / servant, queen / vassal, gentleman / hand—made her leery of inventing a new vocabulary that would date even more quickly than the old one. Certainly, she shows how easily such vocabularies can be used to distort reality and to limit choices. Nonetheless, the idea of growth, of achieving adulthood, is a central one to the *Bildungsroman*, and, as Mr. Hale correctly points out, it can be applied to both individuals and multitudes. What Margaret and Thornton do not realize as they sit debating the development of the working class is that they themselves are in just as much danger of missing their true adult roles as the working class is of being socially placed in a permanent adolescence.

As *North and South* begins, Margaret seems grown-up when compared with her cousin Edith or even with her Aunt Shaw, two people who never mature, but in fact, she is resisting full adulthood. She faces a great change when she leaves London for Helstone, yet, though she is nineteen, she does not even try to imagine what shape her adult life will take there. She imagines only "the delight of filling the important post of only daughter in Helstone parsonage" (36). The narrowness with which she conceives even this static role is shown by the fact that she takes no responsibility for schooling or visiting when she resides there. She treats her residence as if it were one long vacation where her choices are to roam freely or to sketch. Furthermore, her sexual as well as social immaturity is revealed by her reaction to Henry Lennox's proposal: "Margaret felt guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage" (65). Clearly, Margaret has no vision of the future, only an impossible hope that life in Helstone will never change and that she will remain nineteen forever.

North and South presents Margaret with changes on every front, and, while they are painful, she comes to see that they must occur and that in many ways their effects are advantageous. Her acceptance of her sexuality is the most obvious result. But Gaskell is at pains to make sure that we do not read Margaret's growth or her final engagement to Thornton as simply a series of private trials and triumphs. By the end of the novel, clearly Margaret's choice of a mate is also her choice of a way of life and a vision of England's

future that she wants to participate in. The personal and the social roles are completely intertwined, and this calls the idea of woman's separate sphere into question.³ For example, Gaskell makes every turning point in Margaret's relationship with Thornton a kind of public event. Her defense of Thornton before the protesting workmen first leads him to believe she cares for him and brings on his marriage proposal. He questions her integrity when he sees her at the railway station with her brother, a scene brought about because her brother is wanted for mutiny. This misunderstanding is further compounded when, in order to protect her brother, Margaret lies to the police inspector about her presence at the station. Thornton, of course, learns about this lie because of his position as a magistrate. Finally, the two are reconciled over a lawyer's draft of a loan agreement. Each event involves a mutual coalescence of public roles—industrialist and striker, defendant and magistrate, tenant and landlord—and private feeling.

The inner changes Margaret goes through in order to accept Thornton as a lover involve both sexual and political maturation. From their first meeting there is a physical attraction between the two, which Thornton immediately recognizes. Margaret repeatedly emphasizes her dislike of him personally, but she is aware of him in a way that recalls her responses to the two men that she already loves, her father and her brother. Specifically, she is sensitive to the beauty and the expressiveness of their faces. Similarly, with Thornton, even as she states her complaints about his opinions and his manner of expressing them, she notes his "expression of resolution and power"; his "rare bright smile, coming in an instant and shining out of the eyes"; and the way his face resembles his mother's when he is angry (102, 121, 163). And, when he proposes to her, it is the sound of his voice and "the look of his deep intent passionate eyes" that shake Margaret so thoroughly out of her vaunted maidenly self-composure (256-57). In contrast, she has little sense of the physical presence of Henry Lennox, her other suitor.

But it is not until she can understand and see the possibilities in Thornton's position as an industrialist that she can recognize him as a lover, and this process largely involves letting go of the escapism involved in her idealization of Helstone and accepting her involvement in the consequences of industrialization. It begins on the personal level with the development of a more balanced view of her parents. Margaret's attraction to paternalism, her view of Helstone as a perfect haven, stems largely from her idealized picture of her father as parent and pastor. She is always critical of her mother, but it is not until her father reveals the change in his religious beliefs that she sees that he too has faults. This is the first change that shakes her view of the South: "The one staid foundation of her home, of her idea of her beloved father, seemed reeling and rocking" (67). This is compounded by her recognition that "it was an error in her father" not to have told his wife about his change of opinion (79). Thus a more egalitarian perception of her parents gradually emerges. Margaret realizes that her father, for all his personal charm, is

³Critical discussion has also centered around Gaskell's treatment of the ideology of woman's separate sphere with Gallagher and Newton arguing that Gas-

kell inadvertently supports that ideology while Kestner, Harman, and Stoneman see her as revealing its underlying flaws.

indecisive and lacks courage when dealing with others, while her mother reveals surprising courage and strength in the face of serious illness and death. These perceptions fit the pattern of *Bildung* that the novel employs: as she matures, Margaret comes to recognize her parents as human beings rather than as perfect authority figures. They also have a political dimension in the realization that patriarchal rule, once based firmly on a seemingly-unchangeable, religiously-ordered world view, is now faltering—and perhaps had never functioned as well as nostalgia imagines.

In her early encounters with Thornton, Margaret essentially tries to convert him into a Southern-style paternalist. She is angry with him because he professes "to despise people for careless, wasteful improvidence, without ever seeming to think it his duty to try to make them different,—to give them anything of the training which his mother gave him, and to which he evidently owes his position, whatever it may be" (128). The new insights into class relations that her friendship with the Higginses give her, however, rapidly change her rosy view of rural life. To Nicholas and Bessy Higgins, she admits that, while her position in the South was a happy one, others did not fare as well: "Sometimes I used to hear a farmer speaking sharp and loud to his servants; but it was so far away that it only reminded me pleasantly that other people were hard at work in some distant place, while I just sat on the heather and did nothing" (145). She begins to realize that the established patterns and seeming harmony of the South simply cover up the social injustices that are more apparent in the North. Structures which she accepted as natural now seem unacceptable when she describes what the Higginses would face if they chose to move there: ". . . an old man gets racked with rheumatism, and bent and withered before his time; yet he must work on the same, or else go to the workhouse" (182).

A balanced view of the South does not mean that Margaret is content with the social evils she notices in the North, but she also becomes convinced that Milton-Northern is the place where change is most likely to occur. She comes to savor the sense of being at the cutting edge of social and economic change. Nicholas Higgins's unwillingness to accept social evils as natural and his sense that the trade-union movement can right some of them attract her. On the other hand, the Milton manufacturers "[seem] to defy the old limits of possibility, in a kind of fine intoxication, caused by the recollection of what ha[s] been achieved, and what yet should be" (217). The combined recognition that social injustice lies in the rural South and in London as much as in Milton, but that the real potential for effective change lies in the North, brings Margaret to relish the social as well as the private roles which she will combine as landlord and wife of John Thornton and as Nicholas Higgins's friend.

In the last chapters of *North and South*, Gaskell emphasizes again and again how far Margaret has travelled since she first returned to Helstone with the belief that life could offer her nothing better than to be daughter in her father's parsonage. Through Margaret, Gaskell subtly reveals the new directions women are taking toward independent action and freedom. When Mr. Bell, only half jokingly, suggests that Margaret and her father should live with him at a parsonage where she will "be our housekeeper—the village Lady Bountiful—by day; and read us to sleep in the eve-

nings," it is clear how stagnant and reactionary the "important post of only daughter in [a] parsonage" would be after the experience of living in Milton (418, 36).

The return of Henry Lennox as a suitor also reminds the reader of another possible choice for Margaret and of its constrictions. Lennox is the true proponent of "woman's separate sphere" in the novel, and Gaskell uses him to illustrate the unconscious hypocrisy of that viewpoint. In an early scene he relaxes after a day in court and enjoys watching Margaret and her cousin Edith arranging shawls and putting a tea table in order: "He thought it a pretty sight to see the two cousins so busy" (45). But he draws a clear, impassable distinction between their lives and his. He teases them, "Well, I suppose you are all in the depths of business—ladies' business, I mean. Very different to my business, which is the real true law business. Playing with shawls is very different work to drawing up settlements" (40-41). Woman's sphere, indeed, and clearly an inferior one. Whether dealing in jokes or in marriage proposals, Lennox superficially orders his life into public and private sides, and he sees his love for Margaret as "the one outlet which he has formed for the deeper and better feelings of his nature" (62). Yet his course of wooing shows that public and private cannot be kept separate: his prudence and worldliness enter into his early chagrin at Margaret's poverty and his later careful investment of time in her, when she has become an heiress. It is his object to influence her rather than vice versa: "He saw the latent sweep of her mind, which could easily (he thought) be led to embrace all the objects on which he had set his heart" (507). When he realizes that he has lost her to Thornton, his final comment on their relationship is, "I've lost too much time here already" (527). His investment has not paid off. This contrasts directly with Thornton's thoughts when he believes he has lost Margaret, his assessment that he will be "all the richer and more human for having known this great passion" (416).

The contrast between Lennox and Thornton as suitors is one of the first things Margaret consciously notices in Thornton's favor, and this contrast is largely based on their different attitudes toward women. Thornton's mother, despite her early dominant influence over her son and her continuing involvement with his work, is no proponent of women's rights in general. She sees Margaret as a personal threat to her own power and believes that in a marriage her son would inevitably win any struggle for domination. Though she half admires Margaret's always spirited defense of herself and her beliefs, Mrs. Thornton thinks, "If John and you had come together, he would have had to keep a tight hand over you, to make you know your place" (395). For Mrs. Thornton women have their "place" as does the working class. On one level, Thornton agrees with his mother. "This is no place for you," he tells Margaret when she comes down to protect him from the strikers (234). But the fact that his mother is such a dominant force in his life prepares for his fuller acceptance of Margaret's right to contribute in every area. And, as has been shown, their "courtship" is one long public debate on social and economic issues, which, while they disagree on almost everything, yet has its slow effect.

This prepares for the revelation that, unlike Lennox, Thornton does not divide love from the rest of his life, as his first marriage proposal shows. He proposes marriage in the

midst of thanking her for *both* instances of her interference between himself and the protesting strikers—her urging him to face them personally and her stepping between him and the crowd to prevent violence. He declares that, as a result of these actions, she is intermingled in all he does: "All this gladness in life, all honest pride in doing my work in the world, all this keen sense of being, I owe to her!" (253). Thus, in accepting Thornton as a husband, Margaret enters a relationship between equals, one where her influence and her goals will be felt as well as his.

The changes Margaret undergoes in *North and South* are certainly not revolutionary. She does not become, as Mr. Bell jokingly claims, "a democrat, a red republican, a member of the Peace Society, a socialist—" (409). But they are still very important changes, on both the personal and the historical levels. When Margaret is in London, she takes "her life into her own hand" (508). She insists on travelling to Oxford when Mr. Bell dies. She begins a series of charitable visits to the London poor. She initiates the reunion with Thornton by deciding to lend him her money and by ordering Lennox to draw up a loan agreement, one of those business settlements with which Lennox believes women have nothing to do. Gaskell says that Margaret learned "that she herself must one day answer for her own life, and what she had done with it; and she tried to settle that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority and how much might be set apart for freedom in working" (508). The final settlement between the claims of obedience and those of freedom has not been drawn up at the novel's close; it is still evolving. But one thing is certain: at least one woman has emerged into responsible adulthood and has claimed her part in deciding the terms of that settlement.

The processes of maturation for Thornton and Higgins are neither as obvious nor as dramatic as they are for Margaret. Both men have already matured sexually and have located their niches in life before the novel begins. Yet there is a basic similarity between what happens to them during the course of the novel and what happens to Margaret. Like her, both begin as hard-line spokesmen for a particular view of life, and, again like her, they change, not by adopting new ideologies or even by giving up their old ones, but by expanding their outlooks and by accepting new responsibilities in their situations.

John Thornton is most similar to Margaret because he is in danger of missing his true role in life. He is a man of about thirty, seemingly fully formed, when he first appears. But there is a sense of something lacking in his life, even in his own view. He tells the Hales, "Sixteen years ago, my father died under very miserable circumstances. I was taken from school, and had to become a man (as well as I could) in a few days" (126). He senses that his development has been cut off, and, therefore, he returns to school by hiring Mr. Hale as his tutor. He appears to be following an Arnoldian formula for self-development by beginning to explore what high culture has to offer him. His response to Margaret's beauty and to the quiet elegance of the Hales's home supports this viewpoint.

Yet I do not see this as the real path of Thornton's maturation. The fact that he, although a busy manufacturer, takes up the study of Greek shows that he feels something is missing, but Greek is not the solution. What Gaskell leads

him to is a changed view of his role as an industrialist rather than any idea of culture as an antidote to industrialism. From his earliest visit to the Hales, Thornton's experience is not one of softening the manufacturer in himself through the influence of culture, but of arguing about the nature of industrial society and eventually redefining his role within it. Forced to articulate his beliefs about his social role to an audience which often questions his assumptions, Thornton must finally confront the problems it poses.

In the first stages of this ongoing debate, Thornton describes the early days of industrialism in Milton and admits that the early masters were often tyrannical because of their "almost unlimited power" (124). He implies that substantial changes have now occurred and that the masters are fairer, yet the fact that his own attitudes toward his workers—and he is clearly presented as one of the most progressive millowners in Milton—match his mother's so closely calls his claim into question. In the same discussion he reveals that he believes it is childish to yield to anyone else's wishes, even when it comes to following laws, and that it is manly to demand one's own way. He describes the manufacturer's viewpoint on parliamentary laws against air pollution: "[W]e are bidden by parliament to burn our own smoke; so I suppose, like good little children, we shall do as we are bid—some time" (123). He goes on to say that before the law was passed he altered his own chimneys "by my own will," but that, despite the fact that the changes save him coal, "I'm not sure whether I should have done it, if I had waited until the act was passed. At any rate, I should have waited to be informed against and fined, and given all the trouble of yielding that I legally could" (123). This is his early idea of an adult attitude toward life in society. By contrast, at the end of the novel, Thornton shows a previously-lacking maturity when he says about the dining room he starts with his men that "it seemed childish to relinquish a plan which I had once thought wise and well laid, just because I myself did not receive all the honour and consequence due to the originator" (445).

In the second stage of the debate Margaret forces him to admit that what he calls "independence" is simply the desire to exert his own will unimpaired by opposition. She comments that both the masters and the men are "violent and obstinate in pursuit of their rights" (170). Thornton must sum up his position in a way which reveals that the masters have not developed much beyond their tyrannical beginnings: "I choose to be the unquestioned and irresponsible master of my hands, during the hours that they labour for me" (171). Yet, while such arrogant statements make Margaret believe Thornton is as unchangeable as a rock, Thornton himself is often embarrassed and uncomfortable about having to face the consequences of his own assumptions. Thus these debates prepare the way for Thornton's first acceptance of responsibility, rather than irresponsibility, his acquiescence to Margaret's plea to go down and face his protesting workmen so as to protect both the Irish "knobsticks" from the crowd and the crowd from the approaching soldiers.

The result of Thornton's facing the contradictions in his viewpoint is not that he gives up the power he enjoys as a manufacturer, but that he begins to see that power in a different light. Again, his view of the sources of his power is derived from his mother. In his childhood she read to him

from the Bible, "Her merchants be like princes" (511). This childhood vision of the role of the manufacturer has inspired him up to this point. To the Hales Thornton argues, "You seem not to perceive that the duties of a manufacturer are far larger and wider than those merely of an employer of labour: we have a wide commercial character to maintain, which makes us into the great pioneers of civilization" (170-71). Yet this view of his role is essentially without social content. As Gaskell points out, the manufacturers dream of being famous among peoples they do not know and will never see. Yet by the end of the novel this too has changed. Thornton most regrets losing his mill because with it he loses "the opportunity of so much power"—not abroad, but among his own workmen (512).

Thus Thornton's view of the industrial system as well as of his place in it has been immature. He believed the system was faultless—that it always rewarded the hardworking and the just for their labors:

. . . that, in the great scheme of commerce, all dishonourable ways of acting were sure to prove injurious in the long run, and that, testing such actions simply according to the poor standard of success, there was folly and not wisdom in all such, and every kind of deceit in trade, as well as in other things. (378)

His involvement with the Hales and eventually with Higgins matures his understanding of both the system and his place in it. His discussions of industrial life prepare him for the major turning point during the strike when he goes down to face the protesting workmen personally, thus accepting his part of the responsibility for creating this situation. His acquaintance with Higgins shows him that people are not poor or working-class simply because of their lack of character, as he had once argued. Instead he finds that his workmen are "strange, shrewd, ignorant; but, above all, full of character and strong human feeling" (512).

Finally, public and private events complete Thornton's reeducation. Life is no longer a set of simple pluses and minuses. He believes he has lost Margaret but knows too that even her loss has made his life richer and more complete. His financial failure as a manufacturer reveals to him the imperfect nature of the capitalist system. Although his mother urges him to take the risk his father had taken before him and gamble with other people's money, he refuses and finds that success does not always go to the just nor failure to the dishonest. His brother-in-law, Mr. Watson, makes a huge fortune by the speculation that Thornton himself refused to make: "It was a nine days' wonder. Success brought with it its worldly consequences of extreme admiration. No one was considered so wise and far-seeing as Mr. Watson" (519). But this merchant/prince version of success is no longer the supreme measure for Thornton. He regrets his failure most because it cuts off his new experiments in cooperative planning with his workmen. He says "I have so worked and planned. I have discovered new powers in my situation too late—and now all is over" (516-17). Of course, Gaskell's optimism saves Thornton. It is not too late for him, and marriage with Margaret means that he will be able to continue his experiments. The success of those experiments is certainly far from guaranteed, but Thornton

begins them with both a sense of the fallibility of the system and of the importance of cooperation between men and women of all classes.

Higgins also goes through a process of reassessment and maturation, although he changes less than either Margaret or Thornton. He is already a mature man with two grown daughters when he appears in the novel. And, unlike Margaret or Thornton, he already has a clear understanding of his social responsibilities of which his union involvement is the expression. As he tells Margaret, he supports the union, not for his own aggrandizement, but because he believes it is the only resource for the working class as a whole. The union movement, however, is debated and criticized, though not as vigorously as the industrialists' stance is. Some critics read Higgins's willingness to debate it with the Hales and later with Thornton as a sign of selling out. It is important to keep in mind, however, that Higgins never gives up on the union. He does not always have a clear answer to the questions raised about political economy, but he repeatedly claims his right to his own opinion, his right to be honest to his own experience. Even after Boucher's suicide, which is seen in part as a result of the strike, Higgins says that he still will not sign a pledge which requires him to refuse to contribute money to the union in order to get a job: "No, I could na', not e'en for this" (381).

The major criticism that the novel levels at the union movement complements the one it makes about capitalism as a system. Gaskell argues that the union expects men to act as if they were perfect, despite the fact that many of its members are desperate and, again, immature. For example, in describing the protesting crowd on the verge of riot outside Thornton's house, she repeatedly emphasizes the presence of boys: "many in the crowd were mere boys; cruel and thoughtless,—cruel because they were thoughtless" (233). She sees them as responsible for the act of violence that breaks up the crowd and eventually the strike itself: "Their reckless passion had carried them too far to stop—at least had carried some of them too far; for it is always the savage lads, with their love of cruel excitement, who head the riot—reckless to what bloodshed it may lead" (234). Boucher is also a member of the crowd, a man who, partly due to his own improvidence, is unable to support his family and has been made desperate by this. Higgins reveals a deeper maturity when he accepts responsibility for Boucher and, more importantly, for Boucher's children. For their sakes, Higgins asks Thornton for employment, and, in the important scene where the two discuss the children, Higgins asks, "But for th' childer. Measter, do yo' think we can e'er get on together?" (405). Thornton responds, "it was not my proposal that we should go together," but it is a measure of each man's growth that he does find a way to cooperate to support the children. At the end of the novel the younger ones are living with Higgins and the older have been put to school by Thornton. As Margaret has some of her happiest moments in London when she is caring for her cousin's child, the men also emerge into true adulthood by showing they can accept responsibility for others.

Perhaps the slippages and gaps in Gaskell's fusion of industrial novel to *Bildungsroman* are as revealing as her successes. Patsy Stoneman and others have found fault with

Margaret Hale's intensely maidenish sexual modesty. Marxist critics complain of the downplaying of union politics. For myself, a crucial flaw is the extremely secondary role allotted to working-class women in the novel. Yet to emphasize these negative assessments as previous criticisms of the novel have tended to do is to miss the central struggle in which the work is engaged, a struggle, not to collapse, but to understand the intersections of social and psychological, of public and private, and to relate those intersections to the production of class and gender ideologies. The slippages and gaps in *North and South* have to do with Gaskell's determination to write optimistically about how people might reform their ideologies, since they could not live outside them.

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"Morbid and Fearful Conditions of Mind" in Ruskin's *Modern Painters II*

Owen Rogal

Ruskin's pronouncements on his opposition could be so scathingly critical that it is easy to overlook both his determination to search out new knowledge and his willingness to change his position when he finds reason to. The important trip Ruskin takes in 1845 to Italy, the trip that issues in radical changes in *Modern Painters II*, is not a happy accident; he goes to Italy to learn what he does not know about the history of art.¹ Because of this trip, Turner, the hero of the first volume of *Modern Painters*, gives place in the second volume to Fra Angelico and other early painters of northern Italy and to Tintoretto, painters who up to this point in Ruskin's career had not found much favor with him.² Ruskin now responds to them with the ecstasy and reverence that he previously reserved for Turner.³ On first seeing the Tintoretto in the Scuola di San Rocca, he writes to his father, "I never was so utterly crushed to the earth before any human intellect as I was today—before Tintoret" (Cook and Wedder-

¹ See Bradley 17-24 for an account of Ruskin's trip to Italy in 1845, his first without his parents.

² Ruskin writes to his father during his trip to Italy in 1845, "I always thought him [Tintoretto] a good and clever and forcible painter; but I had not the smallest notion of his enormous powers" (Cook and Wedderburn 4: xxxvii).

³ Ruskin's career is marked by compulsive reevaluation and revision. Even

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burn 4: xxxviii). The second volume itself vibrates with Ruskin's joyful excitement with a newly discovered world. The "right taste" that Ruskin introduces in the third chapter of the volume is not simply an abstraction, but a "clasp[ing]," "worshipping," "astonished" (4: 59-60) acolyte of art, Ruskin himself, in fact, who in the following seventeen chapters of the volume enacts "right taste" in his loving descriptions—"canticles" (4: 331n.), hymns to beauty—of Fra Angelico and Tintoretto's paintings.⁴

In the Preface to the Re-Arranged Edition (1883) of the second volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin defends a position that is difficult to distinguish from art for art's sake: "beautiful things are useful to men because they are beautiful, and for the sake of their beauty only" (4: 4). And the volume did effect conversions to this position, W. Holman Hunt, for example, saying that Ruskin established that art could be an end in itself and "of all its readers none could have felt more strongly than

the first clause of the second volume of *Modern Painters*—"Although the hasty execution and controversial tone of the former portions of this essay have been subjects of frequent regret to the writer" (4: 25)—looks back to and reassesses the first volume.

⁴ Holloway establishes how frequently the "Victorian sage" uses characters—fictitious and real—in even expository prose (12-13).

myself that it was written expressly for him" (1: 73). Ruskin himself, though, eventually was rather ashamed of the volume, in later works enumerating its deficiencies.⁵ It is the only volume of *Modern Painters* that he did not consider reissuing in 1870-1871, when he was Slade Professor of Fine Art. When he finally did agree to republish *Modern Painters II* in 1883—in order to counter the influence of the aesthetes⁶—he included almost a continuous commentary on the volume in the form of footnotes, too uncertain to let the text stand on its own, praising and elaborating, but also correcting, condemning, and dismissing particular passages.⁷ Ruskin at least in part refutes as he reissues the 1883 edition of *Modern Painters II*, thereby suggesting his uneasiness with it.

Ruskin sees that *Modern Painters II* is at cross purposes with itself. A strict, uncompromising, inflexible Evangelicalism threatens his aesthetic theories, and Ruskin attempts to refute it in his footnotes for the 1883 edition.⁸ Ruskin shows no inclination to wish away or hide the unpleasant Evangelicalism that was such an important part of his thinking in 1846. Rather than write Evangelicalism out of the volume, he talks in the 1883 footnotes about the author he was in 1846: conflict becomes occasion for public self-assessment. Critic of Turner, Fra Angelico, and Tintoretto, Ruskin is also critic of himself. But not an entirely reliable critic. The second volume of *Modern Painters*, he claims, celebrates beauty, defining the "universal" laws of how it is perceived and created. And Ruskin's "canticles" to Fra Angelico and Tintoretto are the signatures of the volume, canticles so powerfully arresting that they threaten to eclipse an important aspect of Ruskin in the second volume: he is morbidly drawn to the low and foul, the deformed and misshapen, putrefying flesh and dirt.⁹

John Rosenberg suggests that the theory of beauty that Ruskin explains in the second volume of *Modern Painters* is first revealed to him when he sees in an avalanche in the Alps a vision of the "celestial city with walls of amethyst and gates of gold—filled with the light and clothed with the Peace of God" (4: 364, Rosenberg 18-20).¹⁰ Suddenly finding himself in the celestial city of Revelation, Ruskin discovers the "types" of divine beauty.¹¹ And the volume finds its end as well as its beginning in Revelation: the "canticle" that Ruskin concludes *Modern Painters II* with is to one of Fra Angelico's Last Judgments. But Ruskin's Revelation is not simply "celestial." Although the biblical text is silent on the details of resurrection, Ruskin attends to them closely. With the last

judgment the saved find their way to the heavenly father, the damned are condemned to hell. What is the state of these souls—or more exactly, of the decomposed bodies that they inhabit—between the moment of their waking and either their salvation or damnation? When discussing Tintoretto's *Last Judgment* in the chapter on penetrative imagination, for example, he graphically recreates the last awakening:

Bat-like, out of the holes and caverns and shadows of the earth, the bones gather and the clay heaps heave, rattling and adhering into half-kneaded anatomies, that crawl, and startle, and struggle up among the putrid weeds, with the clay clinging to their clotted hair, and their heavy eyes sealed by the earth darkness yet. . . ; shaking off one by one the dreams of the prisonhouse, hardly hearing the clangour of the trumpets of the armies of God, blinded yet more, as they awake, by the white light of the new Heaven, until the great vortex of the four winds bears up their bodies to the judgment-seat. (4: 277)

It isn't simply Tintoretto's choice of subject that determines Ruskin's interests here. It is Ruskin himself—the second volume demonstrates—who is keenly interested in the macabre details of decomposed bodies, searching them out. Arguing in the first chapter of the volume, for example, that various sciences are more valued as "objects" than as "means," he says that his favorite science, geology, "does better in reclothing dry bones and revealing lost creations" (4: 33). The geologist works daily to put back together the parts of dead bodies. Is Ruskin giving here one reason for his strong interest in geology? Or in the first chapter on the imagination he claims that the imagination "has that life in it, and fire, that wherever it passes, among the dead bones and dust of things, behold! a shaking, and the bones come together bone to his bone" (4: 241). In Ruskin's figure the artist becomes a resurrectionist.

It is during his investigations in Italy in 1845 for the second volume of *Modern Painters* that Ruskin's life-long fascination with Quercia's tomb for Ilaria di Caretto begins—he falls in love with an image of death (4: 122-24).¹² The second volume is as much a long meditation on death as an analysis of the laws of beauty. Before defining the types of beauty in a series of six chapters, for example, Ruskin considers—only to dismiss—theories of beauty that compete with his, one of which postulates an important role for custom. Ruskin argues

around two opposing visions, one of felicity and the other of some form of hell" (187).

¹⁰ The critics who treat the second volume of *Modern Painters* most fully are Helsinger, Landow, and Wihl.

¹¹ Although Ruskin does not include this account in the second volume of *Modern Painters*—Cook and Wedderburn add it in the Appendix to the Library Edition (4: 363-65)—the concluding paragraph on Purity recapitulates one of its images: in the unpublished manuscript, the Aiguilles "shot off their shrouds" (4: 364); in the chapter on Purity, Ruskin refers to "young leaves when first their inward energy prevails over the earth, pierces its corruption, and shakes its dust away from their own white purity of life" (4: 133-34).

¹² In a footnote to the 1883 edition, Ruskin quotes a recent diary entry of his on the statue: "It is forty years since I first saw it, and I have never found its like.—(Pisa, 5th November, 1882)" (4: 122n.). In the 1883 Epilogue for the volume, Ruskin declares the statue "the most beautiful extant marble-work of the middle ages,—faultless, as far as human skill and feeling can or may be so" (4: 347).

that custom influences but doesn't determine one's response to beauty. More importantly, though, the illustrations of his point reveal the preoccupations that inform the volume as a whole: "so that the anatomist in a little time loses all sense of horror in the torn flesh and carious bone, while the sculptor ceases not to feel, to the close of his life, the deliciousness of every line of the outward frame" (4: 68). While ostensibly focusing on the creations of the sculptor, the second volume shows a strong interest in the work of the anatomist. And as Ruskin concludes his short discussion of custom, again illustrating the fallacies of its proponents' claims, he refers to an excessively morbid philosophical exercise:

We may keep a skull beside us as long as we please, we may overcome its repulsiveness, we may render ourselves capable of perceiving many qualities of beauty about its lines, we may contemplate it for years together if we will,—it and nothing else,—but we shall not get ourselves to think as well of it as of a child's fair face. (4: 69)

The second volume certainly does not propose the contemplation of skulls, but Ruskin seems to return to them, or analogs of them, obsessively, even at the expense of fair faces.

Ruskin's charnel interests find their way into his explanation of the types of beauty, too. His discussion of the type of infinity, for example—the appearance of light in a distance behind a relatively dark foreground (4: 79-82)—strangely subverts itself.¹³ Ruskin suggests that this distant light that conjures images of infinity seems grotesquely to transform the things it strikes: "the round and muscular growth of the forest trunks is sunk into skeleton lines of quiet shade, the purple clefts of the hill-side are labyrinthed in the darkness, the orbed spring and whirling wave of the torrent have given place to a white, ghastly, interrupted gleaming" (4: 80). It isn't just the skeletal lines that signal Ruskin's interest in the dead, but also the labyrinths and the ghastly white.

Ruskin professes to explain the types of beauty that are "the signatures of God upon His works" (4: 75), but often finds himself deliberating on death and decomposing corpses. Even what seems to be an especially safe subject like purity—another of the six types of beauty—leads Ruskin to "corruption and decay of all kinds" (4: 129). And it is not simply the sight of this corruption and decay that preoccupies Ruskin, but also their smell and feel: "But all reasoning about this impression is rendered difficult, because the ocular sense of impurity connected with corruption is enhanced by the offending of other senses" (4: 129).

As in his discussion of typical beauty, in his discussion of vital beauty Ruskin frequently veers off to things that are very far from beautiful. Here Ruskin takes the opportunity to give play to his "landscape feeling," when, for example, he describes the "signs of life" in a plant, "the symmetry of its leaflets, the smoothness of its stalks, the vivid green of its shoots" (4: 151). Dead plants, however, also draw his notice: "if we see a leaf withered, or shrunk, or worm-eaten, we say it is ugly" (4: 151). Ruskin perversely turns one thing that must

¹³ See Fellows 82-85 for a different perspective on Ruskin's discussion of this type.

surely be a sign of life, the fruit of the cactus, into "a swelling or disease"; he notes that the cactus's very few "signs of healthy condition" are compromised by "blotches, and other appearances of decay" (4: 152). Ruskin knows that our biases, habits, and preoccupations—our frames of reference—determine what we see in the world.¹⁴ He is not aware, though, of the frames he unwittingly uses in the second volume. Ruskin replays the same obsessions in his discussion of signs of life in animals: "there is not anything which causes so intense and tormenting a sense of ugliness as any scar, wound, monstrosity, or imperfection" (4: 154). He says that such signs fill him with "intense horror" (4: 154). If it is horror he feels, it's a horror that fascinates him.

In the introductory chapter on the imagination, Ruskin distinguishes between "sane, healthy, and profitable operation" of the imagination and its "erratic, diseased, and dangerous" operation (4: 223). He doesn't develop this distinction, or he doesn't develop it in his theorizing, which follows the conventional Romantic distinction between imagination and fancy. But his own dramatizations show an interest in disease, when, for example, he elaborates a classical allusion: "so that if there be in any good and lofty work a flaw, failing, or undipped vulnerable part, where sarcasm may stick and stay, it is caught at, and pointed at, and buzzed about, and fixed upon, and stung into, as a recent wound is by flies" (4: 258). And his practical criticism often returns to manifestations of the "diseased" imagination. Shakespeare, whose imagination is especially penetrative, ignores the spots that befoul plants, "while Milton sticks in the stains upon them" (4: 256).

Ruskin champions both Angelico and Tintoretto in the second volume, but he spells out the radical differences between them. Angelico's paintings are harmonious, serene. Tintoretto's paintings are disturbing and unsettling, their juxtapositions unexpected and details discordant. Angelico's world is comprehensible and manageable, Tintoretto's monstrous and mysterious, his characters "houseless" (4: 263, 264) and driven to psychological extremes. In the *Annunciation*, Mary is "startled" (4: 264). In his *Crucifixion*, the people are possessed by "rage" and "fury" (4: 271). In his *Massacre of the Innocents*, the mothers are "all knit together and hurled down in one hopeless, frenzied, furious abandonment of body and soul in the effort to save" (4: 273) their children. Even more interesting than Tintoretto's characters are the "characters" who look at his paintings. The viewer himself of the *Massacre of the Innocents* is deeply unsettled by what he sees as his eyes "seem to become bloodshot and strained with strange horror and deadly vision" (4: 273). Tintoretto gives Ruskin license to dramatize darker aspects of his own psyche.

As we saw in his discussion of Tintoretto's *Last Judgment*, Ruskin is also interested in unusual physical extremes—an interest that informs his discussion of other paintings by Tintoretto. The vegetation in the *Entombment* is dead: "the ghastly tomb grass . . . shakes its black and withered blades above the rocks of the sepulchre" (4: 263). And the landscapes of Tintoretto that Ruskin praises—"a

¹⁴ In the chapter in the second volume "Of Vital Beauty in Man," Ruskin raises the issue of how frames affect vision (191, 194).

⁵ Both *Love's Meinie* and *Deucalion* refer, for example, to the "affected" language of the second volume (25: 122-23, 26: 333-34). In the Preface to the Re-Arranged Edition (1883), Ruskin says "that many and many a time during the revision, I wished I had persisted in my old resolution [not to republish]; not in the mere wounded vanity of an old author looking back on his earliest essays, but in much shame, and some indignation, at finding the most solemn of all subjects of human thought handled at once with the presumption of a youth, and the affectation of an anonymous writer" (4: 3).

⁶ *Love's Meinie* expresses especially strongly Ruskin's adversion to the aesthetes of the 70s and 80s and his desire to counter them (25: 122-23).

⁷ See H. Dixon Hunt for an illuminating discussion of Ruskin's footnotes.

⁸ In 1883, for example, Ruskin dismisses a paragraph in the first chapter as "being indeed offensively aggressive in its pietism, and rude in its brevity" (4: 28n.) and the opening paragraphs of the chapter "Of Vital Beauty in Man" as an "Evangelical burst of flame" (4: 177n.).

⁹ Rosenberg suggests in "Style and Sensibility in Ruskin's Prose" that "Almost invariably the greatest passages in Ruskin's prose are structured

desert place" (4: 263) in the *Entombment* and "the sweep of desert" (4: 269) in the *Baptism*—are strangely chosen for a Wordsworthian lover of nature. He praises this painting for its representation of putrefaction, "the mouldering beams and shattered roofing of a ruined *cattle-shed*, the canopy of the Nativity" (4: 263, Ruskin's emphasis). The background of the *Annunciation* is also made up of a mass of crumbling, rotting ruins: "The spectator turns away at first, revolted, from the central object of the picture forced painfully and coarsely forward, a mass of shattered brickwork, with the plaster mildewed away from it, and the mortar mouldering from its seams" (4: 264). More importantly, we see again that Ruskin's hypothetical viewer, his "spectator," is not the ecstatic hypothetical viewer of the third chapter of the volume, clasping and worshipping beauty.

Ruskin acknowledges the beauty of the "herbivorous tribes" (4: 159), the "tribes" that aestheticians traditionally draw their examples from when determining the laws of beauty, as Ruskin knew since he refers in his chapter on unity to Edmund Burke's discussion of the horse in *Of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (4: 108-109). But in *Modern Painters II* Ruskin is drawn to very different kinds of creatures. For example, igniting in the third chapter one of his "Evangelical bursts of flame," he attacks the "aesthetic" response to art and denounces the whole "corrupt and overpampered civilization, when men build palaces, plant groves, and gather luxuries, that they and their devices may hang in the corners of the world like fine-spun cobwebs, with greedy, puffed-up, spider-like lusts in the middle" (4: 49). The paintings that Ruskin loves and celebrates in the second volume were intended for "palaces" and his figure here for the motives behind paintings is very odd, as if "high" art and the lowest things of the earth are secretly connected. In the following chapters of the volume, Ruskin's deep interest in creatures that, like the spider, frighten—and are reviled by—humans reveals that high and low for him are inextricably connected.

Ruskin characterizes an "inconceivable, admirable, altogether divine" faculty with an anomalous comparison: the associative imagination works "as the motion of a snake's body goes through all parts at once, and its volition acts at the same instant in coils that go contrary ways" (4: 236). Or noting how it is occasionally difficult to reconcile the different criteria of typical and vital beauty, Ruskin praises the person who can "pursue the pleasures of typical beauty down to the scales of the alligator, the coils of the serpent, and the joints of the beetle" (4: 157). His choice of examples shows a "morbid" interest in the low. He contrasts the *Laocoön* with the Elgin Theseus, the latter an example of dignified "calmness," the former twisted with "convulsions" (4: 119). Then in a long footnote he compares the *Laocoön* with "the awfulness and quietness of M. Angelo's treatment of a subject in most respects similar (the Plague of the Fiery Serpents)" (4: 120n.). At the time of the writing of the second volume, Ruskin still admires Michelangelo and he notes approvingly "how his gigantic intellect reaches after repose" (4: 120n.) But Ruskin's discussion of Michelangelo's sculpture shifts to a subject

that does not belong in a work on aesthetics, the method that a serpent uses to kill prey, a subject that Ruskin concedes is "irrelevant to our present purpose":

it seizes once and for ever, and that before it coils; following up the seizure with a cast of its body round the victim, as invisibly swift as the twist of a whiplash round any hard object it may strike: and then it holds fast, never moving the jaws or the body; if the prey has any power of struggling left, it throws round another coil, without quitting the hold with the jaws. (4: 120n.)

Emphasizing the accuracy of Michelangelo, Ruskin descends to a gratuitously graphic "rendering" of his own: "the binding of the arms to the body, and the knotting of the whole mass of agony together, until we hear the crashing of the bones beneath the grisly sliding of the engine folds" (4: 120n.).

When Ruskin offers examples of the penetrative imagination, serpents again attract him as he contrasts Retsch's illustrations for Schiller's *Kampf mit dem Drachen* with Turner's *Jason*, the first unconvincingly representing many different episodes in the life of the dragon, the second "concentrat[ing]" the whole life of the dragon "and infinitely more, into one moment" (4: 259). Turner's dragon, according to Ruskin, is mysteriously threatening—too large to be fully represented on the canvas—and sinister:

All his horror is in that fearful, slow, griding upheaval of the single coil. Spark after spark of it, ring after ring, is sliding into the light, the slow glitter steals along him step by step, broader and broader, a lighting of funeral lamps one by one, quicker and quicker. (4: 260)

When Ruskin describes in the next paragraph Turner's *Jason*, dragons proliferate in his version of the painting:

Finally and chiefly, observe that the painter is not satisfied even with all the suggestiveness thus obtained, but to make sure of us, and force us, whether we will or not, to walk his way, and not ours, the trunks of the trees on the right are all cloven into yawning and writhing heads and bodies, and alive with dragon energy all about us; note especially the nearest with its gaping jaws and claw-like branch at the seeming shoulder. (4: 261)

We cannot be sure whether Ruskin projects his vision of a world of "writhing" snakes onto the painting or "addresses" Turner's "morbid and fearful condition of mind" (4: 261)—a condition that Ruskin strongly sympathizes with. But whether or not Ruskin creates what he sees, again, in the practical criticism of the volume, we see how misleading Ruskin's statements on beauty in the Preface to the Re-Arranged Edition are. In the volume Ruskin constantly plunges into a dark, fractured, decomposing world, populated by dangerous reptiles and tormented people.¹⁵

W. Holman Hunt claims that in 1847 the second volume

of *Modern Painters* confirmed for him the importance of art and suggests that with this volume Ruskin combated the "sickly ideas of beauty" of the day, "modern ambition [that] is utterly without health or force of character," "moribund" art (1: 89-90). In 1883, disgusted by the aestheticism of the 1870s and 1880s, by the "dissolytic,—dialytic—or even diarrhoeic—lies, belonging to the sooty and sensual elements of his [the general student's] London and Paris life" (25: 122-23), Ruskin reissues the volume, hoping that it will have the same salutary effect on the artists of the 80s as it did on Hunt. But it is in the second volume itself that these "lies," "sickly ideas of beauty," and "moribund" art that Hunt castigates, can find their beginnings.

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"Delightfully Irregular":

Esther's Nascent *écriture féminine* in *Bleak House*

Lynette Felber

As early as 1973, the question of Dickens's feminism was raised by Ellen Moers, who called *Bleak House* "the single 'woman question' novel in the Dickens canon" (13) because of its unusual cast of strong women characters. The feminist issue is also crucial for the critics who have viewed the narrative structure of *Bleak House* as a gendered dichotomy, split between male and female narrators, values, spheres, and discourses. Suzanne Graver, for example, argues that the two narrators symbolize the "male public" and "female private spheres" (12), while Carol Senf points out that each narrator is somewhat incomplete, "Esther being all emotion, the third-person narrator all reasoned analysis" (26), who together model a complete androgynous whole. Virginia Blain focuses on the "juxtaposition" of the two narrators, which she views as a "submerged dialectic between male and female viewpoints" (31). The notion of a kind of feminism conveyed through Dickens's narrative and prose was first raised in the Victorian era, by George Henry Lewes's 1852 essay "The Lady Novelists," which portrays a feminized Dickens who speaks in "the mother-tongue of the heart" (162).¹ In 1915 the British modernist writer Dorothy Richardson named the unlikely pair of Dickens and Joyce as two exponents of a

Hunt, John Dixon. "Oeuvre and footnote." *The Ruskin Polygon: Essays in the Imagination of John Ruskin*. Ed. John Dixon Hunt and Faith M. Holland. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1982: 1-20.

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¹⁵ Although he does not discuss the second volume of *Modern Painters* in detail, Simpson traces Ruskin's use of serpent imagery throughout his work.

¹Jean Ferguson Carr uses Lewes's essay to preface her own discussion of Dickens's feminism in *Hard Times*. As she points out, Lewes's designation is really a "backhanded compliment" to Dickens.

status as an outsider in that literary realm" (174). *Bleak House* provides an unusual opportunity to explore correlations between feminine language and feminist ideology because of its explicit concerns with feminism enacted through characters like Mrs. Jellyby and its implicit concern with gender as Dickens cross-dresses by writing through a female narrator-character whose narrative is counterpointed with that of the purportedly male anonymous third person narrator.

At the same time, it is impossible to designate as feminine all features of Dickens's narrative; his suspense driven plots, for example, thrusting forward to a climax and resolution, employ a pattern designated "masculine" by feminist narratologists. *Bleak House* is a mystery, one of those texts Maria Minich Brewer defines as a masculine plot conceived as "discourse of male desire recounting itself through the narrative of adventure, project, enterprise, and conquest" (1151). Susan Winnett finds a male erotic bias inherent in climax-centered descriptions of narrative such as that proposed by Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot* (506). Nevertheless, a carefully qualified feminist reading of *Bleak House* may be supported by considering Esther's nineteenth-century narrative as one which prefigures many features of the feminine narrative advocated by the French theorists—an *écriture féminine*. In this case, as with Joyce, a feminist examination of a male author with a feminine signature is unusual. In defense of this critical gesture, Hélène Cixous points out that writing itself may be gendered, as distinct from the sex of the writer: "the fact that a piece of writing is signed with a man's name does not in itself exclude femininity" (52). This proposition raises major theoretical questions: what is the connection, if any, between writing designated feminine and feminist ideology? Concomitantly, is an inscription of the female body necessarily essentialist? Can this narrative strategy be considered as a kind of feminism? While a resolution of these dilemmas of contemporary feminism is beyond the scope of his essay, *Bleak House* provides a provocative site for exploration of the interrelation of feminine narrative and feminist ideology.

Dorothy Richardson's somewhat enigmatic description of "feminine prose," which she characterizes as "unpunctuated, moving from point to point without formal obstruction" (12) and attributes to Dickens and Joyce, is clarified by contemporary attempts to define feminine aesthetics. Ann Rosalind Jones uses Irigaray's idea of "feminine subjectivity" to define the formal characteristics of *écriture féminine* as "double or multiple voices, broken syntax, repetitive or cumulative rather than linear structure, open endings" (88), though she does not wholeheartedly endorse the notion of an *écriture féminine*. This definition evokes the major narrative characteristics of *Bleak House*, Esther's portion of it in particular. One of the most sustained definitions by Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe (Robbins) describes it as rooted in "female consciousness" and taking the form of "an unrelenting language of process and change" (66) and a "syntactic structure [which] must accommodate itself to the shifting perspective of the writer's observing mind" (67). Admittedly, some of these features are characteristic of Dickens's style elsewhere as well as that of other Victorian novelists whose experimentation heralds the rise of modernism. Yet *Bleak House* is one of the most experimental and obviously proto-modern of all Victorian novels; within the

variety of Dickens's discourse repertoire, Esther's chapters embody narrative characteristics often termed feminine which at the same time presage features of modern experimentation.

Throughout *Bleak House*, Esther's narrative subverts the linear progression of the narrative as a whole and is associated with spaces that defy teleology, such as Bleak House itself, described by Esther as "delightfully irregular." Some of the other narrative features which have most puzzled and disturbed critics—Esther's coy withholding of material (especially in conjunction with Allan Woodcourt), her enigmatic dream visions during her illness, as well as the unfinished sentence with which she ends the novel—suggest the circular, recursive, digressive, and non-teleological narrative described as feminine. Viewed as an early prototype of *écriture féminine*, Esther's narrative reveals strategies for disequilibrium of the binary oppositions suggested by the novel's depiction of separate spheres and gendered narrators. Through this technique, the novel implicitly advocates destabilization as a means for valorizing the feminine, revealing a latent proto-feminism inherent in the narrative itself.

Dickens's opposition to women in public life and his creation of women like his Angelic Agnes and domestically incompetent Dora are often cited as evidence of the impossibility of feminist themes in his novels. In *Bleak House* itself Dickens seems to espouse an anti-feminist platform in his representation of Mrs. Jellyby, whose "telescopic philanthropy" is transformed, with the failure of Borriboola-Gha, into an overt and supposedly obnoxious feminism: her efforts to win women the right to sit in Parliament. What is notable about Mrs. Jellyby, however, is the *kind* of feminism she represents: her feminism consists in an emulation of the capitalist and imperialist patriarch as she exploits the labor of her daughter Caddy and neglects domestic for international causes. This does not, however, preclude another feminism. *Bleak House* may be read as a novel sympathetic to feminism, though its position is that often derogatively termed essentialism. Yet for some feminists, the reprivileging of women's bodies and values (whether biologically inherent or socially constructed) constitutes an alternative to patriarchy.

* * *

If an *écriture féminine* represents and celebrates the female body, in particular its reproductive features and multitudinous sexual potential, the taboos on explicit sexuality in Victorian literature make it difficult to conceive of a Victorian character like Esther Summerson writing her body in exuberant Cixousian fashion. Esther's strategy of self-effacement renders her physical being elusive in the novel. As Helena Michie remarks, "Nowhere is Esther's narrative more informed by the paradox of erasure and assertion than in the discussion of her own physical appearance: her body and its desires" ("Who is this in Pain?" 203). Undescribed by herself, other characters, or even the anonymous narrator, Esther's physical appearance remains vague in Hablot Browne's illustrations, which usually portray her from the back or in profile. Even Guppy, who wears Esther's image "imprinted on [his] 'eart,'" never particularizes the details, though he inadvertently reveals her resemblance to Lady Dedlock. Yet just as Victorian desire may be displaced onto

another character, as Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate in their ground breaking discussion of Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason as doubles in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, or may take the form of "illness, scarring, and deformity" as Helena Michie has shown ("Who is this in Pain?" 199), so may it be inscribed in narrative itself. When Esther writes of the compliments and love Ada and John Jarndyce give her and then self-consciously comments on her (partial or feigned) erasure: "I must write it, even if I rub it out again, because it gives me so much pleasure" (378), she is not only experimenting with narrative technique, as Joseph Sawicki argues (213), but also demonstrating an ability to give herself pleasure, to excite if not satisfy her desire through writing.

Helena Michie asks, "If women are simultaneously language and body, what does it mean to represent their bodies in language?" (*Flesh* 7). One Gothic technique used with some variation in *Bleak House* is the equation of the house with the psyche or self of its owner. Esther's discourse and the space which represents her body converge in the first, lengthy description of her initial impressions of Bleak House. Although the house is, up until this point, John Jarndyce's property, he immediately turns the keys over to Esther in an act of intuited appropriateness. While it is not surprising that the house, a private domestic sphere, should represent Esther, the description demonstrates unanticipated stylistic features of a "feminine prose" or *écriture féminine*:

It was one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another, and where you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are, and where there is a bountiful provision of little halls and passages, and where you find still older cottage-rooms in unexpected places, and with lattice windows and green growth pressing through them. Mine, which we entered first, was of this kind, with an up-and-down roof, that had more corners in it than I ever counted afterwards, and a chimney (there was a wood fire on the hearth) paved all around with pure white tiles, in every one of which a bright miniature of the fire was blazing. Out of this room, you went down two steps, into a charming little sitting-room, looking down upon a flower-garden, which room was henceforth to belong to Ada and me. Out of this you went up three steps, into Ada's bedroom, which had a fine broad window, commanding a beautiful view . . . (62)

The association of the setting with Esther herself is evident in the symbols of cozy domesticity—the hearth fire reflected in the pure white tiles and in the old-fashioned character of the cottage rooms and the dormered roof of Esther's bedroom. The quaint old-fashioned architecture suggests her nickname, "old woman," and John Jarndyce's characterization of a house which "makes no pretension but is a comfortable little place" (64) is precisely his evaluation of Esther. Moreover, the description of the individual rooms indicates that the house represents not only the selves but also the social potential of the various characters in a novel intrinsically preoccupied with class. Ada's room, for example, is higher, three steps up from the sitting room, in contrast to Esther's, two steps up; Ada's window "command[s]" a better view, corresponding to her

higher social status as a legitimate child and prospective legatee of Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

More striking, however, is the use of the house as a figure for Esther's "delightfully irregular" narrative, a site where body and narrative conjoin. Although Esther's description at first follows the trajectory of Jarndyce's tour through Bleak House, she ultimately subverts this linear movement by suggesting alternate routes: "But if, instead of going out at Ada's door" and "Or you might, if you came out at another door (every room had at least two doors) go straight down to the hall again by a half-a-dozen steps and a low archway, wondering how you got back there, or had ever got out of it" (62-63). Thus, Esther's narrative contests, even early in the novel, the forward movement of conventional (male) linear trajectory and emphasizes the multiple possibilities inherent in Irigaray's female "sex which in not one." The implicit connection of the "delightfully irregular" house with Esther's own discourse is suggested later in the novel as she apologizes for her digressions saying, "I am getting on irregularly" (736). Her suggestion of alternate courses through the maze of rooms and her use of a complex, even digressive narrative progression, evokes Rachel Blau DuPlessis' description of women's language as offering a "both / and" mentality rather than the male "either / or" ("Etruscans" 276), a characteristic also demonstrated in Dickens's strategy of alternating between two narrators telling overlapping parts of one story, rather than subordinating a subplot to one major plot.

Bleak House's profusion of rooms, hallways, and ornaments does not reveal disorder but, in contrast to Mrs. Jellyby's house or the chaos unleashed by Chancery, represents an alternate *feminine* order. Esther insists on this perspective in a passage initially occurring early in the novel (but later deleted from Dickens's corrected proofs), describing a dream in which the keys she tries on the locks of Bleak House do not fit: she rejects the dream vision stating, "No dream could have been less prophetic" (825). The dream of the obstinate locks reveals Esther's anxiety about the responsibility Jarndyce immediately bestows on her, yet she is able to perceive the house's logic—"the house was in such order" (142)—it only appears "irregular" to those restricted to conventional logic; as the keeper of the keys, Esther is able to unlock or decode the organization. The fact that it *is* ordered, albeit in an "irregular" fashion—implies it should be appreciated for its multiplicity and profusion. The description of Bleak House provides a revised interpretation of features associated with *écriture féminine* (and implicitly with the feminine body), revealing and valorizing the potential of multivocal, indirect narrative.

One of the most criticized features of Esther's narrative has been her coy withholding of material, especially that concerning Allan Woodcourt. Particularly in her equivocal descriptions of her first encounters with her future husband, Esther's revelations seem maddeningly evasive. Her first mention of Allan calls attention to a deliberate oversight in her chronological account of the party at Beyham Badger's: "I have omitted to mention in its place, that there was some one else at the family party. It was not a lady. It was a gentleman. It was a gentleman of a dark complexion—a young surgeon" (163). What seems at first jerky and stylistically clumsy in the passage is actually Esther's contrived and gradual disclosure

of her strategy, which rejects chronology to place the revelation in a position of prominence at the end of the chapter; most of her disclosures about Allan and their mutually covert evolving romance are narrated in this same fashion.

A similar belated, seemingly evasive revelation at the end of chapter fourteen may be viewed as what Joseph Sawicki calls "controlled release of information" (212) characteristic of Esther's increasing competence and sophistication as a narrator:

"I have forgotten to mention—at least I have not mentioned—that Mr Woodcourt was the same dark young surgeon whom we had met at Mr Badger's. Or, that Mr Jarndyce invited him to dinner that day. Or, that he came. Or, that when they were all gone, and I said to Ada, 'Now, my darling, let us have a little talk about Richard!' Ada laughed and said—

But, I don't think it matters what my darling said. She was always merry." (182)

The broken, reiterative syntax has often been seen as an indication of Esther's lack of confidence or the flurry of her emotional response to Woodcourt; it may even be viewed as a discreet Victorian representation of sexual arousal. Yet this syntax also resembles the style of her initial description of Bleak House; the conjunctive clauses function similarly to the previous postulation of alternate itineraries through the maze of rooms. Esther's supposedly incompetent style participates in the alternate discourse features of an *écriture féminine*: "On the discourse level, we find a discursive, conjunctive style instead of the complex subordinating, linear style of classification and distinction" (Stanley and Robbins 67). Moving in a non-linear fashion, it nevertheless arrives at disclosure and truth through a different means than the anonymous narrator.

Esther's narrative, filled with the gaps of explanations unuttered, appears to comply with prohibitions against certain kinds of female speech. Esther's interest in Woodcourt, for example—a woman's interest in a man—cannot be uttered, and her sense of her marital ineligibility because of her illegitimacy reinforces this constraint. Esther reveals her attraction to Woodcourt indirectly, however. Her initial confession of writerly apprehension, "I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever" (17), shows that Esther experiences the anxiety of a woman writing in a male literary tradition, yet her relation to the third person narrator is presented in the novel as one of *potential* equality, each writing an equivalent portion of the pages.

Dickens has thus created a double discourse in two very different ways, not only employing a dual narrative structure, but also utilizing duplicitous techniques often attributed to women writers. The gaps in Esther's narrative function, ironically, as revelation: she speaks in a kind of double discourse and complies with patriarchal restrictions by not explicitly

naming her desires at the same time the series of qualifications reveal her desire, covertly disobeying through strategic revelation and the creation of revealing gaps. Such a subversive strategy may affirm recent—albeit cautious—reevaluations of Dickens's feminism. Graver formulates this doubleness in a slightly different way, noting not only the dual narrators, but as another part of the "double double vision," Esther's division between an "accommodating" and a "critical" self (3): "That Dickens should have chosen to write obliquely when he writes as a woman is nothing short of brilliant. Subterfuge is a strategy commonly used by the powerless, which Esther surely is . . ." (3), yet she finds this technique ultimately one in which Dickens merely "impersonat[es] women only to celebrate their duty" (4). These subversive techniques—though he may not be fully conscious of their implications—nevertheless inscribe the feminine and reveal strategies for undermining and overcoming oppression. While Dickens the man professed an ideology which limited women's participation in the public sphere,² the narrative and treatment of feminist themes in *Bleak House* by no means preclude all *feminisms*, a point I will return to presently.

The halting syntax of Esther's revelation through conjunctive discourse may also be attributed to tension between the two discourses and her conflict between a desire to speak and her awareness of the forbidden nature of this speech. In the darkest night of her illness, Esther's hallucinatory dreams articulate her desires and frustrations without inhibitions, more directly and fluently than in her conscious speech. Here the impact of her trauma and the difficulty of her efforts to repress her desires are metaphorically uttered: "I labored up colossal staircases, ever striving to reach the top, and ever turned, as I have seen a worm in a garden path, by some obstruction, and labouring again" (431). Unlike her previous stuttering revelations, this one uses recursive language and imagery in the fluent fashion one expects of an *écriture féminine*.

Moreover, in her dreams she defies chronology more overtly than in her previous strategically delayed revelations. Within her dream "divisions of time become confused with one another . . . At once a child, and elder girl, and the little woman I had been so happy as, I was not only oppressed by cares and difficulties adapted to each station, but by the great perplexity of endlessly trying to reconcile them" (431). The passage openly acknowledges what is expressed only covertly elsewhere: what she was able to accept in her everyday life as happiness is actually oppression. Graver calls it a moment when the critical Esther takes over, expressing "despair, resentment, and rebellion" (8). The dream reveals Esther's "sense of being trapped in a system of torment" (Garrett 70), but more specifically the choice of gendered narrative features exposes a uniquely feminine dilemma: using a "spatial mode" rather than a linear progression (Garrett 70), these dreams script as feminine the truths of Esther's experience and allow her to discover within herself an appropriate narrative technique for her story, which she subsequently writes in a feminine

mode. The images of "a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle" disclose the source of her existence, the bejewelled Lady Dedlock, and associate both women with circular images and patterns—including entrapment. The fluid quality of the dream narratives evokes the maternal semiotic chora or presymbolic language described by Julia Kristeva, Margaret Homans, and others. Because of their separation, Esther's identification with her mother—her profound realization of her own femininity—has been delayed. When she first sees Lady Dedlock in church, however, "something quicken[s] within" Esther (224), an image of maternal role reversal signifying identification. The identity process is completed directly after her revelatory dream as her emotional wounds surface as literal scars, and Esther is psychically reborn, "too calm to have any care for myself" (432). Significantly, it is after the hallucinatory return to the maternal that Lady Dedlock discloses her identity to Esther during the visit to Boythorn's, and Esther responds in "broken incoherent words" (449).

* * *

The traditional dissatisfaction with Esther's narrative techniques reveals the complications which emerge when she is evaluated simultaneously as narrator and character: what is viewed as coy behavior in a character may be construed differently as a narrative strategy. Since the two narrators of *Bleak House* are generally evaluated by the standards of conventional nineteenth-century narrative, the first-person narrator, because of his authoritative tone, has often been viewed as "the novel's voice of truth" (Senf 25). Various, Sawicki argues that Esther cooperates with the third person narrator and deconstructs the novel's themes at the same time (221). However, despite her modesty and seeming self-effacement, Esther herself could equally be viewed as the primary narrator. She knows of another narrator—"my portion of these pages" implies another's—while the anonymous narrator knows of Esther only as a character, placing her on a more sophisticated plane of mimetic perception. Her story ends the novel, and she has quite literally the last words. Esther's narrative achieves, therefore, a temporary dominance, but Dickens's strategies also suggest the tenuousness of her primacy as narrator. While Esther's narrative functions to privilege the feminine, reversing conventional gender hierarchy, because "each narrator is incomplete," the two are ultimately interdependent for a full comprehension of the novel (Senf 26). Dickens's strategy does not reverse binary oppositions, establishing a new hierarchy (a goal for which feminists are frequently and often mistakenly attacked), but alternates between male and female, shifting conventional gender hierarchy to explore an alternative arrangement.

The strategy of a destabilized gender opposition meets its greatest challenge in the novel's closure; because of its dual-narrator technique and its tension between conventional and modern narrative techniques, *Bleak House* has one of the most complex closures of any Victorian novel. The problem is to discern closure in one of the multiple endings of the two narrators' stories or in some relation—mutually reinforcing or contesting—between them. From one perspective, the overlapping endings seem conventional. The plot which moti-

vated the novel's mystery, Lady Dedlock's secret, is resolved with the revelation of her union with Captain Hawdon, the existence and identity of her illegitimate child, and her death. The Chancery plot ends—as chaos must—in self-destruction. The domestic ending of Esther's story seems to bestow expected terminal marriages, babies, and fates. However, the combination of these endings and the contesting elements within them defy conventional resolution.

The conclusion provided by the third person narrator in chapter 66, "Down in Lincolnshire," achieves a sense of closure through its dark pessimistic tone, its terminal motifs, and its elegiac imagery, which not only refers to the deaths of several major characters but also to the larger social climate of *Bleak House*:

Thus Chesney Wold. With so much of itself abandoned to darkness and vacancy; with so little change under the summer shining or the wintry lowering; so sombre and motionless always—no flag flying now by day, no rows of lights sparkling by night; with no family to come and go, no visitors to be the souls of pale cold shapes of rooms, no stir of life about it;—passion and pride even to the stranger's eye, have died away from the place in Lincolnshire, and yielded it to dull repose. (767)

The resolution connects the conventional nineteenth-century aristocratic demise with the modern entropy looming ominously throughout the novel, threatening to terminate not only an outmoded caste society, but *all* existence. The closure seems tight and definitive because of both the tone and the lack of new possibilities presented in the plot.

Despite the supposed omniscience of the anonymous narrator in his knowledge of Esther's story, he reveals nothing of the possibility of a new future—an anti-closure, anti-entropy narrated in the chapters which comprise the resolution of Esther's narrative: 64, 65, and especially 67, the terminal chapter of the novel, "The Close of Esther's Narrative." The events of these final chapters suggest other possibilities, eroding the solid closure of chapter 66, which is sandwiched between Esther's last chapters, a strategy of containment in itself. Whereas Chesney Wold is shut up, a new Bleak House is opened for Esther; the lights at the Dedlock estate go out, but in the final chapter the moon shines on the new Bleak House; the illustrious Dedlock line ends, but Esther (not related by blood to the Dedlock line) produces two daughters.

Even the end of the Jarndyce case, described by Esther in chapter 65, comprises a new start rather than confirming the terminal events of the anonymous narrator. Although the chapter dramatizes Richard's death, this event is presented as inevitable and necessary for his salvation—"I will begin the world!" said Richard, with a light in his eye" (763). The theme of rebirth is emphasized by the chapter title, "Beginning the World" and the liberty restored as Miss Flite finally releases her caged birds. The end of the Jarndyce case and the deaths of those irreparably corrupted by it are shown to be necessary for the cleansed, reborn micro-society of the new Bleak House described by Esther in the final epilogue chapter. Chapter 65 foreshadows—and preempts—the entropy of the anonymous narrator's closing as the Jarndyce estate is "found to be absorbed in costs," "laps[ing] and melt[ing] away" (760)

²Michael Slater quotes from a letter Dickens wrote to the editor of *The Quarterly Review*:

The people who write books on the rights of women beg the question. They assume that if women usurped the functions of men it would be a clear gain,—so much added to their present merits. It never occurs to them that it

would be destructive of what they have,—a total overthrow of everything in them which is winning and lovable. A male female is repulsive.

Yet Slater also notes Dickens's support for legislation to protect women's rights in marriage (316, 439 note 34).

in a self-consumption akin to Krook's spontaneous combustion and the extinction of the Dedlock line and aristocracy more generally. Yet Esther's presentation of this entropic motif contains a more complex dimension not evident to the other narrator—the possibility of replenishment, rebirth, and social reform.

Despite the complexity inaugurated by its dual structure, the ending of *Bleak House* is often evaluated through the filter of conventional expectations about the teleology of Victorian plots. The principle of teleology is a positive aesthetic criterion for Thomas Leitch, who terms the novel's plot "the most Aristotelian in Dickens" as "things become literally what they have always been figuratively" (149), while Marianna Torgovnick complains that the ending fails to complete the trajectory of Esther's development" (56). Yet either to praise the ending for completing "trajectory" or to fault it for not doing so is to privilege conventional (male) dynamics of plot as rising action (arousal), climax, and denouement (tumescence). As a feminine narrative, Esther's final chapters contest the male trajectory of discovery and the closure imposed by the third person narrator by providing an open, ambiguous anti-ending.

Indeed, Esther's "ending" subverts both the teleology and the patriarchy of the other narrator's ending. In the celebratory fashion of *écriture féminine*, it emphasizes the triumph of the feminine principle: it is the moon, associated with women (in contrast to the male sun) which illuminates Esther's Bleak House, and the birth of her daughters both reinforces the triumph of Esther's femininity and portends, through their own reproductive potential, its survival in the future. Feminist-minded critics have often objected to Jarndyce's "gift" of Esther to Woodcourt as an example of Levi-Strauss's proprietary transfer of women without noting other less patriarchal implications of this ending. This act, Jarndyce's supreme self-renunciation, may also be viewed as an emulation of Esther's behavior: "I had my own [happiness] too much in view" (912), he tells her in giving her up to the man she has already chosen. The temptation to patriarchal ownership (or a kind of incest) which Jarndyce overcomes testifies to the success of Esther's influence on this already rather androgynous and compassionate male.

Further, the Bleak House which John Jarndyce provides as her dowry to Woodcourt is decorated in replication of *Esther's* taste "laid out according to the manner of [her] beds and flowers at home" (750), following her "plan": "I saw in the papering of the walls, in the colours of the furniture, in the arrangement of all the pretty objects, my little tastes and fancies, my little methods and inventions which they used to laugh at while they praised them, my odd ways everywhere" (751, italics in the original). The italics emphasize the triumph of Esther's "delightfully irregular" logic, her organization, over the male principle.

A major feature of Esther's closure as a feminine narrative is that it is open-ended at the same time it would seem to embody the authority of the terminal position in the novel. The lack of closure has been identified as a primary feature of *écriture féminine*:

A feminine textual body is recognized by the fact that it is always endless, without ending: there's no closure, it

doesn't stop, and it's this that often makes the feminine text difficult to read. For we've learned to read books that basically pose the word "end." But this one doesn't finish, a feminine text goes on and on and at a certain moment the volume comes to an end but the writing continues and for the reader this means being thrust into the void. (Cixous, "Castration" 53)

Esther's final sentence thrusts the reader into the void to an even greater extent than has been previously noted. Many critics have finished the sentence for her, assuming the implicit statement which follows the dash would be her usual self-deprecation ("supposing I had any looks"). Yet by terminating her story with the uncompleted sentence, Dickens leaves open the question of Esther's ability to overcome what critics since Alex Zwerdling have viewed as the emotional abuse of her childhood.

Esther's final uncompleted sentence might be viewed as a resurfacing of her trauma, evidence of her lack of growth despite the apparent happiness she should have achieved; Sawicki interprets it as a narrative which deconstructs the happy ending, providing evidence of "Esther's discontent and the possibility that the marriage is not quite as perfect as plot and thematic constraints would require" (220). However, the pastoral surroundings of the new Bleak House—in a novel which uses symbolic landscapes such as Tom-All-Along's and Chesney Wold so extensively—and the comfortable bantering of husband and wife do not seem to confirm this pessimistic view. There is, moreover, a new, healthier kind of egocentricity in Esther's final chapter: "The people even praise Me as the doctor's wife. The people even like Me as I go about, and make so much of me that I am quite abashed" (769). It is true that she speaks of herself as the doctor's wife, living and acting for him, yet for the first time in the novel she transcends a duty based on repression of her own desires; the emphasis conferred by the capitalized "Me" indicates a new sense of self, still defined in conjunction with her husband (this is, after all, a Victorian novel) but stronger than previous possibilities. The unfinished sentence suggests the possibility of change for Esther—that perhaps she arrests herself mid-sentence because she suddenly realizes her self-deprecation is no longer necessary. A finished sentence would close the novel and resolve the pattern earlier established, but Esther's final gesture as narrator, punctuating the ending of her story with a dash, *suspends* hierarchy—at once having the option of the last word and magnanimously refusing to speak and thus dominate, ending with the feminine but acknowledging the possibility of the Other.

The importance of the suspended sentence rests on the significance we attribute to endings in general, as critics from Aristotle to Frank Kermode and Peter Brooks have noted. Furthermore, Rachel Blau DuPlessis's comment on the *subversive* potential of endings, their ability to unravel what has seemed to be knotted up, is relevant to this particular strategy of *Bleak House*:

One of the great moments of ideological negotiation in any work occurs in the choice of a resolution for the various services it provides. . . . Any artistic resolution (especially of a linear form that must unroll in time) can, with greater

or lesser success, attempt an ideological solution to the fundamental contradictions that animate the work. Any resolution can have traces of the conflicting materials that have been processed within it. It is where subtexts and repressed discourses can throw up one last flare of meaning; it is where the author may sidestep and displace attention from the materials that a work has made available.

(*Writing Beyond 3*)

DuPlessis's analysis facilitates a more significant explanation—other than mere comic relief—for the reemergence of Guppy in Chapter 64.

While there is no question of Esther's accepting his second grotesque proposal, Guppy represents a last "trace" or "flare" of the values vanquished with the Chancery case and the society presented by the anonymous narrator. Esther's marriage to Allan Woodcourt and the preeminence of "feminine" values in the new Bleak House override any possibility of her containment by this last remnant of the patriarchal legal system, this feeble echo of the misogynist Tulkynghorn. The ending dramatizes a new order, embodying the values Carol Gilligan describes as characteristic of a female morality: "seeing the world comprised of relationships rather than of people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules . . ." (29). A social model to supplant the defunct Chancery, the Yorkshire Bleak House is neither a matriarchy nor a patriarchy, but a realm for the practice of virtues modelled by Esther and her androgynous men, John Jarndyce and Allan Woodcourt, who minister, male and female alike, to human needs. The instability of the novel's ending, in the very site where stasis is the norm, dramatizes the function of a destabilized narrative to negotiate ideology. The suspended hierarchy of the arrested sentence supplies, on the narrative level, a solution to binary oppositions.

* * *

As a text espousing an essentialist feminism, *Bleak House* advocates "feminine" virtues of charity, emotion, family, and home. If these values were imposed exclusively on the female characters, *Bleak House* would necessarily be interpreted as a Victorian novel inscribing the social norm of separate spheres. However, these values are advocated as a solution to social problems, represented particularly by Chancery; in both the social and domestic spheres, the androgynous males survive and prosper while the patriarchal males are eradicated. The essentialist feminism of *Bleak House* should not be confused with biologism: the "feminine" values Esther represents may be enacted by enlightened males (Jarndyce, Woodcourt) and are not guaranteed in biological females (Mrs. Pardiggle, Mrs. Jellyby). The usual, facile, dismissal of "essentialism" assumes monolithic, eternal, and biological generalizations about women, oversimplifying the problem of how feminism can achieve change without reinscribing patriarchy through empowering women within an unchanged value system.

Emphasizing a new social order, the essentialist solution of *Bleak House* demonstrates both the challenges and risks of the essentialist position implicit in the theories of Hélène

Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and others of the "French" school: it is a Janus-faced ideology which can be used for and against women's interests. More positively, this position recognizes that feminism must work through the best of those qualities traditionally termed feminine; if women adopt male qualities at the expense of the feminine, patriarchy will merely be reinstated through female-agents such as Mrs. Jellyby. The *inherent* ideological implications of narrative, the "political unconscious" extrinsic to a writer's intention or conscious belief, are also at issue here. While a writer can use a feminine narrative and not be a deliberate feminist, the *impact* of writing the feminine may transcend conscious ideology. Dramatizing the challenges of reading a gendered discourse and the risks of French feminism, *Bleak House* can be read in support of traditional limiting roles for women—a "Victorian" reading—at the same time the text writes the female body and desires. A text which examines a feminist problem and inscribes the feminine, *Bleak House* valorizes the feminine and demonstrates a strategy to destabilize male hierarchy.

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Multiculturalism and the Question of Audience: *Adam Bede* as a Test Case

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Participants on both sides of the debate about multiculturalism advance their arguments as teachers who care about their students.¹ Even those who are most committed to the value of canonical texts would probably concede that the canon was made for students, not students for the canon. And those of us who argue for the value of including canonical Victorian texts in the curriculum can no longer justify that choice only by appealing to their *prima facie* canonical status. Yet a more careful consideration of the audiences in the classrooms of the 1990s may provide a justification of our textual choices on the basis of their ability to affect students' lives, not only as they read them in the classroom but after they leave.

The analogy between the literary and biblical canon is instructive here. The Jewish and Christian scriptures have survived as significant documents because for centuries they have continued to make a difference in the lives of individuals and communities. Their potency is not just attributable to their status as divine revelation, since an appeal to revelation as the justification for privileging them ultimately does not work unless that revelation is somehow authenticated in the believer's experience. Admittedly, the claim of divine revelation provides an important motivation for a believer or faith community to attend to the sacred scriptures, but that claim is given its force through individual commitment and community warrant.

For a variety of reasons too obvious to rehearse, neither individual commitment nor community warrant exists as a context for reading canonical literature. Given the myriad of other legitimate (and spurious) claims for students' attention, the work itself—whether canonical or not—must have the

power to authenticate the claim that reading it matters. The work, rather than a student's commitment to reading or the compulsion of a cultural and social mandate, is the primary bridge to students' attention.

This situation makes the teacher's choice of texts a crucial part of teaching, an additional responsibility that comes with the freedom to choose works outside the canon. If the putative literary merit of canonical texts is no longer available as the first criterion of choice, on the basis of what criteria do we justify our choices? Representativeness of a particular historical era? Readability with respect to students' preparation? Multiplicity of voices with respect to class, gender, ethnicity? The teacher's preparation and interests? The work's relevance to students' current experience? The list of criteria is expandable, the definition of each criterion contestable to the point of exhaustion, as we know from discussions in department meetings and with colleagues. It becomes apparent that we are responsible not only to students but also to communities of interest outside the classroom, including ourselves.

The last criterion listed above—the work's relevance to students' lives—would seem to be one of the most important, given the contemporary situation. After all, if the texts we choose to read and teach must be compelling enough to draw students into their world, wouldn't it be best to have a head start with a text that need not be "translated" with explanatory notes and lectures? Not so. In fact, the increasing diversity of students in any one classroom precludes the possibility of finding a fit for everyone's experience. It turns out that using the criterion of relevance to students' lives is presumptuous, because it is only our experience which can be the basis for attributing relevance, and patronizing, because it assumes stu-

dents will not be interested or moved by a work which we have preemptively decided is remote from their experience or understanding.

In this respect, the analogy with the biblical canon is again illustrative. An African studying in the United States told me that the people in his village church found it much easier to understand the world of the Hebrew patriarchs than did the urbanized American Christians he knew. Similarly, the diverse students in a contemporary classroom may find more meaning and significance in canonical works than their white middle-class American colleagues.

My experience teaching *Adam Bede* in three different institutions has led me to this conclusion: In these institutions a large percentage of the students were first-generation college students, or children of immigrants, or older than traditional-aged college students, or from urban and rural rather than suburban communities. They represented a multicultural perspective that included but was not limited to the American "minority" perspective. If this is true of the church-related liberal arts colleges of my experience, how much more applicable must it be to large public urban institutions.

For example, in the two institutions connected to conservative denominations in the Methodist tradition, many students found that Dinah's sermons were not unfamiliar discourse but read remarkably like the sermons they had heard at the previous Sunday's evening service. They did not find Dinah's religious language stilted and unnatural in comparison to the rest of her ordinary speech, as more "sophisticated" readers have (Doyle 36), since their own religious language undoubtedly sounds similarly schizophrenic or stilted to "outsiders." The experience of these students echoed the way African villagers found affinities in the narratives of the Hebrew scriptures. It illustrates my contention that some aspects of *Adam Bede* may be more easily understood by students from diverse cultural backgrounds than by students from the dominant secular middle-class culture of North America.

Who is more likely to understand Adam's implicit theology of work—the middle-class American student or the child of recently-arrived immigrants from Latin America or Southeast Asia? Who is more likely to assume Dinah's quandary about marrying Adam is a fictional device for prolonging suspense rather than an earnest decision about vocation and calling—the nineteen-year-old middle-class American woman who assumes she can readily have both a career and family or the immigrant from Africa or India who has resisted her family's pressures to marry so she can complete her education? Who is more likely to empathize with the depth of Hetty's shame at carrying a child out of wedlock—the "sexually active" students of the contemporary generation or the working-class woman over forty who has returned to her education after years of child-raising amid hardship? (Ironically, because of Eliot's narrative reticence about Hetty's pregnancy, many students do not realize Hetty is pregnant until she gives birth. On the contrary, despite the lack of explicit language about Hetty's and Arthur's activities in the woods, they have no difficulty understanding she has had sexual relations with Arthur, which may have been less immediately clear to every Victorian "young person" reading the novel.)

The symbolic eucharist Adam shares with Bartle Massey

in the upper room before he stands beside Hetty in the docket is a crucial event in Adam's growth in human sympathy as a result of suffering. Which student is more likely to have experienced the kind of religious emotion that would make this symbol come alive—the contemporary American student who has come of age watching Madonna on MTV or the Latino or Filipino student who has been nurtured in a community whose everyday life and culture is permeated with religious symbols and observances? Certainly my students in a Catholic women's college appreciated the significance of this scene in a way that the Protestant students in the other institutions did not.

Many sophisticated readers of *Adam Bede* have seen in the opposition between Loamshire and Stoniton the country/city polarity of the pastoral genre. Teachers in the past may have been able to connect this polarity usefully to other versions of pastoral; today's teachers are more likely to find a useful connection through pointing out the analogy to the deprivations and despair of their own inner cities versus the "American dream" of the outlying suburbs.

All of this is not to suggest that reading *Adam Bede* will be easy for contemporary students. In his analysis of the complexities of reading any text in *The Art of Telling*, Frank Kermode chooses *Adam Bede* as illustrative because it is ostensibly simple, a book "everybody, whatever that may mean, has read, and which I dare say nobody regards as a major challenge to his ingenuity" (114). Yet even with such a privileged and perceptive audience, Kermode demonstrates by analyzing the first paragraph of *Adam Bede* that the act of reading is fraught with complexity. If this is true for readers who share "the prerequisite of cultural conformity between the [narrator] and the [reader]," how much more complex must the transaction be when the readers—our students—are distanced by time, space and culture?

For reading to be possible, says Kermode, "readers need an ability to sense in the manifest that which is latent" (123). As the years pass, much of what was manifest to George Eliot's contemporaries or even to the "everybody" who has read the book is now only partially accessible through explanatory notes (which themselves insert another complexity into the transaction). Even with explanatory notes, the list of what is manifest to contemporary students—whether from the dominant culture or from minority or immigrant cultures—is likely to be very long indeed.

As our own experience teaches us, the more we know, the more complex the act of reading becomes. We confirm that when we tell our students that learning to read is a lifelong process. Ironically, it may be students who do not come from the dominant culture who understand this most readily. Their having made it to a college classroom suggests they have already learned to "read" the culture which their white middle-class colleagues inhabit as instinctively and thoughtlessly as fish inhabit water; they may thus accept more readily the notion that the complexity of reading is a subtext of *Adam Bede*, audible in the various voices adopted by the narrator, in the fictive readers those various voices address, and in the narrator's treatment of one of the book's major characters, Hetty Sorrel.

Granting the perceived relevance of a text as a poor criterion for choice does not preclude appealing to those

¹See Dominguez for a caution against use of the term "multiculturalism." Other articles in this special issue titled "Writing Cultural Criticism" provide useful discussion of the debate.

aspects of the text which may draw students across the threshold of their interest into the text's many rooms of meaning. Themes and characters are perhaps the most accessible elements in narrative texts (even though both are highly culture-dependent), because they are most easily transferred by analogy to the students' own life situation. If students can identify and comprehend a work's themes and develop empathy with or understanding of its characters, they are more likely to accede to studying and evaluating the work's narrative technique and ultimately to interrogating the more subtle linguistic structures that mark the text's "self-reflexivity" (Chambers 25).

Consider the accessibility of the central theme of George Eliot's works, which Gillian Beer summarizes this way: "commonplace life is heroic, requires no raising to be remarkable . . . and requires a special quality of attention if its significance is to become known" (74). Which of us, whatever our lot in life or our ethnic background, does not warm to the suggestion that our lives are worthy of attention and respect? The value of the "common man" is glibly acceded to by current and aspiring citizens of a liberal democratic society. But Eliot's works ask the reader to move beyond lip service to an active sympathy with the commonplaces and suffering of others' lives, the bestowing of that "special quality of attention" not just to our own kind but to all of human life.

The characters, plot, and narrative commentary of *Adam Bede* can be easily read as supportive of this theme. However, none of the key terms in Beer's summary—commonplace, heroic, attention, significance—has a transparent or univocal meaning. What one takes to be commonplace or heroic or significant is itself a matter of interpretation; the object of one's attention is not entirely a matter of individual awareness or choice, and both are culturally determined. Complicating matters even more, though *Adam Bede* is a self-conscious development of Eliot's realist aesthetic, its author knows the world idealized and interpreted by the narrator in the novel is already lost.

Perhaps the most difficult point of identification for students is with the fictive readers addressed by Eliot, who range from Clapham Evangelicals to supercilious gentlemen dining at their club to bitter old women, the particularities of which fictive readers' experiences are even more removed from the students' experience than their distance from the major characters. Thus the bond between narrator and reader that results from identifying oneself with the fictive reader is not likely to be established by contemporary students reading George Eliot. This is no small matter in understanding *Adam Bede*, because this bond is a primary mode of access to understanding and evaluating the characters.

Despite this difficulty, many ideas and attitudes are accessible. Students may not be able to comprehend the awe Squire Donnithorne inspires, but they will understand Mrs. Poyser's defiance of his authority. (African-American students may see in her the strong motherly women who have exemplified the heroism of the commonplace in their own history.) And students from all subcultures can respond to the

suffering, because so much of it arises from generational and gender relationships that still adhere in our culture, relationships exacerbated in the movement many of them make between more traditional and contemporary cultures.

The point of access, then, is at the place where such sympathetic understanding exists. Attending to the narrative voice(s) and the character of the narrator can complement this sympathy as a means of probing the work's and the student-reader's values. Testing the narrator's values on their own terms and for their consistency can be a critical exercise in all of the senses the term critical evokes. It provides a means for students to engage with the text in a way that may reveal how their own voices—everyone's voice—is given tone and pitch by a cultural perspective that the speaker assumes to be a universal given. Such a revelation may lead to a critical perspective toward one's own as well as another's values and to an increased sensitivity to the voices of other texts, canonical and non-canonical.

What specifically about the narrator's voice and character is important to foreground in a multicultural classroom? So far I have avoided the use of a pronoun for the narrator not only because the narrator assumes at different times a male and a female voice but also because the historical female author adopted a male pseudonym and convinced most of the early readers that this narrator was indeed "a male, probably young, and almost certainly a clergyman" (Beer 25). As Marian Lewes' correspondence indicates, her choice of a male pseudonym was probably motivated by her concern that the book not be judged in comparison with other women's fiction and by her desire to avoid publicity because of her irregular relationship with George Henry Lewes. Her own ambivalent attitudes toward women's fiction (which included a pejorative view of "lady novelists") and debates on the "Woman Question" all enter into consideration of this choice. Perhaps Gillian Beer puts it best by suggesting that the adoption of the pseudonym is "a striking example of a writer who sought to slough off the contextuality of her own name and enter a neutral space for her writing" (25). She may also have been unconsciously motivated by her realization that it was not so much the gender of the author which was significant for a novel to be taken seriously as that it be addressed to a male audience (Lovell 83, Nestor 207).²

So much for the *identity* of the narrator. What about "his" character? The character in the book who is most like the narrator is the Rev. Irwine; both the narrator and Irwine have remarkably similar views of the novel's people and actions; both are the sort of person to whom Adam would spend time talking in Adam's old age, as the narrator reports he has. But the narrator knows much more than Irwine, of course, for he is 50 years later in time. Some of the things he knows are Feuerbach, the *Westminster Review*, Riehl, and Comte, not to mention the changes that had rapidly altered England, changes with which Irwine's simple Christianity could not cope. Clearly the dominant narrative voice in *Adam Bede* is Eliot's famous sybilline voice, though still testing its strength, the voice of a new class—the nineteenth-century lib-

eral intellectual, a voice which compels the reader to accede to the enterprise of re-making society in that liberal image (Cottom). Occasional lapses from that voice provide students with interesting exceptions useful in the analysis of narrative voice (Hardy 128).

The point is that it is not a neutral or disembodied voice; it is in fact impossible to "slough off contextuality." This connection between narrative voice and historical circumstances is precisely what student readers will be oblivious to. Thus, students must be cautioned against reading the narrator's observations or evaluations of the characters as pronouncements *sub specie aeternitatis*. As Daniel Cottom points out, George Eliot's particular details of "ordinary life," her sympathy with the commonplace, and her insistence on universal human characteristics are themselves not necessarily "a broadening of the scope of aesthetics, as she argued, but rather a normalizing of this scope" (56-57). This can be seen in a contemporary reviewer's congratulation of Eliot for the "great tact and discrimination figure before us in this eventful drama . . . taken from the ranks of the workers of the world, and yet the superior ones" (qtd. in Cottom 56). Eliot's common folk are, says Cottom, "figures designed to represent . . . ordinariness" (57). They are an oxymoron—the ideal commonplace. What more appropriate place to test Eliot's notion of ordinariness than in a multicultural classroom?

The treatment of Hetty Sorrel provides a test case for the narrator's insistence on the existence of a universal humanity and for his sympathy with common human life. Many readers have been dissatisfied with the author's treatment of Hetty, and recent writers have attempted to justify Hetty's role in the novel. Mary Ellen Doyle argues that "Hetty is a valid conception of a type and of an individual; . . . in the context of the whole novel she is and must be functionally unsympathetic, because she is disoriented from her proper values . . . and because Adam must learn genuine love through his deception in her" (36). The execution of this design is not quite successful, says Doyle, because at this stage of her career the author is still learning to control the delicate balance of intention and rhetoric.

Other explanations give more credit to the subtlety of the design and execution, as a sample of critical explanations indicates. *Adam Bede* de-sentimentalizes the "high-minded heroines with inner resources who were the liberal version of fallen women" (Beer 70). Hetty is a product of the "community's materialistic ethic and its value on appearance" (Corbett 296). Because of this deficient communal world, Hetty has no subjective self (Perlis 192-93). Hetty is not "a persona," which permits Eliot in portraying her to "interpret the defects of innocence" (Mitchell 67). Hetty is portrayed as a child, "a case of arrested development, not responsible for her actions, and thus a victim no matter what she may finally do" (Harris 180). Hetty is not "punished" for her sensuality, as several critics have suggested, but for her "compulsive dreaming" (Uglow 109). Something like these last three views may be behind Dickens's praise of Hetty's characterization as "skilful, determined, and uncompromising" (qtd. in Beer 59).

William Meyers sees in Hetty a transformation from someone with a "narrow, shallow, hard interior life" who

stands for "the true atheism to which faith in God or lack of it [is] irrelevant" to someone who is

a religious experience in her own right. The focus of religious attention, having ceased to be God, ceases also, at the climax of the novel, to be the divine potentialities of supremely gifted individuals and becomes, not an abstract phrase like 'suffering as such,' but a frightened, stupid, pretty girl who is going to be hanged for killing her baby. Hetty, not Dinah, becomes for a time the novel's *alter Christus*. (36)

Dorothea Barrett echoes this view, though without Meyers's attempt to relate Hetty's status to Feuerbachian principles, seeing her as "a blameless 18 year-old girl who is crucified for the sins of others, not least of women like Dinah who falsify their own, and by extension their gender's, true motives and desires" (46-47).

Such efforts to find a positive rationale for the treatment of Hetty are certainly preferable to explanations that suggest the author's own physical ugliness led her to dislike a character with such monumental physical beauty. Barrett's explanation of George Eliot's lack of sympathy with Hetty is that she had "much more to lose by openly sympathizing with female sexual delinquency" than her male counterparts, Hawthorne and Hardy, "whose private lives had remained within the pale of conventional respectability . . ." (51). This is similar to Janice Carlisle's suggestion that the author initially

chose Hetty as the character for whom she would demand the reader's closest attention and most wide-ranging sympathy. Yet one can see why George Eliot would wish to retreat from such a perspective. . . . For a woman actually involved in an illicit relationship, such identification would be both a natural and an undesirable outcome. (211)

Presenting this cacophony of critical opinions on Hetty in the classroom will stimulate or mirror students' own differing views and also serve as a reminder of the multiplicity of readings that have attained enough legitimacy to become counters in the marketplace of ideas. Of course, as every teacher knows, *Adam Bede* is hardly unique nor the prime example in this respect. But once engaged with a text, few students are satisfied with granting all readings equal legitimacy, especially those which seem to go against the work's "plain sense." The process of sorting through the standards by which they evaluate disparate readings can also be instructive in sorting out the disparate cultural perspectives in the classroom which have been employed in finding a means of access to the work.

Adam Bede itself provides a standard by which these disparate readings may be evaluated and provides the potential for leading students even more deeply into the complexities of interpretation. That standard is the one which the narrator sets forth as applicable for judging all of humanity, i.e., the standard of active sympathy with humanity. To apply this standard to the narrator's treatment of Hetty Sorrel is not to disallow the possibility that a character with obvious limitations of intellect and imagination, clear defects of character,

²Robyn Warhol's discussion of the narrative strategy in *Adam Bede* as representative of female writers' use of direct address is flawed by her failure to

note that most "actual" women readers could not identify with those passages which appeal to male experience, e.g. being in love with someone like Hetty.

and moral culpability may play a significant, even pivotal role. (Hetty's defects deserve interrogation, however; for example, her supposed lack of maternal feeling either for Totty, who sounds like the proverbial spoiled brat, or for her premature infant, a not uncommon phenomenon among women who have just given birth, something Marian Lewes had not experienced.)

Nevertheless, even from the perspective of the narrator's articulated standard for judging human beings, the narrator falls short for denying to Hetty those very characteristics which elsewhere define what it means to be human. The persistent use of animal metaphors to describe her, the belittling adjectives, the absence of direct speech—all deny her human agency. Hetty is rarely permitted to speak for herself. She is, in fact, created to have nothing to say; like an animal, only her bodily expressions convey her limited inner life.³ Even to the two men who love her she is an object. One needn't kill the messenger for describing a situation that is undoubtedly historically accurate (the tendency for some men to objectify women), but even the narrator objectifies her with no trace of irony. Described as a creature so beautiful that "all intelligent mammals, even women" (127, chap. 7) cannot help being drawn to admire her, Hetty is made Other, not-human.

Sometimes Hetty appears to be included in the category of human, e.g., when she is compared to "wretched men and women [who] leap from a temporary sorrow into a life-long misery"; still, says the narrator, "poor Hetty's vision of consequences" is "at no time more than a narrow fantastic calculation of her own probable pleasures and pains" (385, chap. 31). But a paragraph or two later comes this comparison—between "the actions of a little trivial soul like Hetty's struggling amidst the serious, sad destinies of a human being" and

the motions of a little vessel without ballast tossed about on a stormy sea. How pretty it looked with its particoloured sail in the sunlight, moored in a quiet bay! "Let that man bear the loss who loosed it from its moorings." But that will not save the vessel—the pretty thing that might have been a life-long joy. (386, chap. 31; emphasis mine)

Here the narrator equates Hetty with a toy whose own sorrow is less important than the loss of joy her "owner" might have felt all his life.

In the chapters describing Hetty's journey, frequently cited as the most effective and engaging prose in the novel, narrative description predominates, though infrequently the commentary does include Hetty in the "we" that is humankind by finding in Hetty a new susceptibility awakened by suffering. Yet Hetty's suffering, unlike Adam's or even Lisbeth Bede's, does not lead to growth or increased understanding.⁴

Although the chapters describing Hetty's journey sub-

stantiate Beer's contention that Hetty is for her creator "the source of imaginative energy" (as Dinah is "the source of biographic energy," [67]), their powerful effect does not necessarily result in the humanizing of Hetty, as a contemporary reviewer's statement shows:

Is there any one trait that we can help loathing? Her lack of imagination, of conscience, of religion; her intense selfishness, her impassivity, all so forcibly detailed—can we find a single redeeming point in her? Not one; and yet we do not loathe Hetty, but read of this poor forlorn creature with tears in our eyes . . . Her moral barrenness is so hopeless that *she seems to be relieved of human responsibility.*" (qtd. in Mitchell 69; emphasis mine)

The narrative description of Hetty's journey that evokes this response is matched in power by the courtroom testimony of witnesses describing the events surrounding the infant's death. Again, Hetty does not speak for herself—until her confession to Dinah. That confession, which is really only a confession of fear and shame, is presumed by most readers to substantiate the novel's claims for suffering as a necessary prerequisite to experiencing the sympathetic bonds of human community. A skeptical reading might argue that Hetty is not even allowed the dignity of choosing *not* to repent, since it is Dinah who attributes to her a softened heart in her recounting of the event to others. Even in this, the plot seems to deny Hetty's human agency.

How does sorrow and repentance affect most human beings? According to our narrator, "it would be a poor result of all our anguish and our wrestling if we won nothing but our old selves at the end of it. . . . Let us rather be thankful that our sorrow lives in us as an indestructible force, only changing its form, as forces do, and passing from pain into sympathy . . . 531, chap. 50). But since Hetty is not granted a new self at the end of *her* struggling, this passage again effectively excludes her from the "we" of humankind.⁵

The great irony, however, is that if today's reader is compelled to defend and sympathize with Hetty *because* she is mistreated by the plot and the narrator, "the victim of her creator" (Creeger 231), the reader is engaging in the kind of sympathy for Hetty that Eliot hoped to provoke for her characters as well as for the historical human beings outside her novels.

" . . . No story is the same to us after a lapse of time; or rather we who read it are no longer the same interpreters," says the narrator (573, chap. 54). This statement allows for the possibility that Marian Lewes could read Hetty differently in another time and for the possibility that the narrator / character "George Eliot" misread Hetty.

Misreading—misinterpreting—is itself one of the novel's subthemes, shown in numerous instances of dialogue in which

³Here is a sample of the phrases used by the narrator to describe Hetty or her characteristics: "childish soul" (176); "little butterfly soul" (180); "little puss" (197); "narrow bit of an imagination" (199); "vain little nature" (244); "She was like a kitten, and had the same distractingly pretty looks, that meant nothing, for everybody that came near her" (254-55); "the little minx" (273); "perhaps water-nixies, and such lovely things without souls, have these little round holes in their ears by nature, ready to hang jewels in. And Hetty must

be one of them . . ." (295).
⁴Myers's reading of Hetty as a symbol confirms her objectification, not her humanity, which one would assume to be a significant aspect of an incarnational symbol or Christ figure.

⁵Cunningham's discussion of the Methodist background of the novel supports the view that Hetty's confession is inauthentic.

characters debate the validity of another's interpretation (particularly biblical texts), or are misled by mythical or romantic texts to misinterpret events, or read "Nature" as though it were a text and thereby misinterpret their lives. Conversely, Hetty is not interested in what the pictures in the Bible mean; the only "picture" she is interested in interpreting is herself as reflected in the blotched mirror.

Reading and misreading, expansion of human sympathies, openness to the lives and thoughts of people beyond our own necessarily limited experience: these are issues at the heart of the debate about the canon and multiculturalism. A canonical work like *Adam Bede* can be enlisted in the cause of multiculturalism and of widened understanding of one's own and others' cultural perspectives for all the students in our diverse classrooms. For whether one considers the narrator's attitudes sympathetically or critically, our students may come away from reading *Adam Bede* with a sense of the "standpoint dependency" of its narrator. In calling into question the voice(s) of the narrator, students may become more alert to the character of the voice(s) which claim their allegiance in the world outside the novel. They may recognize their own perspective as time-bound and embedded in the present historical condition and hence susceptible to misreading. If these understandings occur, then *Adam Bede* becomes a book that resonates with contemporary questions about representation, about narrative discourse, and about the construction of knowledge and reality.

Appropriating an era's concern into interpretation of texts is, after all, how the biblical canon has continually been revitalized, finding in those ancient texts something that speaks with a contemporary voice. If we are willing to struggle with and understand the narrator's inability to grant Hetty autonomy and personhood, we may be engaging in an act of sympathy worthy not only of George Eliot but of all those writers, inside and outside the canon, whose works provide a bridge between our experience and theirs.

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Christina Rossetti's "Helpmeet"

Diane D'Amico

Recent feminist criticism has led scholars to examine Christina Rossetti's position on what was known in the nineteenth century as "The Woman Question" (see, for example, Leder and Abbott). However, "A Helpmeet for Him," a poem in which Rossetti directly addresses the issue of woman's place in society, has thus far received little attention. Such scholarly neglect is perhaps due to the poem's theme of female subservience, a theme which appears to contradict much of Rossetti's earlier work, such as her two major narrative poems "Goblin Market" and "Prince's Progress." Upon

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³Here is a sample of the phrases used by the narrator to describe Hetty or her characteristics: "childish soul" (176); "little butterfly soul" (180); "little puss" (197); "narrow bit of an imagination" (199); "vain little nature" (244); "She was like a kitten, and had the same distractingly pretty looks, that meant nothing, for everybody that came near her" (254-55); "the little minx" (273); "perhaps water-nixies, and such lovely things without souls, have these little round holes in their ears by nature, ready to hang jewels in. And Hetty must

seemingly more feminist work.

Rossetti first published "A Helpmeet for Him" in January 1888, in the midst of the Victorian debate over female suffrage. During the 1880s, there was hardly a time when a female suffrage bill was not being considered in some manner.¹ Numerous articles on the subject appeared in the periodicals and newspapers, and Rossetti herself was personally acquainted with some of the suffragists such as Barbara Bodichon and Augusta Webster. Although Rossetti had earlier shown signs of sympathy for woman's rights issues, when the woman's movement turned to suffrage, she distanced herself from strong-minded women.² Her private response to female suffrage can be found in the often-quoted letters to Augusta Webster.³ "A Helpmeet for Him" is her public response. Since the poem is short, I shall quote it in full for the convenience of the reader:

Woman was made for man's delight;
Charm, O woman, be not afraid
His shadow by day, his moon by night,
Woman was made.

Her strength with weakness is overlaid;
Meek compliances veil her might;
Him she stays, by whom she is stayed.

World-wide champion of truth and right
Hope in gloom and in danger aid,
Tender and faithful, ruddy and white,
Woman was made.⁴

In tones both soothing and inspiring, "A Helpmeet for Him" urges the women of the 1880s to accept a supporting role in the world's affairs, for such is God's ordinance regarding the daughters of Eve.

The title is the first sign of Rossetti's anti-suffrage stance and her religious justification for it. "A Helpmeet for Him" alludes directly to God's reason for creating Eve as given in Genesis 2:18: "And the Lord said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." Victorians opposed to extending the woman's sphere tended to use the word *helpmeet* and or cited Genesis 2:18 when describing what they saw as woman's proper role (see, for example, Burgon). In March of 1888, the same year Rossetti's poem was published, suffragist Millicent Garrett Fawcett even drew attention to this fact: "Those who thought they were making a stand against the present movement for a wider sphere of activity for women often told them that the special duty for women was to be true helpmeets and companions of

men" ("Social Progress" 4). Clearly, by using such a title in the midst of Victorian debates on suffrage, Rossetti is indicating her conservative stance.

The fact the poem is a specifically anti-suffrage message based on religious grounds is further indicated by the place of publication. "A Helpmeet for Him" first appeared in *New and Old: for Seed Time and Harvest Time*, an Anglican periodical which had by 1888 firmly established an anti-suffrage position. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, issues of *New and Old* often included poems and articles which emphasized woman's role to follow not lead.⁵ The articles do not denounce all changes in woman's sphere, but any advances into the political arena are definitely opposed. "Women's Rights," an article by the Rev. Charles Gutch, founder and editor of *New and Old*, best typifies the journal's position. Gutch argues that although demands made by women for improved education and more job opportunities have been "reasonable," those demands have now been "granted," and further demands made by women for equal political rights are "unreasonable" (153).⁶ Gutch maintains that women should not be allowed to "rule the nation," for not only would the nation suffer, but women themselves would suffer: "If women presumptuously rush in and endeavour to emulate men, the result will only be a miserable failure and, instead of raising themselves in the social scale, they will have to take a lower place, and will forfeit all right to that esteem and honour, with which true man always now regards true woman" (154). Referring to suffragists as "mad enthusiasts," he concludes that enough rights have been granted: "The motto for women, or at any rate, for Englishwomen, with regard to rights and privileges, should be, 'Rest and be thankful'" (154). Charles Gutch was known and respected by Rossetti, and quite possibly he had a significant role in her decision to support the anti-suffrage position.⁷ Obviously, she found his views more persuasive than those of the suffragists.

Possibly Rossetti was asked by Gutch to consider contributing to *New and Old*. It is more likely, however, that she sought publication on her own, for in the February 1879 number, Gutch includes a note from Rossetti that indicates her submission of unsolicited pieces.⁸ In any case, her desire that the poem have an audience is indicated by her inclusion of it in two editions of her own work: *Poems* (1888), published by her American publishers, Roberts Brothers; and *Poems, New and Enlarged Edition* (1890), published by Macmillan. Rossetti did not always include separately published poems in her collected volumes. Clearly, she was willing to express her views on woman's role within the larger context of her collected works and to her own established readers. Moreover, by the summer of 1889, a year and a half after publishing

"Helpmeet," she added her name to the list of women supporting "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage," a lengthy protest drafted by Mrs. Humphry Ward and published in the periodical *Nineteenth Century*.⁹

This protest provides valuable insight into the reasoning that lies behind Rossetti's poem. First describing all the improvements in woman's position thus far as "cordially welcome," this appeal then calls for the "emancipation process" to cease, arguing that to allow women into the political arena would tend "to blunt the special moral qualities of women, and so lessen the national reserves of moral force" (782, 783). Following a line of thought similar to that of Gutch, the writers conclude that to pursue "mere outward equality with men" is "demoralising" for women, leading to a "total misconception of woman's true dignity and special mission" (785). The underlying assumption is that women can serve as moral guides only if they stay out of national politics. Such an assumption also lies behind Rossetti's poem. Only by exhibiting "weakness" and "meek compliance," can woman offer "Hope in gloom and in danger aid."

For twentieth-century readers, such an argument evokes images of the submissive angel in the house who remains at home to create a peaceful haven for her world-weary husband. However, although Rossetti's title was certainly an anti-suffrage sign, the Anglican readers of *New and Old*, and perhaps even her more general audience, would not necessarily have read "helpmeet" as a synonym for devoted wife. By the 1870s Anglican writers had already offered rather liberal interpretations of what it meant for Eve to be Adam's helpmeet. For example, Charlotte Yonge, best known for her Anglo-Catholic novels (novels familiar to Rossetti), defines "helpmeet" in a very general way. In her essay "Womankind," she writes: "All I want to do is to define what I believe to be the safe and true aspect in which woman ought to regard herself—namely, as the help-meet of man; not necessarily of any individual man, but of the whole Body whom Christ our Lord has left to be waited on as Himself. He is her Lord. He will find her work to do for Him" (5-6). The same interpretation appears in the work of the Rev. Littledale, an Anglican theologian who was a personal friend of Rossetti's. In his essay on women and religious education, he refers to women as "helpmates" but argues that marriage is secondary: Women will have duties to perform, but first those duties must be towards "God and society" and only "possibly [will a woman] have to discharge them for a husband" (24).

Both these readings of Genesis indicate that the "Him" in Rossetti's poem should not be read as an individual man, but rather as "God and society." Rossetti's "world-wide champion for truth and right" need not be a wife, dependent upon her husband. She could be a single woman subordinat-

ing self to the needs of others or even an Anglican nun, as her sister Maria had been. In "A Helpmeet for Him," Rossetti is not celebrating human love and marriage, but rather the status woman can achieve through love of Christ. In her own devotional writings, she emphasizes that it is love of Christ, not man, that allows woman to overcome feminine frailty: "As love of his Lord enabled St. Peter to tread the sea, so love of the same Lord set weak woman immovable on the waves of this troublesome world, triumphantly erect, despite her own frailty, made not 'like unto a wheel,' amid all the changes and chances of this mortal life" (*The Face of the Deep* 310). This passage echoes lines 7-8 of "A Helpmeet for Him": "Him she stays, by whom she is stayed. / World-wide champion of truth and right."

During the years preceding the publication of "A Helpmeet for Him" and immediately after it, Rossetti devoted considerable time to writing devotional commentaries. Although now rarely studied, these prose works, especially *Seek and Find: A Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite* (1879) and *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1892) offer valuable insight into Rossetti's thoughts on woman's relationship to both man and God.

In *The Face of the Deep*, it becomes clear that Rossetti's assessment of woman's power is directly related not only to her reading of Eve as helpmeet but to her reading of Eve's fall. Eve was tempted first: "Eve by disbelief and disobedience brought sin to birth" (310). Thus women inherited from the first mother a special burden: "We daughters of Eve may beyond her sons be kept humble by that common voice which makes temptation feminine. Woman is a mighty power for good or for evil. She constrains though she cannot compel. Potential for evil, it becomes her to beware and forbear; potential for good, to spend herself and be spent for her brethren" (*Face of the Deep* 357-58). In Rossetti's mind, because of "Eve's lapse," the woman's way to salvation differed from that of man. Rossetti's helpmeet need not be a wife and mother, but she must be humble and self-sacrificing, accepting her secondary status on earth. If woman was too assertive and tried to compel action, for example if she entered national politics, her weak feminine nature could lead to destruction, literally to the loss of her soul: "perverse rebellious woman because feminine not masculine [was] liable" to "foulness, degradation, loathsomeness" (*Face of the Deep* 400). Recognizing that Rossetti held such an interpretation of Eve's fall helps clarify why she could not support suffrage.

Although Rossetti's faith led her to consider strong-minded suffragists too much like rebellious Eve, she was troubled by woman's lesser status and tried to find in that same faith hope of ultimate equality. In *Seek and Find*, when

¹For a full discussion of the various resolutions and bills regarding women's suffrage put before Parliament during the 1880s, see Rover, especially Appendices I and II. See also Blackburn.

²In the 1860s Rossetti had contributed poems to *The English Woman's Journal* and *Victoria Magazine*, both feminist periodicals founded primarily to promote a woman's right to work.

³These letters are first quoted in Bell 124-25. Typically, subsequent scholars cite these letters when discussing Rossetti's stance on suffrage.

⁴(*Complete Poems* 2: 169). The poem as it appears in *New and Old* is slightly different: in the *New Old* text, line 7 reads "Firm she stands tho' sometime dismayed."

⁵See, for example, "Women's Rights—What Are We Coming to?," "Women out of Place," "The Rights of Women—A Modern Conversation," and "The Crooked Rib—How to Use It."

⁶I would like to thank Jan Marsh for indicating to me that this article was to be found in *New and Old*. Although the article is not signed, I am assuming that Gutch is the author. Typically, articles in *New and Old* give the author's full name or initials. Unsigned articles appear to be by the editor himself.

⁷See Thomas for a discussion of Gutch's influence on Rossetti.

⁸The note reads as follows: "I do not know whether an empty season ever befalls 'Old and New,' but in such a case perhaps you might think my enclosure worth looking at" (February 1879: 34). The "enclosure" was "a Harmony on First Corinthians XIII."

⁹"An Appeal Against Female Suffrage," drafted by Mrs. Humphry Ward and signed by 104 women, was published in *Nineteenth Century* June 1889. At the end of the protest appears the following invitation and request from the editor: "In furtherance of the foregoing Appeal—which has hitherto been only shown privately to a few persons—the accompanying proposed protest is laid before the readers of *Nineteenth Century*, with the request that such ladies among them as agree with it will be kind enough to sign the opposite page and return it, when detached, to the Editor of this Review" The accompanying proposed protest reads as follows: "The undersigned protest, strongly against the proposed Extension of the Parliamentary Franchise to Women, which they

believe would be a measure distasteful to the great majority of women of the country—unnecessary—and mischievous both to themselves and to the State" (788). In the August issue of the magazine, this statement appears again, under the title "A Woman's Protest Against Female Suffrage" and is followed by the names and addresses of approximately 2000 women. One finds "Christina G. Rossetti, 30 Torrington Square" among these names and addresses. I am assuming that since Rossetti responded to the editor's request, she must have read and approved of the full statement of the protest as it first appeared in the June issue.

commenting on the creation, although Rossetti follows the traditional pattern of seeing the masculine sun as "greater" than the feminine moon, she finds in this lesser light signs of value. First, she argues that the "feminine lot copies very closely the voluntarily assumed position of our Lord and Pattern" (30), and supports her claim by finding parallels between the biblical decrees regarding women and Christ's voluntary burdens of obedience, service and self-sacrifice. She even argues that Christ was a type of "helpmeet": "Her office is to be man's helpmeet: and concerning Christ God saith, 'I have laid help upon One that is mighty'" (31). After this comparison, Rossetti considers a then current scientific theory that the moon did not simply reflect the sun's light but that it had its own inherent luminosity" (31). Finally, she concludes this consideration of moon symbolism with an allusion to Galatians 3: 28: "But if our proud waves will after all not be stayed, or at any rate not be allayed (for stayed they must be) by the limit of God's ordinance concerning our sex, one final consolation yet remains to careful and troubled hearts: in Christ there is neither male nor female, for we are all one (Gal. iii.28)" (32). In Rossetti's mind, women were to find equality through Christ, and being a helpmeet, although a required mortal condition, was not the final goal.

Rossetti's efforts to offer consolation to the troubled hearts of women can also be found in *The Face of the Deep*, especially in her discussion of Revelation 12:1 "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." Rossetti writes, "Whatever else may here be hidden, there stands revealed the 'great wonder,' weakness made strong and shame swallowed up in celestial glory. For thus the figure is set before our eyes" (309-10). For Rossetti, the image of the moon not only signified woman's lesser status on earth but it also prefigured a time in heaven when she would take on "sun clothing":

And as instinctively we personify the sun and moon as he and she, I trust there is no harm in my considering that her sun-clothing indicates how in that heaven where St. John in vision beheld her, she will be made equal with men and angels; arrayed in all human virtues, and decked with all communicable Divine graces: whilst the moon under her feet portends that her sometime infirmity of purpose and changeableness of mood have, by preventing, assisting final grace, become immutable; she had done all and stands; from the lowest place she has gone up higher" (310)

For Rossetti, if an individual woman resisted temptation in this world, the feminine moon, which represented woman's secondary status in mortal existence, would in any vision of the next world become a symbol of triumph. The image of the

moon in "A Helpmeet" ("his moon by night") is not only an image of subordination, but an image of future glory.

Considering Rossetti's poem within a devotional context also clarifies the use of amatory and sensuous language in the first line of the poem ("Woman was made for man's delight") and the echoing last lines ("Tender and faithful, ruddy and white, / Woman was made"). To those nineteenth-century readers familiar with scripture, "delight," the most significant word in line one, would carry with it numerous biblical echoes. Repeatedly in the Bible the word appears associated with spiritual experience. For example, in Proverbs, Wisdom refers to itself as "daily his [God's] delight" (8: 30); in Job 22: 26, one reads of finding "delight in the Almighty"; and the Psalmist describes the godly man as one who finds "his delight in the law of the Lord" (1: 2). The physical description of the helpmeet as "Tender and faithful, ruddy and white" alludes directly to the Song of Solomon 5: 10, in which the bride says of her lover: "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand." As one might expect, Rossetti accepted the Christian interpretation of the Song of Solomon in which the bridegroom is read as Christ and the female speaker as the Church. In this particular biblical text, Rossetti would have seen "white and ruddy" as referring to Christ. Thus her use of the phrase "ruddy and white" to describe woman as helpmeet suggests that in such a role woman takes on the spiritual beauty of Christ.¹⁰

Although Rossetti's open support for the anti-suffrage position suggests that she became more immersed in her faith and its demands as she grew older, the message of "A Helpmeet for Him" is not far removed from her earlier poems. For example, in "Goblin Market," rebellious Laura is in danger of destruction when she ventures into the male world of goblins, and she must be saved by the self-sacrificing helpmeet, Lizzie. In "The Prince's Progress," the bride's role is to wait patiently. In fact, the image of the waiting woman appears repeatedly in Rossetti's poetry, both secular and devotional.¹¹ For Rossetti, women were burdened by Eve's sin and only in heaven, when their changeable feminine moon would become "immutable," would women be "made equal with men and angels" (*Face of the Deep* 310). The "helpmeet" would then become the "woman clothed with the sun." In a fallen world, full of lazy princes and goblins, her answer for the rebellious "troubled hearts" of women was to serve as Christ's helpmeet, and wait.

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in "The Convent Threshold" who looks forward to meeting her lover in heaven, the illegitimate daughter in "The Iniquity of Fathers upon Children" who waits to be made "equal" in heaven, and the elder sister in the Lowest Room, who waits for "the Archangelic trumpet burst." In much of Rossetti's devotional poetry, one hears the voice of the soul waiting and longing for God. See, for example, "Long Barren," "If Only," "Weary in Well-Doing," and "Till Tomorrow."

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"I Read It in Your Eye": Spiritual Vision in *Jane Eyre*

Amanda B. Witt

Since Jacques Lacan's unfortunate reference to women as objects rather than viewers in his psychoanalytic definition of "the gaze" (75), it has become fashionable to categorize the power of the gaze in many texts, including Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, as gender-based. Critics such as Peter J. Bellis view the gaze in *Jane Eyre* as male power; Bellis states:

The struggle between Jane and Rochester is embodied in a conflict between two different modes of vision: a penetrating male gaze that fixes and defines the woman as its object, and a marginal female perception that would conceal or withhold itself from the male. (639)

Annette Federico, however, argues that it is the female gaze that defines other females—specifically, that the fashion-conscious female gaze disturbs Jane and causes her to question her femininity, whereas the male gaze benignly "confers approval and acceptance" (30). Other critics offer different interpretations, but almost without exception the power of the gaze is assumed to be gender-based or sexual in nature, an indication of sexual conquest or sexual desire.

Although such views provide interesting insights into the novel, they also are reductive, constricting the richness of *Jane Eyre* as well as the richness of the gaze to gender-based dichotomies. Much can be gained from a more inclusive reading, one which interprets the gaze as an indication of individual confidence and spiritual insight, in which gender is irrelevant. This interpretation solves several difficulties inherent to gender-based readings, and does justice to Brontë's *bildungsroman* by explaining Jane's growth as an internal triumph over her own conceptual problems, rather than as an external triumph over male or female oppression—a focus far more fitting for an introspective novel about an introspective

_____ . *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse*. London: The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1892.

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woman.

Even as a child, Jane "Eyre" is highly aware of sight and eyes; from the first chapter of the novel she describes the ocular attributes of everyone whom she encounters. She does this because, for her, everything is best understood as it relates to vision; Jane tends either to convert things to visual terms or actually to translate them into visual images. This extreme visual orientation is demonstrated by her imagination, which allows her as narrator vividly to portray other characters; by her paintings, which not only translate mental scenes into physical objects but also allow her to gaze at those objects; and by her conversations, which are incessantly couched in terms of sight and blindness.

The explanation for this fascination with sight is found in yet another of Jane's passions: windows. Again from the very first chapter of the novel, Jane notices windows much as she notices eyes, and gravitates to these windows. Each of Jane's obsessions—eyes and windows—illuminates the import of the other fascination: for Jane, the eyes truly are "the windows of the soul." The eyes—like windows—are a passage to the world beyond, a world that is untouchable but understandable. Brontë points out through Rochester that Jane uses the gaze to read the soul, when he says to Jane, "You open your eyes like an eager bird, and make every now and then a restless movement, as if answers in speech did not flow fast enough for you, and you wanted to read the tablet of one's heart" (337). For Jane, the gaze supplies a deeper insight into others than can mere words.

However, while yet a small child, Jane discovers that many people dislike a probing gaze. Jane's most traumatic childhood memory, her imprisonment in the red room, begins with John Reed striking her "for the look [she] had in [her] eyes two minutes since" (42). Bewildered, Jane "[turns] a fas-

¹⁰In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti consistently employs the sensuous imagery of the Song of Solomon to speak of the relationship between both the individual soul and Christ and between the Church and Christ. Such a pattern of imagery also appears in her poetry. See, for example, "After Communion," "Whitsun Tuesday," "I Know Best," and "Long Barren."

¹¹For examples of the figure of the waiting woman in Rossetti's secular poetry see Margaret in "Maiden-Song," who waits patiently for her sisters, the novice

inated eye towards the dimly gleaming mirror" (48), striving to see the threat that others apparently see in her "glittering eyes" (46). Jane supposes that her gaze is somehow wicked or threatening—an idea reinforced by an overheard conversation in which Abbot tells Bessie, "Missis was, she dared say, glad enough to get rid of such a tiresome ill-conditioned child, who always looked as if she were watching everybody, and scheming plots underhand" (58).

Thus Jane discovers that many people see her gaze as a mode of subversion rather than as a mode of understanding—an interesting parallel to the typical critical misunderstanding of the gaze. Jane is, of course, neither subversive nor wicked; her gaze is simply too perceptive. Jane's gaze not only allows her to understand others, but it also forces others to understand themselves, as if they saw their spirits as well as their faces reflected in her eyes. This disconcerting, convicting aspect of Jane's gaze accounts for John Reed's reaction; he shoves her because he suddenly sees in her eyes his "disgusting and ugly appearance" (42). Twice when Jane meets Aunt Reed's "eye of ice" and chastises her, Aunt Reed is convicted by her look as well as her words; on the first occasion Aunt Reed's "usually cold, composed gray eye became troubled with a look of fear" (60); on the second, she looks as if she will cry (69). By the time an adult Jane visits Aunt Reed's deathbed, the older woman knows that to meet Jane's eye is to see her own soul; thus, "the glazing eyes shunned [Jane's] gaze" as Aunt Reed avoids a reconciliation that would entail admission of her own imperfections (268).

Jane's childhood application of this extraordinary gaze leads directly to her confusion about the gaze; for after each of the three early incidents with the Reeds, Jane is punished for her "look," which supplies her with understanding and others with unwanted self-awareness. Confused as to the cause of her punishment, ten-year-old Jane also becomes confused about the gaze itself, a confusion that is exacerbated by several other childhood experiences with the gaze. First, Jane realizes that people judge others by their outward appearance—by their looks (physical appearance) as well as by their looks (glances)—a pun that Brontë plays on throughout the novel. This judgment is not merely applied to the external, but to the spirit. When Mr. Brocklehurst sees Julie Severn's curling hair and his eye gives "a blink, as if it had met something that either dazzled or shocked its pupil" (95-96), he is not judging her physically, but as spiritually ugly. Thus, although the adult Jane admits she would like to be handsomer, her main concern is that people will judge her soul by her body. And so she lashes out at Rochester, saying, "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?" (281).

Further, as a child Jane discovers that the gaze can be used as punishment. First she watches as Helen Burns is made "the central mark of all eyes" (84); then she herself suffers the same punishment. When Brocklehurst makes Jane sit on the stool in front of the other schoolgirls, he emphasizes the gaze, saying, "Ladies, Miss Temple, teachers, and children, you all see this girl? . . . Teachers, you must watch her; keep your eyes on her movements" (98). And Jane, fearing condemnation in the stare of her schoolmates, says, "I felt their eyes directed like burning-glasses against my scorched skin" (98).

Neither here, nor elsewhere, does Jane show any distinc-

tion between male gazers and female gazers; she shows no tendency to fear the male gaze more than the female gaze, or vice versa. She is just as likely to worry about Mrs. Fairfax's and Adèle's opinion of her looks as she is to be concerned about Rochester's; and she seems as little concerned with Diana and Mary's proclamation of her prettiness as she is with St. John's statement of her plainness. If she has visual battles with Rochester, she has them with Aunt Reed as well; if she learns to meet St. John's gaze, she also learns to meet those of Eliza and Georgiana.

By the time she is ten years old, Jane has experienced the dark side of a gaze inflicted by both men and women; with this background, it is understandable that she wants to see without being seen, to understand the inner lives of others without exposing her body and eyes to their judgmental gaze. And so Jane constantly hides to avoid others' eyes. She hides from Aunt Reed beneath the bedclothes, from Mr. Brocklehurst behind a slate, from Rochester in the shadows, from Blanche Ingram behind the window curtain, and from strangers in a grassy hollow. Jane is as likely to hide behind circumstances as behind physical objects; when Aunt Reed is dying, Jane "[gazes] awhile at her who could not now gaze at me," then, significantly "moves away to the window" to ponder the mystery of the spirit (265). From these semi-hidden places, Jane can watch—for Jane will not give up her gaze, however much she mistrusts the gaze of others.

However, although Jane is very good at watching, her experiences with Helen Burns suggest to her that an even higher level of sight is possible: Helen, Jane says, "considered things by a light invisible to my eyes" (88). Helen's gaze can reach past externals to understand and comfort the inner being, both her own and others'. At one point Jane says of Helen, "Her eyes are fixed on the floor, but I am sure they do not see it—her sight seems turned in, gone down into her heart: she is looking at what she can remember, I believe; not at what is really present" (84). Later Jane experiences that gaze turned on herself, during her punishment at Lowood: she says, "[Helen] came up and passed me: in passing, she lifted her eyes. What a strange light inspired them! What an extraordinary sensation that ray sent through me! It was as if a martyr, a hero, had passed a slave or victim, and imparted strength in the transit" (99).

This compassionate understanding is what Jane's gaze lacks; Jane's deficiency is one of kind rather than of strength. "It is not violence that best overcomes hate," Helen says, "Nor vengeance that most certainly heals injury." She continues, "Observe what Christ says . . . love your enemies, bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you. . . . Life appears to me to be too short to be spent in nursing animosity, or registering wrongs" (90). In other words, Helen echoes the teachings of Christ: "You have heard it was said, 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:38). And registering wrongs, exacting an eye for an eye, is exactly what Jane's gaze does. Thus Jane—suspecting that "she might be right and I wrong" (88), fascinated with the eyes as windows to the soul—strives to become, like Helen, a master-gazer, to see beyond the worldly surface of things to a compassionate, spiritual understanding. In Jane's own words, she

yearns for the "power of vision which might overpass that limit [of physical sight]" (140). Such is Jane's mindset when she moves to Thornfield Hall and meets Rochester, who further refines Jane's attitude toward the gaze.

The earliest good Rochester does for Jane's understanding of the gaze is to undo some of the harm done during her Gateshead and early Lowood days. First, Rochester demonstrates to Jane that not all people use the gaze to judge the soul by the body. Jane sees that Rochester is not afraid of the gaze and realizes that if she did not judge his soul by his body, very likely there are people who will not judge her in that way—which Rochester soon proves by falling in love with her. He points out the importance of the soul over the face, saying, "To women who please me only by their faces, I am the very devil when I find out they have neither souls nor hearts . . . but to the clear eye . . . I am ever tender and true" (289).

But Jane still cannot meet his gaze; as she puts it, "I had often been unwilling to look at my master, because I feared he could not be pleased at my look" (286) (again with the pun on appearance and gaze). Rochester might find her gaze threatening or otherwise offensive, as did John Reed and Aunt Reed. Thus we see Jane staring at Rochester when his eyes are safely diverted by the fire, by Adèle, or by Blanche; in this way Jane manages to "gaze [at Rochester] without being observed" (203). Jane also circumvents the reciprocal gaze by converting Rochester into a portrait; pleased with her drawing, particularly with the likeness of the eyes, Jane says, "I [have] a friend's face under my gaze" (263).

But Rochester, impressed with Jane's extraordinary gaze, wants to see more. Whereas Helen warns Jane about how she exerts her own gaze, Rochester warns Jane about how she receives—or refuses to receive—others' gazes, and about the emotional isolation her refusal forces upon her. He says, "I see at intervals the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage: a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but free, it would soar cloud-high" (170), and later remarks that at present Jane is "floating on with closed eyes and muffled ears" (173). Rochester does not intend to leave Jane's eyes closed: "It would please me now to draw you out, to learn more of you," he says; then, "with a single hasty glance [he] seemed to dive into [her] eyes" (164). Rochester's goal, then, is to teach Jane to trust the gaze so she can participate in a healthy, mutually trusting relationship; were he but worthy of that trust, he might have succeeded.

Rochester's dubious integrity with regard to the gaze is first seen in the gypsy scene, where he disguises himself as an old fortune-teller in order to examine Jane. He turns her face to the fire and begins by inspecting her eyes, which until now she has generally kept turned from him. Again, Rochester interprets Jane as emotionally isolated: "Where [the eye] ceases to smile, it is sad; an unconscious lassitude weighs on the lid: that signifies melancholy resulting from loneliness" (230). This probing examination of her eyes, even by an unknown gypsy, is too much for Jane to bear: "Don't keep me long," she says. "The fire scorches me" (229)—echoing her Lowood cry of "I felt their eyes directed like burning-glasses against my scorched skin" (98). Thus by crooked means Rochester manages to gaze into Jane's eyes, usually so carefully guarded. Certainly, Rochester has converted Jane to

an object of his gaze; but so did the girls in the punishment scene at Lowood. Jane herself converts Rochester and, later, Rosamond Oliver to objects via her painting. Clearly, in this text objectification transcends gender lines, and in all cases is portrayed as inferior to the healthy, mutually understanding gaze.

The crucial point in Rochester's attempt to establish the mutual gaze with Jane comes in chapter 23, which begins, significantly, with Rochester's visual pursuit of Jane. Having proposed to her, Rochester exerts a dual influence with his assurance of love for her. On the one hand, Jane becomes certain enough of Rochester to look overtly into his eyes to read his soul, commanding, "Let me look at your face. . . . I want to read your countenance" (283). Indeed, from this point until the wedding disaster Jane meets Rochester's gaze without fear. The assertion of love further increases the compassion of Jane's gaze, which becomes "faithful and generous"—but which still convicts Rochester of his own wickedness, which is the other side, the deceitful and blinding side, of his assertion of love. For Jane's sight fails her, and it fails because she no longer is looking for the truth in Rochester's soul, but for that which he professes and which she wants to see: a true, honest love. As Jane says later, "I could not, in those days, see God [who is, in part, the personification of truth] for His creature: of whom I had made an idol" (302).

When Jane discovers Rochester's deceit she again hides her eyes in order to hide her soul: "He looked at me long and hard: I turned my eyes from him, fixed them on the fire" (329). Rochester is horrified by this "resolute, frozen look" (330), and seeing his agony Jane relents, making another step forward both in the compassion and the self-assurance of her gaze. But then Rochester destroys any chance of regaining Jane's trust; not satisfied with that pity, wanting passion and agreement, he attempts to overwhelm Jane's gaze with his own. Filled as it is with information pertaining to the gaze, this attack is worth quoting extensively:

Mr. Rochester, reading my countenance, saw I had [planted my foot]. His fury was wrought to the highest. . . . He seemed to devour me with his flaming glance: physically, I felt, at the moment, powerless as stubble exposed to the draught and glow of a furnace: mentally, I still possessed my soul, and with it the certainty of ultimate safety. The soul, fortunately, has an interpreter—often an unconscious but still faithful interpreter—in the eye. My eye rose to his. . . . "Consider that eye," [he said]. "Consider the resolute, wild, free thing looking out of it, defying me, with more than courage—with a stern triumph. Whatever I do with its cage, I cannot get at it—" (344)

Notice that here, in the necessity of the moment, Jane's confidence swells and she allows Rochester to look into her eyes. Jane has done this once before, with Aunt Reed, turning her eyes so that her antagonist cannot avoid the soul looking out of them (68). Exerting that self-confident, powerful gaze on the irate Rochester allows Jane to escape.

Now, with Rochester behaving very much like a madman, are we to conclude that his gaze is evil? That he meant all along to mislead Jane, to trick her into a mutual gaze that would "devour" her? The answer is no; and the reason for this

answer lies in an accurate understanding of Bertha. Since Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* most critics have interpreted Bertha as Jane's dark double (Gilbert 360, Bellis 647), as Jane's sexual fears (MacPherson 29), as Jane's need to revolt (Adams 188), as Jane's "passionate and sexual side" (Showalter 28)—always as *Jane's* repressions. However, Bertha can just as easily be associated with Rochester's repressions as with Jane's. After all, as Rochester's wife, Bertha is his "other half"—his bad side, the side of his nature he hopes Jane will eradicate. Indeed, Bertha's main offense—promiscuity, participating in illicit relationships—is Rochester's as well, as feminists correctly point out (MacPherson 47, Rich 150). Thus Rochester prevaricates, perhaps unwittingly, when he claims, "I found her nature wholly alien to mine" (333); but his claim that he "could not pass a single evening, nor even a single hour of the day with her in comfort" (333) is certainly true. He was not comfortable, because he had constantly to battle to keep Bertha from tainting him with a sin he found all too easy to assume.

The frequently-noted fire scenes, clearly indicative of passion, bear out this interpretation of Bertha as Rochester's personal sin. In the novel, Bertha constantly is associated with flames; she attempts to burn Rochester in his bed (179) and she finally succeeds in burning down Thornfield Hall, with Jane's bed the initial target (452). Now, typical interpretations argue that full-blown female desire is too hot for Rochester to handle; however, I would suggest that it is Rochester's own rampant desire—his "hideous demon" (342), as he refers to Bertha—that threatens to destroy both him and Jane. Notice that Rochester's eyes, not Jane's, are "flaming" (344), just as Bertha's are "fiery" (311); when Rochester says, "compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder" (322), he contrasts Jane's eyes with his own as well as with Bertha's. The madwoman's horrifying gaze, with its rolling, red, bloodshot eyes (311), is not a gaze that Jane could ever conceivably take as her own; but Rochester, in his worst moments, could.

And in one desperate moment, Rochester does give in to his demon; he does, for one instant, attempt to devour Jane, to overwhelm her with his gaze. Because Rochester is male some argue that here Rochester attempts to dominate Jane with the male gaze; however, I would argue that Rochester attempts to dominate Jane with *Rochester's* gaze, which happens to be male—just as Bertha overwhelms Jane with *Bertha's* gaze, not the female gaze per se (312). It is an individual, not a corporate, problem.

Importantly, Rochester's passion—his intense love of human companionship—is not wholly evil; it is wrong only when it is uncontrolled, illicit. Just as the fire which represents that passion can either warm or destroy, Rochester's passion also can be benevolent. In Rochester's moments of tenderness Jane still sees fire in his eyes—but it is subdued to "flashing" (301). Indeed, when Jane draws his picture she makes the eyes "flash more brilliantly" (262). Rochester, in his love for human warmth, likes "a cheerful hearth," where "the fire had been kindled some time, and burnt well" (305); and Jane herself feels at times the "reviving warmth of a fire" (326). Indeed, the angelic Helen Burns, with her fiery last name, speaks of the "spark of the spirit" (91) as though some warmth, some fire, is necessary to human existence.

But after Jane discovers Rochester's deceit and her own dullness of vision, she is in no position to see the positive side of Rochester's passionate, flaming gaze. Rather, she resolves to separate herself from the cause of her temptation to go against God, and tells herself that "you shall yourself pluck out your right eye" (325), echoing Matthew 5:29. This scriptural command also is played out in Rochester's case, though this time the destruction of the eye is literal, resulting from the fiery accident that both punishes him for his demon (both Bertha and his own misused gaze) and frees him from it. Significantly, Rochester's deceit not only causes him to lose his sight, but also damages Jane's sight as well; the debacle at Thornfield Hall has undermined her newfound confidence in the gaze to the point that she fears again the judgmental human eye. And so Jane goes back into hiding; at the end of her flight we find her, characteristically, peering furtively through a window at the warmth and human interaction within (358).

When the Rivers family meet Jane, she is at her very worst with regard to her fear of the gaze. However, Jane's experiences with the Rivers sisters do much to restore her confidence in the gaze; she says of Diana, "She possessed eyes whose gaze I delighted to encounter" (370), and feels there is "no suspicion in their glances, there [is] more of curiosity" (372). Further, Jane learns from St. John how to protect herself from the gaze, for St. John's eyes are as impenetrable as they are piercing; Jane says these eyes, "though clear enough in a literal sense, in a figurative one were difficult to fathom. He seemed to use them rather as instruments to search other people's thoughts, than as agents to reveal his own" (372)—much as Jane use her own, though St. John hides behind his own expression rather than behind physical objects.

St. John's cool, impersonal gaze is a relief after Rochester's impassioned, highly personal one. Jane immediately begins to imitate this coolness, this impersonal system of gazing-and-hiding, which allows her to gaze without risk of being devoured. Soon Jane looks at St. John as he looks at her, "openly and without diffidence" (373), imitating his impenetrable gaze while she also refuses to reveal her secrets verbally. Thus protected, Jane does not flinch when St. John leisurely reads her face, "as if its features were lines and characters on a page" (380). Like St. John, she has learned to reveal those aspects of her heart she wishes to reveal, and hide all others.

But soon Jane notices a flaw in St. John's emotionless stare; he cannot gaze at his beloved. Significantly, Rosamond Oliver remarks that Jane is "like Mr. Rivers" (394). Like Jane, St. John shuns reciprocal glances with his beloved in order to hide his inner self; and like Jane's, St. John's eyes inadvertently reveal his inner feelings when he sees that beloved. Jane says, "I saw his solemn eye melt with sudden fire, and flicker with resistless emotion" (390). Notice that even St. John's eyes can flicker with fire—a sure indication that Rochester's flaming passion is not inherently evil.

But St. John quenches the fire of human love in his heart, and the gaze that reveals that love. When he announces Rosamond's engagement, Jane, Diana, and Mary look at St. John and find that "he [is] as serene as glass" (421). "You see, Jane, the battle is fought and the victory won," he later says to Jane (421). And, having conquered that love, St. John

proceeds with his next project: transforming Jane into a missionary's wife, making her even more like him, transforming her gaze as he transformed his own. Jane, however, feels that it is as impossible for her to "aspire to the standard he uplifted" as it would be for her to "give [her] changeable green eyes the sea-blue tint and solemn lustre of his own" (424). Thus Jane once more becomes uncomfortable under another's gaze—although not because she fears it will construe her as unlovable, and certainly not because it is a "dominant" male gaze attempting to bend her will to its own. Although Rich suggests that Jane is tempted by St. John's male gaze to allow a man to give definition to her life (153), Jane is not actually tempted by anything "male" in St. John at all; rather, she is tempted by his spirituality. Jane fears that St. John's gaze is the gaze of God's prophet, which she cannot in good conscience reject; and having lost sight of God once, in contemplation of Rochester, Jane does not intend to lose sight of him again. St. John encourages this view, telling Jane that he is merely attempting "to speak Heaven's message in [her] ear—to offer [her], direct from God, a place in the ranks of His chosen" (427).

Finally, in the proposal scene, Jane realizes that St. John is not God's direct messenger to her. She says,

How much of him was saint, how much mortal, I could not heretofore tell: but revelations were being made in this conference: the analysis of his nature was proceeding before my eyes. I saw his fallibilities; I comprehended them. I understood that . . . I sat at the feet of a man, erring as I . . . I felt his imperfection, and took courage. I was with an equal—one with whom I might argue—one whom, if I saw good, I might resist. (432)

Thus, convinced that she is in the presence of a mere mortal, Jane "risked an upward glance at his countenance" (432); and we have no indication that she avoids his gaze again.

From this point on, Jane openly battles with the problem that has been her enemy all along—not others' gazes, either male or female, but her own perception of the gaze. As she says, "I contended with my inward dimness of vision, before which clouds yet rolled" (444). Should she remain with St. John, and accept his emotionally detached view of love, as signified by his non-revelatory gaze? St. John's coldness frightens Jane more than Rochester's flaming anger; she rhetorically asks, "Do you know, as I do, what terror those cold people can put into the ice of their questions? How much of the fall of the avalanche is in their anger? of the breaking up of the frozen sea in their displeasure?" (437). For, despite Showalter's claim that St. John and Helen Burns are identical forces (118), St. John's gaze lacks the single most important element of Helen's gaze: compassion. As Jane remarks, he uses his gaze as a tool—as a pure but cruel weapon. Thus Jane wonders—should she commit her life to the man with an eye like "a cold, bright, blue gem," (436), or should she return to the man with "full falcon-eye flashing, and tenderness and passion in every lineament" (301)? Jane knows that St. John values the "flame of sacrifice" (429), not the flame of human love; and she finally realizes the torment she would face if she were "forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the

imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital" (433). Jane prays that God will show her the path, and God, who "sees not as man sees" (440), answers her. Jane's vision becomes clear; she hears Rochester's voice and lies down to sleep, "unscared, enlightened" (445).

Thus Jane returns to Thornfield Hall, believing that she can purify Rochester's fiery gaze more easily than she could inflame St. John's pure gaze. The irony, of course, is that Rochester can no longer gaze at all; Jane no longer need fear the fire in Rochester's eyes, and likewise no longer can taste the life of that gaze. Unlike the many interpretations that claim Rochester's blindness as Jane's triumph, this reading of the text construes Rochester's blindness as Jane's tragedy; for now that Jane is willing to risk the passion of her lover's gaze, he can no longer give it. Such an interpretation is far more in line with the rest of the novel, with Jane's spiritual growth, than are readings like that offered by Margaret Blom, who states, "God has been removed from his throne, and Jane reigns supreme," and "Rochester and Jane retreat into a private world where Jane is superior and, therefore, satisfied" (103). Rather, Jane needs Rochester; as Judith Williams insightfully points out, "Rochester rescues Jane from the effects of St. John as surely as she rescues him from the effects of Bertha" (51). Indeed, throughout the novel Jane's gaze threatens emotional isolation, the very frigidity of St. John's icy gaze, just as Rochester's gaze threatens the fire of Bertha's flaming visage. Only together, modifying each other, can either live a life that is both pure and happy.

Through the confidence and compassion her own gaze now contains, Jane turns the desolation at Ferndean to a final triumph. Faced with a blind lover, Jane puts to the ultimate use her extraordinary knack for creating vision out of the other senses; she gives Rochester the most precious gift she has to offer—sight—so that his reference to her as "the vision" (459) is only partially metaphorical. That this gift is a compassionate labor of love, not of domination or vengeance, becomes undeniably clear when Rochester's own sight returns, unaccompanied by any fundamental alteration in the lovers' relationship. Thus, by following Helen Burns's injunction to "distinguish between the criminal and his crime" (91), by loving Rochester despite his injury to her, Jane actually achieves the "power of vision which might overpass that limit [of physical sight]" (140) which she has sought from the first pages of the novel.

Fulfilling the promise of Brontë's *bildungsroman*, Jane grows spiritually during her quest for perfect vision. During the years covered in the novel Jane is influenced by those who misuse the gaze, such as John Reed, Aunt Reed, Abbot, Brocklehurst, and Bertha; and Jane is strengthened and inspired by those who wield the gaze wisely and well, such as Mr. Lloyd, Miss Temple, Helen Burns, and the Rivers sisters. But by far the most influence is exerted on Jane by those who, like her, are imperfect but striving for perfection: Rochester and St. John. It is through contact with these two fallible men that Jane takes the final leap necessary for true clarity of vision, choosing emotional risk over emotional death, but minimizing that risk by looking to God first, rather than to an idolized lover. In this way, by combining compassion with vulnerability, and vulnerability with faith in God, Jane can truly commune with Rochester. She can talk "face to face with

what [she] reverences, with what she delights in—with an original, a vigorous, an expanded mind” (281)—a mind that now has controlled its passions and no longer wishes to tempt her to sin. Thus by the novel’s end, Jane’s remarkable clarity of physical vision is translated into clarity of spiritual vision, and Jane’s final situation matches the apostle Paul’s description of heaven: “Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (I Cor. 13: 11-12).

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Charlotte Brontë’s New Corinne: Re-reading *The Professor*

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At a crucial moment in *The Professor*, Charlotte Brontë’s first novel (written in 1846, but not published until 1857), the narrator, William Crimsworth, the professor of the title, goes to the apartment of Frances Henri, the impoverished young lacemender who has been his best pupil, intent on asking her to marry him. As he hovers outside her door he hears her recite, in her native French, a poem of her own composition, which he incorporates in translation in his narrative. It tells the story of a pupil, Jane, and her relationship with a schoolmaster, who is at times exacting and forbidding and at others tender and encouraging. Jane’s efforts to please him are finally rewarded when, after success in the school examinations, her master crowns her with a laurel wreath. But this moment of triumph has an unexpected aftermath:

Low at my master’s knee I bent
The offered crown to meet;
Its green leaves through my temples sent
A thrill as wild as sweet.

The strong pulse of Ambition struck
In every vein I owned;
At the same instant, bleeding broke
A secret, inward wound.

The hour of triumph was to me
The hour of sorrow sore;
A day hence I must cross the sea,
Ne’er to recross it more. (220-21)

As the moment of Jane’s departure draws closer her master finally reveals his love for her unambiguously, and the poem

ends with him pleading with her to return “home”:

“They call again; leave then my breast;
Quit thy true shelter, Jane;
But when deceived, repulsed, opprest,
Come home to me again!” (221)

As Crimsworth notes, Jane’s circumstances and history are based in part on Frances’s own experience as his pupil, but her story has also been seen as confirmation of the autobiographical character of *The Professor*, which is assumed to record Brontë’s love for her charismatic French teacher Constantin Heger. According to Tom Winnifrith, a scholar more usually noted for his hostility to the practice of reconstructing the Brontë’s lives from their fictions, “Jane” is proof of Brontë’s love for Heger (“Charlotte Brontë and Mr Rochester” 11-12), while Héléne Moglen, regarding the poem as a representation of Brontë’s fantasy relationship with her teacher, sees its resolution as determined by the realities of Brontë’s love for a married man: thus “the moment of recognition heralds separation instead of the impossible consummation,” and the parting of Jane and her master, “effected by an unnamed enemy (Madame Heger, society, conscience),” is assumed to reflect Brontë’s feelings and circumstances as she prepared to leave Brussels and Heger in January 1844 (82).

The fact is, however, that the circumstances outlined in “Jane” are not particularly close to those which Brontë herself experienced in Brussels, as reported in letters to her sister Emily and her old schoolfriend Ellen Nussey (Wise and Symington 1: 307, 309). From these it would seem that she left Brussels convinced that she had been driven out by the unjustified hostility of Madame Heger, and by her husband’s

inexplicable withdrawal of his friendship. Jane, on the other hand, Moglen’s assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, is not rejected by her master; nor is she driven out by an enemy or rival. The anonymous “they,” three times mentioned in the poem, are not represented as hostile to Jane. Their only function is to add a note of urgency to the couple’s final meeting by reminding them of the imminence of the moment of separation.

Interestingly, there is another version of this poem which reflects far more nearly Brontë’s own traumatic experience in Brussels. In this version (“At first I did attention give”) the master’s love for his unnamed pupil is never clear, and the pupil has a jealous rival, another woman, who succeeds in turning her master against her, as Brontë believed Madame Heger had done.¹ Moreover, here the pupil’s love is clearly illicit, for it is said to defy “might and right, woe and wrath” (299). This version ends with the pupil doubly victimized, having experienced her beloved master’s rejection and witnessed his tenderness towards her triumphant rival:

Cold as a statue’s grew his eye,
Hard as a rock his brow,
Cold hard to me—but tenderly
He kissed my rival now. (300)

It is not possible to establish with certainty which of these versions is the earlier. “Jane” is recorded in a notebook that Brontë was using in Brussels in 1843, but she was still copying items into the same notebook after her return to Haworth. Winnifrith assigns “At first I did attention give” to around 1845 (*The Poems of Charlotte Brontë* 416), although the manuscript in which it is preserved is undated. One might hypothesize that this poem, closer in mood and details to Brontë’s own recent history, is the earlier version, while “Jane” represents a later, more considered reflection upon the meaning of that experience. In this alternative / later version, key details of Jane’s story are drawn not from Brontë’s life, but from her reading of a novel that exercised a profound influence upon her throughout her career, Madame de Staël’s *Corinne* (1807). This tells the story of a gifted and ambitious girl, who escapes from a life of stultifying domesticity in England to Italy, where she finds the freedom to cultivate her intellect and her artistic gifts, and achieves economic independence and public recognition.

The most famous moment in Madame de Staël’s novel occurs in the second book, “Corinne au Capitole.” In it the hero, Oswald, Lord Nelvil, first sees and falls in love with Corinne, as he witnesses her being conducted in a glittering public procession to the Capitoline Hill in Rome, there to be crowned with a laurel wreath in recognition of her genius. It may seem a far cry from the glamour of this scene of public homage to the homely surroundings of a schoolroom prizegiving, yet the scene of Jane’s crowning is undoubtedly owed to the example of *Corinne*, the archetypal account of the gifted and ambitious heroine. Indeed the shadowy figure of Corinne is constantly to be discerned not only behind Jane but also

behind her creator, the gifted and ambitious Frances Henri, who might justly be termed Brontë’s “new Corinne.”

In her recent edition of *The Professor* Heather Glen argued for a new reading of the novel, according to which Crimsworth’s story of professional success and personal fulfillment should be viewed not as the confessional autobiography of a peculiar individual, who is to a large extent a projection of Brontë herself, but rather as a fictional example of an influential contemporary genre—the exemplary biography of the self-made man—a genre most notably represented by Samuel Smiles’s 1859 bestseller *Self-Help* (9-10). According to this analysis Crimsworth, rather than being an imperfect vehicle for his author’s personal concerns, is the object of Brontë’s ironic observation, and through his history she offers an astute and highly critical exploration of the Victorian ideal of self-help he exemplifies.

Valuable as this reading is in stressing the novel’s concern with ambition and the drive for recognition, it remains an incomplete reading, for it largely ignores the history of Frances Henri, herself the protagonist of a self-help narrative that shadows Crimsworth’s own. As Glen notes, the self-help narrative was overwhelmingly a masculine genre. In recounting Frances’s bid for self-realization Brontë turned to the example of Corinne. But the fact is, of course, that *Corinne* is not a success story, for there the heroine must pay for her fame and independence by making sacrifices that are not demanded of the heroes of the self-help narratives. Their stories smoothly blend the achievement of professional success with the emotional fulfillment of marriage. No such ending is possible for Corinne. Oswald opts for marriage to her conventional, unintellectual half-sister Lucile and Corinne herself dies. As Madelyn Gutwirth observes of this conclusion, Corinne prefers “her genius to the . . . bonds of marriage, but that is not to say that she thereby renounces happiness. On the contrary, it is her wish to be happy, that is to be herself, and to love, that kills her” (255).

Brontë’s “new Corinne” is no tragic heroine, but neither is she a success, and Brontë’s preferred method for measuring the degree of her failure is irony. I shall argue that, for the full ironic import of *The Professor* to be understood, Crimsworth’s complacent account of unremitting effort crowned by professional and personal success needs to be read alongside Frances’s history of balked ambition. Glen sees Brontë’s irony as directed towards exposing the psychic and emotional costs of Crimsworth’s dedication to the individualistic philosophy of “self-help.” I see it rather as chiefly concerned with revealing how little space that philosophy allowed for the aspirations of ambitious women like Frances Henri.

When Brontë came to write Frances Henri’s story she drew on her own experience as well as on *Corinne*, making her heroine a woman who, like herself, had the avowed aim of equipping herself for a career as a teacher, but who also harbored secret artistic aspirations. How closely Frances’s story touched upon her own anxieties is revealed in an explicit echo of Brontë’s own history. Zoraïde Reuter, Frances’s rival for Crimsworth’s affections, rebukes Crimsworth for reading one

¹This version is printed and discussed by Winnifrith, “Charlotte Brontë and Mr Rochester” 1-13, and in his *Poems of Charlotte Brontë* 416. It is also

printed as Appendix IV of the Clarendon edition of *The Professor*, from which I quote it.

of Frances's essays to his class:

"It appears to me that ambition—*literary* ambition especially, is not a feeling to be cherished in the mind of a woman; would no Mdlle Henri be much safer and happier if taught to believe that in the quiet discharge of social duties consists her real vocation, than if stimulated to aspire after applause and publicity?" (150-51)

Reuter is often said to be Brontë's first hostile fictional representation of Madame Heger, but, although this may account for her role as Frances's duplicitous rival, it does not explain this surprising outburst on the subject of female literary ambition, which seems in any case a strangely disproportionate response to a teacher's encouragement of a promising pupil.

Penny Boumelha (57) points to the similarity between Reuter's words and some remarks of Robert Southey, the Poet Laureate, to whom Brontë had written in 1836, asking for advice on pursuing a literary career. Despite approving of the poems she sent him ("You evidently possess, and in no inconsiderable degree what Wordsworth called 'the faculty of verse')," he was forthright in condemning her ambition: "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life and it ought not to be" (Wise and Symington 1: 155). To pursue such unwomanly ambition, he warns, is to risk making herself unfit for a woman's "proper duties." Brontë replied decorously enough to Southey's admonitions, promising to treasure his advice and give up all desire for literary fame (Wise and Symington 1: 154-56), but she was by her own admission a hearty hater, and in giving the treacherous Zoraïde Southey's sentiments, and some of his very words, she found a way to work off some of her resentment against him.

But, as with Frances's poem, Brontë's memories of *Corinne* have modified her personal recollections. Zoraïde may contain elements of both Zöe Parent Heger and Robert Southey, but she also owes something to *Corinne's* repressive, English stepmother, Lady Edgermond, who tries to curb the young woman's originality and responds to her fervent desire for knowledge with the crushing question "What's the good of all that? Will it make you any happier?," and who insists that women should be wholly absorbed in caring for their husbands and children and that all other aspirations simply lead to trouble: "*toutes les autres prétentions ne faissent que du mal*" (308).

Zoraïde's animadversions on the subject of women's literary ambitions can be easily discounted on the grounds that she is Frances's rival for Crimsworth's affections. Nonetheless, it is clear that Frances's ambition makes her the prey of anxieties which she articulates through the history of *her* ambitious heroine Jane. At the moment of her crowning Jane confronts *Corinne's* dilemma. Like *Corinne* she relishes success: it occasions a thrill "as wild as sweet," but it brings in its wake not only ambition but a painful awareness that, to pursue her ambition, she must separate from her beloved master. *Corinne* dies of her inability to make that choice. Frances's poem seems quite consciously to rewrite *Corinne's* story. Appropriating a role that is usually a male preserve, Jane plays Ulysses to her master's Penelope. In a bold inversion of one of the most stereotypical scenarios of Victorian patriarchal

ideology it is the master who is left pleading the cause of "home," that symbolic space usually assigned to women, while Jane repeats *Corinne's* history—and Brontë's too—by traveling in pursuit of self-realization.

But if Frances's poem offers an optimistic resolution of *Corinne's* dilemma—in the dual sense that Jane is willing to sacrifice love to ambition and that the master declares his intention of maintaining a haven for her, should the solitary pursuit of success become too painful—her own history shows Brontë engaging with the problems of female ambition in a much more troubled and ironic way. Frances's poem may reveal her yearning for freedom and recognition, but her "sad though gentle countenance" (216) as she recites it—so Crimsworth claims—betrays her fear that her poetry must serve as sole consolation for a future without love or companionship:

it seemed to say, "I must cultivate fortitude and cling to poetry; one is to be my support and the other my solace through life; human affections do not bloom, nor do human passions glow for me." Other women have such thoughts. Frances, had she been as desolate as she deemed, would not have been worse off than thousands of her sex. Look at the rigid and formal race of old maids—the race whom all despise—they have fed themselves, from youth upwards, on maxims of resignation and endurance; many of them get ossified with the dry diet; Self-Control us so continually their thought, so perpetually their object that at last it absorbs the softer and more agreeable qualities of their nature, and they die mere models of austerity, fashioned out of a little parchment and much bone. (216)

Like Zoraïde's diatribe against unwomanly ambition, Crimsworth's observations on the subject of "old maids" seem forced and obtrusive, lacking in any convincing relation to his own character and circumstances as the protagonist of a self-help narrative. But, although he is often the object of his author's ironic contemplation, he is also on occasion required to speak for Brontë in making explicit Frances's internal conflicts. In fantasy Frances projects herself into the questing heroine Jane, who is willing to sacrifice love to ambition: but Crimsworth's observations balance that image of female daring against the figure of the woman bereft, whose art must serve as solace for the dearth of human affection. Her chilly apartment in the aptly named street of Our Lady of the Snows, serves as a appropriate image of the future that Frances contemplates. So, too, does Crimsworth's account of her wandering alone in the Protestant Cemetery on the Chaussée de Louvain, mourning the death of her aunt, her last remaining relative (166-70).

As with other episodes in the novel, the scene in the cemetery blends Brontë's personal experience with her memories of *Corinne*. She had accompanied her friend Mary Taylor to that very cemetery in October 1842, to visit the grave of Taylor's younger sister Martha, who had recently died of cholera (Wise and Symington 1: 274-75). But the inspiration for linking this setting with the solitary, unloved woman artist surely came from an episode in Madame de Staël's novel in which *Corinne*, grieving for the loss of her beloved Oswald, visits the church of Santa Croce in Florence,

the burial place of many illustrious scholars and artists. As she studies the tombs of Michelangelo, Galileo, Boccaccio and others, she begins to feel again that zest for fame that formerly motivated her artistic endeavors. But this movement towards recovery, when, briefly, it seems that the promise of glory may fully compensate for the sacrifice of emotional fulfillment, is checked, as *Corinne* comes upon a tomb inscribed with an epitaph which brings home to her the pain of her solitary state (443): "Alone at my beginning and at my ending. I am alone even here" ("*seule à mon aurore, seule à mon couchant, je suis seule encore ici*").

The lonely and unloved existence of the artist—the woman artist in particular—will become well nigh axiomatic for Brontë, represented in the emblematic figure of William Cowper and his fictional counterpart "The Castaway" in *Shirley* (1849) and re-emerging in her somber masterpiece *Villette* (1853) in the solitary figure of Lucy Snowe. Here in *The Professor*, dwelling on Frances's loneliness and probable future as an "old maid," Brontë seems to be setting out to justify her heroine's choice of a future less heroic than that of her surrogate Jane, the path, that is, of "human affections" and marriage. Frances settles for marriage to Crimsworth, and, although she pursues a career, it is one which receives her husband's explicit support and sanction (249). She becomes first a teacher and finally the headmistress of her own school. As Gilbert and Gubar note, we learn of no more poems (331). But if, in becoming a kind of "artist manqué," Brontë's "new *Corinne*" escapes her predecessor's tragic destiny, she is also diminished by her choice. And if Brontë's text seems to argue for the necessity of that choice, yet it also invites its readers to contemplate the sacrifices it entails.

Frances must, for example, sacrifice the prospect of fame, which for Madame de Staël is the natural goal of genius and the medium in which it flourishes: "*le génie inspire le besoin de la gloire*" (367). In the memorable formulation of Ellen Moers, "the myth of *Corinne* is the myth of the famous woman talking, writing, performing to the applause of the world" (176). Not only is *Corinne* an accomplished actress, whose dramatic skills Oswald compares favorably with those of the celebrated Sarah Siddons, even her bouts of poetic inspiration are public performances, as in her improvisations on the Capitoline Hill. Compare this with Frances alone in her room, reciting her poem "Jane," unconscious of being overheard by Crimsworth, or Jane herself receiving *her* laurel wreath in the comparative privacy of the schoolroom.

Joseph Litvak, quoting Gillian Beer's observation that Brontë is "the most introspective of Victorian novelists," suggests that this very introspectiveness made it difficult for her to cope with the theatricality of literary fame (467-68). Difficult it undoubtedly was, but the problem was not simply caused by her habitual, disabling shyness. Alongside her "ostrich longing for concealment" (Wise and Symington 4: 16) there was a real, though repressed, desire for recognition,

which Southey, for example, was quick to recognize and condemn as unwomanly.² Consider the well-known story of Charlotte and Anne's journey to London in July 1848, to present themselves to George Smith, publisher of *Jane Eyre*, as the authors Currer and Acton Bell. Thomas Newby, Emily and Anne's publisher, about to publish Anne's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, sought to capitalize on the success of Currer Bell's *Jane Eyre*, by intimating that the three Bell authors, Currer, Ellis and Acton, were in reality but one writer. When George Smith applied to his author Currer Bell for clarification Charlotte immediately proposed the visit to London. She and Anne set out together, Emily having resolutely refused to accompany them (Wise and Symington 2: 229, 25-54). Had Charlotte's desire for anonymity been entirely straightforward she could undoubtedly have found other means of reassuring Smith that Currer Bell was indeed exclusively contracted to his firm, means that would not have involved her appearing in person before him. The moral imperative to demonstrate her honesty, and the companionship of her sister, provided her with an alibi or cover story that allowed her to enjoy some of the recognition owed her as the author of *Jane Eyre*, without having to acknowledge to herself her unwomanly desire for fame.

A letter to W. S. Williams, her publisher's reader, in December 1849, concerning his plans to have his daughter train for a career as a singer, further clarifies Brontë's painfully ambivalent feelings about fame:

I was told you had once some thoughts of bringing out Fanny as a professional singer, and it was added Fanny did not like the project. I thought to myself, if she does not like it, it can never be successfully executed. It seems to me that to achieve triumph in a career so arduous, the artist's own bent to the course must be inborn, decided, resistless. There should be no urging, no goading; native genius and vigorous will should lend their wings to the aspirant—nothing less can lift her to real fame, and who would rise feebly only to fall ignobly? An inferior artist, I am sure, you would not wish your daughter to be, and if she is to stand in the foremost rank, only her own courage and resolve can place her there; so, at least, the case appears to me. Fanny probably looks on publicity as degrading, and I believe that for a woman it is degrading if it is not glorious. If I could not be a Lind I would not be a singer.

(Wise and Symington 3: 61)

The singer and the actress offered the most compelling images of the successful woman artist, because the performance based nature of their arts held out the greatest promise of recognition. At the same time, their claim to that public space usually denied to women made them anomalous figures, all too easily identified with that archetypal "public woman," the prostitute. As Claire Tomalin notes, the association between

²Southey's letter of March 1837 returns constantly to the subject of the inappropriateness of women pursuing literary fame, and dark warnings of the cost of so doing: "it is not with a view to distinction that you should cultivate this talent, if you consult your own happiness. . . . But do not suppose that I disparage the gift which you possess nor that I would discourage you from

exercising it. I only exhort you so to think of it, and so to use it, as to render it conducive to your own permanent good. Write poetry for its own sake; not in a spirit of emulation and not with a view to celebrity" (Wise and Symington 1: 155-56).

prostitution and the stage was made over and over again throughout the nineteenth century (18). Blessed by a unique talent, such as that manifestly possessed by Jenny Lind, the woman artist might hope to be lifted into a category beyond criticism, where publicity might be experienced as unambiguously "glorious." But, as Brontë's choice of the word "degrading," with its connotations of sexual shame, suggests, she risked identification with the prostitute or "kept woman."

Corinne's own history illustrates the dilemma as Brontë saw it. The freedom Corinne demands, and which she goes to Italy to find, is both artistic and sexual. As she freely admits to Oswald, she has had lovers prior to falling in love with him. The public performances as actress and poetess, in which she takes such unabashed pleasure, carry strongly sexual overtones. In terms of Victorian patriarchal orthodoxy Corinne can only be seen as unfeminine, the dark, transgressive "other" to her fair-haired, retiring sister Lucile, and it is to this paradigmatic representative of the "angel in the house" that she loses her beloved Oswald.

Frances's creative imagination, like Corinne's, is linked to the intensity of her sexual passion, but Brontë will seek to render it innocent, first by confining her performance to the virginal setting of her apartment in the street of Our Lady of the Snows, and then by containing her within the strict bounds of bourgeois marriage, which makes Crimsworth the sole, legitimate recipient of the passion which is the source of Frances's creativity. Complacently he congratulates himself that he alone possesses knowledge of the "fervour"—for which read "sexual passion"—which is the source of her "poetic feeling":

The faculties of her nature, already disclosed when I married her, remained fresh and fair; but other faculties shot up strong, branched out broad, and quite altered the external character of the plant. Firmness, activity and enterprise covered with grave foliage poetic feeling and fervour; but these flowers were still there, preserved pure and dewy under the umbrage of later growth and hardier nature: perhaps I only in the world knew the secret of their existence, but to me they were ever ready to yield an exquisite fragrance and present a beauty, as chaste as radiant. (250)

Where Corinne risks "degradation" by exhibiting her talents in pursuit of "glory," and so loses the prospect of love and domestic happiness, Frances, settling for obscurity, keeps hers "pure" and "chaste," and is compensated with love and marriage.

Crimsworth, viewing her subsequent history through the ideological lens of his own bourgeois aspirations, will see it as a proper feminine complement to his own success story. Assuming as a right the privilege of speaking for them both, he records their achievement of an "independency" and early retirement to the rural idyll of Daisy Lane. Significantly, the last glimpse that Crimsworth gives us of their married life is of

himself seated in his library, writing the definitive account of their lives, while Frances presides Lucile-like over the tea-table. It is an image that underscores Crimsworth's self-appointed role as the "official" voice empowered to speak their history. Nonetheless, the silencing of Frances is not total. Occasionally, her secret history is allowed to disrupt the bland flow of Crimsworth's narrative.

Reviewing his married life Crimsworth reports with satisfaction, "I seemed to possess two wives" (250). One is "Madame the Directress, a stately and elegant woman, bearing much anxious thought on her large brow; much calculated dignity in her serious mien" (250). The other is "my own little lace-mender" (252), magically restored to him every evening, when their labors in the classroom are done. In both these incarnations Frances defers to Crimsworth: "it was her pleasure, her joy to make me still the Master in all things" (252). But it is with some perplexity, with some awe even, that Crimsworth records the occasional appearance of a third Frances, whom he variously describes as "a perfect, white demon," a "sprite," an "elf," a "vexing fairy" (253). This Frances is neither submissive nor deferential. She is passionate and rebellious.

Significantly, her moments of rebellion are marked by a return to her native French, "in which language," Crimsworth reports, "she always attacked me" (253). His way of reasserting his authority is to make her read English "by way of penance" (253). Forced to use a language which is not her own she becomes "like a child or a novice" (253) and must "acknowledge [Crimsworth] as her senior and director" (253).³ We ought to recall that it was in French that Frances composed "Jane," which Crimsworth described as "the language of her own heart" (216), the most notable evidence of her literary talent and the record of her secret ambition. Resorting once more to her native tongue, she reminds us of the aspirations and talents that have had to be suppressed. At the same time, in challenging the privileging of Crimsworth's language, she challenges his right to speak her history.

But the most substantial challenge to the adequacy of Crimsworth's narrative of success comes with the unexpected appearance of Corinne herself amidst the rural peace of Daisy Lane.⁴ The agent of her appearance is Crimsworth's idiosyncratic friend Yorke Hunsden. Challenged one day by Crimsworth about his single status, Hunsden produces a miniature of one Lucia, the woman he loved but could not, he claims, marry. It is, concludes Crimsworth, a "very individual looking female face" with "raven-black hair" and an "Italian eye [that] looked straight into you" (261). If we had any doubts about the *real* identity of this Italian beauty they are immediately dispelled when Hunsden challenges Frances to deduce Lucia's history from her portrait:

"I am sure Lucia once wore chains and broke them. . . . I do not mean matrimonial chains . . . but social chains of some sort—the face is that of one who has made an effort, and a

successful and triumphant effort, to wrest some vigorous and valued faculty from insupportable constraint—and when Lucia's faculty got free, I am certain, it spread wide pinions and carried her higher than—" She hesitated.

"Than what?" demanded Hunsden.

"Than 'les convenances' permitted you to follow."

"I think you grow spiteful—impertinent."

"Lucia has trodden the stage," continued Frances.

"You never seriously thought of marrying her—you admired her originality, her fearlessness—her energy of body and mind, you delighted in her talent, whatever that was, whether song, dance, or dramatic representation—you worshipped her beauty—which was of the sort after your own heart—but I am sure she filled a sphere from whence you would never have thought of taking a wife." (261-62)

Given our knowledge of Frances's secret history we ought not to be surprised at her skill in physiognomy. She can deduce Lucia's history, because it is what her own might have been had she not settled instead for the role of Lucile.⁵

It is a moment when Frances is forced to acknowledge the compromise she has made. Confronting her with the portrait Hunsden challenges her, "Don't you feel your little lamp of a spirit wax pale before such a *girandole* as Lucia's?" (262). And to this unflattering evaluation of herself as a mere lamp, in comparison to the candelabra that is Lucia / Corinne, Frances can only respond with one muted word of assent, "Yes."

But if, through Hunsden's intervention, Brontë measures the diminishment of her heroine, she also allows Frances a final opportunity to protest the necessity of the choice she has made, by turning the argument against her accuser. Throughout the novel Hunsden has served as a foil to the repressed and conventional Crimsworth. He is a progressive thinker, caught up in the revolutionary currents sweeping through Europe, sharing with his international network of radical friends a commitment to "the spread of liberal sentiments over the Continent," and a detestation of "old northern despotisms, and old southern superstitions: (259). It is with conscious irony then that Brontë makes this would-be revolutionary a thoroughgoing traditionalist on "the woman question," trammelled by "*les convenances*" and unable to contemplate marriage to an unconventional woman. The world in which Crimsworth finds fulfillment forces Frances to choose between her literary aspirations and her need for love. But, even in the brave new world that Hunsden and his political allies would usher in, there would be no new dispensation that would open up a space in which the aspiring woman could enjoy both the "glory" of achievement and the emotional fulfillment of love and marriage.

Did Brontë, when she penned that ironic portrait of the "revolutionary" Hunsden, know of those ardent women supporters of the French Revolution who, having led the assault on the Bastille and the march on Versailles, demanded equal

ity for women, only to find themselves hounded out of political life, or even, like Olympe de Gouges and Madame Roland, victims of the Guillotine? It seems unlikely. All the more reason then to remark her percipience and the range of her ironic vision.

It is on the basis of that ironic vision that Heather Glen makes her case for a reassessment of *The Professor*, noting the sophisticated literary intelligence at work in Brontë's "interrogation of the premises of the classic self-help narrative" (31) My purpose in this paper has been to add weight to the case for reassessment by demonstrating that same questioning intelligence at work in Brontë's dialogue with *Corinne*. It does, I think, put the whole canon of Charlotte Brontë's work in quite a different light if we see it as initiated by a novel that invokes a distinctly female literary tradition to investigate the dilemma of the woman artist, and does so somberly and with a fine, disinterested irony—a quality of vision with which Charlotte Brontë has not often been credited.

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³My argument here runs counter to that of Gilbert and Gubar, who claim that Crimsworth gives Frances "her true artistic voice—the 'voice of Albion'" (327), and of Boumelha, who writes "only [Crimsworth] can restore to her the 'mother tongue' that enables her to use the 'language of her own heart'" (56).

As I see it Frances, forced to speak English, is denied "the language of her own heart"—which is French, the language in which she composed "Jane."
⁴Duthie notes "striking similarities" between Lucia and the character of Corinne (128).

⁵Boumelha sees the account of Lucia's history as a "tale that Frances invents" (23). I see it rather as a moment of *recognition*, made possible because Frances is spiritually akin to Lucia.

Books Received

Anderson, Amanda. *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture*. Ithaca & London: Cornell UP, 1993. Pp. x + 250. \$35.00 cloth, \$14.95 paper. "Indeed, I argue in this book that depictions of prostitutes and fallen women in Victorian culture typically dramatize predicaments of agency and uncertainties about the nature of selfhood, character, and society. My purpose is to isolate and describe a pervasive rhetoric of fallenness in mid-Victorian culture, one that constitutes sexually compromised women as lacking the autonomy and coherence of the normative masculine subject. This rhetoric is shaped through interactions between Victorian ideologies of gender and several other historical factors: tensions between materialist and idealist understandings of the self and of moral action, debates on social reform and character transformation, and, not least, preoccupations with the relation between social identities and aesthetic forms. Through close analyses of social and literary texts from the mid-Victorian period, I demonstrate that the Victorian conception of fallenness, represented predominantly by the figures of the fallen woman and the prostitute, must be reinterpreted as culturally more central and analytically more complex than has previously been recognized. As my readings show, the fallen woman is less a predictable character than a figure who displaces multiple anxieties about the predictability of character itself" (1-2).

Approaches to Teaching Brontë's "Jane Eyre." Eds. Diane Long Hoeveler and Beth Lau. New York: Modern Language Assoc., 1993. Pp. ix + 180. \$37.50 cloth, \$19.75 paper. Contents: Beth Lau, "Materials"; Diane Long Hoeveler, "Introduction"; James Diedrick, "Jane Eyre and A Vindication of the Rights of Women"; Janet H. Freeman, "The Place of Jane Eyre in the Brontë Family Canon"; Thomas L. Jeffers, "Jane Eyre and Biography"; Mary Poovey, "Jane Eyre and the Governess in Nineteenth-Century Britain"; Tamar Heller, "Jane Eyre, Bertha, and the Female Gothic"; Phyllis C. Ralph, "Beauty and the Beast: Growing Up with Jane Eyre"; Susan VanZanten Gallagher, "Jane Eyre and Christianity"; Keith A. Jenkins, "Jane Eyre: Charlotte Brontë's New Bible"; John O. Jordan, "Jane Eyre and Narrative Voice"; Mary Burgan, "Fire and Light in Jane Eyre"; Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., "Contrast and Liminality: Structure and Antistructure in Jane Eyre"; Margaret Goscilo, "Jane Eyre and Pictorial Representation"; John Kucich, "Jane Eyre and Imperialism"; Dennis W. Allen, "Jane Eyre and the Politics of Style"; "Diane Long Hoeveler, "Jane Eyre through the Body: Food, Sex, Discipline"; Bernard J. Paris, "Jane Eyre as a Novel of Vindication"; Jerome Bump, "Jane Eyre and Family Systems Therapy"; Donna Marie Nudd, "Rediscovering Jane Eyre through its Adaptations"; Robert L. Patten, "Taking a Walk: or, Setting Forth from Gateshead"; David Rosenwasser, "A Kristevan Reading of the Marriage Plot in Jane Eyre"; an index.

Buzard, James. *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993. Pp. xii + 357. \$19.95 paper. "Tourism is now being studied in a variety of disciplines, but my belief that it fundamentally engages and tests cultural representations has made me approach it mainly from the direction of literary analysis. This work journeys within the boundaries of that conceptual country staked out by a romantic tradition of thought on the mediation of experience through linguistic and other forms of representation—a tradition beset by the consciousness of distance or alienation from what it regards as wholeness and immediacy" (13).

Disraeli, Benjamin. *Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1848-1851, Vol. 5*. The Disraeli Project, Queen's University at Kingston. Toronto, Buffalo, London: U of Toronto P, 1993. Eds. M. G. Wiebe, J. B. Conacher, John Matthews, Mary S. Millar. Pp. lxiv + 591. \$95.00. Some 602 letters from these critical years. Volume includes an 11 pp. intro., chronology, index and appendices.

Donaldson, Sandra. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: An Annotated Bibliography of the Commentary and Criticism, 1826-1990*. New York: G. K. Hall, 1993. Pp. xiv + 642. \$55.00. "This bibliography includes writings about Elizabeth Barrett Browning that consider her work, her philosophy, and her life. In addition, there are entries on the following items when they relate directly to her and her work: on her books as books, such as catalogs of important auctions, reports of significant acquisitions of manuscripts and first editions, and studies of the Wise forgeries and related material; on the Barrett families and the Browning families; on the Armstrong Browning Library at Baylor University in Waco, Texas; on the Browning societies in the United States and England; and on the Browning Institute's campaign to save Casa Guidi, the Browning's home in Italy" (ix-x).

Fenwick, Gillian. *Leslie Stephen's Life in Letters: A Bibliographical Study*. Aldershot: Scolar P, 1993. (Dist. Ashgate Pub. Co., Old Post Road, Brookfield, VT.) Pp. xxxi + 436. \$79.95. "While this study of Leslie Stephen's writings will not be concerned with so-called textual bibliography or with critical evaluation, it is concerned with the transmission of texts and with scholarly literary investigation beyond the confines of description of paper with signs. While the physical detail of a book may be intrinsically interesting, in this study it is considered the means to an end, the end being to comprehend the relationship of individual forms of a work, with the ultimate purpose of understanding the place of the work in Leslie Stephen's writing career. The approach which I have deemed renders the material most accessible to a broad range of users is historical . . . Thus, the book as physical fact is the central point of this study. . . . [T]he information which a Leslie Stephen book contains about its own production is supplemented with accounts of the processes leading to its publication, and of its subsequent transmission and reception" (xxv).

Victorian Group News

Announcements

"Crime and Criminality in Victorian Literature is the topic for a Victorians Institute Conference 30 September - 1 October 1994 at the University of Richmond. Please send 15-minute papers or detailed abstracts by 1 July 1994 to: Charlotte Oberg, English Department, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA 23173.

The Research Society for Victorian Periodicals will hold an open program at its 27th annual conference, the University of South Florida, 16 - 18 September 1994. For further information contact William Scheuerle, 18412 Timberlan Drive, Lutz, FL 33549 or Edward H. Cohen, English Department, Rollins College, 1000 Holt Ave. - 2666, Winter Park, FL 32789-4499, (407) 646-2216, FAX (407) 646-2600.

The Carolinas Symposium on British Studies will hold its 1994 meeting on 15 - 16 October in Norfolk, Virginia, with Old Dominion University as the host institution. For further information, contact John A. Hutcheson, Jr., Division of Business Administration and Social Science, Dalton College, 213 North College Drive, Dalton, GA 30720.

Oxford University Press is planning a comprehensive revision of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and is soliciting the expertise of the literary and academic community. "Many writers and academics . . . have come across . . . earlier examples of usage than those recorded by the *OED*, senses not represented at all, and new etymological and bibliographical information . . . The Chief Editor is . . . hoping that [those] working on a literary, social, or other historical text who [have] found a discrepancy between the material with which they are working and an entry in the *OED* will send their comments to the offices of the Dictionary. In particular he would like to hear of any textual material that is likely to modify the dating and status of words and meanings listed in the second edition of the Dictionary. He would also be grateful to receive references to any work in which information has been published which may have a bearing on the proposed revision of the *OED* text. All contributors will be thanked individually, and a file of the names of correspondents who have made substantial contributions will be maintained for acknowledgment in the final publication. Suggestions, comments, and details of publication should be sent to: The Chief Editor, Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, U. K.; FAX (Oxford) 0865 267810 (country code 44 865) or emailed to oed3@oup.co.uk."

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