

# The Victorian Newsletter

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Cover: On the centennial of his death, T. H. Huxley by "Ape" (Carlo Pellegrini) *Vanity Fair* 28 January 1871.

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## Kingsley's *Hypatia*: Foes Ever New

Lionel Lackey

Clergyman Charles Kingsley, liberal Christian theologian who used the novel for unabashedly didactic purposes,<sup>1</sup> wanted to make Christianity more tolerant, humane, and approachable than he found it among his conservative colleagues. But fearful of losing his faith, perhaps his job, he found himself at cross purposes, compelled to denounce some of the liberalism he favored. These cross purposes confuse the structure of his otherwise courageous 1852-53 novel about anti-intellectualism in fifth-century Alexandria, *Hypatia*.

Modern readers familiar with Kingsley from *Westward Ho!* and from his criticism of John Henry Newman which catalyzed *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* will know of his anti-Catholic bias, typified by his famous slur that "truth, for its own sake, has never been a virtue with the Roman clergy" and that "Father Newman informs us that it need not, and on the whole ought not to be."<sup>2</sup> Guy Kendall notes a parallel aversion to Low Church puritanism with what Kingsley called its "lazy and selfish Manichaeism"; "he found both Puritan and High Churchman, Calvinist and Tractarian, equally to blame" for an unnatural asceticism repressing normal human feelings and bypassing kindness and charity (126). He angrily repudiated the doctrine of eternal damnation as "an insult to [God's] love and justice" (*Letters* 2: 11). In place of salvation as an end in itself, he championed social activism including concern for the physical, intellectual, and economic (besides spiritual) well being of the working classes (see, for instance, Uffelman 17). Unlike many religious conservatives then and now, he maintained that "We might accept what Mr. Darwin and Professor Huxley have written . . . and yet preserve our natural theology" (*Westminster Sermons*, qtd. in *Letters* 2: 292).

Una Pope-Hennessy characterizes the theology of Kingsley as "feeling not observation, instinct not logic" (3). Kendall likewise finds him "not an accurate thinker as theologian. . . . He trusted to intuition primarily, especially when he saw a moral issue at stake" (140). Therefore one may be surprised at his denunciation of that most instinctive, intuitive of thinkers, Emerson.<sup>3</sup> The politics of attack on this common foe made strange bedfellows of the mutually antithetic High Church, Evangelical movement, and Kingsley; he in *Alton Locke* and *Phaethon* caricatured Emerson as Professor Windrush, who showed "contempt . . . for all who dared believe that there was any ascertained truth independent of . . . him, Professor Windrush, and his circle of elect souls" (5).<sup>4</sup>

And as Kingsley wrote to his friend and mentor, the latitudinarian theologian Frederick Denison Maurice, "modern Neo-Platonism—Anythingarianism," as represented by Emerson, was one of the "New Foes with an Old Face" he hoped to assail in *Hypatia*, a novel which would "set forth Christianity as the only really democratic creed, and philosophy, above all, spiritualism, as the most exclusively aristocratic creed" (*Letters* 1: 233).<sup>5</sup>

Yet despite Kingsley's purported defense of Christianity against secular intellectualism, *Hypatia* aroused much disfavor among religious conservatives. Kingsley was to miss his chance at an honorary Oxford degree in 1863 (despite royal favor) because one of the committee members considered *Hypatia* an "immoral book." According to Joseph Ellis Baker, "it was little wonder High Churchmen should not want to give Kingsley an honorary degree" since they said the novel was "calculated to encourage young men in profligacy and false doctrine" (96). Stanley E. Baldwin, among other modern commentators on *Hypatia*, finds himself "somewhat astonished that the author should assail philosophy by a picture of its best, while the record of Christianity which he sets forth . . . is really a series of pictures of black crimes and atrocities" (135). The contradiction, I feel, can be explained by Kingsley's recognition (conscious or unconscious) of serious flaws in Christian practice, if not in some of the implications of orthodox theology, and an irrepressible honesty in presenting these flaws even when they conflicted with his intended thesis. As a result, *Hypatia* becomes an "apology" for Christianity of a different sort from what Kingsley envisaged, almost an apology to the allegedly cold, heartless philosophers represented by Emerson and *Hypatia* if the only alternative is a bigoted, violent, vindictive Christianity.

Almost from the first page of the novel, there is implicit criticism of orthodoxy. Even as Philammon, the young monk who is one of the three protagonists, resolves to evangelize in Alexandria, he thinks uneasily of church doctrine positing eternal fire for unbelievers: "Could God be just in that?" (1: 5). Working under the Patriarch Cyril and his deacon Peter, Philammon is repelled by Cyril's allowing counter-terrorism against Jewish terrorists or conniving at the assassination of the secularist prefect Orestes, and at Peter's scornful denial of goodness apart from Christianity, as in the chaste and morally upright philosophy professor *Hypatia*. *Hypatia* is herself intolerant of Christianity as a plebeian force which threatens

<sup>1</sup>Guy Kendall, in *Charles Kingsley and His Ideas*, faults Kingsley's fiction in that "he can never refrain from moralizing" (104) and invents a conversation in which Kingsley answers an imaginary critic who says, "You destroy the artistic value of your novels, Mr. Kingsley, by intruding a moral at every point." Kingsley replies, "But I deny that there can be any true art that does not bear a moral value. . . . It is the judgment of the people that counts, not of an aristocratic clique of the intellect" (105-06).

<sup>2</sup>From a "Review of Froude," qtd. in Uffelman 27.

<sup>3</sup>For an account of the generally unfavorable reaction of the English clergy to Emerson, see Sowder. Sowder quotes the pro-High Church *English Review* as calling Emerson a "self-idolater" guilty of "sad twaddle" (8), and the pro-

Methodist *British Quarterly Review* as denouncing Emerson's "pantheism" for its "nibbling at the true, the beautiful, the right, as entertained by Christians" (44).

<sup>4</sup>Kingsley's *Phaethon: or, Loose Thoughts for Loose Thinkers* comprises two dialogues, one set in modern England and one in ancient Athens, in which a liberal clergyman denies the Emersonian doctrines of the American lecturer Windrush and Socrates denies those of the specious Athenian freethinker Protagoras.

<sup>5</sup>Thorp, in quoting this letter, includes the word *Emersonian* before *Anythingarianism* (111). In her biography Thorp uses many passages, such as the unflattering reference to Emerson, expurgated by Mrs. Kingsley from the *Letters*.

her Platonic intellectualism and which she hopes to disestablish with Orestes's help. Yet Philammon finds her intolerance more palatable (because more refined) than the churchmen's. He is drawn into her circle until he sees her turn away his sister Pelagia, a vulnerable prostitute who, fearful of rejection by her lover and damnation, has sought Hypatia's moral guidance. However, the church likewise offers little comfort to Pelagia, because its doctrine regards her as a backslider and thus unforgivable: It was "a generation who were forgetting [Christ's] love in His power, and practically losing sight of His humanity in their eager doctrinal assertion of His divinity" (*Hypatia* 2: 165). At last the church accepts Philammon and Pelagia back, but the young monk witnesses an atrocity which all but negates the acceptance. Hypatia, demoralized by the failure of her plans to disestablish the Church and ashamed of herself for temporizing with Orestes, is on the point of converting to the once-despised faith, for a former pupil, the Jewish intellectual Raphael Aben-Ezra, has interpreted it for her as the fulfillment of her long-held neo-Platonic beliefs. But Philammon sees a mob of Christians, incensed at hearing of Hypatia's earlier activities and incited by Peter with Cyril's unacknowledged consent, drag the Platonist into a church and mutilate her to death—even as she reaches upward toward a statue of Christ. Raphael caustically denounces Cyril, whom Peter has supplied with plausible deniability. Philammon and Pelagia, horrified by established Christianity as found in Alexandria, flee to the desert; there the former, before his early death, becomes a saintly abbot who habitually "stopped, by stern rebuke, any attempt to revile either heretics or heathens" (2: 298-99). A vision in his closing moments assures him of the eternal salvation of both the erring women he had loved.

Despite this vision, there is evidence that Kingsley felt embarrassed in dealing with the salvation of "heretics and heathens," balancing his latitudinarian feelings with what he thought the orthodox might require. As the dying Hypatia gestures toward the statue of Christ, Kingsley dramatically demands, "who dare say, in vain?" (2: 264). Yet the inclusion of the gesture betokens uncertainty, as though he feared to neglect any precaution. And he needs to allow a moment of verbal acquiescence for another unbeliever with whom he sympathizes, the Jewish procuress Miriam. This determined woman, softened by protective love for her natural son Raphael, confesses to him as she dies that she is not only his mother but a one-time Christian convert. Raphael urges her to renew her acceptance, and she acknowledges, "A grand thought it is after all—a Jew the king of heaven and earth! . . . Well—I shall know soon. . . . Perhaps . . . perhaps . . ." (2: 286). Interestingly, Kingsley dispenses with such gesture, such acknowledgement, at the death of a third unbeliever, the doughty old warrior Wulf, who refuses baptism because he "would prefer . . . to go to his own people" (2: 296). But the favorable portrait Kingsley has accorded this brave and honest Goth implies that—as with the unregenerate Huck Finn who

wants to share the damnation of his friend Tom Sawyer—the author hopes better things for him.

Kingsley gives glimpses of the warm, accepting, assimilating Christianity he favors, as in Philammon's first mentors, the fatherly desert monks Pambo and Arsenius. In a touching sunrise scene, Pambo gently warns the self-tormenting Arsenius against becoming "more and more zealous for the letter of orthodoxy; and yet less and less loving and merciful" (1: 203). Raphael's long, anxious monologues groping toward Christianity prefigure Levin's ruminations that conclude *Anna Karenina*. "I don't want to possess a faith," says Raphael to his future father-in-law; "I want a faith which will possess me" (2: 6). He finds this faith under the combined guidance and example of several "good" characters who we are told effect his conversion—his gentle bride-to-be Victoria, her kind and gentlemanly father Majoricus, the manly bishop Synesius, the intelligent (Saint) Augustine of Hippo. But unfortunately Kingsley does not trouble to realize these allegedly crucial characters the way he does the skeptics, freethinkers, and bigots—or the way Russian novelists would realize such saints as Sonya Marmeladov, Marya Bolkonsky, Platon Karataev. We learn, for instance, that a powerfully reasoned sermon of Augustine wreaks joyful conviction in Raphael:

What if this same Jehovah, Wisdom, Logos, call him what they might, was actually the God of the spirits, as well as of the bodies of all flesh? What if He was as near—Augustine said that he was—to the hearts of those wild Markmen, Gauls, Thracians, as to Augustine's own heart? What if He were—Augustine said He was—yearning after, enlightening, leading home to Himself, the souls of the poorest, the most brutal, the most sinful? (2: 122-23)

Yet Kingsley depicts the important, persuasive Augustine only second hand, through Raphael's interior monologue.

At last, when Raphael feels sufficiently sure of his Christianity to speak of it to Hypatia, he offers a rather heterodox rendering of the Incarnation and the Atonement. He says that concepts of God as "infinite," "eternal," or "omnipotent" are not enough, for "He must be a righteous God" (2: 230-31). Raphael hopes this righteousness will appeal to Hypatia, who may think of Christ as the Platonic "archetype of man . . . possessing the faculties and properties of all men" (2: 237). Regarding the Crucifixion, this Archetype "must labor his life-long under the imputation of being utterly unrighteous, in order that his disinterestedness may be thoroughly tested" (2: 236).<sup>6</sup> One senses that Kingsley wants to say more about Raphael's liberal theology but is backing down, as if he fears he has said too much already for some orthodox, disapproving audience. As it is, he may not have said enough about his Christian characters to please Christian readers expecting an emphasis on noble, heroic believers contending against cruel pagans, secularist

things which would make divine justice different from human justice. He protests against any explanation of Christ changing the will of God [i. e., to damn or punish mankind]. It is sin and not the penalty of sin which He came to remove. (69-70)

persecutors.

Kingsley, though he would have been loath to admit it, possibly sensed that he had more in common with Emerson the transcendentalist freethinker than with the stern upholders of an intolerant, doctrinaire Christianity. Granted there is a gulf between traditional Christianity and transcendentalism, the one holding to the exclusive divinity of Christ and the inherent sinfulness of humanity, the other to a universal divinity and man's potential for perfection.<sup>7</sup> But given these polarities, many a Kingsley complaint recalls a familiar passage from Emerson.

When Philammon fears (and Kingsley laments false emphasis on) an unapproachable Christ, one thinks of Emerson's observation that the "language that describes Christ to Europe and America is not the style of friendship to a good and noble heart, but is appropriated and formal—paints a demigod, as the Orientals or Greeks would describe Osiris or Apollo" (76). Kingsley and his guide Maurice both knew the penalties for questioning church (or church-supported civil) policy: Kingsley had been disciplined after an angry London sermon against the abuses of capitalism;<sup>8</sup> and Maurice was to lose his professorship at Cambridge for denying the doctrine of eternal damnation, "a dreadful warning to his friends," according to Susan Chitty (155). So both could have endorsed Emerson's finding that "for nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure" ("Self-Reliance" 171). Both could have appreciated (though Kingsley might also have resented) Emerson's unflattering picture of the conforming polemicist: "I hear a preacher announce for his text and topic the expediency of one of the institutions of his church. . . . Do I not know that he is pledged to himself not to look but at one side, the permitted side, not as a man, but as a parish minister?" ("Self-Reliance" 171). Kingsley and Emerson seem to have shared misgivings about St. Paul. In a passage from a letter to Maurice (expurgated from the edition of the *Letters* prepared by Mrs. Kingsley), Kingsley sounds close to "Dover Beach":

I daren't say what I think, I daren't preach my own creed, which seems to me as different from what I hear preached and find believed, everywhere, as the modern creeds are from Popery, or from St. Paul—and as St. Paul—horrible thought!—seems to me at moments from the plain simple words of our Lord. I don't believe he *does* differ from our Lord; but the dread will arise, and torment me. . . . one feels alone in the universe, at least alone among mankind, on a cliff which is crumbling beneath one, and falling piecemeal into the dark sea. (Qtd. in Thorp 124-25)

Emerson's assessment might have made Kingsley feel less alone, had he accepted comfort from such a quarter: "Once leave your own knowledge of God, your own sentiment, and

take secondary knowledge, as St. Paul's . . . and you get wide from God with every year this secondary form lasts" ("Divinity School" 84). Was it St. Paul's downplaying of marriage that troubled Kingsley the tender husband, the devoted father, or St. Paul's de-emphasis of simple goodness in favor of doctrinal abstraction that confused Kingsley the pragmatist, the humanitarian reformer?

Normally courageous and outspoken, Kingsley might have laughed at threats of church retaliation were it not for concern about the beloved wife and children dependent on him. Insightful is a letter to Maurice regarding the mutually hated doctrine of eternal damnation:

[Two Years Ago] is another side-stroke at the Tartarus doctrine, which is never out of my mind. I am trying, without openly attacking it, which I intend to do, *please God*, when I am older and steadier, I am trying, I say, to keep continually tapping on it, by little reductiones ad absurdum, on . . . the point in the public mind, and a necessity of reconsidering the matter. (Thorp 130)

His support of Maurice, when the latter was to be fired, had to be less enthusiastic than he would have liked, according to Thorp. Kingsley wrote to Maurice, "if you are condemned for these 'opinions' I shall and must therefore avow them and they will have to squelch me as well as you." Thorp adds, "he wanted to begin a campaign of letters to the journals but his vigorous schemes were subdued by Archdeacon Hare and other calm heads" (115). As in the aftermath of the sermon against laissez-faire exploitation, Kingsley's crusading campaign lost the name of action.

Given these inhibitions, it is less surprising that *Hypatia* has tensions between its stated thesis and its real (perhaps unconscious) one. According to Baldwin, the thesis was that "Even a weak and wayward Church is better than open and flagrant atheism" (130). But since Hypatia is no more an atheist than Emerson, since Cyril and Peter unleash more "democratic" anarchy than the freethinking Hypatia or Emerson ever could, and since both male protagonists end by breaking with the church of Alexandria, the true thesis seems rather that bigotry, persecution, and violence—though allied with orthodox Christian doctrine—are not really Christianity and are worse than philosophers' alleged coldness.

Kingsley, if not a systematic theologian, was a warm-hearted, generous man, alternately bold and afraid of the consequences of his boldness. His Christianity would incorporate Darwin but not Emerson—perhaps because Kingsley felt it would be easier to proselyte a Darwinian groping for something beyond scientific fact than to reclaim a confident Emersonian apostate. Most important, his faith was not above self-criticism, not above facing ugly aspects of Christian—or pseudo-Christian—practice. This practice, he felt, included

<sup>7</sup>Despite his concept of a forgiving, understanding God and recognition of some good in all humans, Kingsley adhered to the Christian doctrine of universal sin. Thus in *Phaethon* Kingsley's clergyman protests that the excessive freedom of Emersonian Self-Reliance will

lead in practice to the most narrow and sectarian Epicurism for a cultivated few. But for the many, struggling with the innate consciousness of evil, . . . what good news for them is there in Mr. Emerson's

cozy and tolerant Epicurism? They cry for deliverance from their natures; . . . and he answers them with, "Follow your natures . . ." (79-80)

<sup>8</sup>For accounts of this sermon, delivered at St. John's Church, London, while Kingsley was involved with the Chartist movement, see, for instance, Thorp 82-86 and Uffelman 21-22.

not only the brutality of Hypatia's slaying but also received dogmas pointing to an exclusionist, unforgiving God who did not value morality among unbelievers and who would sanction contempt for fellow humans, within or outside the church.

Kingsley the novelist may be faulted for imperfect structure and strategy, but to at least one reader his works merit reconsideration for a relevance perhaps more apparent—in a time of ethnic cleansing, Christian coalition, and strident moral censorship—than it was a generation ago. Television and technology have brought Christianity into closer contact with rival faiths, rival ideologies, inviting comparison, possibly conflict. Secularist and religionist can no longer ignore each other's mindset and agenda. Kingsley, a kind and honest clergyman who wanted art, science, and faith to supplement each other without rancor and with mutual respect, poses an alternative to the poles of a destructive Christianity and a soulless intellectualism.

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## Representing the "Latent Vashti": Theatricality in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*

Lisa Surridge

In the final chapter of *Charlotte Brontë's The Professor*, William and Frances Crimsworth examine an ivory miniature of a woman's face. They know almost nothing about the woman pictured there, except that Yorke Hunsden—a bluff yet sympathetic manufacturer—loved but did not marry her. Their responses thus represent intensely personal reactions to the portrait itself. William speaks first, describing a "handsome" Italian face with "individual" features, a "determined" eye, "firm" chin, and hair which "despise[s] arrangement" (261). In contrast to this rather prosaic description, Frances's response is original and emotive. From the features of the unknown woman, and the scanty facts supplied by Hunsden, she constructs an extraordinary vision of "Lucia" as actress and rebel:<sup>1</sup>

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. . . . Lucia

has trodden the stage . . . (261-62)

Since Frances knows so little about "Lucia," this imaginary portrait of a Corinne-like figure<sup>2</sup> reveals as much about Crimsworth's little "lace-mender" (232) as about Hunsden's "ideal bride" (260). Her vivid fantasy of rebellion and theatricality suggests unexpected and fiery depths in the lady directress and dutiful wife, the forced reader of Wordsworth and lover of Byron, the "vexing fairy" (253) who calls her husband "Monsieur" (252). *The Professor*, written in 1846, did not develop these aspects of Frances's character; however, when Brontë transformed her hitherto unpublished novel into *Villette* (1853), she retained and expanded into key features of the text both the heroine's identification with the actress, and the use of theatricality to suggest latent traits in female character. In *Villette*, theatre transforms the heroine from ice and snow(e) to fire. Lucy's role in the school vaudeville, her identification with the actress Vashti, and her opium-induced "play" in the "theatre" of the park all constitute narrative ruptures which portray the heroine shifting dramatically from

spectatorship to action, silence to speech, and self-effacement to self-display.<sup>3</sup>

The theatre scenes in *Villette* derive much of their revelatory power from contemporary anxieties concerning women and acting. As Christopher Kent observes, Victorians perceived the stage as "an area of special dispensation from the normal categories, moral and social, that defined woman's place" (94). "[T]he most admired qualities of [middle-class] Victorian womanhood were modesty, devotion, tenderness, self-effacement, and quietness of manner," writes Michael Baker. "The position of the professional actress ran directly counter to [this]. . ." (96-97). Thus when Brontë depicted Vashti as the double of her "quiet" (482) domestic heroine, she harnessed to her fiction the full weight of the actress's exclusionary status. Passionate and rebellious, Vashti acts out the subversive impulses of a heroine who appears as "inoffensive as a shadow" (482).<sup>4</sup>

As well as drawing on contemporary anxieties surrounding female performance, *Villette* participates in a nineteenth-century fictional convention associating theatrical experience (especially that of amateurs, and more particularly that of women) with liberated, even subversive behavior. In *Mansfield Park*, for example, the rehearsals for *Lovers' Vows* provide the opportunity for Maria Bertram, Henry Crawford, Mary Crawford, and Edmund Bertram to explore socially untenable or unsuitable desires. Stage performance plays a similar role in *Vanity Fair*, where Becky's Clytemnestra performance punctures social artifice to suggest dark "truths" about her marriage to Rawdon. In each case, theatre disrupts the domestic, middle-class structures which habitually govern social or sexual behavior, and reveals *personae* alien to those which the characters habitually present to the world. These episodes thus resemble the suggestive and disturbing eruptions of a *doppelgänger*. But whereas the actions of a *doppelgänger* typically run parallel to the primary narrative, theatrical episodes puncture the main text itself, disrupting established patterns of characterization and social interaction with radical shifts in behavior, discourse, and milieu.

## I

The first theatrical episode in *Villette* marks an abrupt shift from the heroine's self-assigned role as a looker-on (197) at life. Forced to replace a sick student in the cast of the school play, the "quiet" (482) Lucy is a deeply reluctant actress: "Inclination recoiled, Ability faltered, Self-respect . . .

trembled" (187). Superficially, at least, performance is anathema to her—yet there are indications that theatre will tap Lucy's hitherto repressed emotions and imaginative potential. M. Paul, for example, associates acting with latent powers which he has detected through phrenology: "I read your skull that night you came; I see your *moyens* [abilities]" (185). The attic location of Lucy's rehearsal further suggests the connection between theatre and the repressed. As the site of the nun's appearances and the reading of Dr. John's letters, it is strongly associated with unaccommodated and transgressive sexual desires. In performance, the school play does indeed forge this link. Under its liberating auspices, Lucy is transformed into an assertive and flirtatious figure who revels in the power and publicity of her role: "What I felt that night, and what I did, I no more expected to feel and do, than to be lifted in a trance to the seventh heaven," she admits (197). Significantly, she links this transformation to the discovery of voice: "[M]y tongue . . . got free, and my voice took its true pitch, and found its natural tone . . ." (195).

This scene thus reproduces the trope of the revelatory play within the novel as established by Austen and Thackeray. Notably, Brontë had already exploited this motif in the charades in *Jane Eyre*. There, sophisticated readers enjoyed two layers of theatrical "truth." The first, carefully (and misleadingly) encoded by Rochester, is the false revelation of his desire for Blanche Ingram. Rochester intends the "bride" charade to appear to the watching Jane Eyre like the play in *Mansfield Park*—as a vehicle for sexual desire. His intentions are subverted, however, by the revelatory power of theatre itself, for the charade reveals truths which he either does not recognize or actively wishes to conceal. His eastern costume in the "well" charade, for example, suggests the despotism which will threaten his relationship with Jane. Similarly, his role as chained convict in the "Bridewell" scene symbolizes both the chains of his marriage to Bertha, and the criminal nature of his bigamous intentions.

In *Villette*, the school vaudeville dramatizes latent desires and hostilities among Genevra, Lucy, Dr. John, and de Hamal. As Litvak observes, the scene engenders a "dazzling plurality of complications":

[A] woman dressed from the waist up as a man plays the effeminate suitor of a coquette who plays herself; . . . this female quasi-male-impersonator acts for one man (M. Paul), and both for and against another (Dr. John). . . .  
 ("Scene of Instruction" 480)

<sup>3</sup>In her article "Coming Wonders: Uses of Theatre in the Victorian Novel," Gillian Beer argues the centrality of theatre in *Villette*. She posits that theatrical performance represents the "vital contrary" to Lucy's "hermetic self" (182): "Theatre . . . marks symbolically the stages of her coming to impassioned life" (181).

<sup>4</sup>In *Literary Women*, Ellen Moers explored the anxiety surrounding the actress in Victorian women's fiction (see chapter 9, "Performing Heroism: The Myth of Corinne"). She did not, however, take full measure of the appeal of this oppositional figure. The idea of the actress as the "other" self of the Victorian heroine was proposed by Nina Auerbach in "Alluring Vacancies in the Victorian Character." Auerbach stresses the affinity between the actress's role-playing and the Victorian woman's self-fabrication into the socially prescribed, stock roles of wife, fallen woman, mother, old maid. In portraying female character, she argues, Victorian novelists "tantalyze us and torture

themselves with the dual possibility of character as revelation and as deceit" (37). My own emphasis is on the oppositions and subversive resemblances between actress and heroine, public and private woman, centric and ex-centric figure. In this respect I am indebted to Rachel Brownstein, who suggests in "Representing the Self: Arnold and Brontë on Rachel" that Vashti represents the opposite of the private woman (8), as well as, more generally, to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who foreground the importance of the double in women's writing. For a contrasting interpretation of the function of theatre in *Villette*, see Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act*. Litvak emphasizes the pervasiveness of theatricality in ostensibly non-theatrical scenes, such as those of teaching and governance. My own interpretation stresses the peculiarly Victorian overdetermination of theatrical scenes and spaces as loci of multiple and frequently subversive meanings—a cultural loading which did not exist for instructional spaces.

<sup>1</sup>Prosaic as it is, William's description establishes a physiognomy which, in contemporary terms, would be consistent with Frances's portrait of a rebel. In Victorian heroine descriptions, strong chins conventionally emblemize determination (Fahnestock 340), while unruly hair encodes emotional or sexual volatility (Gitter 941).

<sup>2</sup>As Smith and Rosengarten note, "Lucia" is "strikingly" similar to Mme. de Staël's heroine Corinne. There is evidence that Brontë had read de Staël's novel: two leaves from Volume 1 of *Corinne* were inserted in the copy of *Russell's General Atlas of Modern Geography* which Brontë used in Brussels (*The Professor* 261n).

Theatre thus allows "play" unacknowledged elsewhere in the text: Lucy and Ginevra explore their mutual attraction, Ginevra shows her desire for a foppish lover, and Lucy expresses both animosity against and desire for Dr. John. Important truths are thereby revealed or predicted: Lucy does reject Dr. John, Ginevra does end up with a fop, and so on. Perhaps most importantly, drama enables Lucy and Ginevra to undo the romance conventions which burden them both. By turning from the "worthy" lover to the fop, Ginevra rejects the ideology which burdens her relationship with Dr. John. "He thinks I am perfect," she complains to Lucy, "furnished with all sorts of . . . virtues, such as I never had, nor intend to have" (126). Together, the two women revise the conventional plot which rewards a worthy male with a desirable woman. By acting out desire between the (unworthy, emasculate) fop and the woman/prize, they problematize the woman's traditional plot function as reward or object, while questioning the desirability of the "worthy" lover over the fop. Significantly, their playful subversion of the conventional romance plot anticipates the ending of the novel, where Brontë sets up and then swiftly upsets the pairing-off of her heroine.

The vaudeville in *Villette* thus lifts social constraints, subverts gender identity, and disrupts conventional romance plotting. Lucy's transvestite costume functions as a key symbol of this sexual and social "play." She wears a masculine cravat, *paletot* [short, loose coat], vest, collar, hat, and gloves over conventional feminine clothing. This combination of layered masculine and feminine dress is striking, and its significance potentially complex. Some critics ignore the layering, equating Lucy's dress with simple transvestitism (see, for example, Crosby 707). Others attempt to tease out the meaning of the layering, suggesting that it signifies Lucy's "dread of being submerged in another" (Beer 183) or that "her assumed gender is only assumed" (Brownstein, *Becoming* 175).<sup>5</sup> Many have argued that the transvestitism itself symbolizes Lucy's assumption of masculine freedom, and / or parodies the symbols of masculine authority (see, for example, Gilbert and Gubar 413). However, critics have largely ignored the Victorian stage conventions from which Lucy's costume derives significance.<sup>6</sup>

In Victorian theatre, cross-dressing—almost unheard of in everyday life—was common. Girl actresses habitually played boys' roles; pantomimes and burlesques featured cross-dressed women players; female tragediennes played serious male parts such as Shakespeare's Romeo. The social meanings of this widespread stage transvestitism are, however, difficult to establish. On the one hand, a cross-dressed actress could be seen as discarding the restrictions of feminine dress in favor of masculine garments symbolizing power and authority. Nina Auerbach's account of Ellen Terry's transvestite roles exemplifies this view: "Ellen Terry's legs," she

writes, "aroused . . . women to dreams of expanded selves" (63). However, in the era when women's legs were strongly fetishized, the sight of actresses in tights or trousers had undoubted erotic overtones. In *Actresses as Working Women*, Tracy Davis foregrounds the sexually exploitative aspects of stage transvestitism. Focusing largely on the comedic genres of burlesque and extravaganza, Davis argues that the actress's gender role was confirmed rather than confused by cross-dressing. Indeed, many transvestite stage costumes did not attempt to sustain the illusion of masculinity; rather, they actually emphasized a feminine shape through the use of corsets and garments flared at the hips. "[T]he point of women's cross-dressing," Davis concludes, "was to please, not deceive" (113-14).

Davis's research on comedic transvestitism is complemented by Anne Russell's work on transvestite tragediennes. Surveying critical response to Charlotte Cushman's cross-dressed Romeo (which ran at the Haymarket Theatre from December 1845 to July 1846), Russell has discovered that many reviewers saw the performance as "reinforc[ing] the very codes [it] might seem to undercut" (3). Not only did they emphasize feminine qualities in Cushman's performance (11-12), but they implied that the role of Romeo *itself* was considered problematic in terms of contemporary ideals of masculinity—a feature which, Russell suggests, made it acceptable for women performers (7). Russell's and Davis's research suggests that the meaning of female transvestitism on the Victorian stage was highly dependent on generic context, and that this potentially liberating practice was not free from sexual exploitation or gender stereotyping.<sup>7</sup>

This tension between sexual liberation and exploitation provides an illuminating context in which to consider Lucy's mixed masculine and feminine garb. Generically, the play ("a compact little comic trifle" [180]) belongs to a type which might well feature the sexual commodification commonly associated with comedic acting *en travesti*. Furthermore, it seems likely that the original costume, which Lucy refuses to wear, is sexually provocative. (This is implied when Zélie St. Pierre sneeringly reassures M. Paul that the "belle Anglaise" [pretty Englishwoman] will make a "capital *petit-maître*" [excellent little gentleman] [193].) Lucy's refusal to don tights or trousers may thus be understood as her refusal to perform as sex object; at the same time, her assumption of masculine clothing *in addition to* her habitual feminine dress<sup>8</sup> may allow her to assume symbolically the traditionally masculine powers of speech and sexual assertiveness without this attendant liability.<sup>9</sup>

## II

In *Villette*'s first theatre scene, Brontë's cross-dressed and triumphant heroine discovers a "keen relish" for the liber-

ating and subversive experience of theatre; almost immediately, however, she reassumes her quiet spectator role. The second eruption of theatre in the novel is marked by a similar tension between fear and desire. This time, Lucy is in the audience, not on stage, but her emotional response is stronger and even more ambivalent than when she was playing a role: "It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation. It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral" (369). These juxtaposed and irreconcilable judgments capture Lucy's ambiguous reaction to Vashti.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, she describes the actress's irresistible attraction; on the other, she uses cultural otherness, profession, and bestial and demonic imagery to distance herself from this fearsome figure. This paradoxical reaction is, however, intrinsic to Vashti's symbolic power. As a Jewish actress, Vashti is consummately "other": both anti-theatrical and anti-Semitic prejudice place her beyond the boundaries of social acceptance. Yet her appeal to Lucy relies precisely on her perceived position outside the structures which contain the heroine.

By focusing the "Vashti" chapter on Lucy as a member of the audience rather than a member of the cast, Brontë raises an issue with which feminists are still grappling—that of female spectatorship. In theorizing the gaze, Laura Mulvey has described the viewer as active/masculine and the viewed object as passive/feminine (19). Mulvey admits that this analysis begs the question of the female spectator (29); as Griselda Pollock remarks, we are prompted to ask if "texts made by women can produce different positions within this sexual politics of looking" (85).<sup>11</sup> In the art gallery visit which precedes the Vashti scenes, these issues of objectification, commodification, and female spectatorship are brought to the fore. Here, Lucy moves from constructing her gaze as male (approving "that which it was considered orthodox to admire" [283]) to formulating a female way of looking. From this perspective, she produces a dissenting critique of the Cleopatra painting so admired by the male art connoisseurs of Villette. By refusing to read the codes which reveal this as a painting by and for men, she draws attention to the gender-specific situation in which it acquires meaning and value. Hence, instead of acknowledging the eroticism of Cleopatra's body,

Lucy ponders how much food it takes to feed her; instead of recognizing the reclining pose of the female nude, she demands if the model has a weak spine. Thus although M. Paul claims Lucy views the painting with the "self-possession of a *garçon* [boy]" (287), she in fact displays the self-possession of a woman who refuses to be made complicit in constructing the female body as erotic/art object.

The Vashti episode deepens this exploration of spectatorship, objectification, and authority. Like Mary Cassatt's 1879 painting *At the Opera*, which Pollock analyzes in her work on the female gaze (75-76), it disrupts the scopis/erotic relationship between male viewer and female performer by representing a female viewer and privileging her gaze over that of the male (in this case, that of the present but largely ignored other spectator, John Bretton).<sup>12</sup> In addition, this episode extends Lucy's fraught relationship with theatre. Although Lucy is not on stage this time, her identification with Vashti deepens her association with the transgressive experience of acting, and establishes the actress as the unlikely double of this intensely private figure.

Brontë suggests the actress's transgressive relationship with patriarchy through her association with the archetypal feminist rebel, Queen Vashti. The actress's biblical namesake refuses to dance for her husband, King Ahasuerus. This threatens masculine hegemony in the nation: "this deed of the queen will . . . [cause women] to look with contempt upon their husbands . . . (Esther 1:17). Significantly, Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), a novel nearly contemporary with *Villette*, provides evidence that the name "Vashti" was associated with female rebellion and rage: when describing Margaret Hale's anger at Captain Lennox's patronizing attitude to his wife (Margaret's cousin) Gaskell writes that "all the latent Vashti in [Margaret] was roused" (373).<sup>13</sup> Brontë's actress is also associated with the male Biblical rebel, Satan: "Fallen, insurgent, banished, she remembers the heaven where she rebelled" (370). Hence the actress is linked in Lucy's mind to insurgence against the three great patriarchs—the husband, the king, and God.

Despite (or perhaps because of) her attraction to this transgressor, Lucy distances herself from Vashti by denying

render her invisible to him.

For a more recent and highly detailed discussion of *Villette*, the gaze, and the application of Foucauldian theories of surveillance to the text, see Boone. Boone focuses largely on the role of the gaze in surveillance; he pays little attention to its role in theatrical spectatorship.

<sup>12</sup>Stokes subordinates the powerful relationship between Lucy and Vashti to that of Lucy and Dr. John. He implies that the emotions aroused in this scene are exclusively heterosexual: "[Lucy sees] 'Vashti' in the company of a man who exerts a power over her that she is unable or unwilling to admit even to herself. The mixed desire and hostility that the man arouses in the woman becomes exposed by the turmoil that she undergoes at the appearance of the actress" (779).

<sup>13</sup>Gilbert and Gubar suggest that the figure of Vashti was associated with a "determination not to perform": the Black American poet Frances Harper writes of a "Vashti" who declares "I never will be seen" (422). While the Vashti section of *Villette* clearly dramatizes a great deal of ambivalence concerning theatre, Gaskell's use of the name "Vashti" to denote rage and rebellion indicates a currency for a performative, passionate association more in keeping with Brontë's scene as a whole. Brownstein notes that the name "Vashti" "recalls, by association, the name of the Jewish queen Esther, who as a Racine heroine provided one of Rachel's great roles" ("Representing" 10-11).

<sup>5</sup>In a fascinating reading, Nancy K. Miller compares Lucy's assumption of the signifiers of masculinity in addition to woman's garb to the ironic manipulation of gender role required of female professors working within and against a masculinist academy (115-16).

<sup>6</sup>This contrasts with critical consideration of the Vashti section, which has been heavily (and fruitfully) based on considerations of contemporary theatre, especially the career of Rachel. See John Stokes, "Rachel's 'Terrible Beauty,'" and Brownstein, "Representing the Self."

<sup>7</sup>My thanks to Anne Russell of Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, for her kind permission to quote from this unpublished paper.

<sup>8</sup>Lucy's hybrid costume is fascinatingly similar to that (of collar, cravat, Wellington boots, and skirt) worn to rehearsals and around town by Charlotte Cushman (Russell 17).

<sup>9</sup>Lucy's affinity with the masculine is suggested elsewhere by her threat to call out Zélie St. Pierre, her refusal to exchange her cigar case for Dr. John's turban, and her nicknames "Timon" (339) and "Diogenes" (123).

<sup>10</sup>As is widely recognized, "Vashti" is based on the French-Jewish actress Rachel, who took Europe by storm in the 1840s and early 1850s. When Charlotte Brontë visited London in 1851, she saw Rachel perform twice. On June 7, she saw her in the title role of Scribe's *Adrienne Lecouvreur*; two weeks later, she saw her play Camille in Corneille's *Les Trois Horaces* (Gérin 481). On Rachel's other manifestations in Victorian novels (by G. H. Lewes, Benjamin Disraeli, and George Eliot) see John Stokes's excellent article "Rachel's 'Terrible Beauty': An Actress among the Novelists." Stokes analyzes the Vashti section of *Villette* as Brontë's response to Lewes's critical authority, and, more specifically, to his novels *Ranthorpe* and *Rose, Blanche and Violet*. "By recreating Rachel as Vashti," Stokes argues, "Brontë was invading Lewes's special territory and, in the bedevilment of his critical categories, asserting the validity of her own creative conflicts" (780-82).

<sup>11</sup>Gaze theory has obvious applications to a novel whose heroine casts herself as a "looker-on" at life. Both Lawrence and Litvak argue that Lucy claims the traditionally masculine power of the gaze: Lawrence observes that Lucy is "primarily . . . an interpreter rather than the erotic, mysterious 'other' to obsess the male gaze and fantasy" (450); Litvak argues that she achieves the "stereotypically patriarchal power . . . to objectify and scrutinize others while exempting oneself from similar treatment" ("Scene" 476). While it is true that Lucy is exempt from visual objectification, she is far from assuming with the gaze its traditional (masculine) prerogatives of sexual control and power. She is able to watch Dr. John only because her plainness and low social status

both the actress's humanity and femininity: "I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil" (369). As David Isenberg notes, this demonic imagery parallels Brontë's own response to Rachel (240): "I went to hear and see Rachel," Charlotte wrote to Ellen Nussey, "a wonderful sight, terrible as if the earth had cracked deep at your feet, and revealed a glimpse of hell" (Wise 3: 251). In the Nussey letter, Brontë's distancing tactics are even more categorical than in the novel. Whereas Lucy suggests Vashti has "something neither of woman nor of man" (369) about her, Brontë's denial of Rachel's humanity is absolute: "She is not a woman; she is a snake" (Wise 3: 251).

In "Representing the Self: Arnold and Brontë on Rachel," Brownstein suggests that the actress represents the opposite of the domestic heroine:

[The private woman] is in many respects an actress's opposite: she does not display herself, she must not be talked about, the sex her life depends on is unmentionable either by or to her, she has nothing to do with the vulgar crowd and belongs to her family alone. (8)

As Gilbert and Gubar observe, Dr. John articulates this conservative and fearful response to the actress when he judges (and condemns) Vashti "as a woman, not an artist" (373). The representation of the actress in the Vashti chapter thus draws heavily on contemporary anxieties concerning the actress's opposition to the tenets of middle-class domestic femininity. Since Vashti is based on a historical figure, however, it is worth inquiring where Rachel stood in relation to this discourse.

Contemporary reviews and articles reveal that anxieties concerning women and acting were intensified in her case. Rachel conformed to Victorian social codes neither in her sexual life (she had a string of lovers and several illegitimate children [Brownstein 3]) nor in her acting. While critics celebrated her power, they also consistently remarked on her lack of feminine qualities: "she had little tenderness, no womanly caressing softness . . .," wrote George Henry Lewes (*On Actors* 31). Similarly, George Vandenhoff observed that "[Rachel] had no love in her" (41). In addition to Rachel's violation of normative feminine codes, a further aspect of her "otherness" was her Jewish origin, a fact which was frequently raised, either implicitly or explicitly, in reviews.<sup>14</sup> John Stokes remarks how this prejudice penetrated even George Henry Lewes's otherwise laudatory reviews. In Lewes's early commentary especially, "Jewishness is an inheritance which

[Rachel] brilliantly transforms" (Stokes 778):

It will ever remain a curious problem how this little Jewess, this *enfant du peuple* should . . . [have exhibited] the imperial grace and majesty which none but herself can reach. . . . If you wish to form an idea what Rachel would be without her exquisite intelligence, look at her brother Raphael Félix, who so closely resembles her. Is he not a vulgar Jew Boy? Can anything wipe out the original stain of his birth? Yet Rachel herself physically is no better; and were it not for the "o-er informing spirit," she would be as vulgar. (*The Atlas* [8 August 1846]; qtd. in Stokes 776)

Even in Lewes's later reviews, Rachel's religious and cultural difference is implied by his image of her as a "rod of Moses," (Forster and Lewes 243, 254)—a term which, while celebrating her power, links that power directly to her Jewishness.<sup>15</sup>

Latent anti-Semitism is also implicit in Matthew Arnold's three sonnets on Rachel, written in 1863. (Although these poems postdate *Villette* by a decade, they serve to demonstrate how central Rachel's Jewishness was to Brontë's contemporaries.) All three poems pay tribute to Rachel, yet Arnold identifies with the actress only by effacing her cultural difference. In "Rachel II," for example, she is depicted as a "Greek-souled artist" (l. 12), her Jewish origins erased in favor of the classical plays in which she performed. In "Rachel III," the actress is described as having "Sprung from the blood of Israel's scattered race" (l. 1), yet her German birthplace, French upbringing, and classical roles are used to achieve for her a Greco-Roman and trans-European identity. Only when Arnold can declare Rachel to be of "Germany, France, Christ, Moses, Athens, [and] Rome" (l. 12), can he proclaim his own identity with this Jew.<sup>16</sup>

Many of the strongest terms of acclamation thus carry shades of meaning which suggest Rachel's cultural alienation from the critics who admired her acting. This subtle racism may also underlie the animal and serpent imagery frequently used to convey Rachel's power—Gautier described her head as "like [that] of a viper" (Richardson 47); Jules Janin compared her to a "pythonesse" (75) or "jeune lionne" (31); Lewes portrayed her as "the panther of the stage" (31). These tributes to Rachel's power carry connotations of inhumanity which may reflect cultural difference. They certainly convey her alienation from the domestic woman, for whom such images would have been unthinkable.<sup>17</sup>

Given Rachel's double exclusion through culture and profession, Brontë's decision to represent her as Lucy

feels, is "forced to encompass too many contraries" (20). Neither sees the imposition of a trans-European identity as implicitly anti-Semitic, as I do. It could be suggested that Arnold is merely recognizing the cosmopolitan identity of many European Jews; however, his reference to Rachel reading Thomas à Kempis ("Rachel III," l. 7) reveals his investment in a normalizing process. Notably, the sonnets are distanced from the overt racism of their inspiration, a biography by Mme. de Barrera which Brownstein describes as a "hostile, cavilling, anti-semitic assessment" (16).

<sup>17</sup>Stokes suggests that Lewes's image is derived from Hazliit's commentary on Kean: "His hurried motions had the restlessness of the panther's" (792 n.6). It seems to me that gender is critical in affecting meaning here: what may have been unequivocally positive when applied to Kean may well have carried a different resonance when applied to a woman. Note, for example, Brontë's application of similar imagery to her androgynous heroine Shirley.

Snowe's double must be seen as significant and deliberate. Whereas Lucy stands for the private and the repressed, the British and the Protestant, the "looker-on" at life, Vashti represents the expressive, the passionate, the woman in the public eye, the Jewish, the foreign, the French. In harnessing to her fiction the ambivalence which Rachel's profession and culture aroused in the Victorian mind, Brontë thus created for Lucy a sister whose opposition to her own cultural position and gender identity was virtually absolute.

Vashti's role as the heroine's double is suggested by Lucy's description of the performance bearing her soul "like a leaf, on the steep and steely sweep of its descent" (371). Their affinity is also revealed by Lucy's angry assessment of Dr. John: "[T]o bright, soft, sweet influences his eyes and lips gave . . . welcome . . .; for what belonged to storm, what was wild and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming, he had no sympathy . . .," she charges (372). This accusation is fascinating, in that it links the actress to Lucy's own emotional climaxes (consistently represented as storm), and implies that by failing to respond to Vashti, Dr. John has failed to respond to her. It also foregrounds cultural difference, positioning Lucy and Dr. John in Europe and England respectively: "Cool young Briton! The pale cliffs of his own England do not look down on the tides of the channel more calmly than he watched the Pythian inspiration of that night" (372). In this passage, Dr. John's "cool" British character is implicitly contrasted to Rachel's fiery French and Jewish nature; within these oppositions of fire/coolness, storm/sun, Jewish/Christian, French/English, Lucy places herself in strong affinity with the Jewish and the French.

Lucy's powerful attraction to theatre is, however, threaded with fear. Early in the novel, M. Paul depicts theatre as a flame lighting up the player:

*Vous ne sentez donc rien? Votre chair est de neige, votre sang de glace? Moi, je veux que tout cela s'allume, qu'il ait une vie, une âme!* [Don't you feel anything? Is your flesh made of snow, your blood of ice? I want all of that to light up, to take on a life, a soul]. (180)

In the Vashti episode, however, this theatrical fire burns or consumes the soul it inhabits. Vashti is described as a star<sup>18</sup> verging on its judgment day, "an orb perished or perishing" (368). Moreover, Lucy represents this internal fire as a kind of demonic possession:

[I]n each of her eyes sat a devil. These evil forces bore her through the tragedy, kept up her feeble strength—for she

was but a frail creature; and as the action rose and the stir deepened, how wildly they shook her with the passions of the pit! They wrote HELL on her straight, haughty brow. They tuned her voice to the note of torment. They writhed her regal face to a demonic mask. (369)

The demonic and consumptive/burning imagery associated with Vashti is difficult to analyze. On the one hand, the demonic imagery seems derived from Brontë's view of genius as a form of possession: "[T]he writer who possesses the creative gift owns something of which he is not always master . . ." ("Preface" to *WH* 444).<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the metaphors of consumption which are linked to this demonic struggle take their potency from the powerful myths surrounding tuberculosis. Lucy depicts Vashti as "half-consumed" (368) and "wasted like wax in flame" (369). These signs of ill-health are linked to color imagery which is specifically tubercular: Vashti's pale presence ("like sculpture," "like alabaster," "like silver," [370]) against the crimson theatre identifies her with the hectic tubercular complexion (alternately flushed and pale skin) and the definitive tubercular sign—blood.

As Brownstein points out, this consumptive imagery has a strong factual basis: Rachel did die of tuberculosis, and was spitting blood long before 1851 (10). More generally, however, it derives meaning from the strong contemporary association of tuberculosis with excess. As Susan Sontag points out in *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), the Victorians related consumption to creativity and passion. Tuberculosis was seen as a "sign of an inward burning" (20), a disease afflicting the reckless and sensual (21), the poet (30), and the courtesan (25). Although Sontag does not mention it, the disease was also associated with the actress and her life of long hours, poverty, and excess (both theatrical and emotional). In Louisa May Alcott's *Work* (1873) and Bertha Buxton's *Nell—On and Off Stage* (1880), consumption represents the theatre's capacity to consume or burn up women.<sup>20</sup> Notably, this metaphor underlies the common image of the ballet dancer as a "moth" burned by the footlights—the inflammability of dancers' costumes providing a striking metaphor for their temperament.<sup>21</sup> This moralization of TB was explicitly applied to Rachel: "The inner craving of that great soul was too much for the frail body," remarked the *Victoria Magazine* of 1876, "and eventually wore it out" (264).

Although Brontë's imagery invokes contemporary fears concerning the actress's excessive passion, desire, and creative fire, Vashti's struggle does not constitute a typical tubercular death as represented in nineteenth-century literature. Sontag's research reveals that Victorians idealized consumption as a

<sup>14</sup>Brownstein notes that Rachel's Jewish origin was significant to Balzac, George Eliot, and Disraeli; however, she argues that the actress's race "does not signify" for Brontë, except as a source of power (13). As I argue below, cultural difference is essential to Brontë's construction of an oppositional (dark, mercurial, fiery) personality shared by M. Paul, Vashti, and—finally—Lucy.

<sup>15</sup>Brownstein argues that Lewes picked up this racially charged image from *Villette* (13). It first appears in his reviews in 1853.

<sup>16</sup>Both Stokes and Brownstein juxtapose these sonnets with *Villette*. I differ from them, however, in my interpretation of the poems, especially where they concern Rachel's Jewishness. Stokes, for example, describes the last three lines of "Rachel III" as "an apostrophe to [Rachel's] ability to exceed racial difference" (792n.12). Brownstein considers that Arnold's attempt to represent Rachel as symbolic of a European identity fails—his Rachel, she

<sup>18</sup>As Brownstein points out, astrological imagery and theatrical vocabulary overlap here: Rachel was a "star" of the European stage. The term "pit" in the quotation below similarly aligns the "pit" of hell with the "pit" of the theatre (10-11).

<sup>19</sup>Stokes suggests that this demonic imagery is derived from George Henry Lewes's novel *Rose, Blanche and Violet*, in which an actress is stigmatized as demonic. In contrast, he observes, Brontë's Vashti flaunts her malignity (780-82). Gilbert and Gubar relate the demonic figure of Vashti to the "Satanic Eyes" of *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* (423).

<sup>20</sup>In *Work*, when the heroine sees herself in a mirror after her third season as an actress, she confronts the pale skin and feverish eyes characterizing the consumptive type (51). She leaves the stage and after a battle with illness

achieves the quieter life of a governess. In *Nell*, the TB death of the lovesick actress Phoebe Miller exemplifies the link between consumption and theatrical and sexual excess. Phoebe serves as a foil to the heroine Nell, whose moderation and sexual continence are rewarded by a position in a new, respectable theatre loosely based on that of the Bancrofts.

<sup>21</sup>See the *Court Journal's* 1844 tribute to Clara Webster, a ballet dancer who died of burns when her costume caught fire on stage: "Lovely butterfly of the passing hour, she attracted the gaze of all the gay votaries of fashion and pleasure, and, like the doomed moth, fluttering in the flame, consumed her ephemeral existence" (Guest 116). On the lighting techniques which rendered the risks of fire so high, see Rees.

purification of the dying. In *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), for example, the illness weans the soul from the physical: "[D]ay by day, and grain by grain, the mortal part wastes and withers away, so that the spirit grows light . . ." (637; Sontag 16). In his Rachel sonnets, Arnold represents just such a death: the dying actress is a passive figure who is carried to her deathbed; the peace of her last days is contrasted to the "fret and misery" ("Rachel II" l. 9) of the northern towns. In contrast, Vashti's death in *Villette* is characterized by fierce struggle: "[She] fought every inch of ground, sold dear every drop of blood, resisted to the latest the rape of every faculty, would see, would hear, would breathe, would live . . ." (373-74).

These metaphors of conflict between sufferer and invading foe have more in common with nineteenth-century representations of cancer than of tuberculosis. As Sontag observes, the controlling metaphors of cancer are drawn from warfare: "In cancer, the patient is 'invaded' by alien cells . . ." (14). Brontë may have derived this invasive imagery from *Adrienne Lecouvreur* (the play in which she saw Rachel perform on June 7, 1851). In the final act of this play, the heroine (herself an actress) is poisoned. The corrosive effects of the poison are represented as fire:

*Ce n'est plus ma tête, c'est ma poitrine, qui est brûlante . . . j'ai là comme un brasier . . . comme un feu dévorant qui me consume.* [It is no longer my head which is burning, but my chest. It feels as if there is a furnace burning inside me, . . . a devouring fire consuming me.] (178)

As Brownstein points out, Vashti's active resistance recalls Emily Brontë's final struggle (13). It also echoes the determined physicality of Catherine Earnshaw, whom Emily had depicted as out of place in heaven. More broadly, however, Vashti's defiance symbolizes resistance against all forces which threaten to annihilate the self. In the context of nineteenth-century theatrical literature, these are strongly associated with the corrosive or consuming gaze of the audience.

Ellen Moers and Joseph Litvak both suggest that the Vashti episode may be compared to *Records of a Girlhood*, the autobiography of the early nineteenth-century actress Fanny Kemble.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Kemble's formulation of the relationship between female spectator and actress provides a highly suggestive counterpoint to the Vashti episode. Both Kemble and Brontë describe a female spectator who identifies strongly with the actress she is watching. In Kemble's case, a professional actress goes to the theatre to watch the debut of a young actress. This text is unique in placing a woman actress as spectator watching a woman actress as performer:

The house was crammed, the pit one black, crowded mass. Poor child! I turned cold as ice as the symphony . . . began,

and she came forward . . . The bravos, the clapping, the noise, the great sound of popular excitement overpowering in all its manifestations; and the contrast between the sense of power conveyed by the acclamations of a great concourse of people, and the weakness of the individual object of that demonstration, gave me the strangest sensation when I remembered my own experience. . . . When I saw the thousands of eyes of that crowded pitful of men, . . . and then looked at the fragile, helpless, pretty young creature standing before them trembling with terror, and all woman's fear and shame in such an unnatural position, I wondered how I, or any woman, could ever have ventured on so terrible a trial . . . (465)

Fascinatingly, despite the presence of women (including herself and her mother) in the audience, Kemble constitutes the gaze of the audience as masculine ("the thousands of eyes of that pitful of men"). This gaze is violent, even corrosive: it threatens to "melt" the actress away "like a scrap of silver paper before a blazing fire" (465). Kemble empathizes closely with the debutante, recalling how she, as performer, had been overcome by this corrosive look: "I had known the dizzy terror of that moment, had felt the ground slide from under my feet, and the whole air become a sea of fiery rings before my swimming eyes" (465).

In contrast to Kemble, Brontë foregrounds the female spectator—and actually privileges her gaze over that of a male spectator, John Bretton. She also differs from Kemble in her deployment of the fire imagery associated with the gaze. On the one hand, as I have said, Vashti seems to be consumed from within. At the same time, however, Brontë's actress becomes a source of heat and light—a star, a comet, a sun which pulls and controls the gaze of the audience. Finally, fire literally breaks out in the theatre itself. In this way, Brontë reverses the direction of the burning: instead of being consumed by the gaze of the audience, Vashti threatens to consume the theatre with her fire.<sup>23</sup> This threat of inferno not only reverses the destructive effects of the gaze, but, as Sally Shuttleworth points out, recalls and triumphantly transforms a scientific discourse which depicted unrestrained female sexuality as fire.<sup>24</sup>

For Lucy, Vashti embodies a radical challenge to artists seeking to depict the feminine—and her own reply to the Cleopatra painting which had formed a closed circle of male artist and male viewer, leaving the female viewer no space but that of parody to express *her* vision. "Where [is] the artist of the Cleopatra?" she demands as she watches Vashti's performance. "Let him come and sit down and study this different vision" (370). Lucy sees the actress as a female Moses leading an exodus of women from artistic misrepresentation: her

rod slices through the eroticized flesh of the Cleopatra; her magian power overwhelms an army of fleshy Madonna figures (371). Vashti, in other words, represents a kind of vindication of Lucy's "other" way of looking. Hence, despite the profound anxieties concerning theatricality revealed by the text, *Villette* at last embraces and reverses contemporary prejudice surrounding women in nineteenth-century theatre, holding the actress up as a feminist symbol. Considering the cultural liabilities surrounding the actress in the period, including both her status as object of the commodifying male gaze and her perceived exemption from patriarchal structures, this challenge to male artists to study the actress as a woman's vision of femininity is striking indeed.

### III

In the Vashti episode, Brontë's heroine experiences an intense, though fearful, identification with an actress/double. In the park scenes near the end of the novel, Lucy's affinity with the stage is translated onto an emotional and imaginative plane, as she assumes the roles of director, spectator, and masquerader in the carnivalesque scenes of her own imagination. The theatricality of the park scenes is suggested by the stage metaphors which pervade the episode. Lucy writes of the "night's drama," the "woody and turfy theatre," its "actors and incidents," and events "behind the scenes" (662-63). The park's Egyptian scenery is created out of "timber," "paint," and "pasteboard" (655), and the gate's "flaming arch" (655) acts as a giant proscenium arch to the park/stage. Lighting is provided by the full moon; finally, a torch "[lights] to perfection" (671) the "dénouement" (671) of the scene between M. Paul and Justine-Marie.

This imagery strongly links the park scenes to the novel's theatrical episodes. These experiences are also similar on psychological and social levels. For example, the opium replicates the liberating influence of theatre, allowing Lucy to escape the "prison" (653) of the school and transgress the symbolic boundary of the park railings. The drug also reproduces the heightened state inspired by Vashti: "A gathering call ran among the faculties. . . . Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and venturesome" (650-51). Both transformations are symbolized through imagery of color, light, and water. In the Vashti scene, Lucy is plunged from shadowy hues into a pink dress, and then into the deep crimsons of the theatre. This is paralleled in the park scenes, where the grays of the school are replaced by "purple and ruby and golden fire" (655). Both incidents feature celestial imagery: Vashti is described as a falling star, a comet, an orb, a fierce light; the park is framed by an arch of massed stars, its plain is sprinkled with meteors, its forest with sparks of light. Finally, the scenes share images of rushing water: Vashti's performance is like a "river . . . bearing the soul"

(371); the music in the park like a "tide" (654) or "flow" (654).

By allowing Lucy to undertake the traditionally masculine role of the *flâneur* [stroller, street-idler], opium, like theatre, enables a form of cross-dressing.<sup>25</sup> As Griselda Pollock argues, the role is masculine by definition: "the *flâneur*/artist is articulated across the twin ideological formations of modern bourgeois society—the splitting of public and private with its double freedom for men in the public space, and the preeminence of a detached observing gaze, whose possession and power are never questioned as its basis in the hierarchy of the sexes is never acknowledged" (71). In addition, opium-eating itself had strong masculine associations in contemporary culture through its links with the artistic inspiration of De Quincey, Coleridge, and other major Romantic writers. Lucy's opium reverie thus links her to the great (masculine) literary figures of the previous age; through it, she lays implicit claim to their imaginative powers. There are significant parallels between Lucy's night escapade and De Quincey's famous nocturnal wanderings.<sup>26</sup> Like Brontë's heroine, De Quincey was stimulated by opium to seek out urban scenes, especially theatrical, musical, and popular festive venues. Lucy shares with George Crabbe the heightened sensory perception of the opium-eater (Abrams 25); her apprehension of music recalls De Quincey; her reveries of Egyptian palaces echo the splendid architectural fantasies of opium-addicted writers (Hayter 93).

Judith Williams describes Lucy's opium reverie as a projection of the subconscious: "Lucy enters a world of watery evanescence, Protean transformations, dissolving and rebuilding images. . . ." she writes. "What she sees is exactly what a dream reveals—her unconscious mind" (125). As a projection of the subconscious, the park scenes duplicate the uncanny effects of theatre. Just as the vaudeville dramatized desires and hostilities among its players, the park scenes play out tensions among Lucy, the Brettons, the "secret junta" (666), and M. Paul. In fact, the psychological drama of the entire second half of the novel is compressed and acted out in this nocturnal dream/play.

The first half of the episode dramatizes Lucy's estrangement from the Bretton world. Lucy recognizes that, however fond of her the Brettons are, they cannot know her. Their misconceptions are ironically revealed when the drugged and feverish heroine overhears them describing her as "steady," "grave," and "content" (660). Lucy's alienation from Bretton life is further conveyed through the contrast between her active, outward-looking persona in the park escapade, and the insular relationship of Polly and John Bretton. The latter is revealed through the gaze: "in looking up at him [Polly's] aspect had caught its lustre—the light repeated in *her* eyes beamed first out of his" (655). In this discomfiting image of the wife as human prism, Brontë depicts Polly's eyes as

<sup>22</sup>Kemble's 1878 text covers the period of her early stage career, from her debut in 1829 to her first retirement from the stage in 1834. The events it describes thus predate those of the novel. Yet, crucially, both Brontë's text and Kemble's early career predate the Robertsonian revolution of the sixties, when Victorian theatre embraced the ideals of the middle class. In *Literary Women*, Moers links *Records* and *Villette* as articulations of Victorian women's complex response to Mme. de Staël's *Corinne*. Litvak uses Kemble's account of her debut at Covent Garden to illustrate her rapid oscillation between censorious and covertly celebratory attitudes towards theatrical experience. Hé argues that in *Villette*, too, the private act of writing ("righting")

theatricality becomes "shiftily and dizzily theatrical" (*Caught* 79-81).

<sup>23</sup>Brownstein reads this fire (which is quickly quenched) as a "bitter dismissive last image" which diminishes the actress's power (13). In my view, the image of the actress as fire, as well as the degree of fear which she inspires in the spectators, is more important than the literal extent of the fire.

<sup>24</sup>Shuttleworth quotes the theorist John Bucknill: "Religious and moral principles alone give strength to the female mind . . . . When these are weakened or removed by disease, the subterranean fires become active and the crater gives forth smoke and flame" (321).

<sup>25</sup>This masculine or androgynous aspect of the scene sits in unresolved tension with the female and erotic symbolism of the pool in the wood under the reflecting moon (see Boone 36-37).

<sup>26</sup>De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822) is widely accepted as a source for the park scenes in *Villette*. Rosengarten and Smith note that the Brontë sisters sent De Quincey a copy of their poems in June

1847, acknowledging the "pleasure and profit" they had derived from his works (*Villette* 650n). Biographical links between Charlotte's attempt to imagine an opium dream and Branwell's tragic addiction to the drug have tended to obscure this important literary and cultural association between opium and creative power.

refractors of her husband's sun/eye beams. Polly's subservient gaze contrasts sharply with Lucy's triumphant spectatorship in the Vashti episode, and with her active visual engagement in the park scenes themselves.

The insularity of Bretton life is further conveyed by sea imagery. When Lucy awakens in the Brettons' home after her collapse, she experiences first a sea dream and then a drug-induced reverie. Both contrast sharply with similar events in the park scenes. The imagery of the sea dream conveys distance and somnolence: Lucy's small room is like an underwater cave, where a gale is heard as "a lullaby" (259). Given Lucy's predilection for storm, it is not surprising that she describes this quiescent state in ambivalent terms. The sleeping draught at Bretton is felt as a "tide of quiet thought . . . caressing the brain" (239); in contrast, the opium-laced draught taken before the park episode awakens her to vigorous imagination and action. The call of the fête is described as a "strong tide" and a "great flow" (653-64)—vigorous imagery recalling Vashti's magnetism (which is compared to a "deep, swelling, winter river" [371]), and conveying Lucy's preference for a more energetic and open, albeit less secure, life than that of Bretton.

The first half of the park episode thus reveals distance between Lucy and the Bretton group. The second half plays out Lucy's love for and jealousy concerning M. Paul. It is appropriate that this should occur in a scene associated with theatre, for it is M. Paul who discerns and incites Lucy's theatrical talents. He casts Lucy in his play; he also recognizes her pleasure on stage: "Were you not gratified when you succeeded in that *vaudeville*?" he challenges her. "What fire shot into [your] glance! Not mere light but flame . . ." (216). Whereas Dr. John persists in seeing Lucy as "inoffensive as a shadow" (482), M. Paul recognizes her affinity with Vashti. Significantly, he is himself associated with theatre: in his "ravings," he is compared to a "third-rate London actor" (455); in other angry moments, his "blue" and "lurid" glances seem borrowed from Vashti (422). M. Paul also shares the actress's foreign looks, spare frame, and mercurial personality. During the park scene, Lucy reads his features (as he has read hers) and discerns his Vashti-like potential: "I had often seen movements [in his face], so near the signs of genius—that why there did not shine fully out, the undoubted fire, the thing, the spirit, and the secret itself—I could never tell" (665). M. Paul's theatricality, near-genius, and resemblance to Vashti sit in unresolved tension with his authoritarian roles as chastiser, bowdlerizer, and potential exiler of "fifty Madame de Staëls" (504). Judith Williams suggests, however, that these conflicting roles identify M. Paul with the creative impulse itself—which Lucy describes as "the most intractable, the most capricious, the most maddening of masters" (515).

Given M. Paul's links with theatre and creativity, it is apt that Lucy should dramatize her desire for and jealousy concerning him in a scene redolent of theatre. Yet the park encounter is troubling in another respect: why, we may wonder, did Brontë accord such climactic intensity to the false revelation of love between M. Paul and his ward? To resolve this question, the reader must discard the equation of truth with literal fact, and see the scene instead as a projection of a subjective state. Read in this way, the scene does, like the vaudeville, reveal profound truths concerning Lucy's fears,

desires, and jealousies.

Lucy narrates her encounter with the "secret junta" (666) as a story of enchantment, casting herself as an innocent and fascinated intruder upon evil power: "Fascinated as by a basilisk with three heads, I could not leave this clique; the ground near them seemed to hold my feet" (667). Her narrative juxtaposes the fantastic (Désirée Beck's "fantastic gyrations" [663]), the mundane (the "portly, blithe, and pleasant" [664] Madame Beck), and the lurid (the depiction of Madame Wulravens as a severed head, "flung at random on a pile of rich merchandise" [665]). This is Dickensian grotesque unevenly applied, and, where applied, heightened to horrific levels. The resulting vision is hallucinatory and nightmarish, reflecting the violent hatred and fear underlying Lucy's calm exterior. Yet paradoxically, Lucy faces this projection of her own nightmares with calm strength: "I cannot say that I felt weak before them, or abashed, or dismayed. They outnumbered me, and I was worsted and under their feet; but, as yet, I was not dead" (666).

In addition to this paradoxical combination of terror, fascination, and strength, the scene projects Lucy's desire for and jealousy concerning M. Paul. The latter appears through a second buried narrative—the "ghost story" of M. Paul, whose absent presence haunts the text. Lucy's desire for her absent lover is revealed when she lifts his face from his brother's features (665). In addition, Madame Wulravens' impatient demand, "*Où sont-ils?*" [Where are they?] (670) voices Lucy's sense of lack. Finally, M. Paul appears, like a ghost of himself, as if conjured up by Lucy's desire.

As I have argued, the false "revelation" concerning M. Paul and Justine Marie reveals Lucy's confused, fearful, and highly possessive state. Lucy projects onto Justine her hatred of the "junta," her fear that religious loyalty and familial ties will sever her from Paul, and her extreme sexual jealousy. The latter is revealed through imagery of disembowelment: "something tore me so cruelly under my shawl . . . a vulture . . . strong in beak and talon . . ." (677). Through this staging of her anxieties, fears, desires, and jealousies, Lucy comes to her most passionate declaration of love for M. Paul:

The love born of beauty was not mine; . . . but another love, venturing diffidently into life after long acquaintance, furnace-ried by pain, stamped by constancy, consolidated by affection's pure and durable alloy, submitted by intellect to intellect's own tests, and finally wrought up, by his own process, to his own unflawed completeness, this Love that laughed at Passion, his fast frenzies and his hot and hurried extinction, in *this* Love I had a vested interest . . . (678)

Interestingly, the proposal scene at the school hinges on Lucy recounting her park experiences to M. Paul, as if the recovery of the "warm, jealous, . . . haughty" (709)—and theatrical—persona of her *nuît blanche* were intrinsic to her relationship with this mercurial and actress-like lover.

The park scenes thus play a crucial role in mediating the transfer of Lucy's desire from Dr. John to M. Paul. They also establish Lucy's Vashti-like characteristics as the basis of her relationship with her second lover. The reader may well wonder, however, if these qualities—with their explosive implications concerning women's place in the Victorian gen-

der system—can be accommodated in any marriage. Perhaps this explains on a symbolic level why M. Paul should be threatened or drowned by "storm"—the very metaphor which serves throughout the novel to represent Lucy's (and Vashti's) violent and passionate natures.

The novel's accommodation of Lucy's tempestuous and theatrical qualities is thus tenuous at best. What is significant, however, is Brontë's achievement in using theatre to disrupt the social restrictions governing Lucy, and to reveal rebellious, subversive, and unspeakable desires on the part of her heroine. By exposing her heroine to the transgressive experience of cross-dressing and verbal play, by linking her to the exclusionary power of the actress, and by staging a lurid and fantastic drama of which her heroine is both director and spectator, Brontë suggested aspects of female identity which were largely unrepresentable by the Victorian novelist and unacceptable for the domestic middle-class woman.

In doing so, Brontë also suggested a unique link between women and theatre. In the introduction to her recent book *Feminism and Theatre* (1988), Sue Ellen Case argues that theatre has traditionally suppressed the experiences and fantasies of real women and has substituted the patriarchal values attached to the gender (7). This may be true of theatre itself; however, Brontë's call for artists to study the actress as a "different vision" (370) of femininity suggests that for Victorian women novelists, theatrical experience and the figure of the actress may have served precisely as a vehicle for women's aspirations. In the mid-Victorian period, the social anxieties concerning women, theatre, and transgression temporarily endowed the theatre with tremendous attractions and possibilities for feminist writers. Brontë's fearful yet fascinated depiction of her heroine's experience as actress, spectator and director represents a strong assertion of one woman's ability to claim her own subject position in theatrical performance and spectatorship and, in so doing, to transform a locus of traditional male domination into a site of female pleasure, power, and imaginative freedom.

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## The Eclipse of the Text in Carlyle's Critical Discourse

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*Überhaupt: der persönliche Charakter des Schriftstellers bringt seine Bedeutung beim Publikum hervor, nicht die Künste seines Talents.*

Gespräche 30 März 1824

(Generally, the personal character of the writer influences the public rather than his talents as an artist.)

*Wer die deutsche Sprache versteht und studirt befindet sich auf dem Markte wo alle Nationen ihre Waaren anbeuten, er spielt den Dolmetscher indem er sich selbst bereichert. Und so ist jeder Übersetzer anzusehen, daß er sich als Vermittler dieses allgemein geistigen Handels bemüht, und den Wechseltausch zu befördern sich zum Geschäft macht. Denn, was man auch von der Unzulänglichkeit des Übersetzters sagen mag, so ist und bleibt es doch eins der wichtigsten und würdigsten Geschäfte in dem allgemeinen Weltwesen. Der Koran sagt: "Gott hat jedem Volke einen Propheten gegeben in seiner eignen Sprache." So ist jeder Übersetzer ein Prophet seinem Volke.*

Goethe to Carlyle 20 July 1827

(Whoever understands and studies German finds himself in the market, where all nations offer their wares; he plays the interpreter, while he enriches himself. And thus every translator is to be regarded as a middle-man in this universal spiritual commerce, and as making it his business to promote this exchange: for say what we may of the

insufficiency of translation, yet the work is and will always be one of the weightiest and worthiest affairs in the general concerns of the world. The Koran says: "God has given to each people a prophet in its own tongue!" Thus each translator is a prophet to his people.<sup>1</sup>

In the second epigraph above Goethe is responding to a package sent by an admirer in Britain that contained an English biography of Schiller. In a memorable tribute to the author, who had "learned from the Germans to represent literature as the new liturgy," he offers an assessment of the privileged status of the cultural *Vermittler* in the age of *Weltliteratur* (Vanden Bossche 29).<sup>2</sup> Until Goethe's death five years later Carlyle played the combined roles of *Dolmetscher* (interpreter), *Übersetzer* (translator), and *Vermittler* (mediator) of German culture in Britain with unflagging zeal. In the process he forged a hermeneutic criticism in the image of Goethe's strong personality that made a signal impact on the development of intellectual life in mid- and late-nineteenth-century Britain. Klaus Doderer has argued that Carlyle's critique of Goethe led to a "*Vertiefung und eine neue Wendung*" in the English reception of German thought and literature. "*Obwohl gerade Carlyle die German Romance schrieb und Novalis sehr liebte,*" he put Goethe decisively in the foreground of his mediations on literature, not merely as a poet but as a moral leader exerting comprehensive cultural authority. The result is a growing tendency to consider literature "*als moralisches Erziehungsmittel.*" A necessary corollary to this

result, the discussion on page 143 of Carlyle's evolving attitude toward German "transcendentalism" requires reconsideration. Goethe was Carlyle's "evangelist" precisely on account of his idealization of ordinary human experience. Michael Timko's outline of "the Carlylean *Weltbild*" and its German component (29-35) is constructed on much firmer ground. For an excellent discussion of the religious context of Carlyle's mediation of German culture see Riede.

tendency is a new emphasis placed on the "*Dichterpersion*" rather than the "*Dichtung*" (Doderer 397). In focusing on the author rather than the text Carlyle anticipates Wilhelm Dilthey's methodology in *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (1905), one of the foundation texts of modern literary hermeneutics. Both critics derive their conceptions of literariness, authorship, and the function of criticism from their meditations on Goethe's cultural significance. Indeed, the following passage from the second chapter, "*Goethe und die dichterische Phantasie,*" offers intriguing parallels to Carlyle's approach in his essays on Goethe:

*Poesie ist Darstellung und Ausdruck des Lebens. Sie drückt das Erlebnis aus, und sie stellt die äußere Wirklichkeit des Lebens dar . . . Hieraus erklärt sich, was uns ein lyrisches Gedicht oder eine Erzählung sehen läßt—und was für sie nicht existiert. Die Lebenswerte stehen aber in Beziehungen zueinander, die in dem Zusammenhang des Lebens selbstgegründet sind, und diese geben Personen, Dingen, Situationen, Begebenheiten ihre Bedeutung. So wendet sich der Dichter dem Bedeutsamen zu. Und wenn . . . das Geschehnis so zum Träger und Symbol eines Allgemeinen wird und Ziele und Güter zu Idealen, dann kommt auch in diesem allgemeinen Gehalt der Dichtung nicht ein Erkennen der Wirklichkeit, sondern die lebendigste Erfahrung vom Zusammenhang unserer Daseinsbezüge in dem Sinn des Lebens zum Ausdruck. Außer ihr gibt es keine Idee eines poetischen Werkes und keinen ästhetischen Wert, den die Dichtung zu realisieren hatte . . . Da ist es nun die erste und entscheidende Eigenschaft der Dichtung Goethes, daß sie aus einer außerordentlichen Energie des Erlebens erwacht . . . Seine Stimmungen schaffen alles Wirkliche um, seine Leidenschaften steigern Bedeutung und Gestalt von Situationen und Dingen ins Ungemeine, und sein rastloser Gestaltungsdrang wandelt alles um sich in Form und Gebilde. Sein Leben und seine Dichtung sind hierin nicht unterschieden . . .*

(Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis* 126-27)

(Poetry is the representation and expression of life. It expresses lived experience and represents the external reality of life. . . . What a lyric poem or a story shows us—and what it fails to show us—can be explained on this basis. But life-values are related on the basis of the totality of life itself, and these relations give meaning to persons, things, situations, and events. Thus the poet addresses himself to what is significant. When . . . an event is made the bearer and symbol of something universal; and when ends or values become ideals, what is expressed in this universal content of the literary work is not knowledge of reality, but the most vivid experience of the interconnectedness of our existential relations in the meaning of life. Beyond this there is no idea of a poetic work and no special aesthetic value which poetry should realize . . . Surely the primary and most decisive feature of Goethe's poetic work is that it

grows out of an extraordinary energy of lived experience . . . His moods transform everything real, his passions intensify the meaning and form of situations and things beyond the realm of the usual, and his restless creative drive changes everything around him into form and image.)  
(*Selected Works* 237-38)

For Dilthey, literature is biographical "not in the sense of manifesting personal mannerisms, but of revealing a unity of style which derives from the total being of the poet—a being that comprehends more than private states of mind" (Makkreel 237-38). This notion of biography as an expression of the organic fusion of style and personality underlies Carlyle's hermeneutic: "Goethe's poetry is no separate faculty, no mental handicraft; but the voice of the whole harmonious manhood: nay, it is the very harmony, the living and life-giving harmony of that rich manhood which forms his poetry" (26: 208).

Curiously enough, from the beginning of Goethe's reception in Britain his reputation was, in contrast to Russia or France, not grounded in a tradition of assimilating or resisting texts such as *Werther*, *Faust* and *Tasso*.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the history of Goethe's reception from the publication of the first English version of *Werther* in 1780 to Carlyle's translation of *Wilhelm Meister* (1824) consists of a series of conflicting interpretations focused not on readings of these and other texts—at least not in the sense indicated by Coleridge's "practical criticism"—but, quite differently, on what Saintsbury, in his reappraisal of Goethe's stature as a critic in Victorian Britain, derided as "anthropological" interpretations—that is, pre-Freudian probings of the author's psyche and moral character inferred from and then projected back onto his works, a process which has the effect of overshadowing textual features of the literary artifact. The biographical impulse in Carlyle's criticism is in large part attributable to the influential example of Goethe's own reflections on literature. In *Gespräche mit Goethe* he is reported to have intimated that

*in der Kunst und Poesie die Persönlichkeit ist alles; allein doch hat es unter den Kritikern und Kunstrichtern der neuesten Zeit schwache Personagen gegeben, die dieses nicht zugestehen und die eine große Persönlichkeit bei einem Werke der Poesie oder Kunst nur als eine Art von geringer Zugabe wollten betrachtet wissen. Aber freilich, um eine große Persönlichkeit zu empfinden und zu ehren, muß man auch wiederum selber etwas sein. Alle, die dem Euripides das Erhabene abgesprochen, waren arme Herringe und einer solchen Erhebung nicht fähig; oder sie waren unverschämte Scharlatane, die durch Anmaßlichkeit in den Augen einer schwachen Welt mehr aus sich machen wollten und auch wirklich machten, also sie waren. [13 Februar 1831] (387-88)*

(personality is everything in art and poetry; yet there are many weak personages among the modern critics who do

<sup>1</sup>The original German texts and the translations of the epigraphs are taken from, sequentially, Eckerman, *Gespräche* (92); Eckermann, *Conversations* (55); and *Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle* (18-19, 25-26).

<sup>2</sup>While the point made in the cited passage is certainly correct, elsewhere Vanden Bossche overstates the affinity between Goethe and the German Romantics; it is simply inaccurate to assume that Goethe and his younger contemporaries speak in a single voice on the issue of transcendentalism. As a

<sup>3</sup>The French context is richly represented by Staël and the reader is directed to the discussion of Vasilii Z. Zukovski (1738-1852) and of I. S. Turgenev in André von Gronicka (1: 32-59, 2: 1-46).



not admit this, but look upon a great personality in a work of poetry or art merely as a kind of trifling appendage. However, to feel and respect a great personality one must be something oneself. All who denied the sublime to Euripides were either poor wretches incapable of comprehending such sublimity, or shameless charlatans who by their presumption wished to make more of themselves—and really did make more of themselves than they were. (381-82)

In fact, Goethe's remarks on literature almost invariably issue in a discussion of authorial character or psychology. Eckermann offers an example:

*Übrigens sprach Goethe von Dante mit aller Ehrfurcht, wobei es mir merkwürdig war, daß ihm das Wort Talent nicht genügte, sondern daß er ihn eine Natur nannte, als womit er ein Umfassenderes, Ahnungsvolleres, tiefer und weiter um sich Blickendes ausdrücken zu wollen schien. [3 Dezember 1824] (112)*

(He spoke of Dante with extreme reverence; and I observed that he was not satisfied with the word *talent*, but called him a *nature*, as if thus wishing to express something more comprehensive, more full of prescience, of deeper insight, and wider scope. (75)

The concept in the back of Goethe's mind is, of course, the composite of character and psychology forming Dante's personality. As for Byron, whom Goethe admired more than any contemporary writer, the focus is not on the special qualities of his works but on the uniqueness of his personality. As reported by Eckermann, Goethe speaks of how imperative it was for the secretary to learn English solely on account of Byron, "*dessen Persönlichkeit von solcher Eminenz, wie sie nicht dagewesen und wohl schwerlich wiederkommen werde*" (19. Oktober 1823] (47) (character of such eminence had never existed before, and probably would never come again) (12). Indeed, one can peruse the entire *Gespräche* and *Briefe* and find that Goethe only rarely discusses a specific text or specific characteristics of a text; instead, his interest in the writer's or artist's personality nearly always overtakes textual analysis.

Thus not only does Goethe lend legitimacy to a hermeneutic based on "reading" a poet's personality, which his critics in turn adopt in approaching his work, but mediating Goethe emerges as one of the chief organizing principles in the cultural life of nineteenth-century Britain. For surprisingly many figures of the period—George Eliot, Arnold, Lewes—the focus of their efforts is either on surrendering to or resisting the siren call of Goethe's personality. But it was Thomas Carlyle whose career is more closely associated with Goethe than anyone before G. H. Lewes, and Goethe, who "had opened a new world to him," is the subject of his first

appearance in print in April 1822—an article on *Faust* for the *New Edinburgh Review* (Froude, 1795-1835 1: 132-33). While this modest little piece was not included in the first edition of his complete works, it marked the beginning of his involvement with Goethe and German culture as critic, translator, and editor, and it reveals that at the very outset of his career he tied his literary fortunes to the mediation of Goethe in the English-speaking world. Moreover, on this same foundation Carlyle staked his first claim to speak with cultural authority, and it was in the crucible of German literature and thought that mature his views on art and society, economics and government, were formed. The process of substituting an emphasis on biography for the artifact culminates in Carlyle's critical discourse in the eclipse of the text and a full-fledged critical ideology privileging the investigation of the totalizing personality is already present in Carlyle's critical essays on Goethe—"Goethe's Helena" (1828), "Goethe" (1828), "Death of Goethe" (1832), "Goethe's Works" (1832). These early essays contain a blueprint and a testing ground for the ideology of "hero worship" mapped out in such works as *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1841), *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (1845), and *The History of Frederick the Great* (1858, 1862, 1864, 1865). He first came to the public's attention with his translation of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1824) and this book played a vital role in situating Goethe in Britain's intellectual horizon. Indeed, prior to its publication and the appearance of Carlyle's essays on Goethe (1827-1832), the canonical niche that Goethe would occupy beside Dante and Shakespeare as a poet of genuine European significance was not yet established nor even conceivable. Carlyle, however, singlehandedly created a relevant context for the reception of Goethe which combined speculation on the links between aesthetics and ethics with homilies on the importance of great men and the relationship between art and action. Furthermore, in essays on Schiller, Jean Paul, Novalis, and other German writers, Carlyle anticipates the enthusiastic appropriation of German culture throughout Europe in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Echoing Carlyle's intuition of the centrality of German thought in forming the modern mind, Taine insisted that "*l'Allemagne a produit toutes les idées de notre âge historique*" (277). Taken together these essays provide much more than a rebuttal to less gifted or ideologically antagonistic critics such as Taylor, Ellis and Frere; they comprise a fulfillment of Coleridge's envisioned "history of Belles lettres in Germany" that he wished to combine with "a biographical and critical analysis" of "Goethe as poet and philosopher" with an additional component unforeseen by Coleridge: a consideration of the relevance of German culture for post-Romantic England, a theme that would recur in Carlyle's writings and conversation to the end of his life (see Coleridge, *Letters* 1: 518).

In the essays "Goethe" and "Goethe's Works," which appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1832, the year of

Goethe's death, Carlyle seeks to redress the errors of previous critics—in England and Germany—and to properly introduce Goethe as "a world-changer, and benignant spiritual revolutionist" (27: 440). Carlyle's predecessors had erred in substituting stereotypes in place of genuine psychological profiles of Goethe, resulting in a failure to appreciate his real poetic worth" and his importance to "his own people and to us" (26: 199). Carlyle takes it upon himself, then, to take the full measure of Goethe's humanity and the fundamental question underlying his inquiry concerns the connection between the writer's personality and his works: "What manner of man is this? How shall we even see him? What is his spiritual structure, what at least are the outward form and features of his mind?" (26: 199). Carlyle's approach to Goethe reflects an adjustment in the function of the biographical impulse in criticism, from a preoccupation with outward incident to the relationship between character or personality and expression, which occurs at a moment in history when literature and authors increasingly take on religious and oracular functions in society. He divides Goethe's career into two major phases bound together organically—a youthful period conditioned by "the reconciliation" of "the inward spiritual chaos" of the age (27: 434). Having suffered the spiritual perplexities inherent in modern experience, Goethe "has mastered these, he is above them, and has shown others how to rise above them" (27: 438). Despite the expected caveat concerning Carlyle's "avowed tendency towards 'philosophical' rather than 'formal' criticism," even the usually captious Saintsbury concedes that "altogether there are few things in English Criticism better worth reading, marking, and learning . . . than the literary parts of these earlier volumes of Essays" (3: 497).

The other decisive characteristic of Goethe's mind, which Carlyle also considers the "test for the culture of a Poet," is his sincerity, a quality to be measured by the author's readiness to reveal himself fully in his work. Carlyle's hermeneutic is derived from those works which seem to express Goethe's renowned confessional impulse. The original passage from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* reads: "*Alles war daher von mir bekannt geworden, sind nur Bruchstücke einer grossen Konfession, welche vollständig zu machen dieses Büchlein ein gewagter Versuch ist.*" (All, therefore, that has been confessed by me, consists of fragments of a great confession; and this little book is an attempt which I have ventured on to render it complete.)<sup>5</sup> Carlyle's longing for direct, unmediated knowledge of the poet's essential being—"Would that I saw the Poet and knew him," then "[I] could fully understand him," corresponds to Coleridge's definition of poetry in the *Biographia Literaria* "What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet? that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other. For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself" (*Two Notebooks* 128; *Works* 2: 15).

In the Preface to *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* Carlyle considers the early works *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Werther*: "it would be difficult to name two books which have

exercised a deeper influence on the subsequent literature of Europe . . . . Sceptical sentimentality, view-hunting, love, friendship, suicide, and desperation became the staple of literary ware" (27: 431, 435). The highest importance is assigned to these works because of their role in awakening the historical consciousness of the nineteenth century and in revealing what would be presently recognized as uniquely modern aspects of experience, especially the "feelings that arise from passion incapable of being converted into action" (26: 210). From an examination of Goethe's life Carlyle deduces that he had been driven to despair through "Unrest" and "Discontent" and that *Werther* is actually "but the cry of that dim, rooted pain, under which all thoughtful men of a certain age were languishing" (26: 215). Reaffirming Goethe's position as a cultural authority, the novel is seen "as a symptom, indeed a cause, of his now having got delivered from such melancholy" (26: 216-17).

In order to heighten the contrast between Goethe and the English Romantics Carlyle compares the effect of *Werther* to the impression that the phenomenon of Byronism made on European culture: "life-weariness, his moody melancholy, and mad stormful indignation, borne on the tones of a wild and quite artless melody." Noting Byron's affinity with the *Sturm und Drang* ("Byron was our English Sentimentalist and Power-man"), he sets Goethe's strength and health against the "spasmodic Byronism" of the age (26: 217; 27: 427). In *Sartor Resartus*, a rejoinder to Byronic egoism is combined with an attack on the pursuit-of-happiness eudaemonism that Carlyle considers definitive of Enlightenment culture: "It is only with Renunciation (*Entsagen*) that life, properly speaking, can be said to begin . . . . What act of Legislature was there that *thou* shouldst be HAPPY? . . . Art thou nothing other than a Vulture, then, that fliest through the Universe seeking after somewhat to *eat*; shrieking dolefully because carrion enough is not given thee? Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe" (191-92). The pattern of development projected onto Goethe's works by Carlyle's hermeneutic is mirrored in *Sartor Resartus*, the "biography" of the Clothes-Philosopher, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, who represents simultaneously a caricature of a German Idealist philosopher and a satirical self-portrait of the author as *Vermittler* of German thought. The real drama of the novel consists in the symmetry implied between the author's/protagonist's psyche and the spiritual condition of Britain. Carlyle's despair resulted from the dual crises of faith and authority: "Thus to poverty and dyspepsia there had been added the struggle which is always hardest in the noblest mind, which Job had known, and David, and Solomon, and Aeschylus, and Shakespeare, and Goethe. Where are the tokens of His presence? Where are the signs of His coming? Is there, in this universe of things, any moral Providence at all?" (Froude 1795-1835 2: 66). Teufelsdröckh's spiritual growth, traced from "the Everlasting No," through the "Centre of Indifference" to "the Everlasting Yea" replicates Carlyle's interpretation of Goethe's career from *Werther*, "a poetic utterance of the World's Despair," to *Wil-*

<sup>4</sup>The publication history of the major essays is as follows: "Jean Paul Friedrich Richter," *Edinburgh Review* 91 (1827); "State of German Literature," *Edinburgh Review* 92 (1827); "Life and Writings of Werner," *Foreign Review* 1 (1828); "Goethe's Helena," *Foreign Review* 2 (1828); "Goethe," *Foreign Review* 3 (1828); "Novalis," *Foreign Review* 7 (1829); "Jean Paul

Friedrich Richter Again," *Foreign Review* 9 (1830); "Schiller," *Fraser's Magazine* 3, No. 14 (1831); "Taylor's Historic Survey of German Poetry," *Edinburgh Review* 105 (1831); "Goethe's Portrait," *Fraser's Magazine* 5, No. 26 (1832); "Death of Goethe," *New Monthly Magazine*, 34, No. 138 (1832); "Goethe's Works," *Foreign Quarterly Review*, No. 19 (1832).

<sup>5</sup>*Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit*, ed. Ernst Beutler. Zürich und Stuttgart: Artemis Verlag, 1949 in *Gedenkausgabe* (313). The translation is taken from *Autobiography* 1: 305.

helm Meister, which, by contrast, stands for "a free recognition of Life, in its depth, variety and majesty"; however, "as yet no Divinity" is "recognized here." *Wilhelm Meister* belongs to "the second and sounder period of Goethe's life" (26: 224). While the Romantics expressed a special fascination for *Faust*, Carlyle's generation felt a particularly deep psychological bond with this novel and its portrayal of human development along an axis bounded on one pole by aesthetic sensibility and on the other by action informed by ethical self-awareness. In Carlyle's translation Goethe's novel emerges as an unlikely English classic, but it compelled attention from an entire generation of Germanophiles, for here, according to Carlyle, one could observe the reconciliation of opposing elements in Goethe's personality after a long struggle. In this work "Anarchy has become Peace; the once gloomy and perturbed spirit is now serene, cheerfully vigorous . . . . For he has conquered his unbelief; the Ideal has been built on the Actual, no longer floats vaguely in darkness and regions of dreams, but rests on light, on the firm ground of human interest and business" (26: 224). But only in the late masterwork, the *West-östlicher Divan*, does he ascertain that Goethe has embraced anything resembling transcendental faith; in these poems a "melodious reverence becomes triumphant; a deep, all-pervading Faith, with mild voice, grave as gay" (27: 431).

As the product of a strict Calvinist upbringing, Carlyle was initially repelled by what critics before him had depicted as Goethe's tendency to glamorize licentious behavior in his novels and plays. His close identification with Goethe was therefore not the result of elective affinity, but rather laborious study punctuated by bouts of ambivalence and outright rejection.<sup>6</sup> Resistance was replaced by sympathy only after he had interpolated his own interpretation of Goethe's works, according to which these writings reflect the drama of "a mind working itself into clearer and clearer freedom; gaining a more and more perfect domination of its world. The pestilential fever of Scepticism runs through its stages; but happily it ends . . . in clearer, henceforth invulnerable health" (26: 430). The presence of Goethe in his life brought on a rapturous conversion experience: "The sight of such a man" was to him "a Gospel of Gospels," which "literally" preserved him "from destruction outward and inward." Goethe had "travelled the steep rocky road" of self-discovery which Carlyle also had known and he therefore deserved being named "the first of the moderns" (Froude 1795-1835 1: 300-301). Formerly, Carlyle confesses, he too had been "storm-tossed in my imagination; a man divided from men; exasperated, wretched, driven almost to despair." He had been "an Unbeliever" and Goethe had restored his faith in "the Mercy and Beauty of which it is the Symbol" (*Correspondence* 34). Thus Goethe played a key role in the development of what W. H. Bruford calls Carlyle's "humanistic religion" (36).

<sup>6</sup>Carlyle expressed his ambivalence toward *Wilhelm Meister* in letters to Jane Welsh on 18 September 1823 and to James Johnston on 21 September 1823 (*Letters* 2: 434, 437): "Meanwhile I go on with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*; a book which I love not, which I am sure will never sell, but which I am determined to print and finish. There are touches of the very highest most ethereal genius in it; but diluted with floods of insipidity, which even I would not have written for the world."

"There is poetry in the book, and prose, prose forever . . . . The Book is to be

That Carlyle should have looked abroad for mentors is symptomatic of his marginalized status. As a Scot and a Calvinist Carlyle felt twice-removed from the majority of English and Anglican culture. "My case is this: I comport myself wholly like an alien,—like a man who is not in his own country; whose own country lies perhaps a century or two distant." In later years, he described himself in his adopted language as "an *abgerissenes Glied*, a limb torn from the family of Man" (*Two Notebooks* 65). Even many years later, when he was among the most famous of English writers living in London, he could still write that his work was produced by "a wild man, a man disunited from the fellowship of the world he lives in" (Froude 1835-1881 1: 96). Carlyle's sense of alienation was shared by many of his contemporaries who chose the unconventional path of mediating German texts as a means of inaugurating their literary careers. It is worth noting that the reception of German thought and literature in Britain, from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, was largely the work of cultural outsiders—Dissenters, women, and Scots—culturally ambitious people for whom entry into the majority culture was impeded by gender, class, national identity or the absence of empowering institutional affiliations with prestigious public schools or the Oxbridge universities.<sup>7</sup> In addition to Carlyle, this group includes William Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Holcroft, Walter Scott, R. P. Gillies, J. G. Lockhart, Henry Crabb Robinson, Sarah Austin, and Marian Evans. As Scottish-Dissenting-Female writers occupying the margins of English-Anglican-Male majority culture, publication of their original work was frequently preceded by mediating activities—the translation, compilation, and criticism of German texts. For such writers these activities were not different in kind from their relations with the majority culture; every foray into English literary culture represented a going-out-of-the-self and a leaving-of-the-familiar in order to embrace the other and the foreign. As marginalized cultural workers, English translators and mediators of German literature in the nineteenth century were acutely sensitive to the personal and political elements involved in the mediation of texts from one age or one country to another; these issues are of concern in suggesting how Carlyle's hermeneutic was configured as a framework for interpreting and realizing Goethe's significance for his readers in Britain.

There were, of course, contemporary precedents for Carlyle's valorization of Goethe's cultural authority, none more important than Germaine de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*. Staël's mediation of Goethe as a "living classic" seemed to offer proof that a "modern" could be the equal of the "ancients." Despite bad roads and a shortage of inns, she joined the procession of foreign visitors flocking to Weimar. But, even after a long journey, her interviews with Goethe and Schiller

printed in winter or spring. No mortal will ever buy a copy of it . . . . Goethe is the gre[at]est ge[n]iu[s that has] lived for a century, and the greatest ass that [has l]ived for th[ree]. I could sometimes fall down and worship him; at other times I could kick him out of the room . . . .

<sup>7</sup>See the discussion of the relationship between English Methodism and German Pietism as reflected in the hymns of John and Charles Wesley in Davis 32ff.

could not alter her ideologically motivated appropriation of German culture.<sup>8</sup> Subjected to strict censorship in France, *De l'Allemagne* was first published in London (1813) and it has been credited for revealing Germany for the first time to "die ganze Welt" (Schirmer 39). Staël's portraits of German writers fascinated Carlyle and offered a readily available alternative to the Enlightenment culture he loathed. He was not alone in coming under the spell cast by *De l'Allemagne*; Staël's vision of Germany as the land of poets and thinkers dominated English perspectives throughout the nineteenth century (Doderer 397) and gave impetus to reassessment of Goethe from reprobate to cultural hero. At a time when Goethe's writings fell short of the popularity enjoyed by Kotzebue, Schiller and Wieland, she insisted that he, and not his more prominent contemporaries, "réunit tout ce qui distingué l'esprit allemand" and possessed "les traits principaux du génie allemand" (189).

Carlyle transposed Staël's privileging of Goethe from a political to a theological key; he is a divine presence immanent in the world, a masked god, a *deus absconditus*, whose appearance announces a new epoch of faith to a world grown weary of doubt and relativism. Carlyle's identification of Goethe as "the Strong One of his time" (27: 435), encompassing religion, ethics, and literature, received corroboration from Matthew Arnold:

. . . when Goethe came, Europe had lost her basis of spiritual life; she had to find it again; Goethe's task was,—the inevitable task for the modern poet henceforth is,—as it was for the Greek poet in the days of Pericles, not to preach a sublime sermon on a traditional text like Dante, not to exhibit all the kingdoms of human life and the glory of them like Shakspeare, but to interpret human life afresh, and to supply a new spiritual basis to it. Goethe is the greatest poet of modern times, not because he is one of the half-dozen human beings who in the history of our race have shown the most signal gift for poetry, but because, having a very considerable gift for poetry, he was at the same time, in the width, depth, and richness of his criticism of life, by far our greatest modern man. (28, 29)<sup>9</sup>

Inspiring Goethe's vision of *Weltliteratur*, Carlyle's efforts as a *Vermittler* of German culture also instigated Britain's breakthrough into a broader cultural compass and established a pattern of cultural borrowing from Germany that has continued into the present and is especially noticeable in the all-pervasive presence of Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger in Anglo-American academic circles. As a model of critical evaluation, Carlyle's essays on Goethe are comparable to T. S. Eliot's reassessment of the Metaphysical Poets. Because of their focus on a foreign writer, however, Carlyle's essays are unique among the works of major English critics from after the time of Dryden until the late nineteenth century. As a coherent, sustained critique of an entire tradition, only Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* approach Carlyle's essays both in

<sup>8</sup>For a stimulating discussion of Staël's problematic mediation of German culture, see Furst.

<sup>9</sup>Rosemary Ashton notes that "Arnold modelled his idea of culture and

scale and in the fusion of biography and practical criticism. Carlyle's guiding conviction that biography provides the most authentic basis for literary criticism ("Would that I saw the Poet and knew him [I] could then fully understand him!") looks ahead to Dilthey's psycho-biographical hermeneutic in *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, Freud and beyond to W. J. Bate, Harold Bloom, and John Bowlby.

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## "A Frame Perfect and Glorious": Narrative Structure in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

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Early criticism of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* focused as much, if not more, on the mysterious identity of the author Acton Bell, as on the text itself. Several contemporary critics argued that Acton Bell was simply another *nom de plume* for the more popular Currer Bell, while others speculated solely on the gender of *The Tenant's* author. In a particularly acerbic review in *Sharpe's London Magazine*, the anonymous reviewer decided that the "bold coarseness" and "reckless freedom of language" clearly indicated that a man took part in the writing. On the other hand, the reviewer asserted, only a woman's mind could invent such "contemptibly weak, at once disgusting and ridiculous" male characters, or the "thousand trifles" included in the text. The reviewer finally concluded that a woman, "assisted by her husband, or some other male friend," produced the book.<sup>1</sup> Commentary on the text itself was about as favorable as that on the author. *Sharpe's* reviewer wrote that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was unfit for mention in the magazine. Nonetheless, it had to be mentioned by way of warning to readers at large,

"especially . . . lady-readers, against being induced to peruse it." The story itself was described as "revolting," "coarse," and "disgusting," and showed a "perverted taste and an absence of mental refinement . . . together with a total ignorance of the usages of good society." Decidedly, Anne Brontë's second novel was not well received.

Now that the mystery of identity and gender has been solved, critics are more apt to discuss aspects of the novel than of the novelist. Although Anne Brontë's works continue to be overshadowed by the more popular works of her sisters Charlotte and Emily, recent critics have attempted to salvage *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* through serious, thoughtful explication. Current approaches to the novel are varied, but most prevalent is the discussion of narrative technique—especially the framing of Helen Huntingdon's diary within Gilbert Markham's narrative—and its implications for the novel as a whole.

In their recent discussions of the significance of Markham's enclosing Helen's diary within his own narrative framework, Juliet McMaster, N. M. Jacobs, and Jan B. Gordon have

all reached similar conclusions.<sup>2</sup> Although each approaches Markham's narrative enclosure from a different perspective, all three agree that his incorporation of Helen's diary reflects an equal shouldering of Helen's burdens, an equality of consciousness, and a "possibility of accommodation and reconciliation" that contrasts with Helen's first failed marriage to Arthur Huntingdon (McMaster 368). In short, each argues that Markham's narrative enclosure legitimizes Helen, redeems her, and places her on equal footing with him in their subsequent marriage. While this is a possible interpretation of Markham's incorporation of Helen's narrative, one cannot ignore the evidence within the text that points to an opposite conclusion: Markham's appropriation and editing of Helen's history reflects an attempt to contain and control her. In a society where possession of knowledge equals power, Markham's revealing epistle to Halford further reflects the means by which Victorian men maintained power over women.

Markham begins his letter to Halford by reminding him of their last visit together. At that time, Halford had shared with Markham an "interesting account of the most remarkable occurrences of [his] early life." Halford requested the "smallest return" of confidence from Markham, and now, some time later, Markham is willing to oblige. "It is a soaking and rainy day," he writes, "the family are absent on a visit, I am alone in my library, and have been looking over certain musty old letters and papers, and musing on past times; so that I am now in a very proper frame of mind for amusing you with an old-world story" (34). Markham's letter, then, becomes repayment of a debt owed to Halford. As an "unparalleled proof of friendly confidence," his private exchange of knowledge about his wife provides bargaining power with Halford and represents the basis of their male friendship. Having withdrawn his "well-roasted feet from the hobs," he begins to write Halford a story from *his* past, using as a guide a "certain faded old journal of [his]" (34). Ironically, 250 pages of *his* story happen to be copied from his wife's diary, a diary in which his name is never mentioned. This might explain why he has waited until "the family are absent" to "amuse" his old friend, or, as Markham terms him, the "old boy."

While professing to give a "full and faithful account" (35) of the circumstances under which he first met the mysterious, and presumably widowed, tenant of Wildfell Hall, Markham unwittingly reveals himself as a selfish, manipulative boy who hungers for conquest. In his narrative, which comprised the first hundred pages of the text, he recounts his unfavorable first impressions of Helen Huntingdon. While gazing on her during a church service, he confesses that her hollow cheeks and thin, firmly compressed lips "betokened. . . no very soft of amiable temper" and that he would rather admire her from afar than "be partner of her home" (41). Helen's appearance and temperament defy the idealized image of the soft and amiable Victorian woman epitomized by Eliza Millward in the novel. When Helen returns Markham's stare with an "indefinable expression of quiet scorn," he characteristically remarks, "She thinks me an impudent puppy. . . .

Humph!—she shall change her mind before long, if I think it worthwhile" (41). Helen's scornful, bold, and indifferent attitude sparks Markham's interest. She becomes a challenge to him and a threat to his masculine dominance over more amiable, "kitten-like" women such as Eliza Millward (42). In his eyes Helen becomes something to be tamed.

Before long, Markham does think it worthwhile to change Helen's mind about him. Having failed in several attempts to secure her attention all to himself, he uses her interest in literature to begin what Gordon terms their "book-loan agreement" (726). Markham's ingratiating loan initiates the exchange of books as the basis for his and Helen's growing friendship. After several book exchanges, Markham "experiments" (92) by making an outright gift of Sir Walter Scott's *Marmion*, asserting his right to provide for Helen and attempting to place himself in a dominant position over her. Helen, however, refuses to accept the book unless she pays him for it, thereby reasserting her equality with him.

Markham's ongoing "experiments" serve to establish himself, however, as Helen's trustworthy friend, a position he plans to use later to his advantage. "Let me first establish my position as a friend [he muses],—the patron and playfellow of her son, the sober, solid, plain-dealing friend of herself, and then, when I have made myself fairly necessary to her comfort and enjoyment in life (as I believe I can), we'll see what next may be effected" (93). When he and Helen are on more friendly terms, he duplicitously assures her that he "shall build no hopes upon" their friendship growing into anything more intimate, even though he admits to Halford on the bottom of the same page his "conflicting hopes and fears" (95). Essentially, Markham hopes that establishing himself as Helen's "patron" and becoming "necessary to her comfort" will place him in a position to control and enable him to disarm and conquer her. Markham continues with his "experiments" until finally he thinks his "hour of victory was come" (110). To his dismay, his excitement is quelled during an incident when Helen snatches her hand from his, thus restoring to her control over their relationship. Clearly, Markham (which sounds suspiciously like marksman) is interested only in the conquest, the hunting down, of Helen Huntingdon. Through tactics such as these, he subversively manipulates Helen's emotions and at certain junctures in their friendship gains power over her. Ultimately, though, in their mutual struggle for power Helen will remain the dominant partner.

As Helen's and Markham's friendship grows, so does the community gossip about the dubious circumstances and past of the tenant of Wildfell Hall. Throughout Helen's residence at Wildfell Hall, Markham ignores and denies the possibility of any truth in community speculation. However, when he spies in Helen's library a book with Frederick Lawrence's name inscribed on the flyleaf, he immediately suspects that Frederick is her lover, as the gossip implies. For Markham, Helen's possession of the book from another man violates the conditions of their book-exchange agreement, and he concludes that she has been encouraging the advances of another

<sup>1</sup>Other reviewers similarly attacked Brontë. See especially the unsigned reviews in *Rambler* ("Mr. Bell's New Novel," Sept. 1848) and *Fraser's Magazine* (April 1849). The *Rambler* reviewer was particularly distressed by the "offensive minuteness [of] the disgusting scenes of debauchery," but begrudgingly allowed that "on the whole . . . *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is

not so bad a book as *Jane Eyre*." The *Fraser's Magazine* reviewer concluded that Acton Bell must have been a woman because "the very coarseness and vulgarity [of the novel] is just such as a woman, trying to write like a man, would invent,—second-hand and clumsy, and not such as men do use." All contemporary reviews cited here are from Allott.

<sup>2</sup>In addition to McMasters, Jacobs, and Gordon, see Langland, where she argues that "Gilbert's recounting [of Helen's diary] . . . is an attempt to stop the free flow of oral exchange [and to] justify his version of events" (121).

book giver and patron. He confronts her with this breach of trust, and thinks to himself as he eyes her angrily, "I can crush that bold spirit. . . . But while I secretly exulted in my power, I felt disposed to dally with my victim like a cat" (143). Neither the reader nor Markham knows at this point that Helen remains married to Arthur Huntingdon or that Frederick Lawrence is her brother, not her lover. What is clear, however, is the sadistically predatory nature of Markham's desire to conquer and control Helen.

In an attempt to explain her confusing situation, Helen, in accordance with their book-exchange agreement, tears out the final pages of her diary and "thrusts" (146) it into Markham's hands.<sup>3</sup> She tells him, "Bring it back when you have read it; and don't breathe a word of what it tells you to any living being—I trust your honour" (146). Markham now has his "prize" (147)—knowledge about Helen's secret past—one, he assumes, that empowers him to control her. At his fingertips he now possesses information about Helen that serves as a bargaining tool to maintain her "friendship" and to repay his debt to Halford. Before Markham begins transcribing Helen's diary, he tells Halford "I know you would not be satisfied with an abbreviation of its contents, and you shall have the whole, save, perhaps a few passages here and there" (147). Evidently, he delivers his own edited version of Helen's life—minus the final pages that she has withheld—and we are reminded of his falsely promising a "full and faithful account" at the beginning of his letter. Markham is as little interested in remaining faithful to Helen's diary as he is in remaining faithful to her as a friend. His interest in her and her diary stems less from his affection for her than from his predatory desire to master and manipulate her-story at any cost.

Positioned immediately before Helen's diary, Markham's opening narrative serves in part to provide a background and a framework to Helen's text. But it does more than that. When Markham's narrative is interrupted by Helen's lengthy account of her first marriage, the reader is forced to draw comparisons between important aspects of the two narratives, particularly between the two courtships of Helen that occur in each narrative. Helen's diary recounts specific examples of Arthur Huntingdon's behavior that compare almost identically with examples of Markham's behavior. And Markham's account—albeit unwittingly—further reveals the close parallels between himself and the men described in Helen's story, particularly between himself and Arthur.

Both Arthur and Markham first meet Helen while on hunting expeditions. Again, this suggests the hunting down of Helen—and of women in general, Brontë implies—by typical Victorian men attempting to master women as they master birds in the bush. A Helen recounts the development of her relationship with Arthur, we notice further parallels between him and Markham. Markham's stealing a kiss from Eliza Millward mirrors Arthur's stealing a kiss from Helen. Similarly, during his perusal of Helen's sketches, Arthur turns

one over and discovers that Helen has attempted to draw his portrait. This gives him a certain power over her because her private affection for him becomes public: he knows her feelings for him (while his own remain private) and can use them to his advantage. In a parallel scene, on his first visit to Helen's studio Markham impudently moves a painting leaning in a corner against the wall, discovers beneath it another painting facing the wall, turns the latter over, and finds a portrait of Arthur Huntingdon. Helen snatches the painting from Markham, returns it to its "dark corner," and harshly scolds him for his trespass. Helen reacts similarly to Arthur's trespass by snatching the sketch, tearing it, and throwing it in the fire. When Helen writes of Arthur's passionate outbursts, during which he violently attacks their dog, we are further reminded of Markham's brutal attack on Helen's brother, Frederick. Most important, just as Helen learns that she cannot trust Arthur's word, we learn that she cannot trust Markham's. He patently ignores her directions to keep her diary a private affair. She says, "don't breathe a word of what it tells you to any living being—I trust your honour" (146), and again in a letter to Frederick she writes, "he [Markham] will know that I should wish but little to be said on the subject" (437). These incidents emphasize the ties between Markham and Huntingdon, which are further emphasized by Markham's "old boy" ties to Halford and the male complicity they represent.

Through Helen's interpolated diary, she chronicles in minute detail the raucous, drunken behavior of Arthur and his "boon companions" and the traits that tie them together. Arthur and his friends are portrayed as a wild, roving gang—a club of good old boys—who brag about preying on weaker animals (birds), weaker men (Lord Lowborough), and in particular the "weaker sex." They are a drinking, swearing, violent group whose lives revolve around destroying themselves (by drinking and whoring), each other (by encouraging adultery and other forms of vice), and the women in their lives (by abusing them emotionally). All of this falls under the guise of "sowing wild oats." Mr. Hattersley best sums up their code of conduct when he tells Lord Lowborough, who has just discovered that his wife and Huntingdon have been having an affair for over two years, "I know what it is you want, to make matters straight: it's just to exchange a shot with him, and then you'll feel yourself all right again" (350). But a shoot-out is not what Lowborough wants, which, in their eyes, makes him less a "man" than the other boon companions. He feels betrayed and injured, not only by Huntingdon's and Annabella's affair, but also by the fact that the old boy network conspired against him. He has been shot at and visibly hit. Everyone in the "club" except Lowborough knew about and helped to conceal the affair from him. Through collusion, Arthur and his gang kept Lowborough a trusting, cuckolded fool. Their secret knowledge about him served as a source of power over him. This group conspiracy epitomizes what Helen—who, like all the women in her society, lives in relative isolation compared to the group orientation of men—must

confront when dealing with her husband.

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* women are perceived as threats to male bonding activities—such as romps among the birds, bouts with the bottle, and romps with other women—and the old boys deal with that threat by making women the objects of their laughter. The old boy network operating in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* gains ammunition to control women by violating their privacy. Helen's aunt, speaking from experience, tries to warn her to "keep guard over your eyes and ears as the inlets of your heart, and over your lips as the outlet, lest they betray you in a moment of unweariness" (150). Helen learns this first-hand when Huntingdon repeatedly humiliates her in front of his companions by exposing private aspects of her life. In a typical assault on Helen, Huntingdon blames her for Hargraves' unsavory advances toward her. Her obvious anger at the network's misinterpreting her participation in the scene prompts Hattersley's excited comment, "'She's hit!'" (365), implying that Helen is little more than an animal for his sport. By garnering knowledge about their wives, the boys can later use it (by threatening to expose them) to maintain power and control over them. Helen soon recognizes the hopelessness of her situation, and to undermine Arthur's power over her she begins to repress all emotion and to confide in only one thing—her diary. Arthur's eventual confiscation of her diary represents the climax of the power struggle between them. He "forcibly wrest[s]" her diary from her, procuring a powerful weapon against her because of the painful confessions it contains. In one act, Arthur physically and emotionally disarms his wife.

Like Arthur, Markham is a typical member in the boy's club and his participation is blatantly exposed by the narrative structure of the novel: Markham breaches his wife's trust, appropriates her history, makes light of her previous marriage, and boasts of her pain in his letter to Halford, "old boy." In his opening narrative, Markham attempts to impress upon Halford his initial power struggle with Helen and his eventual victory over her through the control he supposedly gains by marrying her. But Brontë suggests that following Arthur's death the power structure is reversed in Markham's courtship of and marriage to Helen. Markham may be disclosing to Halford his wife's intimate secrets, but this knowledge was voluntarily "thrust" into his hands by Helen (asserting her right to give), not "wrested" from her. In fact, Markham does not even possess Helen's whole story, for she has withheld the diary's final pages from him. Helen's voluntary surrender of the diary, its incompleteness, and the twenty-year gap in time prior to its disclosure, have a disempowering effect on Markham's appropriation of his wife's secrets and on the value of the diary. It no longer poses a threat to Helen's independence, nor can its contents any longer be used to control her. In effect, Markham is trying to pay off his debt to Halford with valueless money.

By so closely aligning Arthur Huntingdon and Gilbert Markham, Brontë shifts our focus from Markham—who, like

Arthur and his boon companions, is a static character—to Helen's progress and the changing circumstances of her life. While some critics have argued that Markham matures by the end of the novel, the text itself does not sufficiently support this contention.<sup>4</sup> The Markham of forty-four differs very little from the Markham of twenty-four: whether a young boy or an "old boy," he still remains a boy (which—with the possible exception of Lawrence—appears to be true of all the men in the novel). What has changed during that time, however, is Helen Graham Huntingdon's attitude and behavior. Markham's letter, while attempting to do just the opposite, alerts the reader to a reversal in Helen's situation from her early days (depicted in her diary) to her present (depicted in Markham's text). Whereas she was powerless and contained in her first marriage, Markham's narrative shows that in their marriage Helen has become stronger, powerful, and uncontrollable.

In her first marriage, Helen's inability to sketch or paint Arthur to her satisfaction suggests her inability to contain him. After their initial introduction, Helen begins the first of many attempts to sketch him: "there is one face I am always trying to paint or to sketch," she says, "and always without success; and that vexes me" (148). At one point she describes a "complete miniature portrait" of Arthur, which she had "sketched with such tolerable success, as to be induced to colour it with great pains and care" (176). Helen's attempts to frame and contain Arthur prove fruitless, however. Later she comments on another attempt to paint him: "how widely different had been my feelings in painting that portrait to what they now were in looking upon it! How I had studied and toiled to produce something, as I thought, worthy of the original! what mingled pleasure and dissatisfaction I had in the result of my labours!" (398). She simply cannot "capture" Arthur on her canvas just as she cannot control his debauchery. Indeed, Arthur controls Helen and finally uses his power to deprive her of her painting supplies (by which she could support herself), her valuable jewelry, and household funds. Yet, she thinks, the portrait's "frame . . . is handsome enough; it will serve for another painting" (398). For Markham's, perhaps?

Once Helen leaves Wildfell Hall, she forbids Markham's writing to her before six months elapse, placing him in a traditionally female (passive) position. Helen controls their dialogue, reversing the typical position of Victorian women.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, after Helen's departure Markham becomes a source of amusement for the women in Linden-Car. He nurses his emotions for Helen, mopes about town because of her absence, and finds himself the object of women's laughter. Humiliated, he responds to those jesting, "'You were laughing . . . and I don't like to be laughed at'" (464). Now he knows how Helen felt at the mercy of Huntingdon and his boon companions.

Helen's economic situation is also reversed after leaving Wildfell Hall. While in residence, she is literally "in ruins" (37) and supporting herself and her son by selling her paint-

<sup>3</sup>The exchange of books as an exchange of trust is significant in understanding the importance of Helen's relinquishing her diary to Markham and his subsequent violation of that trust when he turns the diary over to Halford. Helen's surrendering her diary—as opposed to her telling her story—is not

"an error in the author's technical skill," as George Moore felt, and as Winifred Gerin states in her introduction to the novel. The surrender of the diary, and Markham's later appropriation of it, are perhaps the most revealing of narrative device in understanding Helen's and Markham's relationship.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Jacobs or Mink. Mink argues that "after the final maturation of the characters [including Markham]" takes place, Helen and Markham "enter into a happy marriage" (13, 15).

<sup>5</sup>For a brief discussion of the Victorian woman's necessary subservience and submissiveness to men, see Altick and Houghton (341-53).

ings. Because of her ruined condition, Markham feels safe in pursuing her and potentially elevating her to his social level. By the end of the novel, however, not only her financial situation but also her marital situation are reversed. Arthur is dead and Helen is rich. In addition, Helen's uncle has recently left her a huge property settlement that increases her wealth and subverts the patriarchal tradition of passing wealth from male to male (the uncle gives only a pittance to his nephew). Markham's discovery of Helen's good fortune dismays him because, as he is only a gentleman farmer, he now "saw the folly of the hopes [he] had cherished" (482). Surprisingly, though, she proposes marriage to him. In her proposal she offers him a Christmas rose, plucked from the frigid winter air and symbolic of her ability to bloom in rough weather outside the greenhouse, a common Victorian metaphor for protected women.<sup>6</sup> Helen, now rich, now single, says to Markham, "my marriage is to please myself alone" (486). We believe her.

Markham marries up the social ladder. He marries a woman older, more experienced, and richer than he. He moves into Helen's home (a home complete with a greenhouse owned and controlled by Helen) and into Helen's world, and in doing so he turns over the family farm to his younger brother. Markham comes to his marriage propertyless and powerless. To emphasize his dependence, Brontë goes so far as to suggest that Helen may have made legal arrangements to entail her property (471, 488). Either way, Markham's social elevation through a woman's condescension places him in an uncomfortable, traditionally female position. Elaine Showalter sums up this reversal of traditional gender roles in nineteenth-century women's novels, where men "must learn how it feels to be helpless and to be forced unwillingly into dependency. Only then can they understand that women need love but hate to be weak. . . . The 'woman's man' must find out how it feels to be a woman" (152). Markham is not forced into dependency, but we can hear his nervous uncomfortable laughter when he writes Halford, "I can afford to laugh at both Lawrence and you" (15). Maybe he can, but he also seems to be worrying about who laughs at him.

After his twenty years of silence we find Markham home alone writing his letter to Halford while Helen is away "visiting." This too reverses the pattern of Helen's previous marriage, in which she remained tethered to the home writing letters to Millicent while Arthur was out carousing. Indeed, the traditional male/female power structure has been reversed in Helen's marriage to Markham. His only means of recovering any power is to appropriate Helen's history and make it his own. In his narrative he incorporates Helen's past, edits it, calls it his own, then pays a debt with it. This attempt to frame her in his text is reminiscent of Helen's failed attempts to frame Arthur. But the secrets in the journal have ceased to be a controlling factor in Helen's life, so Markham's attempt to frame her similarly fails. Keeping his wife in her place by appropriating her private history becomes vitally important for Markham, just as the appropriation of women's secrets—and

the power derived from that knowledge—was essential to the survival of Victorian boy's clubs. But in Markham's letter to Halford, we witness the ebbing power of the old boy network over women like Helen Huntingdon.

The reversal of power structures is not unique to Helen's and Markham's marriage. Brontë also implies that similar reversal takes place in Rose Markham's and Halford's marriage. In an argument with her mother on womanly and wifely duties, Rose pointedly rejects the notion that men's needs must come first. She discards her mother's belief that "what's proper to be done . . . [is] what's most agreeable to the gentleman of the house—anything will do for the ladies" (78). Mrs. Markham responds that all "any woman can expect from any man" is that "he be steady and punctual, seldom [find] fault without reason, always [do] justice to . . . good dinners, and hardly ever [spoil dinners] . . . by delay" (79). After Markham related this argument to Halford, he asks him, "'is it so, Halford? Is that the extent of your domestic virtues; and does your happy-wife exact no more?'" (79) The ironic tone of this remark suggests that Rose exacts much from Halford. One suspects that not just Helen but Rose, too, is the dominant partner. In drawing the parallel, Brontë suggests that not only Helen but also other women of her generation have it within their power to reject traditional gender roles and establish new ones.

The twenty-year gap from the end of Helen's diary to Markham's letter to Halford requires explanation. Why the long silence? Why do we hear nothing of Helen after the wedding? And why the hasty close to his letter (perhaps he hears her returning)? By leaving this huge gap in the text, Brontë provides us with a particularly rich opportunity "to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections—for filling in the gaps by the text itself" (Iser 280). During this twenty-year gap, we can imagine that Helen has learned from her previous marriage to Huntingdon and refuses to be victimized by male dominance again. Now having a better understanding of the power relationships between men and women—especially between husband and wife—Helen assumes the right to dictate not only the course of her life but Markham's life as well. She has found a painting to fit her own frame—Markham's—and has finally achieved not only independence but dominance.

In 1969, Hazel Mews pondered the feasibility of Helen's and Markham's marriage. Anne Brontë, she wrote in *Frail Vessels*, "realizes, subconsciously perhaps, that such a marriage depends upon . . . the view of it taken by the husband—his is the accepted position of dominance in marriage and unless he, as the acknowledged holder of power, is willing to abrogate it, there will be a gradual slipping back to the accepted view; it is, therefore, essential that Gilbert Markham hold progressive views" (139). But if he wishes to remain with Helen, Markham really has no choice other than to adjust his views. For with or without his permission, the tenant of Wildfell Hall has reached the point where she can stand on her own.

sheltered experience and faces a chaos from which there appears no protection and no escape" (136).

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## Swinburne's Internal Centre: Reply to an Article

Rikky Rooksby

Although Peter Anderson's "The Sterile Star of Venus: Swinburne's Dream of Flight" included some interesting close reading of several poems, taken as a whole it struck this reader at least as misleading, unhelpful, and anachronistic. Given three decades of able and illuminating commentary on Swinburne by critics such as Cecil Lang, Clyde Hyder, John Rosenberg, Jerome McCann, Kerry McSweeney, David Riede, Terry Meyers, Antony Harrison and Margot Louis, it might have been safe to assume that the ability of Swinburne's poetry to signify to common human experience is now no longer in question. The old charges of Swinburne lacking meaning, of being sound and no sense, a world of words unto himself must surely, in 1994, be lying self-slain on their own strange altar, like Death at the conclusion of "A Forsaken Garden." The last place one expects to encounter such charges is in a journal devoted to Victorian literature.

Anderson's argument is broadly post-structuralist: Swinburne's poetry gives only the illusion of referring to anything outside itself—but that's okay because it offers the spectacle of "the word vanishing into itself" (18), a phrase that will not bear scrutiny. From the post-structuralist viewpoint, what was once perceived as a vice becomes a virtue; the self-referentiality of Swinburne's poetry exposes the condition of all writing. It would be impractical to rehearse here arguments against the denial of language's referential function and the necessity of it remaining central to literary study. Only a recognition of the essential connections between text, author, reader, society, and world can justify the amount of time and resources expended on the criticism and teaching of literature. Deny these links and literature becomes nothing more than an

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arid intellectual game. Deny literature's referential function—however problematic that function may be—and the notion of writing being "radical" or "challenging" is an empty boast. Like that of any other Victorian poet, Swinburne's achievement primarily rests or falls on his ability to signify human concerns and realities, not to the abstract worlds of linguistic and critical theory. As he wrote in 1904, "Marlowe and Shakespeare, Aeschylus and Sappho, do not for us live only on the dusty shelves of libraries" (*Poems* 1:21). We cannot seriously engage with any writer on the basis of his attributed "adulation of empty words."

In Swinburne, Anderson writes, the question of superficiality vanishes "as soon as we recognize that dialectical tension is to be sought . . . not between surface and depth, but between surface and nothingness." Anderson then uses the word "void" and eulogizes it as "shining, ubiquitous, and all-engulfing." What meaning can "void" have when it is displaced from any explanatory philosophical context? Which "void" are we talking about? Is this void only a metaphor for Swinburne's fear of the feminine? Or does it come from Existentialism? Mahayana Buddhism? "Star Trek"? How can anything, let alone a Swinburne poem, "consciously" polish the void? How can this polishing achieve "perfect emptiness"? Like many of the metaphors Anderson uses, and phrases such as "staggered angles of reflection" and the tautological "total annihilation" (22), this is over-heated critical rhetoric. The further such writing moves from human realities the more its language aspires nostalgically for the extra-linguistic world from which it is in flight (as typified by the current popularity of a metaphor like "site").

<sup>6</sup>On a similar note, Hazel Mews states that in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* "a woman, tenderly nurtured, has stepped outside the confines of her usual

Anderson's praise of Swinburne takes away as much as it gives. He refers to "his most magnificent work" and asserts "Anactoria" "is a great poem" (22). But these judgments are validated by the notion that Swinburne's poetry is essentially parodic and not lyric, revealing emptiness not fullness. Probably the greatest impediment to his reputation equalling that of Tennyson or Browning is our time's profound mistrust of lyric poetry, because the lyric emotion itself is regarded as untrustworthy and inauthentic. This in turn is partly due to the increase of spectating in our lives. The lyric impulse is one of involvement, submergence. With observation comes distance, from distance comes detachment, detachment brings alienation, from alienation comes disbelief, which soon begets judgment, and from judgment spring satire, irony, parody, theory. No doubt Swinburne uses parody and burlesque; no doubt his command of meter is dazzling and various; and that our study of him would be furthered by a concordance to give access to the distribution of certain key words and phrases. But to root his greatness as a poet in a notion like that of "the vanishing of the word into itself, the void" and to say that "such poetry clearly gives the lie to the word" is to do Swinburne a grave disservice. Countless phrases in the poetry, like "the brief eternities of life" (3: 254) or "the measureless music of things" (6: 19) to cite but two, saturated with feeling, expose the fatuity of such a view. As McSweeney put it, "in his finest poetry, Swinburne's interests are never in language per se but in language as the expression of his own 'human feelings,' as the articulation of a distinctive vision of human existence, and as the record of his long struggle to move from darkness to some measure of light" (125).

However Anderson's argument might be challenged in a wider context, it can certainly be challenged on specifically Swinburneian grounds. Swinburne's work may well include images of total control but one could find equally as many of surrender. Immersion in the sea is not always associated with drowning and fear; sometimes it is desired. "The Triumph of Time" and "Les Noyades" must be counter-balanced with "Loch Torridon," "In Guernsey," "The Lake of Gaube," "A Swimmer's Dream," and the swim in canto VIII of *Tristram of Lyonesse*. And where in *Tristram* or "The Triumph of Time" or chapter IV or *Lucretia Borgia: The Chronicle of Tebaldo Tebaldei* ("Of the gift of amorous mercy") do we find fear of sexual consummation? Swinburne does not always find it "imperative to exclude the possibility of actual bodily sexuality," witness these lines from *Tristram*:

... So they lay  
Tranced once, nor watched along the fiery bay  
The shine of summer darkness palpitate and play.  
She had nor sight nor voice; her swooning eyes  
Knew not if night or light were in the skies;  
Across her beauty sheer the moon dawn shed  
Its light as on a thing as white and dead;  
Only with stress of soft fierce hands she prest  
Between the throbbing blossoms of her breast  
His ardent face, and through his hair her breath  
Went quivering as when life is hard on death;  
And with strong trembling fingers she strained fast  
His head into her bosom; till at last,

Satiate with sweetness of that burning bed,  
His eyes afire with tears, he raised his head  
And laughed into her lips; and all his heart  
Filled hers; then face from face fell, and apart  
Each hung on each with panting lips, and felt  
Sense into sense and spirit in spirit melt. (4: 50-51)

Furthermore, who is the "Swinburne" of Anderson's piece? The author of "A Ballad of Life," "A Ballad of Death," "Hymn to Proserpine," "Anactoria," all from *Poems and Ballads* (1866) and *Lesbia Brandon*, largely composed during the 1860s. If this "Swinburne" is depressingly familiar it is because he is the poet of Eliot's 1919 essay, of whom "we should like to have the *Atalanta* entire, and a volume of selections which should certainly contain *The Leper*, *Laus Veneris*, and *The Triumph of Time*" (144). There is no doubt that the poems Anderson chooses are important ones (in "Anactoria"'s case crucial) but they cannot serve as an adequate basis for the kind of sweeping generalizations that Anderson makes. Any critical formulations that cannot illuminate *Poems and Ballads* (1866 and 1878) and deal with poems like "Before a Crucifix," "Hertha," "In Memory of John William Inchbold," "Evening on the Broads," "Loch Torridon," "A Nympholept," "A Midsummer Holiday," "The Lake at Gaube," or *Tristram of Lyonesse* simply won't do. Swinburne did not cease developing as a poet in 1866, 1872, or 1879.

Equally depressing is Anderson's use, out of context, of George Meredith's famous remark that Swinburne's writing lacked an "internal centre." As long ago as 1932 Hyder observed that this "has been quoted more than once by critics as if it were an unqualified verdict on the poet's mature production. It does not fairly represent even Meredith's judgment on Swinburne in his early youth" (98). Cecil Lang commented thirty years later that the remark had "dogged Swinburne criticism and damned Swinburne, but it has had its day. No one who knows Swinburne's poetry and his prose, critical or fictional or burlesque . . . could judiciously maintain, that, whatever their shortcomings, they lack subtlety or a radiant center" (232). In 1861, when Swinburne was all of 24, Meredith told a correspondent:

Swinburne read me the other day his French novel *La Fille du Policeman*: the funniest rampingest satire on French novelists dealing with English themes that you can imagine. One chapter, "Ce qui peut se passer dans un Cab Safety," where Lord Whitestick Bishop of Londres, ravishes the heroine, is quite marvellous. But he is not subtle; and I don't see any internal centre from which springs anything that he does. He will make a great name, but whether he is to distinguish himself solidly as an Artist, I should not willingly prognosticate.

(Hyder, *Critical Heritage* 98)

Meredith's comment was inspired by a manuscript satire, and comes four years before the publication of *Atalanta in Calydon*. To apply it to anything Swinburne published later is unfair to Swinburne and Meredith. In 1873 Meredith wrote, "I hope when Swinburne publishes his 'Tristram' you will review him. Take him at his best he is by far the best—finest

poet; truest artist—of the young lot—when he refrains from pointing a hand at the genitals," and in 1909, hearing of Swinburne's death, "He was the greatest of our lyric poets—of the world, I could say, considering what a language he did wield" (Hyder, *Critical Heritage* 124). How much does *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* reveal of the "internal centre" of the author of the "Four Quartets"? Did Yeats have much of an "internal centre" when at the age of 34 he published *Crossways* or Larkin when he wrote *The North Ship*? In 1861 Swinburne was as much in his apprenticeship phase as either of these poets, imitating any form that caught his eye. He found himself as a poet when his innate ability, his education, and the fruits of his practice of various literary forms were ignited by painful losses: the severance of ties with childhood domiciles (Capheaton in 1860, East Dene in 1865), the death of Edith Swinburne in 1863, and the loss of Mary Gordon in 1864.

Meredith's phrase has instigated some critical debate before. Harold Nicolson in 1926 believed such a centre existed in Swinburne, "tenuous but intense, which, if once realised, will give to his poetry an abiding interest and a stimulating originality" (4). Nicolson identified this centre as consisting of "two dominant and conflicting impulses, namely, the impulse towards revolt and the impulse towards submission" (13-14). Swinburne's poetry, he argued, is at its best when these are in balance, as they are in the "Hertha" group of *Songs before Sunrise*, *Atalanta* and *Poems and Ballads, Second Series*. Insofar as Anderson argues that Swinburne's centre is a void he has been anticipated by John Cassidy, David Riede, James Richardson, and Richard McGhee, who wrote "Swinburne's poetry pulls apart, strains outward, explodes, into the blank and nothingness of death and silence" (179). McSweeney devoted a chapter to "Swinburne's Internal Centre," writing that "of all the major Victorian poets, Swinburne's reputation is still the most passionately and insistently naturalistic English poet between Keats and Lawrence" (25) and that Swinburne's internal centre consists of his abiding themes of "naturalism, transience, morality, and poetic vocation" (176).

Perhaps it is time Meredith's phrase was demystified of its slightly metaphysical air. For a writer to have an internal centre surely means no more than that he or she should have a recognizable core or abiding themes and preoccupations. This Swinburne demonstrably has, though he could not have revealed it even if he had wished to do so in 1861. Swinburne's internal centre consists of the themes that inspire him not just in the 1860s but for the whole of his life. The poet who wrote "Les Noyades," "The Leper," "The Garden of Proserpine," "Ave Atque Vale," the "Lake of Gaube" and the many elegies of the Putney years was concerned with death, being and fear. He has an acute awareness of the physical life, sensual beauty and the vulnerability of these things to time; he knows passion and the pain of passion that cannot satisfy itself; he knows "the mystery of the cruelty of thing" (1: 62) which ordained "our wound of living" (4: 11) and rages against it, whilst advocating a creed of self-sufficiency and self-possession. These are all aspects of the internal centre.

The single burden of so many of Swinburne's experiences—writing, swimming, drinking, being flogged, falling into ecstasies at a seascape or (as a youth) at Mass—is trans-

cendence: the self must either break out of its limits, or have those limits flooded by the Other, especially if this process is acted out through the body. Only through this could Swinburne escape the intolerable inner stresses indicated by the fits and the hyperactive body movements he showed as a child and man. The barrier between the two becomes a place of pressure and sensitivity, and might be considered an analogy for the fascination with borderlands, for beaches and crumbling cliffs, that John Rosenberg discussed in his famous essay of 1967. This drama is partly expressed through the dialectic of mastery and being mastered, through power and powerlessness, through sadism and masochism. Sappho, for example, wishes to consume Anactoria and to be consumed. The many encounters with water in Swinburne's poetry express one way for the self to merge with the unbounded.

It is the fact that the core theme of transcendence is so clearly embodied that makes the conclusion of "A Nympholept" one of the greatest moments in Swinburne's *oeuvre*:

The terror that whispers in darkness and flames in light,  
The doubt that speaks in the silence of earth and sea,  
The sense, more fearful at noon than in midmost night,  
Of wrath scarce hushed and of imminent ill to be,  
Where are they? Heaven is as earth, and as heaven to  
me  
Earth: for the shadows that sundered them here take flight;  
And nought is all, as am I, but a dream of thee.

(6:140)

The brilliant ambiguity of the last line has been commented on before. Does the speaker dream Pan, the All? or does Pan dream the speaker? The ambiguities run further. But here is a moment, numinous and hard-won, where the sense of the self invading the Other or the Other invading the self is balanced, resulting in an extraordinary and joyous equilibrium: "Heaven is as earth, and as heaven to me / Earth." The bounded and the unbounded are one. The joy of this conclusion is all the more striking and poignant for a poet whose work is so often compelled to memorialize "the flowing of all men's tears beneath the sky" (1: 131) and to lament that "all the world is bitter as a tear" (1: 52). There are many wonderful moments in Swinburne where the self is merged into the Other or asserts mastery over it—"Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things" (2: 104) takes on a different color viewed in this light, being an expression of psychological necessity rather than anticlericalism—but there are few occasions where the two are so finely balanced.

Perhaps a rare passage of comparable achievement comes in canto VI of *Tristram*, where Swinburne describes Merlin entranced in Broceliande. It is a sequence that vividly reveals Swinburne's deepest concerns because it contrasts so strongly with Tennyson's handling of the same material. For Merlin, the barrier between self and Other has gone; he "knows the soul that was his soul at one / With the ardent world's." More than this, he "hears in spirit" the song of Nimue:

Shed like a consecration; and his heart,  
Hearing, is made for love's sake as a part

Of that far singing, and the life thereof  
Part of that life that feeds the world with love:  
Yea, heart in heart is molten, hers and his,  
Into the world's heart and the soul that is  
Beyond or sense of vision . . . . (4: 99)

Swinburne criticism as a whole has yet to come to terms with the implication of lines like these, though Antony Harrison has re-opened the debate about a "mystical, organicist philosophy" (131). If Bertie Seyton's dream in *Lesbia Brandon*, quoted by Anderson, does show a mind fearful of the feminine and a sterile cosmos, these lines are no less a part of Swinburne's work and must be reckoned with. Here Swinburne has presented through Merlin not only mergence of self with Other, but satisfied the romantic yearning of the early poetry with a fusion of masculine and feminine in a state of erotic and spiritual union. And where does "the soul that is / Beyond or sense or vision" leave the void?

The contest between self and Other, between self-possession and self-surrender can also be seen at the more concrete level of Swinburne's rhythm. Anderson speaks of Swinburne's "scrupulous and overriding attention to metrical beat," but whatever the temptations this is not how Swinburne's poetry should be read. The surest proof of this is to recite one of his poems so that the metrical pulse is paramount. The effect is initially intoxicating but soon palls. Even more than with most poets, Swinburne repays reading by sentence rhythm more than meter. Some of the most satisfying moments in his verse come when sentences and meter are pitted against each other through enjambent, as in these lines from "The Triumph of Time":

To have died if you cared I should die for you, clung  
To my life if you bade me, played my part  
As it pleased you—these were the thoughts that stung,  
The dreams that smote with a keener dart  
Than shafts of love or arrows of death; . . . (1: 37)

Or take this stanza from "At a Month's End":

For the old love's love-sake dead and buried,  
One last time, one more and no more,  
We watched the waves set in, the serried  
Spears of the tide storming the shore. (3: 29)

Swinburne is scrupulous about far more than just meter, witness the observation of "Across, aslant, a scudding sea-mew / Swam, dipped, and dropped, and grazed the sea" (3: 30). If we see his meter as expressing the impulse to be swept away, to be lost in rapture, then sentence structure acts as the impulse to self-possession. Metrical rhythm is the impulse to ecstasy, sentence rhythm the impulse to order and control, and Swinburne's poetry manifests a pronounced tension between the two.

In the penultimate stanza of "A Nympholept" Swinburne asks "My spirit or thine is it, breath of thy life or of mine, / Which fills my sense with a rapture that casts out fear?" Swinburne's internal centre is a seeking after transcendence in

order to reach the rapture that results from union. "Rapture" occurs again and again in the later poetry, casting out fear, fulfilling the spirit. In "The Lake of Gaube" the swimmer takes "The rapturous plunge that quickens blood and breath" (6: 285) just as "The Palace of Pan" evokes the "rapture too sacred for fear" (6: 179). This is more than just an emotion; Swinburne describes it as the very nature of things, which is why his descriptions of nature are so often eroticized. The appalling and seemingly unbridgeable divisions and severings of *Atalanta* and *Poems and Ballads* are healed by transcendence. The self realizes unity with the Other—not all the time, but in a significant number of poems—and this creates and reveals rapture. It is in this experience, rather than in the antitheist satires and positivist hymns of *Songs Before Sunrise*, that Swinburne finally satisfies the religious impulse frustrated in him when the loss of his Christian belief cut him off from those "unaffected and unshamed ecstasies of adoration" (Lang, *Letters* 3: 13) in Church. Words in the later poetry vanish not into a void, but into rapture, into the "measureless music of things." This is not to say that Swinburne's later poems do not face the cosmos with genuine questions, and a real sense of its mystery. "Evening on the Broads," for example, dramatizes the uncertainty of knowing there is some kind of greater life beyond the self into which it can merge, and "By the North Sea" gives a bleak picture of destruction and entropy. But just as often Swinburne achieves the transcendence that releases the self from the dualism of power and powerlessness, master and being mastered, as in section VII of "A Midsummer's Holiday":

As we give us again to the waters, the rapture of limbs that  
the waters enfold  
Is less than the rapture of spirit whereby, though the burden  
it quits were sore,  
Our souls and the bodies they wield at their will are  
absorbed in the life they adore. (6: 19)

That is Swinburne's internal centre, which shines through so many facets of his work, and gives it a human relevance, whatever its technical brilliance or eccentricity. Not a void, but a tumultuous energy, elemental, suffering but undefeated, ever eager to pass beyond itself into union.

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## Tristram, Iseult and the Internalized Centre: A Note on Rikky Rooksby's "New" Swinburne

Peter Anderson

"A penny for the Old Guy"

—T. S. Eliot

To lay the blame for the mid-century malaise in Swinburne studies on the deadliness of T. S. Eliot's influence is no doubt a just move. In terms of the politics of the canon, it is an astute move, too, almost guaranteed, at this late stage of Eliot's declining critical eminence, to gain support for Swinburne's late-twentieth-century ascendancy. In 1995, many more critics are likely to be found ready and eager to bury the academic Eliot than could be mustered to beat at the gates of hell in protest, or howl in the hopes of raising him again. Even I, as the writer of "The Sterile Star of Venus"—an article which one of the leading proponents of the "new" Swinburne, Rikky Rooksby, would certainly have preferred not to see included in these pages, and which he rejects as an almost inexplicable recurrence of the old malaise—even I am compelled to admit that I would be only too glad to borrow a black tie to wear at the wake, and go cracking the odd joke, drinking whisky, and dancing the night away, although I might not be able to escape a slight feeling of unease, knowing at the back of my mind how difficult it may be to keep a great dead poet/critic down.

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,  
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?  
Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?  
Oh keep the Dog far hence that's friend to men  
Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!

(*The Waste Land* ll. 71-74)

Today, to be "new" in Swinburne studies, according to both Rikky Rooksby and Nicholas Shrimpton, his co-editor in compiling *The Whole Music of Passion: New Essays on Swinburne* (1993), it is necessary in the first place to be anti-Eliot. A hostility towards Eliot's reading of Swinburne appears to have been an implicit criterion of the selection process. As noted in the introduction: "If there is a common theme to this consciously diverse collection of essays, in fact, it is a shared rejection of that subtle damnation with faint praise by which T. S. Eliot relegated Swinburne's verse to a peculiar realm of semantic nullity" (viii).

Difficult as it is to go against the grain, or to return like a bad penny, it may be necessary, I think, to point out that even

the expunging of Eliot and his shadow from every future critical page on Swinburne would not in itself be sufficient to dispel a problem that cannot with complete truthfulness be said to have originated with Eliot. A Swinburne who could only too easily be dismissed as not even shallow is, for instance, a Swinburne of whom Swinburne the critic, writing as Swinburne the poet, would appear himself to have been demonstrably aware.

In the first book of *Tristram of Lyonesse*, "The Sailing of the Swallow," one such moment of self-reflexive awareness arises. It is at the end of Tristram's first song to Iseult, a poignantly beautiful and deeply troubling love plaint, "Love, is it morning risen or night deceased . . . ?" After a slight silence, a pause, perhaps, the following interchange takes place between the two (who are of course not yet) lovers:

"Nay," said Iseult, "your song is hard to read."

"Ay?" said he: "or too light a song to heed,  
Too slight to follow, it may be?" (ll. 616-18)

Though small in itself, the moment is in the first place not purely lyrical but dialogical. At this point, the epic is acting like a novel, bringing the spoken views of independent characters into play. Iseult's wondering "Nay" is like a gentle reproach, almost a request for an explanation, while Tristram's quizzical "Ay?" which appears simply to be the sign of a carefree masculine mind, is equally the sign of a sensitivity quick and intent enough to note more in the reproach than the spoken words seem intended to convey. Where Iseult acknowledges the possibility of an intimate personal bond between singer and song, making it "your" song, Tristram readily objectifies it, referring to the song simply as "a" song; although it is possible that a slight chagrin may be concealed in the very lightness of his tone. As for the song itself, once Tristram has spoken, it seems to hang suspended beyond possibility of discussion—exactly where he would have wanted it, perhaps.

At the same time, of course, the self-conscious banter between the two is unconsciously erotic, containing to begin with a maidenly "Nay" to a masculine "Ay?" In a poem like *Tristram*, alive everywhere with sharp and delicate erotic ten-

sions being played out against the omnipotent undertow of death, it would probably be impossible to overrate the importance of a sexual subtext. But here, perhaps precisely because the subtext may seem more important than and different from the overt subject of the conversation, that subject is cut relatively free, made quasi-autonomous. At a meta-level, then, over and above the level of plot, Iseult's language mirrors the act of the reader: "to read." At the same level, Tristram's "Ay?" is also Swinburne's "I?", and the singer/poet, in his skeptical disregard for his own song, raises what would in actual critical discourse historically prove to be the most slighting and dismissive objection of all—that his lyric poetry is devoid of significant weight; lacking, if you like, any real point, or (in a phrase that would stick) "internal centre."<sup>1</sup>

As Bakhtin would have put it, then, these lines are "double-voiced,"<sup>2</sup> spoken not only by the characters in the text but by further, extra-textual voices. Clearly, an exploration of Swinburne's meta-poetics here leads us not into those alienated realms of purely theoretical literary critical or linguistic inquiry which Rikky Rooksby regards as too abstract to be applicable to a "human" reading of Swinburne, ("Reply") but directly into the relativized world of social dialogue and interaction. As in the social world, where no word is final, whether critical or poetic, Tristram can (and does) revise, or rather, invent anew his song, offering Iseult a less pressing, less painfully questioning version.

But what question is it that is so unsettling that it must be suppressed? (In the answer to this, I believe, lies the key to many of the strongest reactions to Swinburne.) And where does the suppression begin? Could it be that Tristram is putting up a careless front in order to deflect attention from the song, while Iseult, for her part, is not asking for an explanation but rather for an *alternative* explanation? In other words, do they both already know, but set out to deny what is in the first song?

A brief, comparative reading of representative sections from both songs may be of use here. The opening stanza of the first song reads:

Love, is it morning risen or night deceased  
That makes the mirth of this triumphant east?  
Is it bliss given or bitterness put by  
That makes most glad men's hearts at love's high feast?

<sup>1</sup>If George Meredith's comment about Swinburne's lack of an "internal centre" has survived many years of radical decontextualization as well as repeated attempts by responsible critics like Rikky Rooksby to settle its meaning once and for all, the reason may simply be the capacity of the phrase to touch a common chord, to seem in some way immediately intelligible and undeniably memorable to successive generations of Swinburne readers. In precisely what way, if any, the poetry can be said to lack an "internal centre" has of course been the focus of much debate. Perhaps the most important point to note, however, is that the phrase itself functions poetically: that is to say, the surplus meaning inherent in the phrase as an image resists all attempts at closure, for a poetic image necessarily plays free of confinement to any single interpretation. There is therefore no hope that the phrase can ever be "demystified" ("Reply") in the way Rooksby would wish, even by as sound a measure as re-centering of the words in their original context—which, as Rooksby shows ("Reply"), lies in a letter by Meredith about a very early work of Swinburne's. I cannot help feeling, therefore, that, rather than offering a piece of positivistic historical evidence as a way of virtually terminating the debate, a more valuable historical approach might be to provide an analysis of

Grief smiles, joy weeps, that day should live and die.  
(ll. 587-591)

And the beginning of the second song reads:

The breath between my lips of lips not mine  
Like spirit in sense that makes pure sense divine,  
Is as life in them from the living sky  
That entering fills my heart with blood of thine  
And thee with me, while day shall live and die.  
(ll. 631-635)

In Tristram's first song, "love" apostrophized, is after that single gesture of honor left behind, as it were, by the impulse to state the driving question. In the first stanza of the second song, however, there are no such questions. Gentle and reverent in tone, the second song is a hymn to erotic love: the flow of the lines in this opening stanza, instead of being reft by opposition and disjunction like the "morning risen or night deceased" of the first, submits to minglings and repetitions like "spirit in sense . . . pure sense divine," that appear dialectically to fulfill the aspiration to ecstasy. In the second song, love unites, a unity in duality evident in the doubling of terms, "lips" and "lips," "sense" and "sense." Here, love is personalized, not simply personified as in the first song, becoming transfigured into a pure spiritual consummation so rapturous that at the end Iseult will be left deep in silent reverie—although in this first stanza of the second song, the strong turn to the delicately more corporeal imagery of heart and blood could on reflection raise a certain dread, foreshadowing, as it seems, (to my mind at least), blood sacrifice.

At the outset of the first poem, the status of love is, however, more problematic. Considering its weight and placement as the opening word, "love" seems to stand as the source of all, the unity that makes the world whole. But love (and its equivalent, the woman to whom the song is addressed, Iseult) is immediately confronted by the spectacle of a world that does not necessarily add up to One—unless terms in opposition and disjunction are only apparently divided, (as they may be, if "morning risen" is simply the equivalent of "night deceased," a possibility which risks the implication that the question itself is merely verbal) or force is used, as the conquering joy of a "triumphant" daybreak would seem to suggest. In the second song, by contrast, love is not and can-

the many uses to which the notion of Swinburne's lack of an "internal centre" has been put—beginning with Meredith's letter, certainly, but not privileging those initial words as in themselves decisive, and going on to trace through the writings of "critics and criticasters" (Hyder qtd. in "Reply") alike the shifting weights of significance the notion has had to bear under changing cultural conditions. In short, I would argue in favor of a painstaking historical examination of what the notion has been called upon to do, when, and why, from Victorian times to our own. As it stands, Rooksby's recontextualization seems to me to amount to little more than an attempt to police out of existence the "slightly metaphysical air" ("Reply") which appears so much to his distaste in the emergent post-structuralist reading of Swinburne in general, let alone in my particular notion of the poetry's lack of an "internal centre" as depicted in *The Sterile Star of Venus*.

<sup>2</sup>The best discussion of Bakhtin's notion of "double voicedness" that I know of is in Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson's *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. Since Morson and Emerson's discussion takes place at numerous interconnected points throughout the study, it is not easy to single out a particular one, but the section between pp. 154 and 164 offers a good start.

not be made answerable for a world of mortality, of life-and-death duality, where opposites shade imperceptibly into imponderables; for love in the second song *is* the answer. In the first song, love questioned is by that act love separated from the world, becoming a single term in a further duality (love and the world), instead of that sovereign state of union with and reconciliation to the world which love is meant to be, a state which the second song will be called upon to restore.

The prime mover in the first stanza of the first song is, then, not love but the impossible (because intensely significant but unanswerable) question: "Why? Why *should* day live and die?" If confronted as unanswerable, however, the question may turn into its corollary: "Is all then meaningless?" It is this hint of an underlying cosmic nihilism that must at all costs be suppressed, and for which the song itself can only too easily be scapegoated as "too light," "too slight," and so on.

To return: in a way reminiscent of Nietzsche's notion of tragic joy in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the last line of the first stanza of Tristram's first song: "Grief smiles, joy weeps, that day should live and die," posits day as tragic spectacle. At the same time, the tense, clipped consonants of the last clause, which is repeated as a refrain throughout most of the rest of the poem, suggest no respite from the basic question: "Why?" In addition, the term "should" seems to contain some of the insistence of a moral imperative, an insistence that can only be coercive in terms of the impulse it opposes, the desire for unconflicted wholeness—as distinct from the holiness of attained desire, the (re)vision at the heart of the second song.

Following the change precipitated by the climax of the first song, the refrain "that day should die," gives way to the mild and lulling syllables of the sequence, "while day shall live and die." This new refrain, repeated in the first stanza of the second song and continued in variations throughout that song, constitutes a sign of submission to the law of nature rather than a radical querying of it. In the culminating words of the second poem as a whole, all claims of the intellect are relinquished: "God knows why day should live and die."

In the new or revisionist song, then, the basic attitude is one of ecstatic submission to "God" and an inscrutable tragic order. In the original or suppressed song, the basic attitude is one of a radical questioning of a tragic order to which it is not so easy to be reconciled, even by love itself. If, in the second song, love consummated makes of the world a backdrop, then love decentered—or at least, challenged—in the first, raises the possibility of a world which can be ruled only by force. In such a world, needless to add, it is power, not love, that assumes, or usurps, all significance. The nihilism of power within the matrix of a cosmic nihilism is therefore not very far from the surface at the outset of the first song.

If it is possible (however lightly) to predicate upon the polarization of response between Tristram and Iseult a critical paradigm, it becomes possible immediately to perceive Rikky Rooksby as an Iseult, a lover. Rooksby, devoted to the pursuit of an alternative explanation that will go beyond the nihilism of the first song, beyond what he himself call the "appalling and seemingly unbridgeable divisions and severings of *Atalanta* and *Poems and Ballads*," ("Reply") finds in the later poetry, that is to say, in the second song, the greater value. Because he is an Iseult, and not just a scholarly critic, he is at his most persuasive when his criticism is a statement of his

love. When at one point he overlooks his own parodic attack on my use of the term "void," which he has attempted to expose as undecidable, meaningless (though I think that by his appropriation he now not only validates the term but shows that he has known all along what I mean: Swinburne's nihilism), asserting: "Words in the later poetry vanish not into a void, but into rapture, into the 'measureless music of things'" ("Reply"), he is an Iseult admitting to a knowledge of the first, but voicing her (his) commitment to the vision of the second song.

In his reply to my article, Rooksby seeks to project a Swinburne without shadows, a radiant Swinburne, a Swinburne almost (if I may add a special twist to this) without tears: The advantage of such a Swinburne is obviously that he becomes the more readily assimilable to the canon. Other, earlier trumpeters of Swinburne's greatness also attempted to convince by presenting him in terms of a nearly-Shelleyan brightness. In fact, Rooksby's "Reply" reminds me of nothing so much as Ernest Rhys's essay "Swinburne's Poems." First published in the *Fortnightly Review* of December, 1905, four years before the poet's death, and around the time of the appearance of the six-volume collected edition of Swinburne published by Chatto and Windus in London and Harper and Brothers in New York, Rhys's essay was repeated as the introduction to a selection like the undated but later New York Modern Library *Poems* by Algernon Charles Swinburne that I have before me as I write. In his introduction, Rhys extols Swinburne's "extraordinary radiant humanity," (vii) and spurns the "popular idea" (xiv) of a morally dark Swinburne, claiming that "he is, of all poets of our era, that one who has suffered most from excess of moral energy, a too religious sense of pity and a too fierce, impassionate sympathy for his fellows" (xiv). Rooksby may lack some of Rhys's expressive intensity, but he certainly seems in agreement with Rhys's general stance and rhetoric. In the final statement of his "Reply," Rooksby declares Swinburne's "internal centre," to be: "Not a void, but a tumultuous energy, elemental, suffering but undefeated, ever eager to pass beyond itself into union" ( ). This is not quite *deja vu*, perhaps, but between the agreement on general stance and a repetition of certain terms selected for emphasis—"energy" and "suffering," and a "religious sense" as the equivalent of "union"—the two critics, despite being separated by nearly the whole of the twentieth century, are, it would seem, at least speaking the same language. (This should be a problem for no one but Rooksby. In "A Century of Swinburne," the essay with which *The Whole Music of Passion* commences, he states categorically that no critical writings "of any consequence" appeared during Swinburne's lifetime" [31].)

To Rooksby as an Iseult, undoubtedly, the most important Tristram is T. S. Eliot. A malignant Tristram, perhaps, Eliot coolly bent his formidable talents to reducing Swinburne's language to vacuity. Eliot nonetheless remained defensive to the end. Swinburne's nihilism was too close to his own, and therefore to be denied. Particularly in the poems published around 1920—the date of the publication in the volume *The Sacred Wood* of "Swinburne as Poet," an essay which Rooksby and Shrimpton take as containing some of the most destructive comments in the history of Swinburne criticism (ix)—"Gerontion" (1920), *The Waste Land* (1922),



and "The Hollow Men" (1925) Eliot's nihilism asserts itself as the infinite desolation that precipitates spiritual crisis, the terror of total fragmentation depicted in lines like the following:

De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs Cammel, whirled  
Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear  
In fractured atoms . . . ("Gerontion" 68-70)

Nihilism is not vacuity, however. Rooksby's assault on the notion of "semantic nullity" can do nothing to erase the specter of a nihilistic Swinburne. It is the return of this specter in the emergent post-structuralist criticism that Rooksby is doing his utmost to exorcise, it would seem, in his attacks on so diverse a group of critics as that comprised by Laurence Lerner, Nicolas Tredell, Susan E. Lorsch and me, personally. His attacks remain those of an Iseult. Again: opposed as an Iseult like Rooksby and a Tristram like T. S. Eliot may be at the surface, their responses are, I believe, based on an underlying complicity: a denial (for different reasons) of the disintegrative power of nihilism.

Post-structuralism, in delineating a world without the assurances of an objective reality, a world predicated upon power/language, (and that language *not* confined to words) offers an advance upon the Tristram/Iseult position, suggesting a way of reading Swinburne which presents in him a more potent and challenging cultural force than ever before; a way of reading connected not, as Rooksby continually and misleadingly suggests, with a defensive denial of meaning like Eliot's, but with a language-based political critique of Europe's myths of legitimacy. Only a nihilistic Swinburne can be read as an "enemy within," and thus connected to all those most marginalized during the Victorian era, from the tiny minority at the so-called sexual fringes of nineteenth-century English society to the global majority of entire peoples colonized by the British Empire.

It is within a political context, too, that it becomes possible to understand the reasons behind Rooksby's exclusion of Nicolas Tredell's *Tristram of Lyonesse: Dangerous Voyage* from *The Whole Music of Passion*. It is certainly not on intellectual grounds that sense can be made of excluding an outstanding post-structuralist interpretation like Tredell's, which depicts Swinburne's treatment of language in *Tristram* as "radically subversive," (97) and including in its stead Rooksby's own more mundane and pedagogical, if broadly enthusiastic, "The Algernon, or Thirteen Ways of Looking at *Tristram of Lyonesse*." It is as though the doors of the literary critical club have to be closed on anything too critical. Rikky Rooksby's "new" Swinburne is not new but neo-conservative.

As part of the attempt to justify his refusal to acknowledge as "new" the strongest post-structuralist reading of Swinburne to date, Rooksby writes:

". . . Tredell's essay claimed that *Tristram's* real innovation emanates from the use of language to break up the structures—of which language itself is perhaps the most basic—that order our perceptions and our lives. Why this should be a desirable aim of laudable achievement for a poet was left unexplained. Behind such a statement can be seen a lazy association of order with bourgeois restrictions

and an adolescent notion of the value of anarchy."

(Rooksby and Shrimpton 17)

Rooksby underestimates the political implications of post-structuralism. By his use of the plural pronoun in "our perceptions and our lives," he seems in addition to assume the right to speak not only for himself and the narrow Anglocentric literary establishment he in fact represents—an establishment which forms, as it were, his own internalized centre—but universally, for humanity at large. In the self-assurance of his words and tone, a "myth of legitimacy" can be seen to be operating. In what way can the order(s) of all human "perceptions" and "lives" be presumed as fully and fairly represented by the scholarly voice of a Tutor at St. Michael's Hall, Oxford (see "Notes on contributors," Rooksby & Shrimpton xv)—Oxford perhaps the last safe haven of English cultural imperialism left in the world? (I speak here not as an American, but as a post-colonial South African.)

I would agree that it is impractical to enter upon a discussion of "theory," but I would like to point out that a humanistic poetics like Rooksby's is a discourse, not a specially privileged system of referentiality. To be "human" is, as he uses it, a form of special pleading. No one can challenge J. D. Salinger's comment in this case: "A horse is at least *human*, for God's sake" (131, emphasis in the original). Saussure's elucidation of the difference between a sign and a referent might be altered accordingly: "'Human' is a sign. The referent is the thing that kicks you."

It is in fact the "human" that might deliver a kick to Rooksby's complacency. In view of the largest and most important "human" (or is it "inhuman"?) situation under the rule of Victorian England, colonization, notions like "rapture" and "self-transcendence"—by means of which, according to Rooksby, the "self realizes unity with the Other" ("Reply")—become perceptibly empty. Precisely when tested in terms of an ability to create unity between the "self" and the human "Other" in this greater context, "rapture" can be seen as an illusory bridge. Under imperialism, the binary logic of Self and Other was a major way not only of dividing rulers and ruled, (cf. Joseph Conrad's refrain about Jim as "one of us," i.e. a Self, in *Lord Jim*) but of marginalizing the majority of the colonized in terms of the functional proto-apartheid which the British inflicted upon "their" territories throughout the world. The usefulness of a binary logic such as "Self" and "Other" to the needs of imperialist conquest has become a commonplace of post-colonial criticism (see, for instance, Ashcroft et. al., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* 49). As Ngugi wa Thiong'o has shown in "The Canon in Africa: Imperialism and Racism," particularly in his critique of the aristocratic aesthete Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa*, the gulf between Self and Other in the colonies could not be overcome by the imposition of a Romantic discourse of ecstasy before "Nature"; a "Nature" which, in Dinesen's work, included, on a racist-reductionist basis, both animals and Black Africans. Even today, "Nature" is not simply a referent, or a benign discourse. In *Lucy* (1991) the story of a contemporary young Black woman of the African diaspora, Jamaica Kincaid shows how Romantic self-transcendence in terms of "Nature," whether in Wordsworth's "Daffodils" or in the most politically correct attitudes toward

ecology, forms part of a discourse perceived by the Caribbean narrator to be a ruse by which the dominant power eludes self-recognition, a discourse which can offer her as a young Black woman of the African diaspora no viable identity. If (to rip out of context one of Rooksby's objections to "The Sterile Star of Venus" and repeat it here) "the last place one expects to encounter such charges is in a journal devoted to Victorian literature," ("Reply") then why is it, one wonders, that Victorian literary studies are so reluctant to engage with the emergent voices of those whom the Victorian era itself marginalized and silenced on a massive scale?

Post-structuralism, as a "voice from within," aims to return to power those who have been marginalized, not by attempting to assimilate them to a centre which retains its dominance beyond question—this last being rather what Rooksby is attempting with Swinburne in relation to the canon, (see his preferred narrative of Swinburne's progress in "A Century of Swinburne")—but by unmasking the oppressiveness of that power in terms of its ability to marginalize in the first place.

If I were to rewrite "The Sterile Star of Venus" now, or rather, if I were to continue the project at which that essay was a first stab, I would not turn to Rooksby's "Reply," which seems to me merely negative and unhelpful if not reactionary in its attempt to crush a nascent post-structuralism, but to the writings of a major thinker like Gilles Deleuze. In *Coldness and Cruelty*, his study of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, the post-structuralist Deleuze removes psychoanalysis from power over the definition of what constitutes sadism and (male) masochism, returning the masochist, by way of von Sacher-Masoch, to full authority over his own sexuality. Deleuze successfully questions the validity of the psychoanalytic concept of a "sodomasochistic entity," (45) arguing that sadism and masochism are not interchangeable practices, the flip sides of a single (perverted) psyche, but two mutually exclusive forms of sexual drama. Basically, where there is a masochist, there cannot be a sadist, because the masochist would not wish to lose control over his performance. In addition, building on Georges Bataille's chapter on de Sade in *Erotism* (Deleuze 17ff.), Deleuze puts forward an illuminating account of the differences between the sadist's and the masochist's use of language: among other things, the masochist is an aesthete in his use of language, while the sadist shows less refinement, opting for the blunt, the crude, the functional.

Swinburne could, I believe, be brilliantly served by a post-structuralist reading. In terms of such a reading, he would become a cultural force to be reckoned with, a nihilist of European stature, the prince of masochist poetics. "From the post-structuralist viewpoint, what was once perceived as a vice becomes a virtue . . ." ("Reply") Rooksby complains; politically unconscious, it would seem, of the part that post-structuralist criticism like Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, volume 1, has played in changing the cultural perception of homosexuality, to name only one former "vice."

"English" in the post-imperial period is a global literature no longer amenable to the monocentric control of an abiding canon which, if it is not a figment of high modernism and therefore in as steep a state of decline as the T. S. Eliot who once presided over it, is certainly a form of cultural

imperialism when extended on the basis of an unselfcritical belief in its own transcendent legitimacy to the human Other. As soon as critical practice is dialogized, relativized, it becomes clear that, among other things, human identity is not a universal that can simply be assumed to operate in and through canonical literary discourse. The question now is whether the critic is prepared to subject the dominant myths of Western power to a radical questioning, (as I, like Nicolas Tredell, believe Swinburne himself to have done) or is simply to continue to act as though nothing in the world could be wrong that a little judicious denial might not set right.

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## Books Received

Alcott, Louisa May. *Norna or, the Witch's Curse*. 1893. Ed. and illus. by students of English 389, Classics in Children's Literature, and others. Edmonton: Juvenilia P, Department of English, U of Alberta, 1994. Pp. xiv + 73. \$8.00 paper. A play, originally written by Alcott when she was fifteen, is reprinted from the London edition of *Comic Tragedies*, published by Sampson Low, Marston, 1893. Included is an intro., notes, bibliography, history of the text.

Allsopp, Michael E. and David Anthony Downes, eds. *Saving Beauty: Further Studies in Hopkins* Origins of Modernism: Garland Studies in British Literature. New York & London: Garland, 1994. Pp. x + 351. \$54.00. Includes Francis L. Fennell, "Hopkins and Rossetti: Reforming a Poetics"; Peter Milward, S. J., "From Wreck to Recovery: Two Essays on Poems of Hopkins"; R. K. R. Thornton, "Gerard Manley Hopkins: Aesthete or Moralist?"; Jude V. Nixon, "Hopkins on Tennyson: Atomism, Parnassian, Chryselephantine"; Carla J. Valley, "'Why Did You Say Binsey Poplars Was Like Whitman?': Whitman's 'Self' and Hopkins 'Selving'"; Donald Walhout, "Scotism in the Poetry of Hopkins"; John C. Hawley, S. J., "Imagining Hopkins as a Priest"; Michael E. Allsopp, "Gerard Manley Hopkins, Oxford, and Edward Urquhart: Doctrinal Controversy and Religious Conversion"; Norman White, "Hopkins Meets Yeats"; Linda Ray Pratt, "Hopkins, Poetic Style, and the Linguistic Controversy of 1875"; Todd K. Bender, "Canon Richard Watson Dixon and Hopkins: Works in Concordance"; Joseph J. Feeney, S. J., "Hopkins in Community: How His Jesuit Contemporaries Viewed Him"; Desmond Egan, "Hopkins' Influence on Poetry"; James Flinn Cotter, "Augustine's Confessions and *The Wreck of the Deutschland*"; David Anthony Downes, "A Reader's Life: Selving through Reading Hopkins," and an index

Andrews, Malcolm. *Dickens and the Grown-Up Child*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1994. Pp. ix + 214. \$29.95. "In a volume of essays marking the centenary of Dickens's death, Angus Wilson identified three main sources for Dickens's concern with children and childhood: the autobiographical, the social and the 'metaphysical-historical.' . . . Wilson's third suggested source, the 'metaphysical-historical' has been comparatively unexplored: by this he means Dickens's 'attempt to resolve the metaphysical debate concerning the meaning and value of childhood that he inherited from the previous century.' That is my starting point in this study" (2).

Bailin, Miriam. *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill*. Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature 1. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. Pp. ix + 169. \$49.95. "This study takes as its point of departure the pervasive presence of the sickroom scene in Victorian fiction and claims for such scenes a crucial therapeutic function within Victorian realist narrative and within the society such narratives represent. At their

most familiar, scenes of illness are employed as registers of emotional tumult, as crucial stages in self-development, and as rather high-handed plot contrivances to bring events to their desired issue. I hope to demonstrate that for all their predictability these scenes serve, in themselves and in their relations to larger narrative structures, as an adaptive strategy to encode and mediate competing personal, social, and aesthetic imperatives. The sickroom scene, I argue, is staged to call forth (in the breach) the conditions under which both the intelligibility of realist aesthetics and the viability of realism's social ethics of cohesion could be affirmed. It is an essential concern of my study to explore the narrative effects and the cultural implications of a cure for self and narrative incoherence that is repeatedly, often obsessively, figured by the private intensities of a deviant state.

"The first chapter suggests the range of meanings conveyed by illness and ministration in early and mid-Victorian England and situates the sickroom scene within the context of contemporary mores and aesthetic preferences. The next three chapters concentrate on the narrative effects of the sickroom strategy as they intersect with the particular concerns and emphases of individual authors. And a final chapter briefly traces the ways in which late Victorian fiction reshapes the sickroom for its own purposes and in the process undoes its recuperative compromise" (1).

Berry, Elizabeth Hollis. *Anne Brontë's Radical Vision: Structures of Consciousness*. English Literary Studies Monograph Series No. 62. Victoria: University of Victoria, 1994. Pp. 122. \$10.50 paper. "The purpose of this study is to examine Anne Brontë's poetry and prose fiction, with particular reference to prevalent image patterns in her work. Bearing in mind that she has been critically undervalued, I wish initially to consider why this may have occurred and then to establish the scope of poetical language that shapes her texts" (11).

Brewer, William D. *The Shelley-Byron Conversation*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1994. Pp. [xiii] + 189. \$34.95. "The Shelley-Byron association, which had such a marked effect on the poetry and lives of both men, constitutes a good example of this kind of relationship [personal and intertextual] and consequently deserves special scrutiny, both for what it teaches us about the poets' works and for the light it sheds on contemporary relationships in general" (11-2).

Engels, Frederick. *The Condition of the Working Class in England from Personal Observations and Authentic Sources*. 1845, 1887, 1892. Academy Victorian Classics. Intro. Eric Hobsbawm. Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1994. Pp. 336. \$12.00 paper. A second printing of the 1984 edition, including Hobsbawm's 1969 intro. "The English text published here is the work of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Moscow, and was verified by the Institute against the text of the Second German edition" (11).

Greenslade, William. *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. Pp. xiii + 355. \$59.95 "The critical obligation is, as far as possible, to historicise the claims that degeneration makes to 'truth,' to show how it might mythologise history, or as R. P. Blackmur put it when thinking of those positivist synthesisers—Comte, Buckle and Nordau—how it represents 'history' as the 'science of thought.' This is not 'truth,' for Blackmur, it is 'drama'—even melodrama. The writers featured in this book, Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf and others, dealt in different ways with this noisy, intrusive, public discursive practice: to listen to them addressing the world is to listen to how they dealt with its rhetorical configurations" (3). "In the fictions of Hardy, Conrad, Forster and Woolf, . . . there is a commitment both to the complexities of human experience and to a concern with those sources of ideological power which shape the possibilities open to individuals: determinisms, not merely of biology, of course, but of money, class, status, education" (10).

Hubert, Henry A. *Harmonious Perfection: The Development of English Studies in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Canadian Colleges*. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1994. Pp. xi + 215. \$28.00. "This analysis of the progression of English studies in Canada traces some of those roots [of Anglo-Canadian idealism] back to the Old World, thereby offering at least part of the context out of which late-Victorian attitudes developed. The study of any culture's attitudes to the learning of its own rhetoric, its own forms of communication, probes deep into the consciousness of that culture. A history of English studies in Canada promises, therefore, much more than a review of how twentieth-century English programs unfolded. At the same time, of course, those interested specifically in the institutional rise of English studies in Canada, as well as in England and Scotland, find in that same history reasons for both the uniqueness and the amazing resilience of their institutional programs" (7).

John Clare in Context. Ed. Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips and Geoffrey Summerfield. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. Pp. xv + 313. \$59.95. Includes: Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips, "Introduction: Relocating John Clare"; Mark Storey, "Clare and the Critics"; Hugh Haughton, "Progress and Rhyme: 'The Nightingale's Nest' and Romantic Poetry"; John Goodridge and Kelsey Thornton, "John Clare: The Trespasser"; Seamus Heaney, "John Clare: A Bi-centenary Lecture"; John Lucas, "Clare's Politics"; Adam Phillips, "The Exposure of John Clare"; Nicholas Birns, "'The riddle nature could not prove': Hidden Landscapes in Clare's Poetry"; James McKusick, "Beyond the Visionary Company: John Clare's Resistance to Romanticism"; Douglas Chambers, "'A love for every simple weed': Clare, Botany and the Poetic Language of Lost Eden"; Roy Porter, "'All madness for writing': John Clare and the Asylum"; Marilyn Gaul, "Clare and 'the Dark System'"; "Selected Further Reading," and an index.

King, W. D. *Henry Irving' "Waterloo": Theatrical Engagements with Arthur Conan Doyle, George Bernard Shaw,*

*Ellen Terry, Edward Gordon Craig, Late-Victorian Culture, Assorted Ghosts, Old Men, War and History*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of California P, 1993. Pp. xxv + 303. "The book scrutinizes the structures of power to be discerned within the cultural configuration of [A Story of] *Waterloo* [by Arthur Conan Doyle], and each chapter takes a different tactical approach. The first chapter introduces the core anecdote [Irving's acting and Shaw's review] and explores its situation with respect to 'sensibility'—the actor's and the critic's. The second chapter surveys the topography of crowd emotion in such a work and the particular handling of the crowd which was to be found at the Lyceum. The third chapter looks at the ways in which authority is imposed upon an audience and Irving as crowd leader. The fourth chapter considers the play's aesthetic, the juxtaposition of realism and idealism implied in the representation of an old man on the verge of death. The fifth chapter situates the historical perspective of Doyle's play in the spectrum of myths / histories of the battle of Waterloo, while the sixth analyzes Irving's inscription of himself into myth / history through the play of *Waterloo*. The seventh chapter tells the story of the aftermath of Irving's battle with Shaw. The eighth chapter maps out the psychic / spiritual configuration within which the uncanny power of Irving's 'personality' might be analyzed. The ninth chapter considers Gordon Craig [Ellen Terry's son and Irving's godson] as a historical and artistic mediator of Irving's presence in the twentieth century—or, indeed, as a medium in contact with his ghost. The final chapter takes up the multiple figurations of death in this study, as well as providing some concluding thoughts" (xix).

Knoepfmacher, U. C. *"Wuthering Heights": A Study*. 1989. Athens: Ohio UP, 1994. Pp. [xxxii] + 138. \$12.95 paper. Includes chapters on "Entering *Wuthering Heights*," "The Narrative Structures of *Wuthering Heights*," "The Meanings of *Wuthering Heights*," "The After-Life of *Wuthering Heights*," and a preface, chronology and "internal chronology."

Marlow, James E. *Charles Dickens: The Uses of Time*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP; London & Toronto: Associated UPs, 1994. Pp. 266. \$42.50. "The premise of this book is that Dickens himself was acutely conscious of time and that his work may be read as a dialogue with his readers about the topics that were at the forefront of the Victorian imagination: time and one's conscious address to it. . . . The most cursory readings of Dickens's biographies, letters, or novels, I believe, leads one to the sense that concerns about the past and the future were constantly—ineluctably—part of his consciousness. In this book, I argue that these concerns were so much a part of Dickens's thinking that he was always in the throes of imagining a stance toward one of these three periods of time that could satisfy all of his psychological needs. But with each stance that he took, his dialectical mind saw the other side. . . . I shall be following his search from novel to novel, attempting not to explicate or honor the form of each separate work but to treat each novel as a kind of existential experiment" (13-14).

Martin, Carol A. *George Eliot's Serial Fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1994. Pp. xi + 348. \$49.50. "This study of George Eliot's serial novels [*Scenes of Clerical Life, Romola, Daniel Deronda, Middlemarch*] begins with a chapter on serialization: its history, its conventions, and its benefits and drawbacks for writers and for readers. I then examine the four serialized works of George Eliot as well as her temptations to engage in what she called 'the nightmare' of the serial for *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*. I discuss her reasons for choosing serialization, her use of serial techniques, the context in which she wrote, and the responses of her contemporaries, particularly those who represent the ordinary readers of the daily and weekly newspapers. These newspapers published hundreds of unindexed reviews, particularly of Eliot's last two novels. Many reviews are quoted here to establish the popular context for, expectations from, and responses to her serial fiction. George Eliot, like Dickens, Trollope, Thackeray, and others, was influenced by the commercial publishing climate that helped the Victorian novel become a preeminent form of entertainment in an era in which popular and intellectual fiction were two faces of the same thing" (3).

Morris, William. *The Tables Turned; or, Nupkins Awakened, A Socialist Interlude by William Morris*. Ed. and intro. Pamela Bracken Wiens. Athens: Ohio UP, 1994. Pp. 99. \$29.95. A reproduction of the "first edition, printed in London at the office of *The Commonweal* in 1887" (29); [h]eretofore, the only wider public access [to the *Interlude*] has been through the text included in May Morris's limited print edition *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist* (1936, 1966)" (2).

Norton, Caroline. *Caroline Norton's Defense*. 1854. Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1982. Pp. xiv + 184. \$8.95 paper. Includes the text, a preface to the 1854 edition, an appendix from the original; no indication of copy text.

Rumble, Alexander. *The Reign of Cnut, King of England, Denmark and Norway*. Studies in Early History of Britain Series. London: Leicester UP; Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck; Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1994. Pp. xvii + 341. \$46.50. 12 essays on Cnut and appendices.

*Sexual Equality: Writings by John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill, and Helen Taylor*. Ed. Ann P. Robson and John M. Robson. Toronto, Buffalo, London: U of Toronto P, 1994. Pp. xxxv + 409. \$60.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper (North America); £39.99 cloth, £16.00 paper (UK); \$67.00 cloth, \$28.00 paper (Europe). Divided into six parts—"Marriage and Divorce," "Domestic Cruelty and Injustice," "Social Equality," "Political Equality," "The Suffrage Campaign," and "The Subjection of Women"—from their writings and speeches there are 18 pieces by J. S. Mill, 12 by J. S. Mill and Harriet Taylor, 2 by J. S. Mill and Helen Taylor, 1 by Harriet Taylor and 10 by Helen Taylor. There is also a 28 pp. intro.

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson: Vol. 1, 1854-April, 1874; Vol. 2, April 1874-July 1879; Vol. 3, August 1879-September 1882; Vol. 4,*

*October 1882-June 1884*. Ed. Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Meheew. New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1994. Pp. xi + 525; 352; 372; 326. \$45.00 per vol.. In vol. 1 there is a 16 page intro. plus "Editorial Procedures and Sources of Information," "The Stevenson Family and Family Tree," "The Balfour Family and Family Tree," "The Main Correspondents: Stevenson's Family and Friends," and Sources of Letters and Other Material." Vol. 1 contains 266 letters to 22 correspondents, the largest number of which went to his mother, Margaret, his father, Thomas, Charles Baxter or Sidney Colvin. Vol. 2 contains 302 letters to 39 correspondents, the largest number again to his mother, but also to Frances Sitwell and William Ernest Henley, and again Sidney Colvin and Charles Baxter; it also contains an appendix of "Six Prose Poems 1875." Vol. 3 contains 351 letters to 65 correspondents plus 6 letters between Stevenson correspondents; numerous letters in vol. 3 are to Edmund Gosse. Vol. 4 contains 301 letters to 58 correspondents plus 6 letters between Stevenson correspondents.

Stone, Harry. *The Night Side of Dickens: Cannibalism, Passion, Necessity*. Studies in Victorian Life and Literature. 145 illustrations. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1994. Pp. xxx + 726. \$65.00. "The *Night Side of Dickens* concentrates on a profoundly important element of Dickens' life and writings, what I call the 'night side' of Dickens, and examines the ways in which that shaded element—a dark, slowly accreting cluster of emotions and ideas—germinated, grew, and then entered and shaped Dickens' art. The night side of Dickens has many forms and colorations—and many disguises. . . . [This book] tracks this hidden and death-environed night side in three crucial areas of Dickens' concern—cannibalism, passion, and necessity. These areas, which seem at first glance to be independent and distinct, are in reality deeply intertwined. There are hosts of connections, reciprocities, overlaps, and reinforcements—entanglements of origins, ideas, events, reticences, responses, and results. What emerges from studying these night-side areas and manifestations are patterns of great significance not only for those interested in Dickens and his art but for those interested in the mysteries of artistic creation" (xvii-xviii).

Stone, James S. *Emily Faithfull: Victorian Champion of Women's Rights*. Toronto: P. D. Meany, 1994. Pp. iii + 336. \$38.00 (Canada \$45.00). "The paucity of material concerning Emily Faithfull's personal life, the absence of formal biographies, and her exclusion from standard biographical sources such as the *Dictionary of National Biography* all militate against a conventional biography. Indeed, after an introduction concerning the British women's movement, the following structure seems appropriate: a chapter dealing chronologically with the few known facts and credible opinions about Emily's private life; succeeded by a systematic survey of her public activities over several chapters; then a concluding chapter assessing her overall contribution to the cause of women" (13).

## Victorian Group News

### Announcements

An international interdisciplinary conference on *The Victorians and Race* will be held at Leicester University 8-9 July 1995, Centre for Victorian Studies and Department of History of Art. The conference will include speakers from the disciplines of history, history of art, English literature, sociology and anthropology. Speakers will include Tim Barringer, Deborah Cherry, Annie Coombes, Helen M. Cooper, Tim Dolin, Anita Levy, Douglas Lorimer, Pamela Gerrish Nunn, Joseph Kestner, and Jan Marsh.

Further details and a registration form can be obtained from Dr. Shearer West, Department of History of Art, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH; phone—0533-522861; Fax—0533-525128; email—sw13@leicester.ac.uk. Places are limited, so early booking is advised.

The Southeastern Nineteenth Century Studies Association will hold its 14th annual conference at Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland, 30 March-1 April 1995. The topic is *Conflict and Resolution*. Contact Gayla McGlamery & Paul Lukacs, Dept. of English, Loyola College, 4501 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21210-2699.

The Dickens Project of the University of California will hold an interdisciplinary conference—*Victorian Mind*—3-6 August 1995 at the University of California—Santa Cruz. Contact: John O. Jordan, Director, Kresge College, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064; phone- 408-459-2103.

*Victorian Beasts and Beauties* is the topic of the next conference of the Northeast Victorian Studies Association, to be held 7-9 April 1995 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Contact Pat Saunders-Evans, Graduate English, Rutgers University, Murray Hall, P. O. Box 5054, New Brunswick, NJ 08903; email-saunders@zodiac.Rutgers.edu.

The Society for the Study of Nineteenth-Century Ireland will hold a conference—*Gender and Nineteenth-Century Ireland* 28-30 April 1995 at All Hallows College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. Contact Dr. Margaret Kelleher, Society for the Study of Nineteenth-century Ireland, Mater Dei Institute of Education, Clonliffe Road, Dublin 3; phone 01-8376027; fax. 01-8370776.

*Victorian Studies* invites submissions for a special issue entitled "Victorian Information Culture." Essays incorporating interdisciplinary approaches are especially welcome. Deadline for submissions is Sept. 1, 1995. Send them to James Eli Adams, Co-Editor, Victorian Studies, Ballantine Hall 338, Indiana Univ., Bloomington, IN 47405.

The Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies Association will hold its tenth annual meeting 6-8 April 1995 at the University of California—Santa Cruz. The topic will be *The Nineteenth-Century City: Global Contexts, Local Productions*. Contact Gordon Bigelow, The Dickens Project, Kresge College, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064; phone: 408-459-2103; fax. 408-459-4424; e-mail dpj@cats.ucsc.edu. Papers will be on Internet in advance of the conference.

*Carlyle at 200* is the subject of a bicentenary conference to be held at St. John's, New Foundland, Canada 10-14 July 1995. Contact Mark Cumming, English Department, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada A1C 5S7.

### Notice

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