NO. 121 SPRING 2012

Victorians

A JOURNAL OF CULTURE AND LITERATURE

(formerly *The Victorian Newsletter)*

Victorians. A Journal of Culture and Literature publishes scholarly articles by many of the most prominent Victorian academics of the last half century. As such, *VCL* reflects the genesis and development of contemporary Victorian studies. *VCL* is a refereed publication featuring analyses of Victorian culture and literature. The editor welcomes book announcements, review copies, and book reviews, along with announcements of interest to the Victorian academic community.

Tables of Contents for *The Victorian Newsletter* from 1952 through 2011 *and*
Full texts of issues 1 (1952) through 80 (1991) *and*
Annotated indices are available at
www.wku.edu/victorian

Editorial communications should be addressed to:

Dr. Deborah Logan, Editor **deborah.logan@wku.edu**
Department of English, Cherry Hall 106
Western Kentucky University
1906 College Heights Blvd.
Bowling Green, KY 42101 **victorian.newsletter@wku.edu**

Manuscript submissions: MLA formatting and documentation sent as: one hard-copy and electronic e-mail attachment (MS Word doc or RTF).

Subscription Rates: United States, $15.00 per year; foreign rates, including Canada, $17.00 (USD) per year. Please address checks to *The Victorian Newsletter.*

Victorians. A Journal of Culture and Literature is sponsored for the Victorian Group of the Modern Language Association by Western Kentucky University and is published twice yearly.

 ISSN 0042-5192.

Victorians

Journal of Culture and Literature

Spring 2012 #121

Deborah A. Logan
Editor

Cassie Bergman
Assistant Editor

Victorians Journal of Culture and Literature
Spring 2012

Table of Contents

Greetings from the Editor

Victorians Journal of Culture and Literature, #121, celebrates its sixty-first year with an impressive collection of new work in Victorian studies. The Spring 2012 issue is particularly distinguished by an array of literary and critical approaches ranging off the "beaten track" of nineteenth-century scholarship. I am most pleased to present work that attests to the energy and vitality of Victorian studies, best seen through the inclusion of lesser-known authors and titles, themes and critical viewpoints. From memorializing pets to contextualizing political reform; from poetic realism to the criminalization of orphans; and from self-reliant aesthetics to concerns about mortality, grieving, and modern psychology—I believe this issue will not disappoint, and I hope you agree.

"Of Pets and People: Matthew Arnold's Pet Elegies and Jules Michelet's *The People*" by Shannon N. Gilstrap focuses on a little-examined aspect of Arnold's poetry: the elegies written to his pets. Gilstrap notes that the elegies "run counter to Arnold's poetic aesthetics," seeming to mock the ideology outlined in his 1853 "Preface." Viewed in the context of Michelet's intellectual influence, the elegies move beyond the sentimentality associated with mourning one's pets to acquire significant "political and thematic depth" consistent with and revelatory of Arnold's literary and social views.

Inna Volkova's "Waking the 'new mind of England': Discussion among Strangers in Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil*" studies Disraeli as both a writer and a politician. By examining how Disraeli "mobilizes the communicative potential of images in *Sybil* and elaborates…a culture of political discussion," Volkova reveals comparable "political and thematic depth" in political fiction often rejected as muddled and incoherent. Here, the very articulation of nationalism depends on the suspension of isolationist thinking in favor of broader visions of social communities—in effect, anticipating the postmodern, globalized world community.

"Realistic Poetry: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*" by Daniel Brown addresses the seeming incompatibility of poetry and realism. Brown's analysis compares the parallel artistic developments of poet Aurora Leigh and painter Vincent Carrington, both of whom struggle to learn their craft and to define their idiosyncratic aesthetics—all while trying to earn a living. Although feminism "is central to Barrett Browning's realism…*Aurora Leigh* speaks very much from the center of [other] ongoing debates on realism"—debates framed around urban squalor, poverty, and social decay, no less than around shifting aesthetic and gender ideologies.

Tamara Wagner's "The Making of Criminal Children: Stealing Orphans from *Oliver Twist* to *A Little Princess*" addresses issues related to orphans and criminality, and the exploitation of vulnerable children by adults. Embroiled in the criminal plots of scheming adults, these children were "coerced into silence, exposed in court,…[or] by default associated with criminality." Wagner's study begins with Oliver Twist, a seemingly incorruptible character surrounded by opportunities to be exploited—even his step-brother plots to defraud him. Examples from Burnett's *A Little Princess* and Yonge's *The Clever Woman of the Family* illustrate the evolving trajectory of plots involving mysterious legacies, lost inheritances, absent parents, and children whose feistiness actually prevents their "fall" into criminality.

"'I have often wished in vain for another's judgment': Ideal Aesthetic Commentary and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall"* by John Paul W. Kanwit acknowledges recent efforts to "resurrect" Anne Brontë "as the intellectual and artistic equal of Charlotte and Emily," while contending that "aesthetic commentary of her novels remains under-examined. Her novels *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey* reveal a "preference for external criticism that was both educated and rational"; but Anne also asserts that "the artist is sometimes best served by her own commentary." A common complaint against *Tenant* is the inclusion of Helen's diary, a narrative choice often regarded as either a mistake or poor aesthetic judgment. On the contrary, Professor Kanwit concludes, "we should take Anne Brontë seriously as a significant contributor to nineteenth-century discourse about aesthetics, including the differences between real life and its more figurative rendering in art."

"Emily Brontë's Defeat of Death and Unintended Solace for Grief" by Laura Inman offers a thoughtful and sensitive analysis of Brontë's poetry about death and grieving. Inman outlines the emotions aroused by mortality: "fear, relief, desire…and resignation," noting that the poet adds a fifth quality: "the conspicuous absence of clichéd expressions of Christian submission to the will of God and the comfort of heaven." Inman's study demonstrates how Emily Brontë's poetry on this theme anticipates modern psychological theory through writing that reveals "personal sorrow so intensely" that it "represents a shared experience."

I am grateful, as always, to Western Kentucky University for its generous support of *Victorians Journal*, particularly to Dean David Lee and English Department Head Karen Schneider. I am deeply appreciative to Laura Wagoner for keeping the books in order and to assistant editor, Cassie Bergman, for lending her editing expertise and her good-humored enthusiasm. Thanks to Tom Meacham for the cover design and to Zack Adams for technical support.

Deborah Logan
Bowling Green, 2011

Of Pets and People: Matthew Arnold's Pet Elegies and Jules Michelet's *The People*

by Shannon N. Gilstrap

THE DOG: L'animal dans lequel la Nature nous montre le mieux son sourire bienveillant.—Renan[1]

Ah, little dog, it is from you that I shall be sorry to depart.
—Matthew Arnold[2]

Early in life, Matthew Arnold meditated on his struggle to maintain a relationship with his poetic muse, as his correspondence demonstrates. A little past age thirty, and shortly after writing one of his defining works, *Empedocles on Etna*, Arnold wrote to his best friend, Arthur H. Clough, that he felt "three parts iced over" (*Letters* I.252). Arnold considered various reasons for his muse's abandonment, but critics have pointed to three late poems as the "dying fall" of Arnold's poetic career: the elegies to his pets. For instance, Lionel Trilling writes that the only "considerable" poem Arnold wrote after 1867 was "Westminster Abbey," but quickly adds, "and there is 'Thrysis'"; in an end-note, he admits: "This is not to mention the animal elegies" (270, 388n12). He mentions the animal elegies only once more to demonstrate Arnold's general love for animals. Tinker and Lowry's *Commentary* also notes these late poems' lean technical sophistications. Certainly, they run counter to Arnold's poetic aesthetics, as recorded in his prose works. These elegies seem to mock his 1853 "Preface," with its Olympian pronouncement:

> What are the eternal objects of poetry, among all nations and at all times? They are actions; human actions; possessing an inherent interest in themselves, and which are to be communicated in an interesting manner by the art of the poet....The poet, then, has in the first place to select an excellent action. (*Complete* I.3-4)

[1] "The animal through whom Nature shows us her most benevolent smile" (qtd. in *The Note-Books of Matthew Arnold* 527).
[2] Arnold, upon leaving Yale President Noah Porter's house (*The Letters of Matthew Arnold* V.333 n.1).

How should a reader, then, reconcile household pets with "the latter books of the *Iliad*...the *Orestia*...the episode of Dido" (I.4)? The animal elegies, which Tinker and Lowry assert are "not poetry of the highest kind" (313), contrast the insistence on form and the Grand Style one encounters when reading the preface to *Merope* or *On Translating Homer*.

Taking into account, then, such disparity between preaching and practice, what critical purpose can these poems serve? At best, some scholars believe that the pet elegies—"Geist's Grave" (1881), "Poor Matthias" (1882), and "Kaiser Dead" (1887)—present a mellower Matthew Arnold. Perhaps, as Tinker and Lowry suggest, they serve as a "revelation of his personality," giving "pleasure to certain readers who had found his earlier poetry somewhat austere and coldly intellectual" (313). At worst, they appear to be the hard-to-swallow, final productions of one of the Victoria era's greatest and most anthologized poetic voices. However, another approach to these poems can mitigate the judgment of either flippancy or failure by putting the poems into the context of a dialogue Arnold had with Jules Michelet. When read in light of Michelet's *The People*, particularly "Digression: The Instinct of Animals: A Plea in their Favor" (Section II, Chapter VI), Arnold's pet elegies gain political and thematic depth. Furthermore, such a reading demonstrates a continuous thread of potentially radical political thought extending from Arnold's early to his mature years, providing introductory evidence of the extent to which at least one revolutionary piece of literature, and one revolutionary thinker, influenced Arnold's thought. Looking trans-textually at these works evidences radical egalitarianism and a vision of humanity and creation much wider than has generally been allowed Matthew Arnold.

Arnold and France

Jules Michelet—French social critic, sympathetic historian of the French Revolution, educational reformer, and amateur naturalist—was an acquaintance of Arnold's, who closely read and followed Michelet's works throughout his life. Early in his tenure as secretary to the Marquis of Landsdowne, Arnold made an important visit to Paris. His closest friends believed that this trip's effects were merely superficial; as Arthur H. Clough noted,

> Matt is full of Parisianism; theatres in general, and Rachel in special: he enters the room with a chanson of Beranger's on his

> lips—for the sake of French words almost conscious of tune; his carriage shows him in fancy parading the rue de Rivoli;—and his hair is guiltless of English scissors: he breakfasts at twelve, and never dines in Hall, and in the week or 8 days rather (for 2 Sundays must be included) he has been to Chapel *once*. (*Letters* I.71)

Yet Arnold of the theatricality, late rising, and scarcely trimmed hair returned from Paris with more than superficial Parisianism.

Through an introduction from Philarete Chasles, Arnold met Michelet in February 1847, one year after Michelet published *The People* and one year before the February Revolution of 1848 broke out in France—a revolution that Michelet's fiery lectures at the College de France arguably helped incite. The meeting was characterized by Michelet's "l'accueil beinveillant" of the young man, so much so that a year later Arnold felt comfortable enough to request a letter of introduction for Arnold's friend, Arthur Stanley (*Letters* I.99).[3] Arnold met with Michelet a second time when the former toured France for the Newcastle Commission in 1859. Arnold met with him on 15 April: "Then to Michelet—saw his wife, and talked with him a long time" (I.436). During this visit, Michelet penned a letter of introduction to George Sand for Arnold, but a delay caused Arnold to miss his appointment with her. Arnold's relationship with Jules Michelet was, clearly, a convivial and close one; however, after the Newcastle Commission meeting, their personal contact diminished. No further correspondence exists, so one must consult Arnold's note-books and journals to explore his interactions with Michelet and contemplate their impact.

Michelet never leaves Arnold's thoughts for long, for his note-books and journals evince his continued reading of Michelet by referencing touchstone passages. These notations demonstrate just how deeply involved Arnold was with Michelet's works, even after his personal contact ceased. As early as 1847, Arnold was reading Michelet's *Histoire de France* and, by 1875, he owned all seventeen volumes of that work (*Letters* I.407). He also either read or owned copies of *L'Amour, La Sorciere,* and *Droit*. Although he does not specifically cite *The People* in his personal or public writings, many textual references, including quotes, paraphrases, or echoes, show that it was "a book important to Arnold"; its influence appears in his early letters, reading lists, and several poems, as well as *Culture and Anarchy* (*Letters*

[3] According to R. H. Super, Michelet may have even requested the initial interview with Arnold "because of Michelet's interest in Dr. [Thomas] Arnold's *History of Rome*" (*Complete* VIII.435n218:26).

I.82-83 n.5). Arnold either quotes directly from or employs *The People* in *The Popular Education of France*, *Friendship's Garland*, "A Liverpool Address," "Equality," "Numbers," "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," and "A Word More About America," among other titles. Michelet's ideas and ideals continually surfaced throughout Arnold's life, spanning his poetry as well as his literary and social criticism.

Despite this breadth of influence, a full-scale exploration of the interplay between Michelet and Arnold has not yet been done, as Mary Schnieder notes (x). Iris Sells's *Matthew Arnold and France* mentions Michelet only once (66). F. J. W. Harding's *Matthew Arnold, the Critic, and France* has a section on Michelet's influence on Arnold, but it explores primarily how Michelet's thought affected Arnold's vision of France, not of England. Finally, W. F. Connell's study does not mention Michelet at all, even though a major part of Michelet's social project was, like Arnold's, popular education. As Harding makes clear, Arnold's more overt engagements with other French writers like Maurice and Eugenie de Guerin, Saint-Beuve, Renan, Senancour, Joubert, and Guizot eclipse Michelet's influence. Asserting the subtle influence of *The People*—arguably the foundational piece underpinning all of Michelet's later work—on the seemingly insignificant pet elegies of Arnold's late career takes a minor step towards establishing Michelet's revolutionary ideas as a ground note in Arnold's social and critical project.

Arnold and Michelet

The People establishes the foundation for Michelet's entire historical, social, and political vision. In it, he demonstrates his belief in the importance of the peasant class to France's history and its future; he dispels myths about the peasant class while exposing bourgeois and aristocratic prejudices. The first part of *The People* proves how conflict alienates classes from each other and from themselves. The second and third parts, including "Digression," present Michelet's solution to the problem raised, a solution based on love and a sense of equality between classes and people. Shared senses of nationalism, family, and morality provide the solidarity Michelet envisioned; indeed, *The People* marks the culmination of the impulse behind the French Revolution as he understood it. Michelet reinforces the social vision in *The People* with his later works on Natural History, including *The Bird, The Insect*, *The Sea*, and *The Mountain*, as Edward Kaplan points out:

> Michelet's attempt to penetrate nature's mysteries extends his mission as an historian equally interested in the past and in contemporary affairs. In the autobiographical preface to...*The Bird* (1856), he connects the democratic ideology he celebrated in *The People* with his present interest in ornithology: "Thus, all Natural History had appeared to me [in 1846] as a branch of politics. All living species would arrive, according to their humble right, and knock at the door seeking entrance into the bosom of Democracy." (6)

If in *The People* Michelet wants to demonstrate how societies and people throughout history "act out the same striving for freedom," his studies of Natural History, particularly of animals, "unswervingly traces their identical teleology" (21). This trajectory linking Michelet's politics with his vision of the natural world make "Digression" highly relevant to a reconsideration of Arnold's pet elegies by providing a foundation for tracing a similar trajectory or parallel.

Despite its title, "Digression" constitutes a serious part of *The People*'s argument. But the chapter should be contextualized before applying it to Arnold's pet elegies. Michelet's insistence on the peasant class's noble instinct, effaced in the public conscience by class conflict and an increasingly materialist society, led him to argue for the nobility of children, a simple proof of all humankind's inherent worth. In the chapter preceding "Digression," Michelet chronicles how seeing children as insignificant perpetuates injustices committed against them. This allows them to be exploited in this life and the next; he laments, rather melodramatically:

> [t]he poor quarters of our cities, those vast dens of death where women are wretchedly fecund and give birth only to weep.... Constantly pregnant through barbarous lack of foresight, women produced without rest or truce and in tears and desolation more children, more dead, *more damned*! (126)

The last phrase emphasizes how, to his mind, the Catholic Church treats children as insignificant by damning them before they even have a chance to understand religion.[4]

Michelet further argues that humans treat animals similarly (137). Thus, this digression participates in his argument for change in moral attitudes, away from "the barbarism of man, who disowns, debases, and tortures his inferior brother" and towards one of equality and unity (130). This same sentiment is prefigured early in *The People* when Michelet, writing on the bondage of the working and lower classes, states, "Barbarous the learning and cruel the pride that so degrade animal nature and separate man so widely from his inferior brethren" (61). He recognizes animals' inherent nobility and charts how human pride, modern society, and the Catholic Church have conspired to drive a wedge between not only humans and humans but also between humans and animals, noting "the attraction the most advanced among [animals] visibly feels for man" (130). This same wedge dramatically contributes to the bondage of every class exposed in Part I of *The People.* Michelet, at the end of "Digression," betrays this larger purpose:

> This is the true rehabilitation of inferior life. The animal, that serf of serfs, finds himself once more related to man—the Lord of this world. May the latter now resume with a more gentle feeling the great work of the education of animals, which formerly gained him the dominion of the globe and which he has abandoned for two-thousand years to the great detriment of earth. May the people learn that their prosperity depends on their merciful treatment of this poor inferior people. (137)

With language merging the animal and human—"animal" becomes "serf" and "people"—Michelet demonstrates his thesis that the treatment of the peasant class has paralleled human's treatment of animals. Yet, like animals, the peasant class has secured humankind's success as a whole, particularly in France. Michelet argues for a revolution in how sentient beings treat one another across species and, by implication, across classes.

Arnold and Equality

Matthew Arnold's social and political agenda for England approximates Michelet's as presented in *The People*. Mary Schneider explores the democratic ideals that help link Arnold with Michelet; she clearly demonstrates that Arnold's poetics were geared, not towards the few, as many of his detractors continue to believe, but towards the many (53).[5] This democratic tendency shows especially in his early commentary on the function of poetry: "the early letters indicate Arnold's sympathy with the attempts of the people to gain greater

[4] This is one of a series of Michelet's critiques of the church, especially the Jesuits.

[5] Isobel Armstrong, for instance, claims that Arnold "was no democrat in poetry" (217).

control of their world and his sense of the responsibility of the poet to influence them in finding a more worthwhile life" (34). This desire remained strong throughout Arnold's career, from "Democracy" and "A French Eton" to such later essays as "Equality." This last essay provides a convenient segue between Michelet's ideals and Arnold's in his pet elegies.

In "Equality," Arnold advocates for, among other things, equality among English citizens. He argues against the Rousseauian concept of the "natural" or "abstract" right of individuals to equality in a state of nature, concluding that "peasants and workmen have no natural rights" (*Complete* VIII.285).[6] But before allowing this comment to get away from him, Arnold provides a caveat: "Only we ought instantly to add, that kings and nobles have none neither" [*sic*]. Rather than base his concept of equality on an abstraction, he sees rights emerging from the creation of society and law through history, remarking that "all rights are created by law and are based on expedience, and alterable as the public advantage may require." Arnold thus argues from the historical situation, much as Michelet does, and not by hearkening back to a pre-social state of nature. After asserting equality's necessity, Arnold remarks that England's laws, politics, and people seem devoted to the perpetuation of inequality: "it is assumed...with great unanimity amongst us, that our signal inequality of classes and property is expedient for our civilization and welfare" (*Complete* VIII.285). He looks to France and the conditions for equality it has created; France is "the nation which has come nearest to human perfection in that state which such perfection essentially demands....Michelet himself...could hardly say more for France than this" (VIII.286). Arnold does not recommend a radical redistribution of wealth in order to solve England's signature inequality.[7] His solution focuses more on a moral path, one allowing every class to realize its full human potential as exemplified by France, "where the people, as distinguished from a wealthy refined class, most lives what we call a humane life, the life of civilized man" (VIII.291).

In "Equality" and other essays, a change in attitude towards those groups of people perceived as inferior characterizes Arnold's moral movement, aligning his ideas with

[6] Arnold's characterization of Rousseau's natural right appears reductive in this essay, for Rousseau also believes that rights emerge from social organizations. His relation to Rousseau is fraught with tension and paradox, as Trilling notes (254-58). Arnold's rhetorical situation might have contributed to this reduction, since "Equality" was delivered orally before the Royal Institution of Great Britain for the Promotion, Diffusion, and Extension of Science and Useful Knowledge on 8 February 1878.

[7] To do so would approximate communism and the bane of American style equality, which "are content with too low and material a standard of well-being....Many are to be made partakers of well-being, true; but the ideal of well-being is not to be, on that account, lowered and coarsened" (*Complete* VIII.290).

Michelet's. The simple act of elegizing an animal grants it nobility, similar to what Michelet argues for in "Digression," and so the form that Arnold has chosen reinforces this theme. Even Arnold's many comments on the three classes—Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace—are suffused, not with the superiority of any one class, but with the recognition that within each class are "best selves," manifesting physically in the form of "geniuses," who can help guide all English people into closer proximity with Culture.[8] These cherished ideals grew in part from Arnold's intellectual cultivation of *The People*. Reading the late poems "Geist's Grave," "Poor Matthias," and "Kaiser Dead" is best accomplished with *The People* in mind.

The third quatrain of "Geist's Grave," Arnold's first published animal elegy, acknowledges Geist's spirit: "That loving heart, that patient soul, / Had they indeed no longer span, / To run their course, and reach their goal, / And read their homily to man?" (*Poetical* 450). The words "soul" and "homily" lend to Geist's existence a connection to God as well as the ability to teach humankind. Similarly, Michelet concludes "Digression" with the following: "May knowledge remember that the animal is more closely related to nature and was her prophet and interpreter in antiquity. She will find a voice of God in the instinct of these simplest of the simple" (137). Michelet disdains a religion that denies children and animals a share in God's kingdom; he catalogs the demonization of animals in church art, noting "There is to be no God for [the animal]; man's merciful father is to be a cruel tyrant for whatever is not human" (136).

Arnold echoes these sentiments as he muses upon Geist's afterlife, emphasizing humankind's ignorance of its own assurance in that area:

> ...and not the course
> Of all the centuries yet to come,
> And not the infinite resource
> Of Nature, with her countless sum
>
> Of figures, with her fullness vast
> Of new creation evermore,
> Can ever quite repeat the past,
> Or just thy little self restore.

[8] Interestingly, Michelet also terms his ideal human a "man of genius" (Kaplan xix).

> Stern law of every mortal lot!
> Which man, proud man, finds hard to bear,
> And builds himself I know not what
> Of second life I know not where. (*PW* 450)

In the first two quatrains, Arnold laments the lack of provision for an animal afterlife in Christianity. However, by contrasting this lack—either in the order of nature or in the spiritual realm—with humankind's building of a doubtful "second life" merely out of pride, Arnold further drives home the tendency of humans to place themselves over and above both animals and people deemed inferior. Not one of the hardhearted, the narrator builds his beloved pet a memorial, which reads, "*People who lived here long ago / Did by this stone, it seems, intend / To name for future times to know / The dachs-hound, Geist, their little friend*" (*Poetical* 452). Clearly, Arnold connects his sense of Geist's importance with Michelet's "Digression" through his understanding that the dog has a soul and participates nobly in the family circle, bringing with him divine lessons of a kinship between animal and human.

"Geist's Grave" also offers an allusive connection to "Digression" that reinforces the political equality and democratic impulses tying these two works together. Michelet, praising those past geniuses who have not, through excess of pride, ignored the importance of animals, recalls "tender and profound Virgil":

> Indian in his tenderness for nature, Christian in his love for man,
> this simple man restores in his great heart the lovely universal city.
> There nothing having life is excluded, though each creature there
> wishes only that his own kind may enter in. (133)

Virgil's mastery both of his human and animal natures "affirms the value of humanity" and "pictures the world as a vast democracy in which the equality of all citizens, be they animal or human, is that of life itself" (Kaplan 141). Arnold condenses this Virgilian quality onto Geist: "That liquid, melancholy eye, / From whose pathetic, soul-fed springs / Seem'd surging the Virgilian cry, / The sense of tears in mortal things" (*Poetical* 450). By alluding to "*Sunt lacrimae rerum*" from the *Aeneid*, Arnold communicates Virgil's passion to the speaker through Geist, further marrying this work to Michelet.

Arnold's next pet elegy, "Poor Matthias," strengthens the political and social subtexts capable of being traced in "Geist's Grave." The poem memorializes his daughter Nelly's canary, bought "one stormy day," when

> Stress of gale and showers of spray
> Drove my daughter small and me
> Inland from the rocks and sea.
> Driv'n inshore, we follow down
> Ancient streets of Hastings town –
> Slowly thread them—when behold,
> French canary-merchant old
> Shepherding his flock of gold
> In low dim-lighted pen
> [...]
> There a bird, high-coloured, fat,
> Proud of port, though something squat –
> Pursy, play'd out Philistine –
> Dazzled Nelly's youthful eyne.
> But, far in, obscure, there stirr'd
> On his perch a sprightlier bird,
> Courteous-eyed, erect and slim:
> And I whispered: "Fix on *him*!" (*Poetical* 457-58)

The biographical details reveal Arnold's political indebtedness to *The People*. The word "Philistine" never drops lightly from his pen, and so it deserves special attention. The narrator shuttles aside the "Pursy, play'd-out Philistine" bird dazzling Nelly's eye, a representation of the vulgar middle-class, instead recommending that she fix her attention on the more obscure yet worthier bird.

Throughout *The People*, Michelet laments this same dazzling lure of the bourgeois. He writes of the cheap goods the middle-class and aristocracy delight in and how such cheap surface appearances mask a "play'd out" spirit:

> In a time of rapid ascension, the lower classes wanted immediately to have comfortable things and even made a brilliant appearance; but they remained satisfied with a brilliance that was mediocre, even vulgar...completely mass produced. (42n2)

In "Digression," Michelet remarks that humanity's fascination with its own works and machinery has led to a severance from the natural and profitable relationship with animals:

> That world of pride, the Greek and Roman city, had contempt for nature; it valued only art....Whatever seemed low or ignoble disappeared from its eyes; animals perished as well as slaves. Rid of both, the Roman Empire entered into the majesty of the desert. The earth....became a garden of marble. Cities remained, but the country was gone; circuses and triumphal arches stayed, but cottages and laborers were no more. (132)

The tale of the canary highlights Arnold's commitment to working class dignity and nobility; and, in keeping with much of his social criticism, an implicit condemnation of the middle-class's vulgarity and the aristocracy's brutality.[9]

Another connection with "Digression" comes midway through "Poor Matthias" and reiterates Michelet's paralleling the treatment of peasants with that of animals. The death of Matthias reminds Arnold bitterly of how little the industrial Philistine world of London regards human life:

> Birds! we but repeat on you
> What amongst ourselves we do.
> Somewhat more or somewhat less,
> 'Tis the same unskilfulness.
> What you feel, escapes our ken –
> Know we more our fellow men?
> Human suffering at our side,
> Ah, like yours is undescried! (*Poetical* 457)

Not only does Arnold here echo such early poems as "The Buried Life" and "Stanzas From the Grande Chartreuse" but also his frequent condemnations of the conditions endured by the

[9] Arnold's freeing of Matthias mirrors St. Francis of Assisi's freeing captive birds.

working class poor: "This obscure embryo...travailing in labour and darkness...showing itself to us in Lambeth, or Spitalfields, or Dorsetshire," and the now famous story of poor Wragg, the working class woman who, out of desperation, killed her own child (*Complete* II.324).

The last of Arnold's pet elegies is about his mongrel dog Kaiser, titled "Kaiser Dead." Arnold bought the dog under auspices "vouch'd by glorious renown" that Kai was "A dachshound true" (*Poetical* 459). As Kai grew, however, Arnold observes his transformation: "Soon, soon the day's conviction bring, / The collie hair, the collie swing, / The tail's indomitable ring, / The eye's unrest - / The case was clear; a mongrel thing / Kai stood confest." Arnold thus ranges Kaiser with a lower class of animals not noble by birth, a status transformed through poetry. To his daughter Lucy, Arnold wrote of a visitor's reaction to Kaiser's mixed blood:

> ...Douglas Sandford was there, who was very anxious to hear about Kaiser; he knew he had turned out a mongrel and imagined we should have got rid of him, so he was much interested in hearing that he was in high favour and never taunted with his ignoble origin on the father's side. (*Letters* V.249-250)

A hint of revolutionary fervor surfaces when Kaiser is placed beside Max, a pure-bred dog. Arnold suggests that Kaiser's Populace status makes him a threat to Max's aristocratic sense of *fait accompli*. He writes, "For Max, thy brother-dog, began / To flag, and feel his narrowing span. / And cold, besides, his blue blood ran, / Since, 'gainst the classes, / He heard, of late, the Grand Old Man [Gladstone] / Incite the masses" (*Poetical* 459-60). Clearly, Arnold here uses his dogs' relationship as a metaphor for class warfare and revolutionary insurrection. And since the mongrel dog Kaiser is this poem's subject, Arnold's sympathies seem to lie with the lower-class and their revolutionary stirrings.

The British aristocracy's waning influence constitutes a common subject in Arnold's social and political criticism. Max's feeling "his narrowing span" thus parallels Arnold's assertions that the aristocracy's time as a ruling power is running out. Moreover, and more in keeping with *The People*, Max and Kai realize their inherent brotherhood, which Michelet advocates between classes in the later chapters of *The People* on Associations and Education. Near the close of "Kaiser Dead," Arnold extends this recognition of canine fraternity beyond the earlier characterization of Max and Kai as "brother-dog[s]": "Poor Max, with downcast,

reverent head, / Regards his brother's form outspread; / Full well Max knows the friend is dead / Whose cordial talk, / And jokes in doggish language said, / Beguiled his walk" (*Poetical* 460). Michelet likens his ultimate vision of France to this, where classes, like these two dogs, recognize a bond of love, friendship, and faith. This recognition, represented by Max and Kaiser, proves positively for both Arnold and Michelet that it is likewise a necessary condition for humanity.

Arnold and the Elegy

Having suggested the influence that Michelet's ideas in *The People*, and especially "Digression," possibly had on Arnold's pet elegies, there are potential objections to taking these poems at more than face value. First, one may object that these poems were not seen, even by Arnold, as worthy of critical consideration. At worst, he could be employing his expert sense of irony, designated by John Holloway as his best rhetorical weapon; one hallmark of that irony is an asymmetrical relationship between tone and statement (237). The pet elegies certainly open themselves up to this criticism, given the high-minded seriousness of elegiac writing applied to family pets. But Holloway's analysis confines itself to the rhetorical strategies of Arnold's prose, which takes the ironic tack away from being a factor in his poetry: "irony is a means whereby a writer may say something in a tone that normally would be inappropriate to it" (235). This statement begs the question of what exactly Arnold calls the reader's attention to *inappropriately*. Is he ridiculing Michelet's exaggerated egalitarian principles? Perhaps he believes Michelet's ideas—which extend a God-inspired desire for freedom even to minerals and rocks—are extreme; but certainly the poet's vision of social equality and mutual respect between humans as a basis for freedom and liberty underpin his entire project.

Moreover, Arnold's attitudes towards the animals and their elegies do not point to irony in the poems. In his correspondence about the animal elegies, he demonstrates a genuine commitment to the poems and their message. One line particularly undermines the possibility that "Poor Matthias" was written in an ironic vein:

> I was in hopes you [would] like the verses. The *genre* is a light one, but being a musician, you know that not the *genre* in itself, but the treatment is what matters; and you know too the great importance of a good *motif*, and in this case the *motif* I feel sure is good. I think the public will take kindly to the thing; so many keep canaries! (*Letters* V.240)

Clearly these lines indicate a careful treatment of the subject, not an inappropriate one.[10] Arnold wrote to Alexander Macmillan that "Geist's Grave" is "really not bad, I think" (V.125), and to Constance de Rothschild Flower, a close friend, he claimed that the lines "were at any rate written from the heart" (V.130). He even calls attention to the artistic allusions in the poem, including *Measure for Measure* and Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe* (V.134). These and other comments demonstrate a certain pride in the pet elegies and challenge the idea that they are ironic.

Another consideration is Arnold's avowed praise for those poets who have the genuine ability to see into the beauty and magic of nature; *Essays in Criticism: First Series*, for example, features Maurice de Guerin, who "has a truly interpretive faculty; the most profound and delicate sense of the life of Nature, and the most exquisite felicity in finding expressions to render that sense" (*Complete* III.15). He quotes with approval a passage from de Guerin on the poet's nature: "Be constantly observing Nature in her smallest details, and then write as the current of your thought guides you:—that is all" (III.21). Of this "beautifully fine and true" sentiment, he later writes, "Poetry is the interpretress of the natural world" (III.30). He surely felt the need, in his poetry, to follow de Guerin's path:

> I have said that poetry interprets in two ways; it interprets by expressing with magical felicity the physiognomy and movement of the outward world, and it interprets by expressing, with inspired conviction, the ideas and laws of the inward world of man's moral and spiritual nature....In both ways it illuminates man; it gives him a satisfying sense of reality; it reconciles him with himself and the universe. (III.33)

The second objection to these poems rises out of the animal studies field and has to do with the problematic morality involved in elegizing a pet, a Victorian vogue in which Arnold may have been participating. Criticisms of animal elegies by animal studies scholars suggest a certain double movement within the poems, possibly unconscious on Arnold's part, but nevertheless significant as an objection to taking his animal elegies as serious socio-political

[10] "Poor Matthias" was later parodied in *The World*; although Arnold termed the writer "Some fiend" and a "demon" (*Letters* V.245), he did appreciate the humor.

statements. Martin Danahay writes that Victorians displayed a tendency to "dream" animals; in other words, they appropriated animals into the aesthetic realm of visual, literary, or performance art and thus used them for political, psychological, and personal ends (5). According to Teresa Magnum, animal memorials

> —whether portraits, statues, elegies, or heroic anecdotes—could supplant actual animals and their suffering. This happened when, through the complex operations of mourning, pet memorials transformed one animal into all animals....The paradoxical problem with mourning was that memorialization idealized but also isolated the beloved pet as being apart from the animal world of stray dogs, hunted animals, work animals, and "food" animals. (31)

If Arnold's pet elegies echo Michelet's parallel between the treatment of animals and the working class, then it could be argued that, by elegizing these animals, he does not ennoble a particular class, as Michelet does. Instead, he idealizes a particular vision of nobility capable of recognition only through death—thus the (probably) unconscious double movement on Arnold's part. Manifestly, he ennobles Kaiser, Geist, and Matthias, using them as socio-political metaphors for the equal recognition of the lower classes; latently, however, by condensing an entire class (or species with reference to animals) onto a single figure and memorializing that figure, Arnold essentially writes over actual and more widespread suffering in both the animal and social worlds: "By literally or metaphorically burying animals, pet owners joined this social ambition to hide animals and their suffering from public view and hence, from public responsibility." Pet elegies amounted to an assertion of obliviousness to animal—or, in this case, human—suffering as well as "self-absorption in grief" (32).

One cannot easily extricate Arnold from the above objection. In his attempts to treat the deaths of Geist, Matthias, and Kaiser *humanely*, Arnold has problematized his relationship with them by treating them *human-ly*. In his animal elegies, according to Mangum's analysis of the vogue, Arnold has "killed" his animals twice over through the very act of elegizing them, and thus he does not respond to them as "truly" animals (21). If, as this essay asserts, these animal elegies participate in the same project as Michelet's in *The People*, then Arnold has also distanced himself from the issue of equality, especially with regards to the working class.

This last acknowledgement becomes uncomfortably clear when considering that Matthias is a caged bird symbolizing a caged Populace. According to one taxonomy, caged birds exemplify the most domesticated and peaceful of all Victorian pets (Danahay 106); when Michelet walked into his garden, he was thrilled by the sound of a bird drawing "back his head and [throwing] out his breast; never was a singer, never was a poet, in such natural ecstasy" (Michelet 61). To this he contrasts "our sad and caged birds" who have "never given me the idea of this intelligent and powerful creature, so small and yet so impassioned." To this "natural" bird, Michelet relates metaphorically the position of the working-class artisan who, despite his hardships, thrills to meager interaction with literature and other studies. This free bird, as opposed to Arnold's domesticated Matthias, represents the antithesis of the "learning and cruel pride" that have "separated man so widely from his inferior brethren."

Arnold may be forgiven for not recognizing the subtleties of elegizing these pets and using them as a vehicle for a socio-political statement about equality across classes. Perhaps he was a victim of time and place. The trend towards animal equality and the formation of such organizations as the Humane Society were still in their infancy, and even Michelet's ideas in his Natural History studies were considered farfetched by his contemporaries. The fact that "Geist's Grave" was included in an 1883 collection of verse, *Voices for the Speechless*, a collection of poems edited by Abraham Firth, Secretary of the American Humane Association, recommends accepting these poems as honest and heartfelt productions. The collection, according to its preface, was to teach "the duty of kindness to animals" via poets who have been "touched by the sufferings of the 'innocent animals'" and have "loftily" pleaded their cause (Firth). Clearly, the fact that Arnold allowed his poem to be included in such a volume suggests that the entire trajectory of his argument in the poems—both for the animals and for the idea of equality—proceeded from motivations other than malicious intent.

Criticism of Life

When Geist and Kaiser, the dachshunds, and Matthias, the canary, died, Arnold's poetic production was mostly well behind him; yet these deaths effectually reinvigorate his muse. Truly these poems, at first glance, seem out of character for the literary personality Arnold cultivated as the high priest of culture and protector of poetry with such statements as, "Vainly will [a poet] imagine...that he can make an intrinsically inferior action equally

delightful…by his treatment of it" (*Complete* I.3-4).[11] However, these pet elegies should not be dismissed as inferior, nor should critical eyes elide them; Michelet's views enhance their poetic and political value in a way Arnold would have most valued—that literature, and poetry especially, is a "criticism of life" (IX.163). As Michelet notes, in the Indian epic *Ramayana*, animals helped poetry to manifest itself in the human world:

> The first Indian poet sees two doves on the wing; while he is admiring their grace and amorous flight, one of them falls, struck by an arrow. He weeps, and without dreaming of it, his groans are measured by the pulsations of his heart and assume a rhythmical movement, and poetry is born. (131)

The death of his pets re-invigorated Arnold's muse, enabling him to connect the human and animal worlds; of the relation between the two, "Poor Matthias" asks, "Who assure us, sundering powers / Stand not 'twixt his soul and ours?" (*Poetical* 457). Arnold's definition of poetry as a criticism of life inheres in Michelet's commentary, from his earliest socio-political concerns for human freedom and equality to the last pieces of poetry he wrote.

Gainesville State College

[11] In the 1854 "Preface," Arnold wrote: "the poetic faculty can and does manifest itself in treating the most trifling action, the most hopeless subject"; but then: "it is a pity that power should be wasted; and that the poet should be compelled to impart an interest and force to his subject, instead of receiving them from it" (*Complete* I.17).

Works Cited

Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Arnold, Matthew. *Arnold: Poetical Works*. Ed. C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry. London: Oxford UP, 1969.

_____. *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*. 11 Vols. Ed. R. H. Super. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1960-1978.

_____. *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*. Ed. Cecil Lang. 6 Vols. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1996.

_____. *The Note-Books of Matthew Arnold*. Ed. H. F. Lowry, Karl Young, and Waldo Hilary Dunn. London: Oxford UP, 1952.

Danahay, Martin, and Deborah D. Morse. Introduction. *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature*. London: Ashgate, 2007. 1-12.

Firth, Abraham. Preface. *Voices for the Speechless*. Ed. Abraham Firth. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1883. Project Gutenberg. Web. 10 July 2004. <http://infomotions.com/etexts/gutenberg/dirs/1/2/8/7/12879/12879.htm>.

Harding, F. J. W. *Matthew Arnold, the Critic, and France*. Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1964.

Holloway, John. *The Victorian Sage*. London: Macmillan & Co, 1953.

Kaplan, Edward. *Michelet's Poetic Vision: a Romantic Philosophy of Nature, Man, and Woman*. Amherst: U Massachusetts P, 1977.

Mangum, Teresa. "Animal Angst: Victorians Memorialize Their Pets." Danahay and Morse. 15-34.

Michelet, Jules. *The People*. Trans. John P. McKay. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1973.

Schneider, Mary. *Poetry in the Age of Democracy: The Literary Criticism of Matthew Arnold*. Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1989.

Sells, Iris. *Matthew Arnold and France*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1935.

Tinker, C. B. and H. F. Lowry. *The Poetry of Matthew Arnold: A Commentary*. London: Oxford UP, 1950.

Trilling, Lionel. *Matthew Arnold*. New York: World Publishing, 1965.

Waking the "new mind of England": Discussion among Strangers in Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil*

by Inna Volkova

Leslie Stephen once remarked about Benjamin Disraeli: "May not one lament the degradation of a promising novelist into a prime minister?" (450). While not contesting the prominent place Disraeli achieved in politics, Stephen recognized in his fiction indications of a "promising novelist." Despite Stephen's juxtaposition between Disraeli-the-novelist and Disraeli-the-politician, it is the intersections of his politics and his fiction that are most intriguing. His 1845 novel *Sybil,* where he articulated the main principles of the Young England movement, is one such intriguing case. In part, Disraeli articulates his political views in the form of the novel in order to reach a broad audience; however, there is a more significant link between his fiction and his politics. In *Sybil*, the Young England program is communicated to readers through a series of images that give expression to Disraeli's ideal of a pre-Reformation England but resist mechanical definitions. This article examines how Disraeli mobilizes the communicative potential of images in *Sybil* and elaborates a culture of political discussion that can be derived from metaphorical (rather than rationalistic) thinking that was gaining momentum in the Victorian era.

Disraeli embraces the genre of the novel because he sees in it traits, such as imaginativeness, metaphoricity, and vagueness, that serve as optimal vehicles for his political thinking. At the heart of his ideology is the idea of an image, seen here in his presentation of history, an idyllic England, and Charles Egremont's speech in the House of Lords. However, besides articulating his ideals in the form of images, *Sybil* suggests a public sphere centered upon discussion among strangers. As images circulate in these discussions, they create a shared space of understanding. By recovering Disraeli from a perception of him as a political manipulator and a mastermind of false consciousness, this analysis reveals that his views on political discussion expose the pitfalls of excessive rationalism, pointing to new ways of understanding and consensus that are perhaps unachievable through the means of rational-critical debate.

Disraeli's vision of a public sphere in his novels finds itself in a complex relationship with his politics outside of fiction. Reviewers and scholars have passed judgment on Disraeli-the-novelist and Disraeli-the-politician in quite divergent ways. Some contend that fiction was an organic stepping stone for developing his political ideas. Michael Flavin, for example, argues: "Disraeli's novels are the site on which he produced and developed the ideas which informed his political creed" (1). Similarly, others call Disraeli's Young England trilogy "a testing ground for his political and moral philosophy" (Schwarz, "Disraeli's" 64). Thom Braun, however, views the relationship between his fiction and politics more problematic; while Disraeli's "artistic integrity often had a healthy independence of his political views," Braun notes, "it is also true that much of his writing was political, in that it was so often unashamedly manipulative in the way it interpreted life" (146). Considering the relationship between Disraeli's fiction and political philosophy either as a straightforward connection or a troubling combination seems to be a simplified approach; alternatively, there is something endemic to fiction that resonates directly with the innermost mechanisms of his political thinking. Examining Disraeli's novel writing with this premise may not tell us what is so distinct about the genre of the novel per se, but it would suggest how he mobilized this genre.

Disraeli's contemporary reviewers and current critics have pointed to the vagueness of his political vision and hence the impotence of his novels in relation to the realm of practical politics. His aphoristic political statements impressed in the public mind vivid images of the nation, history, and religion, rather than constructing long chains of logical causalities. Of Disraeli's creed, Leslie Stephen notes, "[t]o grasp its precise meaning, or to determine the precise amount of earnestness with which it is set forth, is of course hopeless" (432). Scholars have perpetuated this trend. Daniel Schwarz underscores the vague, impractical endings of the Young England novels where it is not clear just "how such necessary political changes as the revival of a strong monarchy and of an independent responsible aristocracy will take place" (*Disraeli's Fiction* 102). Others point to his novels' "fervour, enthusiasm, faith, impracticability and, above all, vagueness" (Braun 92); his lack of "inclination, and perhaps capacity, for the elaboration of systematic argument" (Smith "Introduction" 14); and their "incoheren[ce] about the work to be done" (Colón 50).[1]

[1] According to Paul Smith, proclamations of future change in *Coningsby* and *Sybil* were "more uncertain than they sounded" (*Life* 66); whereas *Tancred* offers an even more emblematic example of vagueness by dwindling into "lack of conclusion" (89).

What has been considered a flaw in his novels or lack of "capacity" to argue clearly is, in fact, an integral principle of Disraeli's political design and consensus-building. Rather than founding his vision of a public sphere on excessive rationalism and "systematic argument," he communicates his ideas in images thus suggesting a public sphere where the common denominator is not the best argument but a shared image. To this end, he sees the genre of the novel as uniquely accommodating of his politics. Distinct from the commonplace perception of Disraeli's fiction, this discussion develops an alternative interpretation that is both more sympathetic and insightful about what he brings into the contested arena of Victorian cultures of political discussion. The novels do not cloud his political ideas but instead mobilize the agency of a unifying image. Articulating his political vision through images, Disraeli capitalizes on their constructive vagueness. His images bring about cohesion and expose the limits of excessive polemical rationalism, which falls short of expanding and sustaining consensus over differences of opinion.

Even his harshest critics agreed that the novel was his only means to revamp flagging Toryism:

> Toryism, as Mr. Disraeli conceives it, is not an historical, or a scientific, but an historic-romantic policy....It has no principles, no laws, no rules, no organization. How then is it to be recommended except in the non-scientific form of the novel? It is a mere question of sentiment, of loyalty, of fanaticism....Views vast and perplexed, indefinable to one's-self, inexplicable to others, find themselves on all sides imprisoned by any fixed order. ("The Repentance" 489)

As much as the reviewer disparagingly discards Disraeli's politics alongside its "non-scientific" form of expression, so does he express what fiction becomes under Disraeli's pen. The novel for Disraeli is not an encyclopedia of empirical knowledge or an exercise in inductive reasoning but a mode for an altogether different kind of insight. Ironically, the novel here is construed as a medium that conveys the "indefinable," the "inexplicable," the incommunicable. Because the review locates Disraeli's politics outside of the public sphere predicated on rational-critical debate, his claims are labeled essentially incommunicable and incomprehensible. If only "historical" or "scientific" politics fall within the limits of what is communicable, Disraeli's vision falls short of this standard. But he seems to have a different standard in mind when representing in his novels something that could not be expressed in terms of rational-critical debate. Besides highlighting the perceived flaws of his politics, this critique, conversely, conveys the problems he had with rationalism.

I understand Disraeli's images quite broadly and admit to their heterogeneity; but despite their differences, they all share his non-rationalist way of communicating his political ideas. Whether it is the mysterious and captivating appearance of the "new mind of England" (*Sybil* 354), a nebulous image of the two "nations" of the rich and the poor followed by the heavenly "female form" of Sybil in "the vacant and star-lit arch" (97), or Egremont's speech in the House that remains a mysterious absence in the text, images carry more weight for Disraeli than meticulous chains of arguments or inventories of facts. Although he did glean facts from Blue Books and commissioners' reports for *Sybil*, the novel itself is a complicated blend of empirical observation and political agenda. As William Monypenny and George Buckle write:

> Disraeli had the speculative, *a priori* mind which finds pleasure in the exercise of fitting facts to theories; but in the region of politics and history this type of mind, as long as it is active, flexible, and receptive, is, if not more likely to arrive at truth, more likely to be illuminating than the other laborious type, often overpraised, which clings timidly to detail, and shrinks from independent and imaginative flight. (vol. I.694)

Disraeli's "imaginative flight" and use of image in lieu of argument is less the manipulative tactic of a politician than an alternative way of understanding and crafting the sphere of political discussion. This analysis aims to recover the culture of discussion in Disraeli's fiction, specifically *Sybil*, which has been dismissed with suspicion or read *only* as manipulative. To see in Disraeli not a manipulator but an advocate of an alternative culture of discussion that offered a viable critique to the dominant rationalist strain leads to a significant reconsideration of the Victorian public sphere. Besides reproducing the usual accounts of it as a contested ground among various identity groups, such as workers, women, and other "outsiders," this discussion also highlights the contested history of models for organizing the public sphere as such.

Disraeli's use of images in part stems from Coleridgean symbol. Mary Poovey characterizes his politics as "noncontestatory, disinterested, and capable of subsuming opposing positions" and calls them "another version of what Coleridge called the symbol"

(515). However, for other critics, it is not a symbol but an image that seems to be crucial for understanding Disraeli's thought. For instance, Paul Smith comments that in his aspiration to influence people's "imaginations in a manner that called for the artistic orchestration of images rather than the logical exposition of arguments," Disraeli pursued "a politics of public relations" of sorts (75). Thus, while exhibiting a pronounced connection to the Romantic worldview, he anticipates the future developments of mass democracy and populism. However, the critics' evocation of both "symbol" and "image" in describing Disraeli's work requires further investigation, because a symbol and an image entail different kinds of agency in the context of a public sphere.

While symbol implies a way of understanding that cannot be achieved, for instance, through reasoning, an image often evokes manipulation of our feelings, thoughts, and desires.[2] The question then becomes whether Disraeli's work can best be characterized in terms of symbols (which intimate a way of understanding) or in terms of images (which at times short-circuit reflection and draw us closer to mass politics). In *Sybil*, Disraeli straddles the line between the two. While promising an organic community based on the sharing of a symbol as the truth (e.g., idyllic England), Disraeli's images also foreshadow the populist mechanisms of consensus. Images in the novel, then, operate both on the level of pointing to some kind of transcendental truth and serving quite down-to-earth pragmatic goals of furthering the Young England program. This hybrid quality of Disraeli's images positions him as neither a mere manipulator of images nor as a disinterested voice of truth. Disraeli's use of images reveals that they are always already implicated in some practical agenda, but their agency can be viewed as something other than merely manufacturing false consciousness. Rather, his use of images in discussion scenes offers perhaps the only feasible way to establish consensus among different social interests. Thus, I use the term "image" in order to highlight its pragmatism (hence the difference from the Coleridgean symbol), but at the same time to recover a constructive (not necessarily manipulative) agency of "image" (an agency quite different from just "exciting appetites," as it is in Coleridge) in Disraeli's fiction.

[2] On Coleridge's use of symbol as a way of understanding, see *Works* 8, I, "Lecture 4" 197. On the glorification of symbol over allegory in *The Statesman's Manual* see *Works* 6, 30. See also "The Landing Place" (*Works* 4, I, 160), which argues that "Mere images" arouse our "appetites," rendering such faculties as "*reflection*" unnecessary.

A most intriguing feature in Disraeli's trilogy, most vividly *Sybil*, is that he stages most crucial and revelatory discussions among *strangers*. The dynamics of such encounters often carry a trail of mystery and romantic fantasy. But what may at first seem fantasy-like in such scenes does not diminish the extent to which they explore the practical implication of *strangehood*, or a condition of being a stranger, in the national and cosmopolitan arenas. Despite his own anti-cosmopolitan political agenda and glorification of race, Disraeli foregrounds the advantages of the condition of strangehood among participants in a dialogue. A face-to-face discursive community of strangers, alluded to in this novel, allows Disraeli to negotiate between the embodiedness, intimacy, and proximity of a stranger and the stranger's ability to bracket social and political attributes to aspire toward universal truth. *Sybil* reflects on the political possibilities of a discursive community of strangers, in which discussion is predicated on the shared condition of strangehood that neither folds into a totalizing community of neighbors nor fractures because of estrangement and incomprehensibility.

Sybil's preoccupation with strangehood also offers a commentary on the novel as a printed medium that implies an audience where "strangehood is the necessary medium of commonality" (Warner 75). While Warner thinks about strangehood as a symptom of modernity, for Disraeli it is a desirable and advantageous condition that cannot otherwise be achieved. *Sybil* imagines a model of discussion in the public sphere that is predicated on consensus-building among strangers by means of a shared image; this notion provides a critique of the prevalent rationalistic model by introducing the image as a key agent in consensus-building. The novel explores the condition of strangehood and so gives us insights into understanding the modern condition.

As the second part of the Young England trilogy, *Sybil* intends to portray "the condition of the people of this country" and provide "some picture of the moral and physical condition of that people" ("General Preface" viii-ix). The people, for Disraeli, are a foundation for the development he calls "the new and...better mind of England" ("Preface to the Fifth Edition" vi). Charles Egremont is a protagonist whose "emancipated intellect and expanding intelligence" allow him to become a mouthpiece of reform (60). In a passionate address to Sybil, Egremont delivers essentially an abridged version of the Young England program:

> The mind of England is the mind ever of the rising race. Trust me it is with the People. And not the less so, because this feeling is one of which even in a great degree it is unconscious...you will witness a

> development of the new mind of England, which will make up by its rapid progress for its retarded action....I know, however hindered by circumstance for the moment, those principles must bear their fruit. It will be a produce hostile to the oligarchical system. The future principle of English politics will not be a leveling principle; not a principle adverse to privileges, but favourable to their extension. It will seek to ensure equality, not by leveling the Few but by elevating the Many. (354)

The "mind of England" in this passage reveals its political purchase because it figures here as an appealing yet vaguely outlined image. It is quite beside Egremont's point to expound to Sybil what the "mind of England" means exactly or who it includes. More, an inquiry into a clear-cut definition of the "mind of England" would rather diminish than enhance Egremont's teleological worldview. It is precisely in this romanticized form, painted by broad strokes, that the "mind of England" can muster differentiated viewpoints under its umbrella. The image of the "mind of England" is not an empty signifier, however, but a notion around which Disraeli is able to gather different characters of varying persuasions that are all somehow genuinely invested in it. It means *something* to Egremont as well as to Sybil or Gerard. But this image does not stand alone; its link to another image, the "People," creates a kind of weaving of ideas as images. The term "People" here calibrates its meaning as an image between a connotation of inclusiveness and the more restrictive sense it acquires in Disraeli's vision. Elsewhere, Disraeli lambastes the term "the people" as "sheer nonsense" ("The Spirit" 23). Unlike a "nation," "the people" for him is not "a political term" but one of "natural history." However, Egremont elevates "the People" (hence the capitalization) precisely to the level of the political. His address to Sybil bristles with multivalent images that form intriguing links among themselves and draw their vitality from their somewhat loose meanings.

In order to reach for the future so vividly imagined by Egremont, a transition from people's unconscious feelings to a conscious realization and deliberate action is needed. The new mind of England can become conscious of itself and of England's future only when it becomes conscious of the country's true history. The moment of coming to consciousness is also expressed as the awakening moment of the true Tory spirit that for now, according to Disraeli, "sleepeth" (330). It is suggested, too, that "an age of inquiry and agitated spirit like the present" will catalyze this impulse (64). In order to imagine a future, *Sybil* is preoccupied with uncovering an image of the past.[3] The narrative persistently oscillates between two tasks: pointing to the future revival and crafting an image of the true history in lieu of "a complete mystification" (40). This true past, the novel suggests, lies just beneath a veneer of falsehood that started during the Reformation. But this sense of layering history does not work in the text as a complex unfolding. The true history remains a depthless image at a distance that merely has to be uncovered.

Despite centuries-long mystification, Disraeli "demystifies" this history in one chapter. His project to cover a span of English history from the early sixteenth century to the early Victorian era seems rather compact for its ambition. In part, what makes such brevity possible is Disraeli's specific vision of history as a succession of singular individuals. Bolingbroke, Lord Shelburne, Pitt the Younger, and the reclaimed Major Wildman lend themselves as milestones of Disraeli's history. The nation, "the English people" (46) or "the multitude" (45), similarly take the shape of one individual-like historical agent when, for instance, the narrator announces that "Whiggism was putrescent in the nostrils of the nation" (38). This endows the nation with an independent will and historical agency. Since the "People" become a conscious agent in his account and not passive masses kept in check by ideology, Disraeli configures his politics, including his use of the image of the "People," in emancipatory terms. Just like the "People," the notion of history itself takes on qualities of an image. What seems to be a recovery of true history from that written in the spirit of "Whiggism" is problematic in Disraeli's delivery. The chapter in question by no means intends to supplant this true history. At best, Disraeli points to this alternative history in hypothetical terms: "If the history of England be ever written by one who has the knowledge and the courage, and both qualities are equally requisite for the undertaking, the world would be more astonished than when reading the Roman annals by Niebuhr" (39-40). But if Disraeli by no means pretends to attempt this "undertaking" in one chapter of the novel, he also seems to suggest that true history itself would always remain in the hypothetical realm. Such a seemingly self-defeating gesture actually prepares us to embrace the idea that history, if at all, can only come into political presence in the form of an image. Disraeli aims less to

[3] Peter Jupp argues that a construction of England's past was an essential part of how Disraeli saw his political intervention: "One of the principal ways in which Disraeli fashioned an identity and a role for himself in public life was by constructing a particular interpretation of the past and giving it repeated publicity through a steady stream of writings" (131).

accomplish this "astonishing" narrative of bare history than to preserve the affect of this notion. It is a desire for something that matters more than the actual possibility of recovering it. If so, an image of true history accommodates the desire for truth and gives some concreteness to the history that is impossible to write.

Although Disraeli cherishes this possibility of writing the true history, he admits that an entirely clear, comprehensive, and demystified history is always beyond reach. There is a curious moment in Chapter 3 (Book I), where he suggests that history will perhaps never be free from a trail of mystery, nor will it ever be given sufficient discursive space. His account of Lord Shelburne, Prime Minister during the reign of George III, foregrounds the two points: "Why Lord Shelburne on that occasion was set aside, will perhaps always remain a mysterious passage of our political history, nor have we space on the present occasion to attempt to penetrate its motives" (43). Despite his intolerance for mystification, Disraeli is somewhat fascinated with the idea that some historical reasons and motives will remain a *mystery*. Just as mysterious as Shelburne's discharge is the England that existed before the two-century Whig regime. Moreover, Disraeli's awareness of insufficient textual "space" suggests that he crafts the present historical excursus into a shape predetermined by this limitation. As a result, he performs a kind of flattening out of history into a veneer of mystification while featuring the idyllic image of pre-Reformation England as a charmingly mysterious, if flat, image—an image whose mysterious halo itself comes dangerously close to mystification. A flat image becomes a conveniently portable device for his politics.

As much as Disraeli's version of history aims to subvert historical mystification, it remains dependent upon it. This mystified and distorted history is the only given, and thus even his recovery of history inevitably has to take its origin from this mystification. When Disraeli describes this mystified version of history, he seems much more *interested* in mystification as such than in elaborating what lies under its veneer: "Generally speaking, all the great events have been distorted, most of the important causes concealed, some of the principal characters never appear, and all who figure are so misunderstood and misrepresented, that the result is a complete mystification" (40). Thus, all Disraeli has to work with is mystification. The image of England that comes *before* this point in history remains surprisingly underdeveloped and unattended. This is as if to imply that, for him, history *begins* at the very moment it gets distorted. Disraeli's main battle is to expose the distortions of what came after this idyllic moment of England's past. For his project, the

image of England removed by a few centuries does not need to be finessed with microscopic details: its very efficacy lies in vagueness and distance. In other words, his image of England is to be perceived only on a certain scale, as if a distanced view provides a sense of reality to this image. While, on the one hand, his historical excursus gestures towards some static image of the past (seemingly on solid historical footing), on the other, it entertains quite a different view of history. In *Sybil*, history becomes a process of "perpetual displacement," as Catherine Gallagher suggests, "a realm without origins or stable values" (207). While Disraeli's aim in this novel is "more carefully to distinguish between facts and phrases, realities and phantoms" ("General Preface" vi), his idyllic England is a distant point on the historical horizon where reality and myth converge.

The image of Disraeli's England glimmers not only through his compact historical narrative but also through the crucial architectural and pastoral place in the novel. Abbey Marney, with its materiality of stone and landscape, complements the immaterial, imaginative aspect of the idyllic past. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer suggests, the Abbey conveys "the mythic, ahistorical quality in Disraeli's vision of an ideal society" (174). The image of medieval England acquires more relief as the Abbey's spatial and temporal (or atemporal, being beyond historical unfolding) dimensions combine. The ancient monastery dramatizes the contrast between the past as a "mythical" age of communal wellbeing and hospitality, on the one hand, and the devastating effects of modern history, on the other. An aristocratic protagonist, Charles Egremont, ruminating on his walk about hard times for the poor, is deeply touched by "the grateful vision of some monastic remains" (86). These "moss-grown and mouldering memorials" lend themselves as a stage for political discussion when Egremont encounters two strangers (Gerard and Morley) under the shade of an old yew—a silent thread between past, present, and future.

As a symbolic setting for a conversation between Egremont, Gerard, and Morley, the Abbey serves to unfold the novel's central historical and political questions. The conversation seems to flourish not despite but precisely because Egremont and the two men remain strangers to one another. They converse face-to-face and "in a tone of respect" about the history of the abbey and the role the monks played as its original land-owners (94). The text offers a detailed description of the faces and demeanor of the strangers but suspends their class position:

> The first was of lofty stature, and though dressed with simplicity, had nothing sordid in his appearance. His garments gave no clue of his position in life....he showed a frank and manly countenance. His complexion might in youth have been ruddy, but time and time's attendants, thought and passion, had paled it. (89)

Gerard's presence in the conversation is furnished with neither the knowledge of his name nor his social status but simply through his "frank and manly countenance." This way of being intimately present to the other, yet enjoying the freedom of abstraction from one's class and personal identity, carries an emancipating agency throughout *Sybil*. In other words, the novel treats the condition of being a stranger not as an obstacle to be overcome, but as a means to overcome obstacles, which all amount to the central problem of the novel—the estrangement between the rich and the poor.

If Gerard subverts the hierarchical discursive conventions by bracketing his class status, Morley employs yet another kind of liberating tactic—by suspending his physical presence in discussion, he enters into it through a more abstract, disembodied medium—his voice. Morley joins in "unobserved" as "a voice which proceeded neither from Egremont nor the stranger" (94). A face-to-face encounter is juxtaposed here with a more indirect one, a voice that (despite its concrete personal characteristics) articulates abstract ideas rather than embodied and class-determined experiences. Through a description of his voice, we learn about Morley's prominent but perhaps too abstract and therefore unfeeling ethos: "It was a still voice that uttered these words, yet one of a peculiar character; one of those voices that instantly arrest attention: gentle, and yet solemn, earnest yet unimpassioned." His excessive intellectualism is further evident in his face, which is "slightly marked with the small pox" and is "redeemed from absolute ugliness by a highly-intellectual brow, and large dark eyes that indicated deep sensibility and great quickness of apprehension" (95). Morley's revelatory diagnosis of England—"THE RICH AND THE POOR" as two estranged nations "between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers of different zones, or inhabitants of different planets"—seems to result from a kind of synergy produced, ironically, by this discussion among *strangers* (96). Against the idyllic landscape and symbolic significance of Abbey Marney, Disraeli configures a practice of discussion among strangers where the suspension of certain social identifiers and names opens up new possibilities.

Despite the novel's preoccupation with the rebirth of a strong sense of one nation and Disraeli's rejection of cosmopolitan sympathies,[4] this scene of productive strangehood evokes strong cosmopolitan sensibilities. The flattening-out of history seems to diminish claims for nationalism. Abbey Marney is open to strangers who are welcome to form affinities to the local, to the concrete place, to the gesture of hospitality, while remaining detached from any specific place as a member of the global community.[5] The Abbey's hospital, besides being the most conspicuous structure to an observer, is closely interwoven with the spirit of hospitality that strangers would receive, regardless of who they are:

> there, still more distinctly, because built on a greater scale and of materials still more intended for perpetuity, the capacious hospital, a name that did not then denote the dwelling of disease, but a place where all the rights of hospitality were practiced; where the traveler from the proud baron to the lonely pilgrim asked the shelter and the succour that never were denied, and at whose gate, called the Portal of the Poor, the peasants on the Abbey lands, if in want, might appeal each morn and night for raiment and for food. (87)

But the recent history of the Abbey puts an end to the ethics of hospitality, and Disraeli laments that "the gate of the poor was to be closed for ever; and the wanderer was no more to find a home." Being a supporter of parish relief and a critic of the New Poor law,[6] Disraeli sees face-to-face recognition between strangers as a basis for community and the public sphere. Built to last, the Abbey's hospital becomes an embodiment of this ethic that is preserved through centuries of spiritual decline and sustains a possibility of revival.

In the discussion between Egremont, Gerard, and Morley, there emerges the very ethic of recognition, respect, and hospitality the ancient Abbey embodies. Rather than imposing a totalizing consensus, the image of England's past, so vividly evoked by the Abbey's

---

[4] Disraeli condemns Liberal cosmopolitanism while defining the Tory party exclusively through the national sentiment: "Gentlemen, the Tory party, unless it is a national party, is nothing....Influenced in a great degree by the philosophy and the politics of the Continent, they ['a body of public men'] endeavoured to substitute cosmopolitan for national principles; and they baptized the new scheme of politics with the plausible name of 'Liberalism'" (*Selected Speeches* 524). The majority of the working classes "repudiate cosmopolitan principles" and "adhere to national principles" (528).

[5] Deffenbacher argues that *Sybil* operates from the awareness that architecture determines consciousness. Marney Abbey is an embodiment of "the medieval social system" (3) and so promotes the formation of a certain kind of "social character" (4); hence, the stranger-oriented consciousness it embodies.

[6] Paul Smith notes that Disraeli "continually lambasted the new poor law" (77).

structures, instead serves as a common ground while allowing for diverse opinions. Egremont is aware of the purchase this background consensus yields; on whether or not the monks were "easy landlords" (91), he observes: "'Well, whatever difference of opinion may exist on these points…there is one on which there can be no controversy: the monks were great architects'" (93). Just like this shared appreciation of the ruins, the strangers share an idyllic, if flat, image of monastic England.

While from this scene and from Disraeli's historical excursus one may tease out some outlines of this idyllic England, the image never acquires precise definition. Of course, part of it could be historical distance, but there is another important dynamic that better explains the vagueness of the image that lies at the heart of *Sybil*. The England we are led to long for without quite knowing what it looks like is nothing other than the result of populist techniques. As Ernesto Laclau notes, an imprecise definition or an empty signifier is a technique of populism (105), which allows for "the construction of a global identity out of the equivalence of a plurality of social demands" (83). In Disraeli's novel, the social demands of the People and the aristocracy are "reconciled" under the notion of one nation presented through a low-resolution image of England. Yet, this is not to say that the novel's sole purpose is to trick. Quite the opposite: this image provides the common ground while acknowledging difference. Where possibilities for Habermasian consensus through procedural argumentation exhaust themselves under the weight of irreducible perspectives, *Sybil's* fantasy of consensus through a shared image becomes a viable alternative. The circulation of this image among the three strangers brings into the same conversation Egremont's expanding mind (which eventually professes an organic relationship between the aristocracy and the people), Gerard's Chartist mentality (i.e., mass physical action), and Morley's dream-like abstractions about a community of purpose.

Egremont gains access to the people by means of an assumed occupation of a "reporter" and a fictitious name of Mr. Franklin—both attributes sustaining him as a stranger (173). As he and Aubrey St. Lys visit the destitute dwelling of Philip Warner, a handloom weaver, they encounter Sybil, who is paying the Warners a visit of sympathy and support. But if Sybil's agency is conveyed through feminized sympathy in the domestic sphere, Egremont's sympathetic feeling is combined with a desire for public, political action: "his sympathies had become more lively and more extended;…a masculine impulse had been given to his mind;…he was inclined to view public questions in a tone very different to that in which he had surveyed them a few weeks back, when on the hustings of his borough" (170). Egremont successfully wins a seat in Parliament even though "the condition of the people was a subject of which he knew nothing" (74). He is transformed from an alienated, complacent stranger to a sympathetic stranger driven by a desire to know the people. This powerful effect produced by a sympathetic stranger even causes the indignant and jealous Morley to regret a spontaneous act of opening oneself up to the other: "'We have all of us opened ourselves too unreservedly before this aristocrat'" (303).

The novel contrasts Egremont's agency with Morley's interventionist and ultimately unsuccessful model of strangehood. Gerard impugns Stephen Morley for a lack of knowledge of the people that was once characteristic of Egremont: "'Stephen is prejudiced….He is a visionary, indulging in impossible dreams, and if possible, little desirable. He knows nothing of the feeling of the country or the character of his countrymen'" (358). Morley's "high-flying philosophy" (173), as Gerard puts it, accounts for his estrangement from the people and a consequent stalemate in a discussion at the Rising Sun. When a group of miners gather at the pub after a working-day, their leader Master Nixon begins a discussion of the injustice of the tommy system and the oppression from Diggs, a tommy-shop manager.[7] In contrast to the Abbey, the pub, due to its class specificity and us/them mentality, precludes possibilities for productive discussion. In addition, as editor of the *Mowbray Phalanx*, Morley proves incapable of a face-to-face argument, without the medium of his newspaper. On overhearing the conversation, Morley intervenes only to be brushed off as a "stranger":

> "But why do not you state your grievances to the landlords and lessees," said the stranger. "I take it you be a stranger in these parts, sir," said Master Nixon, following up this remark by a most enormous puff…."I take it you be a stranger in these parts, sir, or else you would know that it's as easy for a miner to speak to a main-master, as it is for me to pick coal with this here clay [pipe]. Sir, there's a gulf atween 'em." (182)

When Morley proceeds to argue his "high-flying" "principle of association" by suggesting that fifty families "live under one roof," Master Nixon protests, "'you speak like a book'"

[7] "Tommy" refers to goods that the workers could redeem for their credit at the tommy-shop. Tommy credit was a substitute for wages paid in money. The tommy-shop enjoyed a kind of monopoly on its customers (without conventional money they could not shop somewhere else) as well as on the prices it established.

(183). The persuasive power of Morley's bookish abstractions crumbles under his estrangement from the particulars of the miners' lived experiences. Ironically, while oblivious of the "gulf" between the miners and the masters, Morley overlooks yet another gulf—between the people and himself. His agency is just the reverse of Egremont's endeavor to wed the image of Tory England to the everyday lives of the people.

On a bigger scale than Morley's failure at the Rising Sun, the novel intimates that the Chartist crisis and the violent action that ensued are also symptomatic of mishandled discussion. Despite the fact that "all that the people desired was a respectful discussion of their claims" (275), they meet with a refusal of this right by the House of Commons. The resulting Chartist disturbances suggest that the source of violent action is rooted in a broken code of fair discussion: "The House after a debate which was not deemed by the people commensurate with the importance of the occasion, decided on rejecting the prayer of the Petition, and from that moment the part of the Convention who advocated a recourse to physical force in order to obtain their purpose, was in the ascendant" (342). Gary Handwerk highlights a tension between the novel's advocacy of "discussion as a political mechanism" (328-29) and the novel's "message of expediency" (341), manifested in the application of force. Since the consequences of the riot bring the novel to a happy end, Handwerk suggests that the novel "couples a rhetorical renunciation of force with a narrative justification of its consequences" (336). While I agree with Handwerk that Disraeli places a particular importance on discussion, and that the agency of discussion is compromised by a more expedient physical force, I am more skeptical about his claim that what Disraeli supports is *persuasion*. Handwerk admits that the role of persuasion in the novel is undercut by its not infrequent association with "manipulation," and the only persuasion success story is that of Egremont in relation to Sybil (332). If *persuasion* never really carries much weight in the novel, what kind of discussion does?

Disraeli is invested in imagining a public sphere predicated not so much on persuasion as on discussion among strangers that "opens up," perhaps even "too unreservedly" (303); such discussion entails respect and recognition of the other, even if that other upholds different views. While an emblematic example of this takes place among Egremont, Gerard, and Morley at Marney Abbey, another instance of such productive strangehood transpires in London as the Chartist delegates Gerard and Morley converse with Lord Valentine. Their encounter generates respect and recognition of the other *without* necessarily upholding

persuasion as a *raison d'etre* of discussion. Again, we are in the midst of a discussion scene which thrives on the dynamics between strangers; Gerard and Morley become simply "one of the delegates" or "the other delegate" (276), and the identity of a stranger becomes indistinguishable. After the delegates express their Chartist claims to Lord Valentine and hear his aristocratic convictions in return, Gerard advocates a respectful recognition of differences: "'Well, well; he has his opinions and we have ours. But he is a man; with clear, straightforward ideas, a frank, noble, presence; and as good-looking a fellow as I ever set eyes on'" (279). Arguably, these words amount to more than class-conscious etiquette. Just as he does in earlier descriptions of Morley and Gerard, Disraeli continues to draw connections between physiognomy and the course of discussion. Valentine's face-to-face interaction with the delegates, unlike the majority of their door-to-door round of the political elite, suggests we may detect clues from one's "frank, noble, presence." This embodied presence is key to an ethic of recognition, albeit recognition of difference. Moments like this when characters entertain diverse opinions in the spirit of mutual recognition insinuate that, although *Sybil* imagines a consensus around an image of Tory England, this consensus is far from totalizing and is capable of accommodating intellectual diversity.

The trope of a meeting between strangers in Disraeli's *Sybil* taps into the central theme of the outsider that runs through Victorian fiction. As the nineteenth-century novel gradually expanded its scope of representation, it was challenged to incorporate new types of subjects that were socially and culturally different from the respectable world of novel-readers. Raymond Williams describes this change by juxtaposing a selective class-determined and privileged "knowable community," from the regional countryside of Jane Austen's novels to the broader world of George Eliot's novels, where readers encounter the working classes, albeit somewhat as a "landscape" (257). Suzanne Graver's work on Eliot similarly examines the complexities of the idea of community in the nineteenth century once a traditional "face-to-face" community becomes for ever a thing of the past under the pressures of modernity (27). A frequent recurrence of discussion scenes among strangers in *Sybil* suggests that Disraeli is not only in tune with the changing public sphere but committed to the political advantages of this "ideal of critical distance" (4), to use Amanda Anderson's term.

While some discussion scenes bring this ideal to life, there are moments when the intersubjective synergy never happens. Lady Marney's attempts to initiate her son Egremont into the art of political plotting and gossip result in his consent to run for Parliament yet

never resonate with his larger political views. The political advantages of such secrets as "the king is dying" (51) to which she is privy never become valuable commodities for Egremont. With a hope that "confidence...will always subsist between us" (52), Lady Marney creates a coalition with her son that highlights their ideological differences: her pragmatic calculation to acquire a seat for him in Parliament contrasts with his respectful exchange of ideas with the strangers at the Abbey ruins. Lady Marney's management of her son's political career in the name of the Tories "to have our own again" prompts Egremont not to submit to it but to search for an alternative model of a politician. Besides Lady Marney, Sir Robert Peel (or "a gentleman in Downing Street" (411)) employs a manipulative discursive practice. Peel's ideal of coming across as "'frank and explicit'" to the deputations of manufacturers, farmers, and others seeking his help is but a performance of sincerity, which he considers to be "the right line to take when you wish to conceal your own mind and to confuse the minds of others" (414). Such shutting down of discussion contrasts starkly with the opening up of the strangers' minds at the Abbey ruins.

While we recognize Disraeli's philosophy refracted through the statements of Gerard, Egremont, St. Lys, or Lord Valentine, it seems ironic that he misses out on a major opportunity to express his views fully through Egremont's speech in the House. The narrative absence of this speech is contrasted with the great resonance it produces in political circles. The high society makes futile attempts to make sense of the speech; Mr. Egerton insists that "the whole speech was against radicalism" (340), but adds that "no one knew exactly what he was after" (341). Another infers that it "was the most really democratic speech that I ever heard," and ventures the meaning of the speech to be "that if you wished for a time to retain your political power, you could only effect your purpose by securing for the people greater social felicity." Lord Loraine is no better off puzzling over Egremont's meaning behind "obtaining the results of the charter without the interventions of its machinery." Insofar as the meaning of the speech resists transparency, so does Egremont himself elude definition in the MPs' political lexicon. A "radical," a "whig," "[n]ot a conservative certainly," and "crotchety" are the labels applied to him (340). This moment may well reflect Disraeli's own piqued ego from critical responses like this: "Mr. Disraeli looks but at the surface of things. Originally a Radical, then a Whig, by and by a Conservative, and now we really cannot tell what, he has no well-grounded principle to fall back upon" ([Review] *Fraser's* 83). Perhaps to justify himself, too, Disraeli represents the labels attached to Egremont as mindless talk.

Egremont and his speech remain obscure to imply that the emergent ideas of the "new mind" of England have still not found their full expression in discourse. The absence of the speech from the text dramatizes this deferral of precise language and stable meanings, representing a vague image of the Young England program that organizes the novel yet resists precise definitions or expressions.

However, the rationalistic criteria of clarity, comprehensibility, and systematic argument are not necessarily Disraeli's central maxims of political discussion. If so, the trail of mysteriousness and vagueness that envelops Egremont's speech once again indicates some populist tendencies about it and the novel. The speech functions not so much as an *expression* of the new mind of England but rather a kind of emptied-out emblem of that mind. Without much of specific content (it is presented to us only through second-hand reports), the speech acquires almost unlimited capacity to embrace society beyond factions and classes. Combined with this mobilization of populist techniques is also the elevation of Egremont to the level of abstraction. He is distilled to an ethereal state of a "voice" only:

> Yes! there was one voice that had sounded in that proud Parliament, that free from the slang of faction, had dared to express immortal truths: the voice of a noble, who without being a demagogue, had upheld a popular cause; had pronounced his conviction that the rights of labour were as sacred as those of property;...who had declared that the social happiness of the millions should be the first object of a statesman. (350)

In order to get to the universal truth, Egremont sheds all sorts of particularities, from political affiliation to aristocratic privilege. But Disraeli lets Egremont run away with this Habermasian abstraction only to present him in full particularity (as much as fiction can allow) in front of Sybil, who is reading his printed speech. In other words, Egremont continuously calibrates his discourse between abstraction and embodiment. Hence, the novel's interest in effective political discussion maneuvers between two levels: the abstractions that help transcend class, gender, partisan, and other particularities for the sake of common dialogue and the embodied context of face-to-face encounters that makes the "immortal truths" come alive.

Speaking "immortal truths" without being "very sure of his audience" (341), Egremont engages with the challenges and shares the anxieties of a novelist. David Randall's historical

account of the public sphere suggests that, due to the proliferation of print culture beginning in the Renaissance, readership "expanded toward unknowability at the very moment of printing" (231). But in this scene, both Egremont's oral discourse and its printed version confront the anonymity and potential limitlessness of their audience/readership. Egremont is not "very sure of his audience," because he realizes that the scale of his reach goes far beyond the intimate listener in a face-to-face discussion and because the public he evokes into being (the "new mind" of England) does not yet exist (341). The emergent "new mind" of England, as any other public constituted through printed discourse, "exist[s] by virtue of [its] address" (Warner 73). Egremont mobilizes the embodied and the universal planes of strangehood: a stranger who converses face-to-face and a stranger who addresses an open-ended public of strangers in the virtual space of readership. Rather than dismissing face-to-face oral discussion in favor of the modern public produced by the printed word, *Sybil* treats the two as complementary. Disraeli expands this stance by embracing the print medium of the novel while affirming the agency of inter-personal discussion. While the advantages of the unprecedented scale and unity of time of a public held together by print are crucial, they cannot provide an analogue for the embodied proximity of the other in face-to-face discussion. Disraeli's attempt to point to the intrinsic values of both suggests his complicated answer to the question of what kind of intersubjective relationship constitutes a democratic community. Ironically, the fact that he tries to preserve the weight of both models as he uses *the print medium of the novel* points not to a smooth suture of the two but rather a modern ascendancy of print over unmediated discussion (a kind of uneven development) that is impossible to rebalance.

References to the Chartist disturbances and the final scenes of the Hell Cats' invasion of Mowbray Castle may lead one to conclude that Disraeli abandons his faith in discussion and admits to the necessity of force to rectify historical injustices.[8] However, recourse to force is employed only when discussion is foreclosed, whether it is through the dominance of the Whig discourse of history or the refusal of the House to give the Chartist plea due deliberation. Rather than figuring as a means more advantageous than discussion, violent force operates as an inevitable corollary of interrupted discussion. The happy union of Sybil

[8] Bishop Hatton, who proclaims himself "the Liberator of the People" (491), leads an insurrection of the people of Wodgate, or Hell Cats, who invade the mining districts and the Castle and go on strike to demand the ratification of the Charter. Wodgate is portrayed as a place of despotism while Hatton's flawed leadership is meant to satirize the Whig anti-people rule.

and Egremont that seems to be a result of the riot and seems to justify the application of force is counter-balanced by the fact that the casualties in this riot are the very individuals who put primary importance on physical action rather than discussion: Morley, Gerard, and Bishop Hatton. When Disraeli ends with a "prayer" that "a free Monarchy and a privileged and prosperous People...can only be brought about by the energy and devotion of our Youth" (497), his admiration for the energies of youth align with Egremont's commitment to discussion over the violent energies of a riot. Those who are more willing to forfeit their commitments to discussion for a short-term expedient of force fall out of the narrative scope by the end of *Sybil*. Whereas Handwerk argues that Disraeli "mixes" his commitment to discussion with justification of force ("a Machiavellian justification of whatever works" (341)), it is not the case that force actually "works" in *Sybil*. Rather than being a sure means to an end, force is represented as fraught with vicissitudes. What is therefore unpredictable and uncontrollable seems hardly to "work" in a practical sense, as Handwerk implies it. What the novel is certain about, though, is that force destroys its own proponents. In *Sybil*, force becomes not something that "works" when discussion fails but that results when discussion is not given a chance to succeed.

Preoccupied with the condition of England as a country of two "nations," *Sybil* foregrounds a culture of discussion that promises a remedy for social polarization. Disraeli invests the figure of a stranger with a communicative advantage and empowers his protagonist on his journey into the "nation" of the poor. Egremont's encounters with the People open up minds and hearts, and the novel suggests the desirability to maintain the status of a stranger (even if it means to go under another's name). While predicated on respect, sympathy, and mutual understanding, a conversation among strangers in *Sybil* does not produce a totalizing consensus. At the ruins of Marney Abbey, Egremont, Gerard, and Morley gain insights into each other's thoughts but still maintain room for the differences of opinions. When the Chartist delegates Gerard and Morley converse on the subject of the Charter with Lord Valentine, the exchange of opinions does not lead to agreement but, surprisingly, it does generate respect for others' views and a tolerant interest in those views. The novel represents these moments of "productive" strangehood alongside dead-end avenues of discussion exemplified through Morley, "a gentleman in Downing Street" (411), Lady Marney, Lord Marney, and other members of high society. The novel ultimately

rewards commitment to discussion, while those who at some point were tempted by the expediency of physical force fall victim to the very force they intended to marshal.

To be sure, in Disraeli's vision of Tory Democracy, it is an aristocrat who has the privilege of being a stranger. No lower-class character gains the kind of mobility and agency that Egremont does. But even if the agency of strangehood in this novel implies a hierarchal structure, one cannot ignore the democratizing pull it generates as well. When Egremont converses with Gerard and Morley and chooses to remain a stranger to them, they, too, are equally strangers to him. By bracketing social differences, the novel imagines a discussion among strangers as a potentially unlimited forum based on equality of participants. At the same time, a common ground among participants is created through the mysterious image of England. Exposing the limitations of the rationalistic model of discussion offered by Utilitarians and political economists, Disraeli reveals that consensus is not altogether a result of rational deliberation. An image veiled in mystery is an equally indispensable foundation of consensus and perhaps by far more feasible than a reason-based one. Yet, along with the opportunities of this public sphere that converges on a mysterious image of England, *Sybil* raises questions of its legitimacy. Does the novel come down to Disraeli simply letting us peek into his workshop of creating false consciousness through images? Although *Sybil* mobilizes the democratic potential of the public sphere, the dangers of slipping into totalizing control and manipulation through images remain all too real. *Sybil* imagines an ideal of discussion but is also aware of its vulnerability. Disraeli's model of political discussion does not collapse into the notion of false consciousness for several reasons. First, his vision points to the limitations and vulnerability of rationalism and, therefore, works as a kind of critique. Second, Disraeli's thinking about the "People" as a heroic actor of history rather than an indistinguishable multitude is rather emancipatory. And finally, the images that organize discussions are quite porous, allowing for diversity of opinions and so always disruptive of the totality that false consciousness needs.

Michigan State University

Works Cited

Anderson, Amanda. *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001.

Bodenheimer, Rosemarie. "Looking Back into the Future: *Sybil*." *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.

Braun, Thom. *Disraeli the Novelist*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981.

Coleridge, Samuel T. "The Landing Place, or Essays Interposed for Amusement, Retrospect, and Preparation." *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. Barbara E. Rooke. Essay V. *The Friend I*. Vol. 4. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969. 154-61.

_____. "Lecture 4." *Lectures 1818-1819. Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. R. J. de J. Jackson. Vol. 8. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972. 169-97.

Colón, Susan E. *The Professional Ideal in the Victorian Novel: The Works of Disraeli, Trollope, Gaskell, and Eliot.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Deffenbacher, Kristina. "Designing Progress: The Architecture of Social Consciousness in Disraeli's 'Young England' Novels." *Victorian Review* 24.1 (1998): 1-11.

Disraeli, Benjamin. "Conservative and Liberal Principles. Speech at Crystal Palace, June 24, 1872." *Selected Speeches of the Late Right Honourable the Earl of Beaconsfield*. Ed. T. E. Kebbel. Vol. 2. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882. 523-35. *Empire Online*. Adam Matthew Digital. MSU Libraries. Web. 29 Oct. 2010.

____. "General Preface." *Collected Edition of the Novels and Tales by the Right Honorable B. Disraeli.* London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1875. vii-xx. *Googlebooks*. Web. 15 Oct. 2010.

____. "Preface to the Fifth Edition." *Collected Edition of Novels and Tales by the Right Honourable B. Disraeli.* London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1870. vii-ix. *Googlebooks*. Web. 20 Sept. 2010.

____. "The Spirit of Whiggism." *The Works of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, Embracing Novels, Romances, Plays, Poems, Biography, Short Stories and Great Speeches, with a Critical Introduction by Edmund Gosse...and a Biographical Preface by Robert Arnot.* Vol. 9. New York: M. Walter Dunne, 1904-05. 1-39.

____. *Sybil, or The Two Nations*. Ed. Thom Braun. London, New York: Penguin, 1980.

Flavin, Michael. *Benjamin Disraeli: The Novel as a Political Discourse*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005.

Gallagher, Catherine. *The Industrial Revolution of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832-1867*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985.

Graver, Suzanne. *George Eliot and Community: A Study in Social Theory and Fictional Form*. Los Angeles: U of California P, 1984.

Handwerk, Gary. "Behind Sybil's Veil: Disraeli's Mix of Ideological Messages." *Modern Language Quarterly* 49.4 (1988). 321-41.

Jupp, Peter. "Disraeli's Interpretation of English History." Richmond and Smith. 131-51.

Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso, 2005.

Monypenny, William Flavelle, and George Earle Buckle. *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli Earl of Beaconsfield*. 2 vols. London: John Murray, 1929.

Poovey, Mary. "Disraeli, Gaskell, and the Condition of England." *The Columbia History of the British Novel*. Ed. John Richetti. New York: Columbia UP, 1994. 508-32.

Randall, David. "Ethos, Poetics, and the Literary Public Sphere." *Modern Language Quarterly* 69.2 (June 2008): 221-43.

"The Repentance of the Tory Party." *North British Review* 51:102 (1870 Jan.): 478-508. The Nineteenth Century Index. *ProQuest*. MSU Libraries. Web. 15 Sept. 2010.

[Review] "Coningsby; or, the New Generation. By Benjamin Disraeli, Esq. M. P." *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 30.175 (July 1844): 71-84. The Nineteenth Century Index. *ProQuest*. MSU Libraries. 15 Sept. 2010.

Richmond, Charles and Paul Smith, eds. *The Self-fashioning of Disraeli, 1818-1851*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.

Schwarz, Daniel. *Disraeli's Fiction*. London: Macmillan, 1979.

___. "Disraeli's Romanticism: Self-Fashioning in the Novels." Richmond and Smith. 42-65.

Smith, Paul. *Disraeli: A Brief Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

____. "Introduction." Richmond and Smith. 1-15.

Stephen, Leslie. "Mr. Disraeli's Novels." *Fortnightly Review* 16.94 (1874): 430-50. The Nineteenth Century Index. *ProQuest*. MSU Libraries. Web. 15 Sept. 2010.

Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2002.

Williams, Raymond. "The Knowable Community in George Eliot's Novels." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 2.3 (Spring 1969): 255-68.

Realistic Poetry: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*

by Daniel Brown

> Realism should be defined as the antipode of art. It is perhaps more odious in painting and in sculpture than in history and the novel; I do not mention poetry: for, by reason of the mere fact that the instrument of the poet is a pure convention, a measured language, in a word, which immediately places the reader above the earthy quality of everyday life, one sees how grotesque would be the contradiction in terms if anyone spoke of realistic poetry, admitting that such a monster could be conceived.—Eugene Delacroix (1860)

> What form is best for poems? Let me think
> Of forms less, and the external. Trust the spirit,
> As sovran nature does, to make the form... (V.223-25)
> — Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (1857)

As the French Romantic painter, Eugene Delacroix, indicates in his 1860 journal entry, early debates on realism centered on whether or not "the earthy quality of everyday life" was an appropriate subject for painting and literature (363). Indeed, the term "realism" had only been a topic of public discussion for less than a decade, largely originating as it did in 1850s France and England;[1] its definitions, possibilities and limitations were wide open for debate. In England, throughout the latter half of the 1850s, many prominent authors and critics wrote about realism in painting and literature: John Ruskin, one of the first in England to discuss realism at length; George Eliot, who developed her theories of realism from her readings of Ruskin; William Michael Rossetti, brother to Dante Gabriel and Christina; David Masson, professor of English literature and editor of *Macmillan's Magazine*; and George Henry Lewes, philosopher, essayist and George Eliot's long term partner. One of the more

[1] The 1855 paintings of the French artist, Gustave Courbet, "sparked off the controversy that publicized the term realism as a slogan...because of their unclassical rendering of peasants and labourers" (Morris 63). Further, "the first use of the term in Britain, when *Frazer's Magazine* described Thackeray as 'chief of the Realist School', just predates the passionate French controversy over the term '*realisme*' sparked off by Gustave Courbet in 1855" (88).

comprehensive treatises on realism to appear during this period, however, comes from a potentially surprising source: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's novel-length poem, *Aurora Leigh* (1857).

In addition to offering meditations on realist art and artistry, *Aurora Leigh* treats of realist subject matter and thus defied contemporary beliefs about poetic form. Delacroix, for example, refused to even consider the possibility of applying the "measured language" needed for poetry to the "earthy" subjects of realism (363). Writing slightly before Delacroix but sharing his sentiments, David Masson argues in *British Novelists and Their Styles* (1859) that poetic verse should be reserved for "high, serious, and very heroic themes," leaving "to prose such as are of plainer or rougher, or less sublime and impassioned character" (9). But as early as 1848, an anonymous essay in the *Christian Remembrancer* grants the prose novel superiority in handling those "long threads of commonplace doing and suffering which now make up the web of...existence," rendering obsolete "the Epic and the Drama" (qtd. in Maitzen 23). Poetry and realism simply were not compatible in the minds of many artists and critics.

Poetry, furthermore, could have its counterpart in painting, as John Ruskin indicates in *Modern Painters III* (1856).[2] In "Of the Received Opinions Touching the 'Grand Style'," he refers to the eighteenth-century painter, Joshua Reynolds, who declared that "in painting, as in poetry, the highest style has the least of common nature in it" (290). Ruskin takes umbrage with Reynolds' notions of what constitutes "poetic" art:

> Reynolds had no right to speak lightly or contemptuously of imitative art....It is *not* true that Poetry does not concern herself with minute details. It is *not* true that high art seeks only the Invariable. It is *not* true that imitative art is an easy thing. It is *not* true that the faithful rendering of nature is an employment in which "the slowest intellect is likely to succeed the best." (295)

The elements that Ruskin defends in poetry here are those generally associated in the nineteenth-century with realism: imitation, concern with minute details, and faithful rendering of nature. Those "Invariable" qualities, with "the least of common nature in [them]," were the essence of poetry for Reynolds; in the nineteenth-century, critics would

[2] *Oxford English Dictionary* cites *Modern Painters III* as the first source in English to use realism in the context of painting and literature. Caroline Levine considers Ruskin an "inaugural theorist of realism" (12).

place these "Poetic" traits under the rubric of "idealism" and use it to oppose realism. Reynolds' beliefs about "Poetic" art thus persist through those of Delacroix and others who used terms like "poetry" and "idealism" to denote realism's opposite. As will be seen, however, Barrett Browning held views similar to Ruskin's in that the "ideal" language of poetry could be used for a detailed and realist rendering of "common nature."

As Ruskin suggests, though, realism and idealism never did quite stand in opposition, a point reiterated most influentially in George Levine's *The Realistic Imagination* (1983). In fact, Levine shows that many Victorians never considered the two opposed, quoting George Henry Lewes for support: "The opposite of realism, Lewes had said around mid-century, was not idealism but 'Falsism'" (10).[3] As Levine argues, "the truth realism sought was replacing the transcendent reality that had dominated knowledge until the Renaissance, but that truth could lead out from the particular once more to an alternative transcendence" (11). That realism served to replace an earlier epistemology is hardly surprising or new; this function of realism is central to Ian Watt's seminal definition in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). However, what often gets overlooked in discussions of realism are the ways it seeks "alternative transcendence." Notions of transcendence, suggesting the spiritual or the sublime and a rising above the familiar, would seem to belong strictly to idealism. Yet, as Levine says, realism's focus on "the particular, under pressure of intense and original seeing, gives back the intensities normally associated with larger scale, traditional forms" (13). One example of a "larger scale, traditional" form, of course, would be the epic poem, which, again, many nineteenth-century critics considered incompatible with realism, but which Barrett Browning nonetheless appropriates for her frequently realist purposes in *Aurora Leigh*.

Certainly, the tension existing between ostensibly realist and non-realist forms in *Aurora Leigh* has already been the subject of critical debate. For example, Mary S. Pollock argues that *Aurora Leigh* engages in a dialogue between feminism and a more "masculinist" tradition of literary realism (45-48). And Marjorie Stone similarly argues that Barrett Browning negotiates expectations of gender and form to create "a thoroughly 'novelized' epic, in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense of the term" (104). More recently, Eric Eisner argues that *Aurora Leigh* succeeds "not so much by fusing realism and idealism but by running the formal codes of realism and idealism *against one another*" (90). However, I argue that

[3] Ruskin notes in *Modern Painters III*, the "unfortunate distinction between Idealism and Realism which leads most people to imagine the Ideal opposed to the Real, and therefore *false*" (226).

Aurora Leigh sits more at the forefront of debates on realism than has been credited in critical scholarship. Rather than writing strictly from a feminist margin—although feminism, as will be seen, is central to Barrett Browning's realism—or playfully running together ostensibly opposed codes, *Aurora Leigh* speaks very much from the center of ongoing debates on realism, showing that its "formal codes" were never really separate.

Indeed, while Barrett Browning often conceived of *Aurora Leigh* in terms of hybridity or fusion, her aim was to reveal the inseparability of perceived opposites. In an 1855 letter, she says she was working on a story "opposing the practical & the ideal lifes & showing how the practical & real (so called) is but the eternal evolution of the ideal & spiritual—that is, from *inner to outer*...whether in life, morals, or art" (Barrett Browning xix). Although somewhat defensive about her beliefs, she nonetheless refers to herself as a realist in several letters to Ruskin.[4] In an 1855 letter to him, she refers to herself as "a *realist* in an out-of-the-world sense—accepting matter as a means (no matter for it otherwise!)" (Kenyon 214-15); and in an 1859 letter she says, "I am what many people call a 'mystic,' and what I myself call a 'realist,' because I consider that every step of the foot or stroke of the pen here has some real connection with and result in the hereafter" (299). Although it might be argued that she proposed a qualified or eccentric model of realism, her understanding of the concept is very much in line with George Levine's understanding of it as a quest for a "world beyond words" which is both "meaningful and good" (22). Also, Barrett Browning offered her definition at a time when realism was still very much an emergent concept; if by her own account she is a bit unorthodox, there actually was very little orthodoxy at this point.[5]

The emergent nature of realism is shown in the way *Aurora Leigh*'s artist characters adapt their styles throughout the course of the narrative.[6] At the start of the poem, both Aurora and Carrington practice strictly what George Levine calls "larger scale, traditional forms" (13). Aurora is inspired to emulate the classical poetry she reads in her father's

[4] Ruskin greatly admired *Aurora Leigh*, naming it, in *The Elements of Drawing* (1857), "the finest poem written in any language this century" (Kenyon 268).

[5] Most critics were reluctant to use the term at all. Gustave Courbet, one of the first to whom it was applied, hoped it was "a label which...no one is expected to understand fully" (372). William Michael Rossetti wrote of realism as "the thing, less easily defined than apprehended" (98-99). And David Masson lamented, "The terms Real and Ideal have been so run upon of late, that their repetition begins to nauseate; but they must be kept, for all that, till better equivalents are provided" (248).

[6] Although the word "artist" generally suggests a worker exclusively in the visual arts, here it refers equally to Aurora the poet and her painter friend, Vincent Carrington. For instance, at the beginning of Book II, Aurora refers to herself as a "woman and artist" (II.4).

library. Carrington, on the other hand, works in the neo-classical tradition that would have been taught through his formal, academic training, in the sort of "grand style" privileged by Reynolds.[7] Both Aurora and Carrington, however, come to embrace realism for its ability to capture essential truths about its subjects, which further suggests realism's inseparability from idealism. Furthermore, the courses these characters take reinforce our understanding of Barrett Browning's own attitudes toward realism and the ways it manifests in *Aurora Leigh*.[8]

Realism in *Aurora Leigh* translates fairly equally across the verbal and visual arts and pertains more to subject matter than to strictly formal differences. The text itself crosses fluidly between the verbal and the visual; through Aurora's use of vivid imagery and descriptions of art objects and her ongoing dialogues with Carrington, it shows a mutual interaction between the work of verbal and visual artists.[9] *Aurora Leigh* does not prioritize formal structure, instead trusting "spirit...to make the form" (V.224-25). And the ease *Aurora Leigh* assumes in crossing between painting and literature actually reflects the general critical approach of the time. While some critics wondered if realism was more suited to certain forms than others, many moved easily between references to painting and literature. For example, when Masson refers to "a growth among our novel-writers of the wholesome spirit of Realism," he adds, "To borrow a phrase from a kindred art, a spirit of conscious Pre-Raphaelitism has invaded this species of literature" (257).[10] For the most part, whether addressing painting, literature or both, concerns about realism stemmed largely from how much of "everyday life" was appropriate to "Art," broadly conceived.

Aurora's own first forays into the world of Art are actually far removed from the public debates concerning such emergent topics as realism. Taught by her aunt at Leigh Hall,

[7] The Pre-Raphaelites famously opposed such rigid training, as did the French Realists, for whom neo-classical norms were even more strictly imposed (see Morris 52, 76; also Nochlin, *Realism* (1971)). Many British authors wrote critically of formal, academic training, ranging in tone from the hostility of Ruskin's many essays or W. Holman Hunt's *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (1905) to the humorous ridicule used in Thackeray's *The Newcomes* (1855) or Wilkie Collins's *Hide and Seek* (1854).

[8] "[T]he heroine's development as a woman and as an artist shows how Barrett Browning's own poetic theory and practice evolved from romanticism to realism" (Pollock 46). Losano argues that "paying particular attention to scenes of aesthetic judgment in fiction allows us to decode a writer's theories of representation" (7).

[9] W.J.T. Mitchell, drawing from Foucault, argues that verbal and visual media share an "infinite relation" and "there are no 'purely' visual and verbal arts" (5). Mitchell provides a thorough and provocative account of issues at stake in comparative studies of image and text. Also, see Losano for a good overview of recent "interart criticism on the Victorian novel and on Victorian culture more generally" (5).

[10] Although the similarities between realism and Pre-Raphaelitism may not be apparent to us, many Victorians saw a connection. William Michael Rossetti, for one, considered the PRB to be the direct, British counterpart to the French Realists. See Marcia Werner (2005) for more on the subject.

Aurora initially practices the most mundane of the domestic arts and crafts; as several critics have mentioned, these were strictly to be practiced in the home and not for commercial competition. Aurora does not rank herself as particularly skilled in these activities, nor does she think very highly of them:

> We sew, sew, prick our fingers, dull our sight,
> Producing what? A pair of slippers, sir,
> To put on when you're weary—or a stool
> To stumble over and vex you … 'curse that stool!'
> Or else at best, a cushion, where you lean
> And sleep, and dream of something we are not
> But would be for your sake. Alas, alas!
> This hurts most, this—that, after all, we are paid
> The worth of our work, perhaps… (I.457-65)

If women are not valued for this sort of artistic labor, it is because this labor is not intended to produce much of value; rather than to earn a livelihood, it is basically "make work," intended to keep a bored housewife busy. In time, her productions will no longer even be of use in the home, as supply comes to outweigh demand, and stools become just another object to "stumble over." Worst of all, the apparently worthless nature of this work leads to alienation and mutual contempt between husband and wife. In the end, Aurora sees this role of domestic artisan as unbearably stultifying, one that would make her unappreciated for who she really is and fill her with self-loathing.

This monotonous upbringing does have its advantages, as in trying to escape it she discovers her true passion in the world of books—from which she sets her mind on a poetic vocation. Thus she will come to place her work in the public sphere with professional artists like Carrington. Compared to the relatively stable if lackluster demands of the domestic sphere, competition in the public sphere requires an artist not only to be familiar with emerging trends in representational practices but also to lead the way in terms of innovation. Initially, Aurora seems uninterested in contemporary practices in representational art and is actually drawn to a traditional view of poetry as a means to express the otherworldly—perhaps in rebellion against her domestic education or because, as she tells Romney, having

been "kept in long-clothes past the age to walk" (II.332), her isolation prevents her from knowing about contemporary issues.

Given Aurora's affection for the classical authors discovered in her father's library, it makes sense that she initially accepts the more traditional view of poetry as a vehicle for idealist concepts. Poets, Aurora says, are:

> …the only truth-tellers now left to God,
> The only speakers of essential truth,
> Opposed to relative, comparative,
> And temporal truths… (I.859-62)

Valorizing the poet's ability to express "essential truth," Aurora here is much more of an idealist than a realist. In fact, she seems openly contemptuous of the "relative, comparative and temporal truths" that concern realists:

> … while your common men
> Lay telegraphs, gauge railroads, reign, reap, dine,
> And dust the flaunty carpets of the world
> For kings to walk on, or our presidents,
> The poet suddenly will catch them up
> With his voice like a thunder—'This is soul,
> This is life, this word is being said in heaven,
> Here's God down on us! What are you about?' (I.869-76)

Common men, telegraphs and railroads all seem like the stuff of realism: indeed, a very detailed account of Aurora's trip through France to Italy via rail will feature prominently in Book VII; yet Aurora here pronounces that these all amount to naught in the eyes of God. Steeped in the literature of the past, isolated at Leigh Hall from the concerns of the modern world, Aurora sees herself as part of a tradition that proclaims the timeless and the ideal to the masses, well above petty, everyday concerns.

Aurora Leigh, however, is a *Künstlerroman*, and these early beliefs will be slowly tempered with an understanding of the importance of the contemporary and the material. As will be seen, this follows largely from her venturing out into the "real" world, where she must subsequently earn a living and directly face the everyday sufferings of "ordinary" people.

And Aurora does have considerable difficulty actually *looking* at the suffering of the masses, especially when at their most ugly or repulsive.[11] However, she must train herself to focus more on contemporary, "worldly," and even painful subjects in order not only to successfully compete as a poet of the nineteenth century but to do any real, social good.[12]

Although she has earlier encounters with the real, it is halfway through the poem, in Book V, that Aurora truly begins to articulate a realist aesthetic in a passage that contains the famous injunction for poets to represent "Their age, not Charlemagne's" (V.203). Indeed, this passage is often cited as Aurora's (and Barrett Browning's) call to leave off idealized depictions of the past in favor of empiricist (i.e. realist) depictions of the present. But even then her theory of realism is coded in terms of the classical mythology familiar from her upbringing, as when she says she cannot believe

> That Homer's heroes measured twelve feet high.
> They were but men—his Helen's hair turned gray
> Like any plain Miss Smith's who wears a front;
> And Hector's infant whimpered at a plume.[13] (V.146-49)

This formulation essentially takes the idealized figures out of classical mythology and recasts them as realist subjects, ordinary men and women.[14] Barrett Browning had planned to adapt a number of classical and Christian subjects to a modern treatment.[15] This blending of "ideal" and "real" reflects the aforementioned beliefs she held about realist art. In *Aurora Leigh*, she opts for realistic depictions of the present age that nonetheless retain a concern with the timeless and the eternal and show her protagonist advocating the same. Again, realism did not necessarily preclude idealism but merely formulated it in more particularized terms.

[11] Eisner puts this well, saying that Aurora has a "conflicted relationship to the real" (93).
[12] As Masson put it, the "spirit of Realism" (or "Pre-Raphaelitism") was marked by "an increased willingness to accept, as worthy of study and representation, facts and objects accounted common, disagreeable, or even painful" (259).
[13] Ruskin also refers to this episode in *Modern Painters III*, using it as an example to rebuke Reynolds' notion that poetry "has the least of common nature in it."
[14] The Pre-Raphaelites did something similar with their painterly treatments of characters from mythology and literature. They also expressed admiration for Barrett Browning, placing her amongst their list of "Immortals" (Hunt I: 159; see also 159n10).
[15] For one example, Barrett Browning planned to rewrite *Prometheus Bound* from a contemporary perspective (Bush 267).

One of the most striking realist passages occurs in Book III of the poem, when Aurora visits Marian Erle's apartment in Saint Margaret's Court.[16] Significantly, Book III provides the first glimpse of Aurora living on her own, seven years after leaving Leigh Hall. This episode both follows the description of her early professional struggles and provides one of the poem's first direct encounters with the squalor of Victorian London:

> A sick child, from an ague-fit,
> Whose wasted right hand gambled 'gainst his left
> With an old brass button in a blot of sun,
> Jeered weakly at me as I passed across
> The uneven pavement; while a woman, rouged
> Upon the angular cheek-bones, kerchief torn,
> Thin dangling locks, and flat lascivious mouth,
> Cursed at a window both ways, in and out,
> By turns some bed-rid creature and myself—(III.760-68)

This passage seems to exemplify the main traits of realism: a detailed description—as with the brass button and the rouged, angular cheek-bones—of a scene taken out of contemporary, everyday life. It does not falsify, make picturesque or otherwise soften the painful nature of the setting at hand but shows the sick child and the rather crass woman—most likely a prostitute, given the "flat lascivious mouth"—in a very frank manner.

The poem's description of this woman is also rendered rather effectively in a realist style through her speech. For example, her sharp accusations ("We cover up our face from doing good, / As if it were our purse!" (III.772-73)), sexual innuendo ("What brings you here, / My lady? is't to find my gentleman / Who visits his tame pigeon in the eaves?" (III.773-75)), and cruel threats ("Our cholera catch you with its cramps and spasms, / And tumble up your good clothes, veil and all, / And turn your whiteness dead-blue" (III.776-78)) all seem accurately to reflect her social class and disposition. Of course, people do not normally speak in blank verse, but the form here is largely transparent. The general tone and content suits this woman who "must have been most miserable, / To be so cruel" (III.781-82). While Aurora is

[16] The poem is less successful in its treatment of Marian herself. Without speculating too much on the reasons (likely tied to anticipated audience reactions), it seems fair to say the poem fails to follow through on its realist vision with Marian.

shocked by the harshness of the woman's speech, she is also moved to pity and tosses money on the street, which is snatched up by an ugly mob that had been lurking in the shadows. The point of depicting such squalor, difficult as it is for Aurora to look upon—as the woman at the window rightly observes—is to show the degree of suffering endured by the lower classes. More importantly, such depictions show the spiritual corruption caused by suffering: the cruelty and vulgarity of the woman at the window, the greed of the mob. Rather than being an impartial view of "low life," realism here is employed to show how society has deviated from an ideal.[17]

If Aurora is not exactly scientific in her observations, she does aspire towards a certain degree of clinical detachment. She realizes that she must make an effort to look at some of the less pleasant aspects of life. For example, while observing street life in Paris, she confesses:

> These crowds are very good
> For meditation (when we are very strong)
> Though love of beauty makes us timorous,
> And draws us backward from the coarse town-sights
> To count the daisies upon dappled fields… (VI.136-40)

She then finds herself envying the objective neutrality of "men of science, osteologists / And surgeons" who do not flinch at the ugly or mundane aspects of reality (VI.172-73). For even a poor beggar boy

> Contains himself both flowers and firmaments
> And surging seas and aspectable stars
> And all that we would push him out of sight
> In order to see nearer... (VI.194-97)

Aurora Leigh—from its Neo-Platonic and Christian (i.e. idealist) basis—claims that all reality is a manifestation of a single, divine presence. Therefore, one should acquire the strength and discipline to look at *all* manifestations of the divine, even those that are not necessarily picturesque, in order to better understand and appreciate it. This may well lead to

[17] For example, Ian Watt says that French Realists "asserted that… their novels… were the product of a more dispassionate and scientific scrutiny of life than attempted before" (215). Aurora forces herself to look at harsh realities, but she is not dispassionate.

discouragement and away from joy or pleasure. As Aurora says, "These crowds are very good / For mediation (when we are very strong)." What is gained by such mediation may not be so much a solution to human suffering but simply wisdom and understanding. Paradoxically, the dispassionate, clinical gaze leads here to greater sympathy and compassion, if not to greater optimism or hope for human advancement.

The realism of *Aurora Leigh* is thus wary of rationalist ideas of progress, maintaining instead the fundamentally static, immutable universe associated more conventionally with idealism. Perhaps the poem's worldview is best expressed in the opening line: "Of writing books there is no end" (I.1), a quotation from *Ecclesiastes*, which professes that nothing changes and that, while wisdom leads to suffering, it is at least better than folly. Certainly, Aurora's biggest objections to Romney's social projects are that he believes human nature can be changed through science and "material ease" (II.477). While Aurora does advocate for the poor, she does not believe it is enough to simply improve people's living conditions if they do not also understand the importance of the spirit working through their lives. Yet, the allusion to *Ecclesiastes* also suggests an infinitely detailed universe, one whose particulars can be arranged into an endless array of specific stories. Herein lies the decidedly realist vision of the poem, which is mapped over its more conventionally idealist foundation.

Just as the poem weds matter and spirit, however, it also weds visual and verbal. Indeed, the very first few sentences of *Aurora Leigh* indicate there will be a casual overlap between verbal and visual representation throughout. Aurora says her purpose is to "write my story for a better self / As when you paint your portrait for a friend" (I.4-5). The implication, reinforced by the casual manner in which she slips between references to writing and painting, is that visual and verbal representations are interchangeable. Aurora will be both writing an autobiographical poem and painting a self-portrait through language.

Yet, there are also ways in which verbal and visual are not strictly interchangeable but actually complement each other, as with the portrait of Aurora's mother. The portrait shows the mother's "throat and hands," painted after her death, rising ghostlike out of a festive dress substituted at the last minute for the funereal shroud:

> That swan-like supernatural white life
> Just sailing upward from the red stiff silk
> Which seemed to have no part in it nor power
> To keep it from quite breaking out of bounds. (I.139-42)

While this composition is rendered in visual terms, it nonetheless denies the reader a clear picture of Aurora's mother. The "throat and hands," which seem to float like a mist out of the lifeless shell of the red dress, give no indication of personally recognizable features. In becoming fluid and amorphous, her mother's body threatens to break down into a visual abstraction. Over time, however, it loses even the abstractly visual:

> In years, I mixed, confused, unconsciously,
> Whatever I last read or heard or dreamed,
> Abhorrent, admirable, beautiful,
> Pathetical, or ghastly, or grotesque,
> With still the face…which did not therefore change,
> But kept that mystic level of all forms… (I.147-52)

Aurora's mother is now represented entirely through words, a list of modifiers ("Abhorrent, admirable, beautiful") connected to no seeable object. She does remain, in some place in time, unchanged in her original form, but she has also joined into "that mystic level of all forms." Visual and verbal work together here to help express the poem's realism. Recall that Barrett Browning, in her letters to Ruskin, saw little difference between realism and "what many people call" mysticism. Aurora's realism similarly assumes a "mystic level of all forms," which can nonetheless have an array of specific, concrete, and highly visualized forms mapped over it. Through the example of her mother's portrait, Aurora uses visual and verbal representation to depict both the specific and the essential nature of her subject.

Of course, Aurora is a poet and her visual descriptions must always be rendered through verbal language, whereas it might be argued that Carrington, the poem's painter, works in a more directly visual medium. Carrington and his paintings exist only through the poem's verbal representations; even in the case of actual paintings similar to those attributed to Carrington in the poem, it seems likely that no object ever truly escapes the field of signification.[18] So, whether in poetry or in painting, verbal and visual elements are always at play.[19] *Aurora Leigh* thus uses the descriptions of Carrington's paintings to argue that it is the

[18] See Mitchell's *Picture Theory* and the introduction to Jennifer Green-Lewis' *Framing the Victorians* (1995). Also see n9.
[19] See n9.

treatment of the subject and not so much the medium itself—whether ostensibly more verbal or more visual—that defines realism.

Indeed, while Carrington and Aurora work in different media, the poem shows them both beginning from similar theoretical and artistic positions. Aurora first meets Carrington during the formative years in which she discovers poetry. This "rising painter," who "holds that, paint a body well, / You paint a soul by implication" (I.1095-098), shares Aurora's fundamental belief that external forms (bodies) develop from internal essences (souls).[20] Like Aurora, Carrington works in a classically inspired tradition; the interplay of verbal and visual throughout the poem parallels that of Aurora and Carrington in the development of their crafts. Ultimately, both move away from idealism based in neo-classicism and towards a burgeoning realism.

In fact, it is Carrington's plans for a neo-classically inspired painting that cause Aurora to rethink her own art and artistry. Near the beginning of Book III, she receives a letter from Carrington, informing her of his plans to paint the Greek mythological figure, Danae, being impregnated by Jove (Zeus) in the form of a shower of gold. He plans to use Aurora's friend, Kate Ward, as a model for Danae. In his letter, he explains that he wants Aurora's "good counsel" (III.101) on some preliminary sketches he has made:

> …overbold and hot,
> Both arms a-flame to meet her wishing Jove
> Halfway, and burn him faster down; the face
> And breasts upturned and straining, the loose locks
> All glowing with the anticipated gold. (III.122-26)

In the second sketch, Jove has already arrived, and

> She lies here—flat upon her prison floor,
> The long hair swathed about her to the heel
> Like wet seaweed. You dimly see her through
> The glittering haze of that prodigious rain,
> Half blotted out of nature by a love
> As heavy as fate... (III.128-33)

[20] As indicated in a footnote to the Oxford World's Classics edition, this philosophy also applies to the eponymous hero of Robert Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi" (n332).

Clearly, both contain sexually charged imagery, and Carrington seems mainly interested in the erotic aspects of the Danae myth. In fact, Victorian men often used the Danae myth to denote prurient fantasies about female sexuality.[21] At the same time, however, Victorian women used the myth themselves to indicate male prejudice.[22] By using Kate Ward to depict Danae, Carrington reveals the chauvinist aspect of the neo-classical ideal.[23] Pollock is certainly correct that the realism of *Aurora Leigh* is connected to Barrett Browning's feminism; however, it is used more to challenge pre-existing forms than emergent ones. As will be seen, the real Kate Ward will make a better subject for a painting than Danae, the idealized figure from Greek mythology.

Aurora tolerates Carrington, however, and treats his request for her "counsel" with gentle mockery. His letter concludes by saying that he prefers the latter of his two sketches, as it "indicates / More passion" (III.134-35). Aurora agrees but with an irony that shows an awareness of its chauvinistic implications: "Surely. Self is put away, / And calm with abdication. She is Jove, / And no more Danae—greater thus" (III. 135-37). Danae has been obliterated and supplanted by Jove, in an act that foreshadows the sexual attack on Marian Erle. However, Aurora follows her initial response to Carrington's sketches by reinterpreting them in a way he did not necessarily intend:

> ...Perhaps
> The painter symbolizes unaware
> Two states of the recipient artist-soul,
> One, forward, personal, wanting reverence,
> Because aspiring only. We'll be calm,
> And know that, when indeed our Joves come down,
> We all turn stiller than we have ever been. (III.137-43)

[21] See Djikstra (369-71). Similarly, the narrator of D. G. Rossetti's "Jenny" (1870) refers to the prostitute he has just paid in gold as "A Danae for a moment" (line 379).

[22] Jane Eyre objects to Rochester treating her as "a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily round me" (354-55). The reference to Danae in *Aurora Leigh* echoes Tennyson's *The Princess*: "Now lies the Earth all Danae to the stars" (167). Gossin holds that Tennyson's poem is latently anti-feminist, as the "Danae allusion appears at the crucial moment when the Princess realizes her utopian project of female education is doomed" (78). Stone suggests "Aurora's insistence...that the sole work of artists is to represent their age...can in part be viewed as Barrett Browning's corrective response to Tennyson's failure to do so in his 'fairy tale'" (116).

[23] The neo-classical art he creates in the tradition of history painting was considered, for a time, the epitome of masculine creativity (Martinez 621).

Aurora also prefers the moment of impregnation represented in the second of Carrington's sketches to the moment of anticipation represented in the first. In Aurora's formulation, though, Jove represents divine inspiration and not sexual penetration. She rewrites Carrington's project to support her own poetic and artistic vision, diffusing its more licentious implications by shifting her focus. After a pause in her train of thought, represented literally by a line break, she concludes, "Kind Vincent Carrington. I'll let him come / He talks of Florence—and may say a word / Of something as it chanced seven years ago" (III.144-46). Her re-reading enables her to appreciate his painting, while he provides a connection to her past, her childhood in Italy, her days at Leigh Hall, and Romney.

The nostalgia and longing prompted by Carrington's letter leads her to reflect more on her own career as an artist, which has largely been a disappointment up to this point. Although she was "miserable" at Leigh Hall, she says she "seem[s] to have missed a blessing ever since" (III.149-50). Most notably, her literary career has not flourished, and she feels she has only produced hackwork: "I did some excellent things indifferently, / Some bad things excellently. Both were praised, / The latter loudest" (III.205-07). The only readers this work inspires are those with an overly romantic orientation who lavish undeserved praise on poet and poetess alike. Aurora thinks less of her readers for liking what she considers substandard work and less of herself for drawing admiration from such an undiscriminating audience. On coming to this realization, she destroys her works in progress, reinforcing her belief that her poems had little life in them from the start.

While she is disappointed with her poetic efforts thus far, she believes she still has the ability to write a truly remarkable work of art. Much like the figure in Carrington's first sketch of Danae, Aurora has been burning with a desire for artistic release. She also expresses these feelings through references to mythology:

> And yet I felt it in me where it burnt,
> Like those hot fire-seeds of creation held
> In Jove's clenched palm before the worlds were sown –
> But I—I was not Juno even! ... (III.251-54)

The feelings of artistic impotence Aurora expresses here shed further light on her preference for and interpretation of Carrington's second Danae sketch. Aurora's frustrations are exacerbated by the fact that she has spent most of her time and effort writing commercial

works in prose: "In England no one lives by verse that lives; / And, apprehending, I resolved by prose / To make a space to sphere my living verse" (III.307-09). Aurora's ambition—high minded verse expressed through a reference to the world-building powers of gods and goddesses—is contrasted with the tedious work she must do to earn a living. And while some of her readers claim that her poetic voice can still be detected in her prose works, she disavows anything poetic about them. In short, what Aurora does produce is only to earn a living, and what she wants to produce remains only in her imagination.

Carrington's chauvinistic series of sketches thus become an illustration for Aurora's own frustrated longing and desires for artistic release. Through Carrington's description and Aurora's reinterpretation of his proposed painting, *Aurora Leigh* explores a number of the relations that exist between verbal and visual in the poem. Much like the portrait of Aurora's mother, the images of Danae—rendered solely through language—are dissected and rewritten to tell the story of Aurora's career as a poet. This new narrative, of a nineteenth-century poet struggling to earn a living writing magazine articles and encyclopedia entries, is also much closer to a realist narrative. And the traces of poetry in her prose suggest the hybrid form of *Aurora Leigh* itself. However, Aurora is still imagining her existence in terms of Greek mythology and is not satisfied with these hybrid writings. Although the "hot fire-seeds of creation" have been planted, Aurora and Carrington have yet to create their realist masterworks.

The change in Carrington's work is described in a letter he sends to Aurora in Book VII, after her move to Florence. This letter refers back to the earlier one and the visit Aurora made to his studio after reading it:

> Remember what a pair of topaz eyes
> You once detected, turned against the wall,
> That morning in my London painting-room;
> The face half sketched, and slurred; the eyes alone!
> But you…you caught them up with yours, and said
> "Kate Ward's eyes, surely." … (VII.578-83)

Kate Ward was originally intended to sit for Danae and at this point Carrington had only finished her eyes—with an admirable precision, it seems; it is appropriate that Kate Ward's eyes are what sparked Carrington's new artistic direction. As the saying goes, "the eyes are

the window to the soul," and it seems fitting that the eyes could function as a symbol for essential self in *Aurora Leigh*. However, once rendering Kate Ward's eyes on canvas, Carrington realizes that he is covetous of their owner:

> … Now I own the truth:
> I had thrown them there to keep them safe from Jove,
> They would so naughtily find out their way
> To both the heads of both my Danaes
> Where just it made me mad to look at them. (VII.583-87)

He can no longer bear the thought of casting Kate Ward's eyes, the symbol of her essential self, in the body of Danae, where she will fall prey to Jove's lust. In fact, he becomes a bit obsessed with those eyes and can no longer proceed as planned:

> Such eyes! I could not paint or think of eyes
> But those—and so I flung them into paint
> And turned them to the wall's care. Ay, but now
> I've let them out, my Kate's: I've painted her
> (I change my style and leave mythologies)… (VII.588-92)

Admittedly, the rescue narrative invoked at the end here is still a part of Victorian paternalistic attitudes, but this certainly seems an improvement on Carrington's earlier disposition. By "letting out" her eyes from the canvas, he liberates Kate from his jealousy and imprisonment of her. His letter also includes praise of Aurora as an artistic equal, suggesting further that he has been influenced by her feminism.

Most importantly, though, he has left off painting *mythologies* and has instead painted the real Kate Ward:

> A half-length portrait, in a hanging cloak
> Like one you wore once; 'tis a little frayed—
> I pressed too for the nude harmonious arm –
> But she, she'd have her way, and have her cloak… (VII.595-98)

The "frayed" cloak instead of "the nude harmonious arm" further marks a shift towards realism from neo-classicism. The fraying shows signs of everyday wear and tear, whereas the

other harkens to the idealized forms of Greek statuary and history painting. It also shows a less sexualized attitude towards his subject. This is not a painting of an idealized figure from mythology but of a real, "flesh and blood" woman. To dispel worries that he is now merely oppressing Kate as a domineering husband instead of as a vulgar artist, Carrington asserts:

> She has your [Aurora's] books by heart more than my words,
> And quotes you up against me until I'm pushed
> Where, three months since, her eyes were: nay, in fact,
> Nought satisfied her but to make me paint
> Your last book folded in her dimpled hands
> Instead of my brown palette as I wished... (VII.603-08)

The substitute of the book for the palette is another symbolic gesture, replacing Carrington's influence over Kate with Aurora's (and again showing the interchangeability of painting and poetry). It also adds a narrative element to the painting, as it alludes to the story of Aurora's influence over Carrington and Kate Ward. While this influence seems to have reformed Carrington, it also seems to keep Kate free from his control; indeed, Kate worships Aurora more than Carrington. Carrington's painting of Kate Ward shows the influence of Aurora's feminism to move him towards realism.

This process also causes Aurora to reflect on her own artistic development. Indeed, his letter carries praise of her most recent publication and news that it has become a critical and popular success in England. Barrett Browning's juxtaposing of these two works suggests that both her artist characters have reached a similar maturity. Aurora even connects herself to Carrington in her reflections, saying they both understand the "twofold world" (VII. 762), in which an artist

> Holds firmly by the natural, to reach
> The spiritual beyond it—fixes still
> The type with mortal vision, to pierce through,
> With eyes immortal, to the antetype
> Some call the ideal—better called the real...
> [...]... Ay, Carrington
> Is glad of such a creed: an artist must,

> Who paints a tree, a leaf, a common stone
> With just his hand, and finds it suddenly
> A-piece with and conterminous to his soul..." (VII.779-98)

Certainly, this passage echoes the statements Barrett Browning made on realism in her letters to Ruskin—the artist's rendition of physical forms concerns parts of an infinitely varied but connected whole. In the case of Carrington's painting, the "real" Kate Ward captures much better a timeless ideal than if she were painted as the mythological figure of Danae, such exaggeration being not so much idealism as a type of "Falsism." Created through direct, empirical observation, "Kate Ward" is not Danae but the "typical" woman of the nineteenth-century—itself a type of fictional construct, but one produced through a realist treatment. Aurora's masterwork is presumably on par with *Aurora Leigh*, also presented as Aurora's work, which is similarly populated with realist characters. Carrington's painting of Kate Ward is thus analogous both to Aurora's poetry and the realist vision of *Aurora Leigh* as a whole.

There is no need for Carrington to idealize his model by turning her into Danae because she is already, in reality, an ideal type of "woman." This realist representation grants Kate more autonomy. Representing her in an idealized form, on the other hand, prevents Carrington from seeing her as she is, just as overlooking a poor beggar boy in the streets might cause Aurora to misrepresent humanity as whole. In learning to more closely observe their environments and remain true to what they see, both move closer to the realist style gaining ascendancy in the nineteenth-century. However, both also remain inflected by their classical and neo-classical influences and work not only with the world of forms but also with a world of ideals behind those forms. *Aurora Leigh* thus uses its artist figures to suggest an aesthetic theory that best represents the infinite relationships between the ostensibly polar opposites of inner and outer, word and image, or spiritual and material. If realism is considered by some to be applicable only with the latter items in that lists of pairings, it was not so strictly delineated for Barrett Browning or many of her contemporaries.

University of Florida, Gainesville

Works Cited

Anonymous. "Review of *Jane Eyre*." 1848. *The Victorian Art of Fiction*. Ed. Rohen Maitzen. Ontario: Broadview P, 2009: 17-26.

Armstrong, Nancy. *Fiction in the Age of Photography*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999.

Barrett Browning, Elizabeth. *Aurora Leigh*. 1857. Ed. Kerry McSweeney. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Ed. Richard Nemesvari. Ontario: Broadview, 2000.

Bush, Douglas. *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry*. New York: Pageant, 1957.

Courbet, Gustave. "Statement on Realism." Harrison, et.al. 372.

Delacroix, Eugene. "February 22, 1860." Harrison, et.al. 363.

Dijkstra, Bram. *Idols of Perversity*. Oxford: Oxford, UP, 1986.

Eisner, Eric. "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Energies of Fandom." *Victorian Review* 33.2 (2007): 85-102.

Gossin, Pamela. "'All Danae to the Stars': Nineteenth-Century Representations of Women in the Cosmos." *Victorian Studies* 40.1 (1996): 65-96.

Harrison, Charles, Paul Wood, and Jaison Gaiger, eds. *Art in Theory 1815-1900: an Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

Hunt, William Holman. *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. 2 Vols. London: Macmillan, 1905.

Israel, Kali. *Names and Stories: Emilia Dilke and Victorian Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

Kenyon, Frederic G., ed. *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*. New York: Macmillan, 1898.

Levine, Caroline. *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2003.

Levine, George. *The Realistic Imagination*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983.

Losano, Antonia. *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2008.

Martinez, Michele. "Women Poets and the Sister Arts in Nineteenth-Century England." *Victorian Poetry* 41.4 (2003): 621-28.

Masson, David. *British Novelists and Their Styles: Being a Critical Sketch of the History of British Prose Fiction*. London: Macmillan, 1859.

Mitchell, W.J.T. *Picture Theory*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1994.

Morris, Pam. *Realism*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Pollock, Mary S. "The Anti-Canonical Realism of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Lord Walter's Wife'." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 29.1 (1996): 43-53.

"Realism." *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2nd ed., 2009. Oxford UP Web. 25 July 2010.

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. "Jenny." 1881. Web. 30 Dec. 2009. <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1881.1stedn.rad.html#p115>.

Rossetti, William Michael. *Fine Art, Chiefly Contemporary*. London: Macmillian, 1867.

Ruskin, John. *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. 39 vols. London: George Allen, 1903-1912.

_____. *Modern Painters III*. Ed. David Barrie. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.

Stone, Marjorie. "Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: 'The Princess' and 'Aurora Leigh.'" *Victorian Poetry* 25.2 (1987): 101-27.

Watt, Ian. *Realism and the Novel Form*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957.

The Making of Criminal Children: Stealing Orphans from *Oliver Twist* to *A Little Princess*

by Tamara Wagner

Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837-38) is arguably the most memorable and influential fictional representation of a Victorian child threatened by the criminal element. In part this may be due to the undisguised sentimentality with which the orphan hero is portrayed, a sentimentality that accounts for the novel's emotional poignancy and furthers its critique of society. The flamboyance of Fagin's den of juvenile thieves, however, has perhaps done as much to canonize *Oliver Twist* as *the* Victorian novel about criminal children. A nest of thieves chiefly made up of children or those who have entered it at a young age (the prostitute Nancy started stealing for Fagin at age five) singles out the novel's central concern with children as both victims and perpetrators of crime. The representation of the criminal underworld is markedly ambiguous. It features within a mystery narrative, an early plot of detection that reworks traditional inheritance plots. Oliver's inheritance and hence the question of his true identity hinge on his escape from any moral taint. The clause in his father's will that makes this stipulation, however, ironically precipitates a criminal conspiracy. At the instigation of his half-brother, Edward Leeford or "Monks," Oliver is to be inducted into a life of crime through a group of exemplary young thieves of his own age. Once having "stained his name with any public act of dishonour, meanness, cowardice, or wrong" (433), Oliver forfeits his inheritance, which would then go to Monks. This peculiar clause forms the crux on which the novel turns. The conspiracy involves a criminal network, showing how this network serves Monks's corrupt interests. In the same vein, the law fails to protect and instead persecutes children. Oliver embodies the sentimentalized suffering of social injustice; yet he also prefigures the more active child criminals and victims of subsequent fiction. In critically engaging with the narrative conventions of dealing with children involved in crime, the novel's inheritance-cum-conspiracy-plot generates a watershed for their literary functions.

Dickens self-consciously wrote against prevailing representations of crime. In his preface to the third edition of *Oliver Twist*, he stressed that the novel was to eschew the paradigms of early-nineteenth-century fiction that invested the "every-day existence of a Thief" with "allurements and fascinations" (457). In contrast, Dickens described criminal lives in all their sordidness. Sparked off by the *Newgate Calendar*, an immensely popular collection of criminal biographies, "Newgate novels" generally painted thieves as "seductive fellows (amiable for the most part), faultless in dress, plump in pocket, choice in horseflesh, bold in bearing, fortunate in gallantry, great at a song, a bottle, pack of cards or dice-box, and fit companies for the bravest." Surely, Dickens emphasized, this was a far cry from "miserable reality." *Oliver Twist* challenged readers' expectations raised by such narratives. And yet, in writing about the criminal underworld of nineteenth-century London, Dickens could hardly ignore the genre's popular paradigms. It was simply the standard fictional mode for presenting criminality. Conversely, ever since the publication of *Oliver Twist*, it has been impossible not to take its self-conscious subversion of the genre into account. This is particularly true when it comes to the representation of children innocently implicated in crime, when they are, like Oliver, coerced into associating with criminals or become, in turn, persecuted by legal authorities.

Throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, novelists have recurred to motifs, tropes, types, and specific dilemmas that are introduced and not necessarily always resolved in Dickens's novel. Oliver's immunity to the sordidness around him has been considered particularly problematic. What is it that makes him immune? Is his resistance part of, or the result of, his inheritance? Is it purely passive? Is his goodness inherent, impervious to environmental influences, and does not this disprove the novel's underpinning social critique? In other words, how does the hero's immunity affect the depiction of crime as a social problem? Far from invalidating *Oliver Twist*'s cultural impact, however, the questions that this seeming incongruity raises have become central to its literary legacy. The novel's structure—its uses of opposites and the series of coincidences that have often been dismissed as unrealistic—testifies to Dickens's awareness of the problem. The Artful Dodger, a notorious juvenile delinquent, and Oliver in his firmly retained innocuousness feature within a spectrum of criminal children that showcases uncertainties about corruption and corruptibility. Their juxtaposition conveys an ambiguity that was central to nineteenth-

century discourses on endangered childhood. Subsequent novelists were to draw on and continually rework Dickens's influential way of tackling the issue.

In order to bring out the larger cultural significance of this literary legacy, this essay consists of two sections: first, an analysis of how *Oliver Twist* takes up and redeploys literary conventions and, second, a reassessment of the cultural afterlife of Dickens's criminal children. In either highlighting or, conversely, dismantling their double role as victims and perpetrators, subsequent novelists create vulnerable child protagonists who are accused of crimes when they are themselves victims. They are coerced into silence, exposed in court, even if only as witnesses, or are by default associated with criminality because of their vulnerable status as (mostly penniless) orphans. Ranging from a capable young witness in one of the domestic chronicles of the religious novelist Charlotte Yonge to the eponymous little princess whose rich imagination is pitted against the paucity of the fraudulent adult business world in Frances Hodgson Burnett's children's book, these exploited child heroes and heroines are less passive and more capable of defending themselves without sounding like the Dodger.

Dodging Corruptibility: Oliver's Inheritance

The dubious attraction of Fagin's den of juvenile thieves has generally been noted as a vexed issue in discussions of the novel, as has the question of Oliver's potential corruptibility or, rather, the ambiguously presented impossibility of it. But what exactly is it that guarantees Oliver's goodness, if there really is a guarantee? Does the novel fully bear out the often alleged concept of innate morality or inherited immunity and, if so, does this necessarily undermine either the narrative trajectory of the conspiracy-plot or the underpinning social criticism? This morality appears to be particularly bourgeois, too, as critics have pointed out from various angles, singling out the foundling from the start. Concentrating on the novel's indisputably conflicted treatment of class issues, Terry Eagleton has railed against the "petty-bourgeois consciousness" he detects in it (128). Eagleton terms Oliver "a negative centre, whose effective absence from his own narrative allows him passively to focus on the socially significant; yet his nullity is also determined by the novel's ideological inability to show him as social *product*." As a result, there is "a contradiction between the social reality mediated by childhood innocence, and the transcendental moral values which that innocence embodies." Since then, however, Dickens scholars have amply asserted "how deeply important illogic, inconsistency, and paradox itself are to Dickens" (Rodensky 42). As Brian Rosenberg has put it in his discussion of "Character and Contradiction in Dickens," ambiguity as well as paradox can be seen as a defining element of Dickens's fiction (147). The two-pronged treatment of destitute children's corruptibility in *Oliver Twist* illustrates how seeming incongruity expresses a number of concerns, both social and literary.

Lisa Rodensky has recently taken up Rosenberg's stress on Dickens "as a novelist of doubt, conflict, and contradiction" to focus on the complexity of Dickens's knowledge and criticism of criminal law (Rosenberg 145). Rodensky draws attention to "the relations between character and conduct, and in turn their relation to criminal responsibility" (47). As the novel alternately pinpoints and sidesteps the question of criminal responsibility, Oliver's immunity rears its head as a recurring problem, one that is integrally related to that of his origins. But this is not so much the result of a sleight-of-hand on Dickens's part—Rodensky speaks of "a Dickensian wobble" (73)—than a major theme in the novel. Its criminals undergo a decisive shift in their characterization as they act, in a series of parallel scenes, as Oliver's opposites. Brian Cheadle notes that, when Sikes is hunted down by a vengeful crowd in a scene that repeats Oliver's persecution by a similar mob, the fears experienced by the "wretched, breathless child" (*OT* 77) are projected onto the murderer, which creates sympathy (Cheadle 315). Similarly, the prostitute Nancy suddenly (and one might well argue, inexplicably) waxes sentimental over Oliver's pretty face and manners, turning her into a different character. She becomes the prostitute with a heart of gold who sees in Oliver a reflection of her own lost innocence. Yet so far, critics who stress the significance of these shifts have concentrated almost exclusively on the adult criminals of the novel, summarily dismissing Oliver in terms similar to Eagleton's, if for a different reason. When "Oliver drops out of our sight almost entirely (and happily since we don't really miss him)...Dickens attends to other characters, all criminal" (Rodensky 35). This completely elides the criminal children as Dickens instead draws attention to the nefarious role models these children are presented with. Sikes's murder of Nancy is indisputably one of the most harrowing scenes. It was one of Dickens's favorites to act out on his reading tours, and this undoubtedly contributed to the novel's lasting fame.

Oliver Twist, however, also created the most famous juvenile delinquent of English literature: the Artful Dodger. Jack Dawkins, the Dodger, is Fagin's star-pupil, the most skillful and hard-working among the juvenile thieves he trains. Oliver is to "make 'em [his]

models, [to] do everything they bid [him], and take their advice in all matters, especially the Dodger's" (72). The two boys form opposing poles in a spectrum of destitute children that includes the workhouse children, Noah Claypole, the bullying charity boy, and also Little Dick, the dying friend at the baby farm for whom rescue comes too late, as well as the young thieves—all illustrations of Oliver's possible fate.[1] In one of the parallel scenes that underscore this spectrum of vulnerable, corruptible children, the Dodger's witty retorts after his arrest are a distorted mirror version of the scene in which Oliver is wrongfully condemned. While Oliver remains speechless and eventually faints, the Dodger prunes himself in an entertaining spectacle. But his cheeky responses to the justice, as he "shuffle[s]" in, "with a rolling gait altogether indescribable," and demands his "priwileges" as an Englishman (367), are preceded by Fagin's flamboyant description of the promised spectacle. It is Fagin who, when his other young pickpockets worry how the Dodger will "stand in the Newgate Calendar," stresses that he should not be regarded "in the light of a victim" but "as the chief actor in a scene of most uncommon and exquisite humour" (363-64). This is a facile strategy of the trainer of juvenile thieves. Scholar Monica Flegel maintains that the description of the following scene of the Dodger dodging questions in court downplays the fact that there is a child on trial here: "though played for laughs, the moment is essentially tragic" (154). Yet by couching the actual trial in Fagin's exaggerated view of the scene as offering the Dodger so "favourable an opportunity of displaying his abilities" (364), Dickens shows that he is not just aware of but indeed capitalizes on the incongruity. As Marah Gubar suggests, the Dodger "fails to live up to his jaunty nickname. Proving himself the least artful in dodging punishment, young Jack Dawkins is caught before any of the other thieves [and] disappears entirely from the narrative, thus belying Fagin's assertion that we should not consider him 'a victim'" (3). "Jack Dawkins—lummy Jack—the Dodger—the Artful Dodger" (*OT* 362) is just another victimized child after all.

Despite his undeniable vitality, in fact, the Dodger's tragic precocity serves to illustrate street-children's lack of a childhood. Dressed like a man, he is "about [Oliver's] own age, but one of the queerest-looking boys that Oliver had ever seen. He was a snub-nosed, flat-

[1] Fagin's thieving boys are "[b]y the plot's subliminal logic…the workhouse boys again, grown older, no longer asking for more but taking it" (Lankford 22). Little Dick is the novel's sentimentalized child angel. He talks of heaven and blesses Oliver (and this despite the fact that it is stated that nobody teaches them to pray). Since Dick is not a mysterious foundling equipped with a gold locket, it is interesting to note that he contrasts with Oliver in that he lacks a spirit that can be roused. In defiance of his circumstances, "nature or inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver's breast" (7). This is what enables him to survive.

browed, common-face boy enough, and as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see; but he had got about him all the airs and manners of a man" (60). Oliver is about ten to eleven years old at the time, and children even younger were tried and punished in court (Jackson 90-91). Despite the undeniable hilarity of the scenes that star the Dodger, Dickens repeatedly foregrounds "miserable reality": a criminal career that involves "no canterings upon moonlight heaths, no merry-makings in the snuggest of all possible caverns, none of the attractions of dress, no embroidery, no lace, no jack-boots, no crimson coats and ruffles" ("Preface" 457-58). Instead, lace is restricted to the "wipes" the boys "produce" by stealing, while Dickens keeps his promise not to "abate one hole in the Dodger's coat." In his jauntiness, the Dodger is nonetheless an intriguing residue of Newgate fiction, while Fagin's speculation on Oliver's potential to become another Dodger complicates and is complicated by the issue of his incorruptibility.

When Dickens set out to attack the Poor Laws of 1834, write against Newgate fiction, and "to show, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance" ("Preface" 457), he clearly had a manifold agenda. For Dickens, the consequent simultaneity of allegory (Oliver as embodied innocence) and exposure of social issues were clearly not incongruous. Moreover, a mysterious foundling is likewise a literary residue, and this inflects the representation of destitute children vulnerable to corruption. Until the newborn, offspring of "[t]he old story" of an unwed mother, is "ticketed" by workhouse clothes, "he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar" (5). Simultaneously, his mother's gold locket is part of a conventional foundling tale's paraphernalia. This is not just Dickens's appropriation of literary conventions to package social criticism. Without being a swapped nobleman's child, the illegitimate workhouse child on the road to becoming "[t]hat boy [who] will be hung," as the "gentleman in the white waistcoat" foretells (15), literally turns out to be worthy—worthy of being retrieved from the criminal underworld, of receiving more (of attention, love, education, as well as food), and worthy also in the sense of the father's will. The locket as the stolen proof of his "true" identity marks him out as the unborn child described in this idiosyncratic will and thereby testifies to Dickens's investment in what he terms the "romantic side of familiar things" (x) in *Bleak House* (1852-53). But it also literalizes the proving worthy of destitute children.

The locket, moreover, is itself implicated in crime. It is stolen by a fellow pauper. This alone already short-circuits the sentimentalization of vulnerable workhouse inmates. What is

more, when the locket is destroyed, it is by a conspiracy involving Bumble the beadle and Monks, a seemingly reputable member of the middle classes. Oliver is thereby "ticketed," as it were, as a lost boy of the well-to-do. Undeniably, this obscures the social agenda. But we must not forget that Oliver's proven parentage does not take away his illegitimacy; he remains a "bastard child" (431), as Monks insists. The reader, of course, is meant to agree with Brownlow, who rebukes Monks for using a term that "reflects true disgrace on no one living, except you who use it" (432). Nonetheless, as Cheadle stresses, "Oliver's mother's sexual transgression…is remembered down to the novel's last breath" (317). That the reader is not allowed to forget it underscores the novel's endeavor to detach criminality from illegitimacy. This adds another aspect to its wide-sweeping indictment of the law for failing to protect children, additionally bringing to the fore children's victimization not just in criminal underworlds, but also in crimes committed against them throughout society. Any seeming genre incongruity thus supports, rather than undermines, the point Dickens wants to make about children caught up in crime.

According to the father's idiosyncratic will—itself a suitable metonymy of the idiosyncrasy of most authorities in the novel—parentage alone is not enough to ensure the inheritance and, with it, Oliver's changed position. On the contrary, his father fears an inherited proclivity to vice, a proclivity borne out in his elder son Monks, who has had all the advantages of a well-placed, well-connected middle-class boy. Monks is indeed indirectly responsible for the peculiar clause in the will: that the unborn, illegitimate child who is to inherit according to the will is, if a boy, only to come into the money "on the stipulation that in his minority he should never have stained his name with any public act of dishonour, meanness, cowardice, or wrong" (433). Establishing the foundling's identity, therefore, is irrelevant unless Oliver is proven worthy of his inheritance, or rather, in a negative definition, as long as he cannot be proven unworthy of it. No wonder, then, that the locket exits very abruptly and appropriately through an official's criminal act. Mr. Bumble, bribed by Monks, assists in having this piece of evidence thrown into a river. Laura Berry has suggested that the novel's conclusion "works to occlude inheritance as an economic category, and to replace it with heredity as a biological category that proves worth" (59). Yet Oliver also inherits his half-brother's resentment and their father's suspicion of both sons.

Biological inheritance—and its relation to character—moreover remains a slippery issue. Of Monks it is said that he has "from an infant repulsed [his father] with coldness and

aversion" (433). His face has come to reflect his vices. It has become marked by a disease, by frightening "fits" that startle Oliver at their first encounter, and which are said to be likewise related to, if not the result of, his character, rather than vice versa: "you, who from your cradle were gall and bitterness to your own father's heart, and in whom all evil passions, vice, and profligacy, festered, till they found a vent in a hideous disease which had made your face an index even to your mind" (414). That Monks is the offspring of a legitimate—but mercenary—marriage, while Oliver is illegitimate, complicates the question of inherited character as well as of its legibility on the face. But it also negates any linkage of Oliver's presumed immunity to an inherent, bourgeois morality.[2]

Some recognizable affinity with the middle-class characters who rescue him is nonetheless written on Oliver's face. He closely resembles his mother, whose final circumstances belie her "breeding," her origins or class background. Her portrait, hanging in Brownlow's house, provides the first clue to Oliver's origins. And there is a larger, metaphorical significance to this resemblance. Goldie Morgentaler writes of a "mystical heredity…an intuition of kinship" (4), while Flegel claims Oliver's "innate goodness [as] the result of heredity" has generally been diagnosed as "inherently classed" (152).[3] But then, does not Fagin see this affinity, too, and diagnose it delightedly as just a potential asset for a professionally thieving child? As another pickpocket puts it, "Wot an inwalable boy that'll make, for the old ladies' pockets in chapels! His mug is a fortin' to him" (*OT* 177). This makes his face a misleading clue that can be marketed, not a guarantee of impeachable character. It is a potentially deceptive attribute, and this rejects rather than validates associations of physiognomy with character. Dickens repeatedly ridiculed this extremely popular association in his fiction.[4] Ultimately, however, it turns out that Oliver cannot be

[2] Dickens makes Monks the expected offspring of a mercenary marriage but without creating any sympathy for him. To trace Monks's villainy to his childhood has been primarily a twentieth- and twenty-first-century endeavor, as is showcased by a prequel episode in the 1999 mini-series for British television channel, ITV.

[3] Flegel considers this ambiguity central to Victorian discourses on juvenile delinquency, arguing that "[t]hough it is in part his heredity and his class that safeguard young Oliver…it is clear from those children who are not as lucky as him that constructions of childhood do play a central role in the text" (154). He concludes, although *Oliver Twist* "demonstrates that not all children are alike, and that not all children can be saved to childish dependence…his nature and character are nevertheless representative of the *ideal* childhood." The Dodger, according to Flegel, is simply "not easily a child."

[4] The most famous example is "the development of an entirely new organ, unknown to phrenologists on the back of his head" (9) after Mr. Pecksniff has been knocked down by the front door in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844); but this jocular reference to phrenology did not prevent Victorians from undertaking phrenological readings of Dickens's works. Goyder's *My Battle for Life* quotes the immediately preceding section at some length to illustrate Dickens's organ of "Secretivness" (415-16).

converted, and so his face does reflect his inner character after all. Yet it remains ironic that Fagin seeks to exploit what is meant to create sympathy for the victimized child. He is able to identify and trade on the bourgeois culture that singularly fails to protect the vulnerable members of society it is nonetheless so ready to sentimentalize.

What accounts for much of the ambiguously presented vitality of the juvenile thieves is, in fact, that the household of "the pleasant old gentleman, and his hopeful pupils" (*OT* 66) doubles as a parody of Victorian work ethic or home values and as a deliberate rejection of romanticized Newgate-style criminal life.[5] Fagin features as a mock-instructor and parental figure, and the "home" he gives destitute children contrasts positively with places offered by official authorities: the baby farm, the workhouse, an apprenticeship with a chimneysweep or an undertaker. It has often been remarked that "the community of the thieves functions as both mirror and parody of the polite society" (Lankford 22), and that "Fagin's den offers perhaps the most notable parody of the middle-class family in the novel" (Waters 34); indeed, "Fagin resembles a housewife in straitened circumstances" (35). Part of the den's attraction certainly proceeds from its comparative domesticity. So far, Oliver has only received institutionalized care, meanness, and rejection. His reception among the thieves, as insincere as it is, makes him feel welcome as a potentially useful member of their circle. Their "Game" to practice pick-pocketing tellingly seems to be the first game Oliver ever plays, although it was a common strategy to train criminal children (Duckworth 27). Still, that Oliver enjoys it indicates that he might not be entirely incorruptible. In another ironic twist, all this is harnessed by Monks. There is no flamboyant underworld in the style of Newgate romances to which mistreated children can be apprenticed. Instead, criminal networks are in the service of corrupt men like Monks. Seemingly master of an extensive, self-sufficient system of criminal elements of all ages, Fagin turns out to be the tool of a well-connected, educated gentleman who wants to get rid of his illegitimate half-brother.

Dickens used to be furious as *Oliver Twist* nonetheless continued to be lumped together with works of the "Newgate School." In *Dickens and Crime*, Philip Collins stresses that "Dickens was often included in this 'School,' to his great annoyance" (10). More recently, in

[5] The *Newgate Calendar* features intertextually in the novel. Brantlinger calls it "Fagin's anti-Bible for criminals" (71). Oliver is given accounts of criminals—and especially their ends—as a deterrent, to prevent him from turning in his associates. Fagin wants to make clear to Oliver both that he already is one of them and that the outside world of books (and Brownlow is associated with books from the beginning, especially as he accidentally purloins one) has already condemned him.

a discussion of "Dickens's relationship to sensation," Diana Archibald takes up this contested issue to stress that *Oliver Twist* "defies categorisation," showing how "Dickens himself resisted the labels attached to his fiction" (53). It is more than just resistance to labeling. In writing out the false glitter of a life of crime, Dickens produced something antithetical to crime's standardized fictionalization. Yet, what undoubtedly continues to be most memorable and has been most influential is the vitality and ambiguous attractiveness of the thieves' den and its juxtaposition with Oliver's innocuous, wide-eyed perception of it. In a curious way, this wide-eyed approach helps present the community of juvenile thieves in all their dubiously attractive vitality.

Oliver's Legacy: Accusing Orphans

The literary and larger cultural legacy of Dickens's criminal children is clearly two-pronged as well: it comprises such jaunty juvenile delinquents as the Dodger and the unwilling child criminal or innocently implicated child who views criminals and law-enforcers with equally critical innocuousness. Two otherwise markedly different novels that deal with crime and children provide an insightful point of comparison. *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) by Charlotte Yonge, a didactic, religious novelist who also wrote for children, gives more agency to the child as witness, while she remains associated with incorruptible innocence. Where Oliver is speechless and faints, and the Dodger is cheeky with ultimately little effect, Rose Williams ably speaks up in court to defend her presumed delusions and to expose the villain. Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1905), by contrast, imbues the innocently implicated child with an "odd" and "old-fashioned" jauntiness that simultaneously rewrites the usually moribund "oldfashionedness," or precocity, of Victorian innocents. But while Oliver needs to be rescued by the good adults in the novel, and Rose helps right domestic happiness by expunging a fraudulent, criminal element, Sara Crewe needs to escape from and expose the institution in which she is not the only poor orphan who is wrongfully accused of lying and stealing to cover up adults' crimes.

In pointed contrast to Yonge's didactic use of the child's superiority over irresponsible and incapable adults, Burnett's novel simultaneously exemplifies and complicates the creation of "child characters who have no need of adults" in Edwardian children's literature (Gavin and Humphreys 5). To begin with, the later novel hence more clearly foregrounds the divergence of the orphan figure's narrative functions as crystallized by *Oliver Twist*.

Burnett's novel returns to the question of innate morality, although class-bound superiority becomes re-channeled into a more egalitarian concept of children's imaginative power.

First published as *Sara Crewe; Or, What Happened at Miss Minchin's* (1887-88), a title that reverberates with echoes of newly popular detective fiction, *A Little Princess* depicts a child, both vulnerable and empowered by her imagination, who is mistreated and falsely accused. Yet she triumphs despite adult incompetence, cruelty, and criminality. Heiress to her father's diamond mines, Sara is placed at a boarding-school, but when her father dies bankrupt, from the shock that a friend has apparently defrauded him, mercenary Miss Minchin, the schoolmistress, exploits her as an unpaid servant, "treat[ing her] like a pariah" (198). Peter Hunt has suggested that "Burnett thoroughly milks the riches-to-rags-to-riches theme" (43) when Sara regains her fortune after all. It is a case of "Cinderella meets Dickens—or, at least Hesba Stretton and her city-waif novels," novels about social problems written for children that were closely modeled on Dickens. Much of Sara's superiority to circumstances is indisputably grounded in her gentility as a "princess," and yet it is also made clear that she "is a paragon of virtue *despite* being fabulously rich." Gubar pointedly calls Sara "a truly artful orphan whose ability to dodge a Dickensian doom is inextricably linked to her social, intellectual, and linguistic competence" (35). In the face of the fairy tale-like resolution, the adult world remains defined by speculation and crime, ranging from large-scale fraud to a treatment of juvenile servants that borders on child abuse. Those who have retained childlike qualities suffer as well as the children they fail to protect. Despite the novel's celebration of the child and the childlike, there is an underlying critique of immaturity here. Sara's father is "a rash, innocent young man" (Burnett 11), who is soon "overweighted by the business" (75) and dies when "the dear friend [runs] away" (90). As his lawyer sarcastically puts it, "[w]hen a man is in the hands of a very dear friend, and is not a business man himself, he had better steer clear of the dear friend's diamond mines" (89). Friendship, innocence, and trust have no business in the adult world.

As in many late-Victorian and Edwardian children's stories, adults are either sinister or weak, and the latter include the friend who "ran away like a swindler and a thief because [he] could not face [his] best friend" when, it turns out, he innocently ruined him (Burnett 177). He ultimately adopts Sara, yet this is scripted as her day-dreams' realization. Conversely, when Miss Minchin confiscates Sara's belongings, it is a robbery ("the things Miss Minchin had taken from her" (12)); when the scullery maid, another mistreated child, is openly

accused of stealing, although "'Twas cook give [a missing pie] to her policeman" (215), this appropriately feeds into a story of persecution in which Becky is "the prisoner in the next cell" (138). A reading child, Sara makes "up a story of which Becky was the ill-used heroine" (56), little anticipating that she will soon be similarly treated. She survives by being an imaginative and "old-fashioned child" (15), displaying the precocity that renders fictional precursors either moribund—Paul Dombey in Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1846-48) is the most notorious example—or as disconcerting as the Dodger.[6] But Sara is at once as old-fashioned and hot-tempered as Oliver when he beats up the charity boy who insults his dead mother, or like Jane Eyre when she pitches into an older cousin in Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel. Sara realizes the agency that earlier fictional orphans only sporadically assert. Burnett's novel dismantles a stereotype, as her orphan children are invested with more agency and, literally, vitality.

But whereas this triumph over the adult world with all its business fraud and broken contracts implies good riddance of adults (excepting the childlike, when they do survive), for domestic novelists like Yonge childhood innocence needs adult protection. Although Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* (1856) has recently been mentioned as showcasing how "childhood was increasingly portrayed as being semi-independent of parents; siblings acted as a group, as a unit, in circumstances very frequently engineered by the absence of parent or parents" (Kehily 52), parents' absence is a toilsome challenge to these sibling groups. It is certainly not registered with the sense of liberation as it is in Edwardian children's stories that go so far as to domesticate criminality. In some instances, anyone undermining adult authority appears to be embraced. An extreme example is "our own dear robber" (201) in Edith Nesbit's *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899), partly anticipated by Burnett's *Editha's Burglar* (1888).[7] Offering a pointed contrast, in Yonge's *The Clever Woman of the Family* a child's lucidly delivered evidence makes a didactic point about adult irresponsibility. The development of the innocuous child with a powerful imagination and of

[6] As Gubar shows, Dickens "presented precocity as a horrifying offense against the true nature of childhood, which he often associated—as in the case of Little Nell and Paul Dombey—with a pastoral purity diametrically opposed to the industrialisation and commercialisation of contemporary society" (9).

[7] Compare with Gubar's analysis of "domesticated" burglars in children's fiction (131). Distinct from a long-standing tradition that "Golden Age authors represent children as free from the shaping force of social, familial, and scholastic institutions," influential domestic women writers such as "Catherine Sinclair, Mary Howitt, Harriet Mozley, Juliana Ewing, Charlotte Yonge, Mary Louisa Molesworth, and Dinah Mulock Craik…embed child characters in extensive networks of family members, friends, servants, and teachers," refusing to "indulge in the fantasy that children are self-sufficient figures" (5).

an increasing jauntiness—Sara defies the schoolmistress with that "look in her eyes [which] Miss Minchin most disliked" (Burnett 166)—may be most easily traced in Edwardian children's literature by Burnett, Nesbit, or Molesworth. But the legacy of *Oliver Twist*'s juxtaposition of social criticism and childhood innocence can be found in the still neglected tradition of Victorian popular fiction that was—like Yonge's—often targeted at a crossover audience of children, families, and adults.

At first sight, Rose is a typical Victorian orphan, a highly gifted, imaginative child raised by her impoverished spinster aunts.[8] But Yonge always avoids idealizations of precocity, and it is the novel's villain who attempts to dismiss Rose's evidence as "the confused recollections of so young a child," even though she might be, as he sneeringly remarks, "precocious" (396). Clear, distinct, and without confusion, her statement certainly contrasts with that of the befuddled "clever woman" of the title, yet great stress is put on Rose's "innocent tones" (394). The effect might be outwardly sentimental: "Poor, dear little Rose looked very sweet and innocent....Half the people in the court were crying, and I am sure it was a mercy that she was not driven out of her senses, or even murdered that night" (496). Still, Yonge eschews any allegory. Like Oliver, Rose is examined in court; and, like the streetsweep Jo in *Bleak House*, she appears in the witness box.[9] Dickens's suffering children, however, remain silent. Emblems of injured innocence, they rarely speak out, unless it is to prove their corruption (like the Dodger does). Jo may have something important to say about a number of crimes, but his evidence cannot be taken since he has no surname. This makes him an extreme example of a silenced child, an aptly silent accusation of larger social crimes against children. Yonge's Rose, however, speaks up clearly. Indeed, her reliability contrasts with adult incompetence as she brings to justice a repeated fraudster who runs an illegal lace-making operation; this masquerades as a charity home for children until a child's death exposes his fraudulent identity (including that of his fake widow and child). Rose's identification of him as her father's fraudulent manager convicts him, whereas "the Clever Woman of the family [is] shown in open court to have been so egregious a dupe that the deceiver could not even be punished" (387).

The novel's main plot revolves on the learning process that Rachel Curtis, the would-be "clever woman," has to undergo, and in this plotline Rose serves to highlight Rachel's

[8] Rose Williams moreover contains as many echoes of Dickens's virginal Rose Maylie as of Oliver.
[9] On Dickens's adaptation of a child laborer's testimony, see Coveney (124).

incapability. Parallel plots also include the revived romance of the novel's real clever woman, Rose's wheelchair-bound aunt Ermine. Lame since a childhood accident caused by her brother's chemical experiments, Ermine is one of the rare disabled Victorian heroines who not only get married and continue to earn money; she is also an adoptive mother. She raises Rose when the child's father absconds abroad, falsely accused of a number of financial misdemeanors committed by his manager, Maddox. Later she becomes joint-guardian of her husband's nephew after this baby's mother dies in premature labor brought on by more adult irresponsibility. Simultaneously, the childhood accident that disables Ermine does not allow an idealization of victimized children. Children can be willful and difficult to handle. They are also not necessarily grateful. This is an important point Rachel has to learn. Her cousin's young boys refuse to be taught by her. Handing these children over to a professional governess (who handles them better), Rachel sets up a charitable institution for working-class children with the help of a suspicious stranger, Mauleverer, who turns out to be the forger Maddox. Under a false name, he lives at the presumed charity institution with a false widow (his mistress) and runs an illegal lace-making business. It is therefore particularly ironic that Rachel attempts to save the working-class Lovedy Kelland from her aunt's lace-making business by placing her into her institution. Having to work even harder there, Lovedy dies of diphtheria brought on by neglect and overwork. Although Maddox also defrauds Rachel financially, she has blundered so completely in her arrangements that nothing can be proven against him. Instead, it is Rose's partly inadvertent detective work and capable witness account that convict him of crimes committed in the past.

Most of the crimes exposed in the novel involve money, although there are also disconcerting sexual undertones. To cover up financial and sexual affairs, Maddox and his mistress, formerly Rose's nurse, are the "tormentors of her infancy" (395). In the absence of her parents, they bully her at night, threatening undefined "dreadful things" and frightening her with mysterious growls and phosphoric letters made out to be supernatural. Rose's suffering as a young child is paralleled by what the abused lace-maker, Lovedy, has to undergo. That both are victims of the same fraudster shows that Yonge employs a conventional doubling to span social strata and to stress the importance of education for all poor children, whether working-class or of impoverished gentility. Although the child Lovedy dies a sentimentalized death through this doubling, Yonge solves an issue that complicates Dickens' representation of accused children—one that is erased rather than

addressed in the more straightforward idealization of childhood innocence and children's resistance in Edwardian children's fiction.

The different trajectories described by *Clever Woman* and *A Little Princess* span the complex and versatile literary legacy of Dickens's representation of crime and children. This also highlights the need to read across genre demarcations between fiction for children and for adults, canonical and non-canonical works, "to break down artificial boundaries [that] obscure valuable symmetries" (Gavin and Humphries 2). Rose Williams illustrates the influence of *Oliver Twist* most clearly, yet Yonge's novels are indeed full of children having to deal with the temptations as well as the undeserved effects of crime. Not only victims, they are frequently guilty of a number of misdeeds and, if their crimes are often mundane, they are connected to or paralleled with more serious offences. Overt didacticism should not make us automatically dismiss this counter-current to children who need no adults (and who might instead befriend domesticated burglars). Yonge empowers children as witnesses who transcend child victims' sentimentalization by exposing adult irresponsibility and incapability as much as children's vulnerability to crime.

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Works Cited

Archibald, Diana. "'Of All the Horrors…The Foulest and Most Cruel': Sensation and Dickens's *Oliver Twist*." *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre*. Ed. Kimberley Harrison and Richard Fantina. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2006. 53-63.

Berry, Laura C. *The Child, the State, and the Victorian Novel*. Charlottesville: U Virginia P, 1999.

Brantlinger, Patrick. *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998.

Burnett, Frances Hodgson. *A Little Princess*. London: Puffin, 2008.

Cheadle, Brian. "*Oliver Twist*." *A Companion to Charles Dickens*. Ed. David Paroissien. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008. 308-17.

Collins, Philip, *Dickens and Crime*. 1962. New York: McMillan and St Martin's, 1994.

Coveney, Peter. *The Image of Childhood*. 1957. London: Penguin, 1967.

Dickens, Charles. *Oliver Twist*. 1837-38. London: Penguin, 2002.

_____. *Martin Chuzzlewit*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1844.

_____. *Bleak House*. 1852-53. London: Bradbury and Evans, 1853.

Duckworth, Jeannie. *Fagin's Children: Criminal Children in Victorian England*. London and New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2003.

Eagleton, Terry. *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*. 1976. London: Verso, 2006.

Flegel, Monica. *Conceptualising Cruelty to Children in Nineteenth-Century England: Literature, Representation, and the NSPCC*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.

Gavin, Adrienne E., and Andrew F. Humphries. "Worlds Enough and Time: The Cult of Childhood in Edwardian Fiction." *Childhood in Edward Fiction: Worlds Enough and Time*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 1-22.

Goyder, David George, *My Battle for Life: The Autobiography of a Phrenologist*. London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1857.

Gubar, Marah. *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.

Hunt, Peter. *Children's Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001.

Jackson, Louise A. *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

Kehily, Mary Jane. *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*. Maidenhead: Open UP, 2004.

Lankford, William T. "'The Parish Boy's Progress': The Evolving Form of *Oliver Twist*." *PMLA* 93 (1978): 20-32.

Morgentaler, Goldie, *Dickens and Heredity: When Like Begets Like*. London: Macmillan, 2000.

Nesbit, E. *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*. London: Puffin Books, 1994.

Rodensky, Lisa. *The Crime in Mind: Criminal Responsibility and the Victorian Novel*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.

Rosenberg, Brian. "Character and Contradiction in Dickens." *Nineteenth Century Literature* 47.2 (1992): 145-63.

Shore, Heather. *Artful Dodgers: Youth and Crime in Early Nineteenth-Century*. Rochester, NY: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 1999.

Waters, Catherine. *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Yonge, Charlotte. *The Clever Woman of the Family*. Ontario: Broadview, 2001.

"I have often wished in vain for another's judgment": Ideal Aesthetic Commentary and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

by John Paul W. Kanwit

Charlotte Brontë, in her 1850 "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell," explains why she and her sisters adopted gender-neutral pseudonyms: "we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise" (52-53). Bias against women authors was widely recognized in the Victorian period, but Brontë cites a more specific problem: the dearth of fair criticism for women. She complains that women's writing is judged based on the writer's identity rather than on the merits of the work itself, and that women writers tend to receive empty praise that betrays the critic's disdain. Her strategic use of a pseudonym eventually gained her productive criticism if not immediate publication; as Currer Bell, she submitted *The Professor* (not published until 1857) to Smith, Elder and received in 1847 a useful letter in return:

> It declined...to publish that tale, for business reasons, but it discussed its merits and demerits so courteously, so considerately, in a spirit so rational, with a discrimination so enlightened, that this very refusal cheered the author better than a vulgarly-expressed acceptance would have done. (53-54)

Against the "prejudice" and "flattery" that women artists often experienced, Brontë defines in the "Biographical Notice" several features of ideal criticism, especially the requirements that it be reasonable, educated, and "courteously" phrased.

Unlike her sister, Anne Brontë wrote very little about her artistic practice, excepting her preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). Anne complains that, even writing under her pseudonym, Acton Bell, failed to gain *Tenant* the sort of rational

criticism that Charlotte received for *The Professor*. Instead, *Tenant* garnered either praise "greater than it deserved" or "asperity...more bitter than just" (3); she wished that critics could read *Tenant* objectively, as a work distinctly different from those of Currer or Ellis Bell (5). But contemporary critics tended to review the three authors together, almost as a unit.[1] Once Charlotte Brontë revealed the sisters' identity, critics assumed that *Tenant* was simply modeled on *Jane Eyre* or *Wuthering Heights*, a notion perpetuated in the twentieth century. Subsequent critics questioned Anne Brontë's art by claiming that her inclusion of Helen Huntingdon's long diary in the middle of *Tenant* was a careless mistake; even sister Charlotte regretted that her subject was too closely based on the Brontës' family life ("Biographical Notice" 55).

More recently, Margaret Mary Berg, Antonia Losano, and others have demonstrated that Anne was an artist consciously different from her sisters, especially in her representation of an independent woman painter, Helen Huntingdon, who develops a more realistic style.[2] However, despite this recent attention to Helen's painting and, more generally, to resurrecting Anne as the intellectual and artistic equal of Charlotte and Emily, aesthetic commentary of her novels remains under-examined. Both *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey* reveal that she shared Charlotte's preference for external criticism that was both educated and rational, as exemplified by *Tenant*'s Gilbert Markham. But Anne also suggests, primarily through Helen's writings in her diary, that the artist is sometimes best served by her own commentary. Against the Victorian stereotype that equated serious criticism with an external male voice, Helen objectively assesses both her own art and that of others. Through Helen's selective use of commentary, Anne Brontë provides an implicit answer to critiques of her aesthetic choices in *Tenant*.

The Brontës, the Visual Arts, and *Agnes Grey*

In *The Art of the Brontës*, Christine Alexander and Jane Sellars detail how Anne, Charlotte, and Emily gained their extensive knowledge of the visual arts: primarily from

[1] For example, the *Athenaeum* (1848) notes, "The Bells must be warned against their fancy for dwelling upon what is disagreeable" (qtd. in Allott 251).

[2] See also Stanford, Stewart, and Chitham who compellingly argue for Anne's originality. Stanford claims that Anne is a "completely different sort" of writer who should not be compared with her sisters (Harrison and Stanford 230). Stewart details how *Tenant* should be considered a reworking of *Agnes Grey* rather than an adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*. Chitham argues that "Anne's artistic and moral challenge to the content of her sisters' novels comes in *Wildfell Hall*" (134), especially in its parody of *Wuthering Heights*.

Romantic drawing manuals, art instructor John Bradley, and brother Branwell. Alexander notes that the Brontë sisters were not simply passive receivers of art; they "were often critical [in their juvenilia] of the forced association between text and picture, occasioned by the poetry or prose being commissioned to accompany an already completed engraving" (15). In other words, they early on demonstrated attentive and unconventional aesthetic interpretations that they later hoped to find among readers of their novels. Charlotte, for example, followed "the art reviews she had read in the pages of *Blackwoods*" in critiquing such engravings for their uses of perspective and the picturesque. Sellars writes of Anne, "We have no documentation of the writer's personal views on art but we can attempt to interpret them by reading her novels and by scrutinizing the small number of her drawings still in existence" (134). As this discussion demonstrates, Anne's novels reveal that her view of ideal aesthetic commentary is informed by both an extraordinary knowledge of artistic technique and a willingness to question conventional symbolic interpretations.

In contrast to Anne, more is known about Charlotte's aesthetic views, especially on nineteenth-century art criticism as well as on her sisters' novels. Charlotte read and enjoyed William Hazlitt's essays (Wise 3: 88, 174). Like her biographer Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte was very familiar with John Ruskin's more famous works, including *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *Modern Painters*. Writing to W. S. Williams (the reader at Smith, Elder & Co.) after reading John Ruskin's *Modern Painters I* in July of 1848, Charlotte remarks, "I feel more as if I had been walking blindfold—this book seems to give me eyes" (2: 240). Yet Charlotte was unwilling to accept Ruskin's views without trying them herself: "I *do* wish I had pictures within reach by which to test the new sense....However eloquent and convincing the language in which another's opinion is placed before you, you still wish to judge for yourself." Given Charlotte's excitement about reading Ruskin, and her willingness to communicate her views of him with acquaintances outside the family, it seems likely that she would have shared *Modern Painters* with her sisters as well. Helen Huntingdon's evolution to more realistic art further suggests that Anne was familiar with the Ruskin school of criticism.

Moreover, Charlotte had Anne explicitly in mind in her July 1848 letter to Williams, as she immediately follows her comments on Ruskin with her worries that negative reviews of *Tenant* have "depressed" Anne (Wise 2: 241). There are parallels as well between her views of Ruskin and those of *Tenant* in this letter. Praising Ruskin's style—"there is both energy

and beauty in it"—she opines that *Tenant*, by contrast, "had faults of execution, faults of art" (2: 240-41). Although Charlotte states in an August 14, 1848 letter to Williams that all three sisters are still working on their "art," she clearly viewed *Tenant* as a novel inferior to Anne's earlier *Agnes Grey* (2: 241, 243). Charlotte's 1850 "Biographical Notice" confirmed her discontent with *Tenant*'s subject as "an entire mistake....She hated her work, but would pursue it" (55). Although Charlotte complains elsewhere in her "Biographical Notice" that critics assess women's art based on the personality of the writer, she seems to do the same here, conflating the novel with the dourness that she saw in her sister. Charlotte suggests that *Tenant* is, in effect, devoid of novelistic art; the book is a mere sermon or documentary designed to warn readers about the evils of debauchery. Perhaps most damaging to Anne's artistic reputation is Charlotte describing her writing as drudgery rather than artistic process. Although this "passage stresses Anne Brontë's willful determination to use art as a vehicle of moral instruction, the impression that it ultimately conveys is that of a writer at the mercy of a compelling force [personal experience] which she cannot resist and which prevents her from choosing a saner alternative by submitting to the authority of her sister's 'reasonings'" (Berg 10). Charlotte places herself in the "Biographical Notice" as the sort of rational reader that she found at Smith, Elder after submitting *The Professor*; in her view, Anne's failure to heed her advice resulted in inferior artistic practice.[3]

Though Anne did not write directly about nineteenth-century aesthetics aside from her preface to *Tenant*, her novels contradict Charlotte's views by showing that she did understand the difference between the repetition of mere personal experience and the process of discovery that creates successful art. In *Agnes Grey*, Anne provides a model of unbiased artistic critique that can lead to such art; her aesthetic commentary is concerned with points other than monetary value, gossip about artworks, and even family ties to the artist. Anne contrasts the ideal aesthetic commentator with Rosalie Ashby, who evaluates paintings based on such superficial considerations. Inviting Agnes to Ashby Park, her new home after marrying Lord Ashby, Rosalie remarks that Agnes will see there "two fine Italian paintings of great value...I forget the artist...doubtless you will be able to discover prodigious beauties

[3] Surely contributing also to Anne's lowered reputation was Charlotte's comparing her with Emily: "[Anne] wanted the power, the fire, the originality of her sister, but was well-endowed with quiet virtues of her own" ("Biographical Notice" 57). Anne's "quiet virtues" do not seem the equal of Emily's "power," "fire," and "originality." Placing herself as the definitive interpreter of her dead sisters' works, Charlotte seems clear about which was the greater artist.

in them, which you must point out to me, as I only admire by hearsay" (174; ch. 21). Rosalie's assessment is clearly not based on the careful interpretive work that Anne expected readers to bring to her novels. For Rosalie, the paintings are simply another possession, like her poodle or her child (173-74; ch. 21). In many respects, she appears as the typical nineteenth-century character who betrays her superficiality though her inability to appreciate art; yet she is distinctive in recognizing her interpretive shortcomings and in pointing to Agnes as a better model. Although there are few instances of Agnes commenting on art, her ability "to discover" something new by actually looking "in" artworks suggests features of this interpretive model. This process of discovery is equally important in *Tenant* and contradicts Charlotte's claim that Anne viewed artistic production as mere drudgery. As we will see, superficial characters in *Tenant* lack even the ability to discern their betters in aesthetic perception, suggesting a pointed social critique of the Regency rakes in that novel and of the Victorian tendency to discuss art merely because it was fashionable to do so.

Like Helen Huntingdon in *Tenant*, Agnes Grey's sister Mary sells her pictures. Also like Helen, Mary does so out of necessity—ostensibly so that her ailing father can "spend a few weeks at a watering place" (7; ch. 1). Mary's mother encourages the plan: "Mary, you are a beautiful drawer. What do you say to doing a few more pictures, in your best style, and getting them framed, with the water-colour drawings you have already done, and trying to dispose of them to some liberal picture-dealer, who has the sense to discern their merits?" (7-8; ch. 1). Mrs. Grey's comments are notable for several reasons. First, the picture dealer must be "liberal," that is, willing to accept paintings for sale from a woman artist. Mrs. Grey does not propose hiding Mary's identity as Helen does in *Tenant*; she hopes that Mary's paintings will be judged by "their merits" and not by the artist's sex. Moreover, Mary would have been identified as a woman artist not only by her name but also by the feminine medium of water colors (Losano, "Professionalization" n25). Helen's decisions to hide her identity and to paint in the masculine medium of oils surely made *Tenant* more threatening to Victorian readers than *Agnes Grey*. Unlike Helen, Mary does not actually support herself or her family, as the Greys ultimately do not need the money (Mary's father encourages her to keep the money). By contrast, Helen supports herself through her painting in *Tenant*, suggesting Anne Brontë's own growing assurance as a novelist and her desire to subvert stereotypes about women's independence.

Mrs. Grey's comments about Mary's art are significant because of their critical acuity; she judges not as a mother but in terms of aesthetic merit, thus representing the ideal critic and reader both Charlotte and Anne Brontë sought. Mrs. Grey demonstrates her objective appraisal of both daughters' art by contrasting her praise of Mary with her more qualified comments to Agnes: "You draw pretty well too; if you choose some simple piece for your subject, I dare say you will be able to produce something we shall all be proud to exhibit" (8; ch. 1). The implications here seem fairly straightforward; Agnes' art is good enough to hang up (if perhaps only in their own home) but not good enough to earn money. While it is not clear whether Agnes might have sold her paintings if she had followed a different career path (Mrs. Grey's comments solidify Agnes's plan to become a governess), we do know that Mrs. Grey was right about Mary, who later "had good success [selling] her drawings" (48; ch. 5). Mary's more successful drawing career is not due solely to her talent but also to hard work, contrasting with Agnes's much more distracted practice. Agnes remarks, "Mary got her drawing materials, and steadily set to work. I got mine too; but while I drew, I thought of other things" (9; ch. 1). As we will see, Mary's commitment to hard work allies her with the likewise-successful Helen Huntingdon in *Tenant*, which suggests the value that Anne Brontë attached to this virtue in aesthetic production.[4]

Aesthetic Commentary and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Both Mary in *Agnes Grey* and Helen in *Tenant* lack access to the sort of external, public aesthetic commentary that Charlotte Brontë valued in her artistic career, and so they must seek more private sources. For Mary, it is her mother who determines the merit and marketability of her work. For Helen, artistic insights are first developed through personal reflections in her diary. Elizabeth Langland usefully asserts that Helen's diary mitigates the "soft nonsense" or unrealistic niceties that Anne Brontë hoped to avoid in writing *Tenant* ("Preface" 3). Unlike the constant gossip that Helen experiences upon moving to Wildfell Hall, gossip that is "without identifiable authority" and "mindless," writing in the novel "suggests both thought and authority" (122). Helen develops her aesthetic "authority"

[4] The contrast between Mary and Agnes suggests a connection to the Brontë sisters: although all three were accomplished drawers, Charlotte was significantly more distinguished. She never sold her art, but she did exhibit two paintings at the Royal Northern Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Leeds in 1834 (Alexander 25-26). Through her depiction of Mary and Agnes, Anne demonstrates both her awareness that the artistic talents of siblings can differ and her desire that each be judged fairly according to her own merits.

through her written reflections on her art, which allows her to judge her work objectively based on form, technique, and artistic conception. Moreover, Helen's writing prompts her (and readers) to consider the symbolic significance of her paintings, which is less important to her career but central to her growing awareness of herself and others. Helen's decision to establish independence by leaving her husband and painting for a living was the most outwardly shocking aspect of *Tenant* for contemporary readers; yet, it is her critical mind, as expressed through her commentary on art, that helps her improve her painting and therefore her earning potential. Helen paints for a living only during a brief section of her life after she escapes from Arthur Huntingdon and before his death allows her to reassume the station of a lady. By contrast, she writes about her paintings throughout her long diary, both before and during the period when she paints for a living.

While circumstances force Helen to sell her paintings, she early on expresses professional motivations in her diary by hoping to reach a broader audience. Scholars have commonly identified two phases in Helen's painting career: amateur and professional (Losano, "Anne Brontë's Aesthetics" 53), but this division is blurred when we examine Helen's early writings on her art. Helen begins her diary by imagining that her art may one day do more than temporarily distract her: "if my productions cannot now be seen by any one but myself and those who do not care about them, they, possibly, may be hereafter. But then, there is one face I am always trying to paint or to sketch, and always without success; and that vexes me" (123; ch. 16). Arthur Huntingdon, whose face she tries to draw, is one possible audience for her art. But Helen is aware that this infatuation impedes access to an even larger, more astute audience. Her many portraits of Arthur are personal not public works, as her later mortified reaction to his discovery of them indicates. In her journal, she assesses them critically, noting that her efforts are "always without success." To be sure, Helen's infatuation with her subject may be part of the reason for her self-critique, but she is equally exacting in assessing other artworks at this point in her career.

Helen's writing on an early landscape painting that she intended to be her "master-piece" demonstrates a critical knowledge of formal artistic terms:

> The scene represented was an open glade in a wood. A group of dark Scotch firs was introduced in the middle distance to relieve the prevailing freshness of the rest; but in the foreground were part of the gnarled trunk and of the spreading boughs of a large forest tree, whose foliage was of a brilliant golden green. . . . Upon this bough, that stood out in bold relief against the sombre firs, were seated an amorous pair of turtle doves, whose soft sad coloured plumage afforded a contrast of another nature. (150; ch. 18)

Helen's command of such formal concepts as "middle distance," "foreground," and "bold relief" shows that she is a serious artist prior to selling her paintings. While early Victorian commentators often described paintings in terms of narrative significance, Helen presages later, professional critics in focusing on form as well as on the story told by the painting.[5] These formal terms suggest that Helen's painting before her marriage is not merely a woman's accomplishment, and thus it may be too simple to assume that she becomes a professional only when she makes money. Moreover, her command of painterly technique indicates that Anne Brontë was more knowledgeable about novelistic form than *Tenant*'s critics have commonly believed. In a famous remark that influenced twentieth-century views of the novel, the Irish novelist and critic George Moore (1852-1933) wrote that "almost any man of letters" would have advised Anne to let Helen tell her story directly rather than interrupting the story with Gilbert's reading of Helen's diary (253).[6] But Anne seems in *Tenant* fully conscious of both formal features and overall aesthetic effect. Helen considers her landscape as "somewhat presumptuous in the design" (150; ch. 18), a comment implying her understanding of the distinction between art and life. For Losano, "a 'presumptuous design' hints at the intervention of the artist into the realities of nature, the presence of conscious aesthetic form rather than systematic copying from nature" ("Anne Brontë's Aesthetics" 56). In emphasizing aesthetic design over mimesis, Anne Brontë here seems well aware of how to avoid the problem that Charlotte and other critics supposedly identified in her novels—that is, that they were too much like Anne's own life.

Through her heroine, Anne seems equally conscious that art should communicate certain ideas in an original composition. Helen writes in her diary, "I had endeavoured to convey the idea of a sunny morning. I had ventured to give more of the bright verdure of spring or early summer to the grass and foliage, than is commonly attempted in painting" (150; ch. 18). Even at this supposedly pre-professional stage in her career, Helen' verbs indicate awareness of her

[5] See Prettejohn for a useful discussion of professionalization in Victorian art criticism.

[6] By contrast, Stewart argues that Anne's decision to introduce Helen's diary into the long middle section of the novel was not a mistake, as Moore argued, but a conscious aesthetic decision designed "to contrive a scene of reading . . . so intensely involving that no textual distance could dampen it" (Stewart 84).

artistic inadequacies in reaching for the uncommon. This gap between ideals and execution—a recurring problem in Victorian aesthetics—is similarly represented in *Jane Eyre*. As Rochester examines her work, Jane asserts: "my hand would not second my fancy; and in each case it had wrought but a pale portrait of the thing I had conceived" (157; ch. 13)—an opinion seconded by Rochester: "you have secured the shadow of your thought; but no more, probably" (158; ch. 13). Losano notes that Jane's ekphrasis "emphasizes the process of painting rather than the product" (*Woman Painter* 116). By contrast, Helen's written commentary aims at—and eventually helps achieve—a more finished product, which suggests a difference in aesthetic philosophy between Anne's novels and those of Charlotte. Instead of emphasizing the process of artistic creation, Anne hoped that her novel would represent successful likenesses of real, if sometimes undesirable, characters ("Preface" 3).

Helen's writings about her landscape thus demonstrate her early awareness of artistic ideas and formal execution. But her commentary also shows the importance of symbolic and narrative interpretations, which often underscore Helen's emotional connections to her paintings. A central part of Anne's aesthetic philosophy, one wrongly critiqued by Charlotte as unconsciously expressed, was that art should be informed by lived experience and feeling. Naomi Jacobs remarks that Helen's diary allows her to express "all the rage and frustration she must suppress when with other people. She mentions several times that the writing 'calms' her" (213). While Jacobs has Helen's married life specifically in mind, her observation about Helen's ability both to steady herself and to express feelings through her writing is equally applicable during her courtship with Huntingdon. These feelings are prominently expressed through symbolic descriptions of her landscape painting. Most obviously, the "amorous pair of turtle doves" in the painting suggests a connection to Helen's infatuation with Arthur Huntingdon (150; ch. 18).

But Helen's adjectives also imply a warning, which she may only realize subconsciously at this point in her life; the turtle doves' "soft *sad* coloured plumage" indicates the perils that await young couples in love (150; ch. 18; emphasis added). The turtle doves are "too deeply absorbed in each other" to notice the young girl kneeling before them; such ignorance of their surroundings suggests they are oblivious to threats against their future happiness. The young girl does not provide a better model of attention; her "pleased" and "earnest" gazing shows that she does not understand the troubles that await the turtle doves; she will likely make similar mistakes in her own life. As Brontë notes in her preface, the novel represents a

warning to young women taken with dashing young men, but symbolic and narrative descriptions of artworks serve to reinforce this message in powerful ways. Anne Brontë suggests that Helen should have read her painting for its negative symbolic connotations, to allow for the possibility that the story begun by the painting could end badly.

The novel's ideal mode of interpretation—closely examining form, symbolism, and narrative—in itself reveals Arthur Huntingdon's unsuitability for Helen. During their courtship, he "attentively regard[s]" Helen's landscape "for a few seconds" before turning away (150; ch. 18). Huntingdon's cursory attention to Helen's painting indicates a pervasive issue in Victorian aesthetics, particularly as more and more artworks were available to the public eye. In a lecture delivered at the 1857 Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition, Ruskin argued, "the amount of pleasure that you can receive from any great work, depends wholly on the quantity of attention and energy of mind you can bring to bear upon it" (*Works* 16: 57-58). Similarly, in her preface to the second edition of *Tenant*, Anne Brontë writes that early critics have read the novel "with a prejudiced mind [or have been] content to judge it by a hasty glance" (3). Huntingdon demonstrates the kind of superficial appraisal about which Ruskin and Brontë worried, a method of looking unlikely to unravel even the simplest artworks. But Huntingdon is not simply marked as a superficial character because of his inability to appreciate art; more specifically, he fails to use the requisite interpretive tools. Instead of considering Helen's technique, formal features, and symbols, he remarks on the landscape in clichéd terms:

> Very pretty, i'faith! and a very fitting study for a young lady.—Spring just opening into summer—morning just approaching noon—girlhood just ripening into womanhood—and hope just verging on fruition. She's a sweet creature! but why didn't you make her black hair [like Helen's]? . . . I should fall in love with her, if I hadn't the artist before me. (150; ch. 18)

Helen's technical as well as symbolic description of her painting demonstrate the limits of reading the painting on a merely iconographic level, "searching for particular symbolic motifs and assigning significance to various visual elements in her picture" (Losano, "Anne Brontë's Aesthetics" 51). Moreover, Helen's decision about the figure's hair—"I thought light hair would suit her better" (151; ch. 18)—suggests just one of the ways in which Huntingdon's biographical reading is amiss. His association of the painting's subject with

Helen demonstrates a particular challenge that women artists and art critics faced in commentary on their work: not only did they struggle with the general lack of attention that Ruskin describes, but they also dealt with the sexual interest of male viewers, including that of Ruskin himself. Responding in 1886 to a letter in which the artist and art critic Emilia Dilke acknowledged her intellectual debt to him, Ruskin highlights her sexuality over her status as the foremost authority on French art history in Britain: "I am entirely delighted but more astonished than ever I was in my life—by your pretty letter and profession of discipleship....I thought you at Kensington the sauciest of girls" (qtd. in Israel 87). Helen only escapes this kind of attention upon first moving to Wildfell Hall.

In an earlier chapter entitled "Further Warnings," Anne Brontë contrasts Arthur Huntingdon's self-interested appraisal of art with Helen's thoughtful and solicited commentary on the works of others. Because he is not romantically interested in Milicent Hargrave, Huntingdon "carelessly takes up" her drawings and casts each one aside without comment (136; ch. 17). Instead of forcibly taking another's paintings as Huntingdon so often does, Helen provides advice only when asked. She comments on Milicent's paintings "with my critical observations and advice, at her particular desire." Helen's "critical" comments and "advice" oppose the mere flattery that women artists commonly experienced in the mid-Victorian period. Although we do not know exactly what Helen says to Milicent, she likely provides expertise about the paintings' form and ideas, as she does in remarks on her own paintings. Thus, Anne Brontë may have imagined Helen as the sort of figure who could supply some of the rational and courteous criticism on women's work that she found lacking. Brontë represents both the value and limitations of such collaborations: while Helen remarks on Milicent's drawings when asked, she never requests Milicent's opinions, nor are her drawings ever described in the text, perhaps indicating that Milicent is not the same caliber of artist.[7]

A more significant problem is that Helen's ability to provide critical commentary to Milicent is limited by her infatuation: "my attention wandered from [Milicent's] drawings to the merry group," which included Huntingdon (136; ch. 17). Brontë here demonstrates that characters cannot be neatly divided between those who appreciate art and those who do not; though Helen provides a better model of attention than does Huntingdon, she too is distracted

[7] Milicent does make unsolicited comments on Helen's paintings at one point after Arthur discovers his face on the back of them, but Helen is unable to attend to her remarks because of her embarrassment (149).

by her love interest. Moreover, she initially fails to interpret correctly Huntingdon's superficial social performances, suggesting her lack of perceptive acuity. Notably, Helen's diary helps her begin to "see" Huntingdon more clearly; she writes, "I do not think the whole would appear anything very particular, if written here, without the adventitious aids of look, and tone, and gesture, and that ineffable but indefinite charm, which cast a halo over all he did and said, and which would have made it a delight to look in his face, and hear the music of his voice, if he had been talking positive nonsense." Surely, Huntingdon *is* speaking nonsense, and thus embodies the "soft nonsense," the mere charming flow of words, that Anne Brontë eschews in her preface (3). Huntingdon appears in Helen's description as a sort of villainous melodramatic actor with his overstated gestures and his thoughtless words, a performance that requires little interpretation on the reader's part. But while Helen partially acknowledges Huntingdon's superficiality, she is on the whole taken with him.

Like her ekphrastic comments on her landscape painting, her later writings on Huntingdon's portrait help her more accurately diagnose his flaws. After experiencing life with the increasingly degenerate Huntingdon and escaping from him, Helen writes of his portrait: "Now, I see no beauty in it—nothing pleasing in any part of its expression; and yet it is far handsomer and far more agreeable—far less repulsive I should rather say—than he is now; for these six years have wrought almost as great a change upon himself as on my feelings regarding him" (377; ch. 44). Unlike what occurs in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the portrait itself has not changed. Rather, Huntingdon's physical decline finally causes him to look like what he is—an ugly and vulgar man—a fact that Helen should have discerned much earlier in his portrait. Like such later Victorian art commentators as Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde, Helen acknowledges the subjective role of the viewer in assessing art and nature. But, through her comments on her landscape and Huntingdon's portrait, she also implies that some interpretations better account for the real life that these artworks represent. Most prominently, art should be interpreted without the sort of romantic "charm" that clouded Helen's initial appraisal of both Arthur Huntingdon's social performances and her portrait of him. As Anne Brontë notes about "vicious characters" in her preface to *Tenant*, "it is better to depict them as they really are than as they would wish to appear" (4). She here responds to criticism of the first edition of *Tenant* that she went too far in portraying the depravity of Arthur Huntingdon and his friends, saying that they are depicted realistically, even if readers

might hope that such characters do not exist. Brontë suggests that readers have the duty to acknowledge realistic representations when they are rendered as such.

In noting *Tenant*'s basis in real characters, Anne seems to reinforce Charlotte's critique that its subject is based on her family ("Biographical Notice" 55). But Anne's preface also claims the thankless and difficult labor inherent in her realistic artistic process: "I wished to tell the truth....But as the priceless treasure too frequently hides at the bottom of a well, it needs some courage to dive for it, especially as he that does so will be likely to incur more scorn and obloquy for the mud and water into which he has ventured to plunge, than thanks for the jewel he procures" (3). Realistic art, claims Anne, takes more work than simply copying real life or repeating more familiar stories. Similarly, as she moves toward producing more realistic art in an attempt to support herself and her son, Helen describes how she must embark on her own difficult journey to improve her skills:

> The palette and the easel, my darling playmates once, must be my sober toil-fellows now. But was I sufficiently skilful as an artist to obtain my livelihood in a strange land, without friends and without recommendation? No; I must labour hard to improve my talent and to produce something worth while as a specimen of my powers, something to speak favourably for me, whether as an actual painter or a teacher. (337; ch. 39)[8]

The sort of work that Helen has in mind here is clearly different from her earlier approach to art. But her consciousness and knowledge of its deficiencies is not new. As I have argued, it is this growing self knowledge, expressed through writing, that enables Helen to paint for money rather than becoming what was more socially acceptable for a Victorian woman: "a teacher" (337; ch. 29).

If Helen's early interpretations and paintings are made less successful by her infatuation with Arthur Huntingdon, her efforts to improve them through hard work are impeded by unsolicited comments and advances from Walter Hargrave. Helen sets up her easel in the library, which she believes will be private; but Hargrave interrupts Helen's solitary painting with his superficial comments on art. Helen writes sarcastically, "Being a man of taste, he

[8] Similarly, Anne sought to convince Charlotte in 1845 that her poems were worthy of inclusion in the sisters' collection, revising them nightly in order to improve them (Nash and Suess x). She clearly understood firsthand the difficult work of aesthetic production.

had something to say on this subject as well as another, and having modestly commented on it, without much encouragement from me, he proceeded to expatiate on the art in general" (338; ch. 29). Like Arthur Huntingdon, Hargrave demonstrates the popular tendency for "cultured" individuals to make superficial, uninformed commentary about art; also like Huntingdon, Hargrave's primary interest in Helen is sexual, not aesthetic. Yet Brontë's primary point here is not about how to judge individual characters based on their appreciation of art but about how a woman's art should be produced and interpreted. Helen's writings and her sarcastic tone reveal Anne Brontë's understanding and critique of the cultural as well as personal challenges that confronted women artists. In response to these challenges, Brontë suggests that a woman's art is usually best produced and interpreted in solitude, without the distracting attentions of male viewers. Notably, Helen is best served at this point in her artistic career by her own diaristic writings and not by uninformed male commentary.

Independence and Collaboration

Helen's move to Wildfell Hall helps her to avoid, for a time, the bothersome attentions of male suitors, and she there demonstrates her developing talent as an artist. Helen takes obvious satisfaction in painting for a living; her studio, she writes,

> has assumed quite a professional, business-like appearance already. I am working hard to repay my brother for all his expenses on my account; not that there is the slightest necessity for anything of the kind, but it pleases me to do so: I shall have so much more pleasure in my labour, my earnings, my frugal fare, and household economy, when I know that I am paying my way honestly. (376-77; ch. 44)

Like Mary in *Agnes Grey*, Helen does not need to work for a living, as her brother would gladly support her. But Helen—in supporting herself fully—subverts Victorian gender norms to a greater extent than does Mary and influences another woman to at least contemplate independence. Weary of her mother's entreaties to marry, Esther Hargrave tells Helen, "I threaten mamma sometimes, that I'll run away, and disgrace the family by earning my own livelihood, if she torments me any more; and then that frightens her a little. But I *will* do it, in good earnest, if they don't mind" (419; ch. 48). Helen counsels patience, but it is she who has abandoned a self-described "career" as a wife. As a painter, she gains a certain degree of power and freedom of choice. Her removal of Huntingdon's portrait from its frame, a frame

she will re-use for another, saleable painting, symbolizes this greater control over her own affairs (377; ch. 44). Further, Helen deliberately conceals her identity: she signs her paintings with false initials and changes the names of places depicted in her paintings (43; ch. 5)—an indication of Anne Brontë's knowledge of the period's fascination with attribution, which was famously connected with her own authorship. As important as her growing professionalism is her move to Wildfell Hall, which facilitates her more astute interpretations of paintings in her diary. It is only after escaping Arthur Huntingdon's house that Helen is able to read his portrait as an indication of his depravity.

As it turns out, however, Helen becomes too isolated at Wildfell Hall. She can no longer comment on the art of others, and she finds that she needs an outsider's perspective on her own paintings. Against critics who have argued that Anne Brontë erred in her narrative structure, Juliet McMaster posits the importance of both Helen's diary *and* Gilbert's narration: "As Helen's diary records the destruction of opposites [Helen and Arthur], the story of Gilbert Markham serves to restore our faith in the possibility of a relationship between a man and a woman that is one of equals who are capable of mutual accommodation and beneficial modification" (363). Such "accommodation" and "modification" are significantly expressed through Gilbert and Helen's conversations on aesthetics. Early in his narration, Gilbert indicates his perceptiveness in deciphering Huntingdon's character in one of Helen's portraits: "There was a certain individuality in the features and expression that stamped it, at once, as a successful likeness. The bright, blue eyes regarded the spectator with a kind of lurking drollery—you almost expected to see them wink; the lips—a little too voluptuously full—seemed ready to break into a smile" (45; ch. 5). Gilbert here positions himself as an ideal reader of *Tenant* by recognizing this portrait as a realistic representation or "successful likeness." By contrast, early readers of *Tenant* failed to recognize that "characters [like Huntingdon] do exist" ("Preface" 4). Most important, Gilbert can read Huntingdon's flawed character in his portrait. His features are more than simply mimetic; the eyes and lips rightly suggest to him negative symbolic qualities, seeming to wink and smile mockingly. Gilbert asks readers to imagine how the portrait would mock its viewer if it could move; we are thus encouraged to interpret the portrait the way Gilbert does, realizing that Huntingdon is "prouder of his beauty than his intellect" (45; ch. 5). Huntingdon represents a certain threat to women, one posed by the existence of "vicious characters" in fiction as in society ("Preface" 4).

To be sure, the autobiographical form of the novel (in the guise of his letter to Halford) allows Gilbert to "shape his past to portray himself in the most advantageous light" (Westcott 214)—that is, to make himself look perceptive. But Gilbert's trick is ultimately Brontë's; by constructing her novel so that Gilbert can portray himself as an interpretive model, Brontë again demonstrates her consciousness of her formal choices. Gilbert himself reinforces this attentiveness to form by writing about Helen's growth as an artist in specific, formal terms; the Huntingdon portrait is "not badly executed; but, if done by the same hand as the others, it was evidently some years before; for there was far more careful minuteness of detail, and less of that freshness of colouring and freedom of handling, that delighted and surprised me in them" (44; ch. 5). Gilbert positions himself as a perceptive connoisseur in recognizing similarities among Helen's paintings while also noting specific improvements in her later works: "freshness of colouring and freedom of handling." Helen has moved beyond mere colouring and execution to a freer style that can express the larger concepts lacking in her earlier landscape. Like Helen in her comments on this landscape, Gilbert understands that good art is not simply the result of mimesis or "careful minuteness of detail." Rather, we should look for ideas that "delight" or "surprise," even if they are imperfectly rendered. These verbs, which describe Anne's conception of the effect of successful art on a perceptive viewer, provide an implicit answer to Charlotte's claim that Anne's writing drudgingly copied actual life.

Helen's markedly different reactions to Gilbert confirm his status as someone who can help her further improve her art. Gilbert asserts that when asked "about some doubtful matter in her drawing[,] [m]y opinion, happily, met her approbation, and the improvement I suggested was adopted without hesitation" (64; ch. 7). To our knowledge, this is the first time in her life that Helen has sought or accepted another's suggestion on her art. She makes clear the importance of Gilbert's perspective: "I have often wished in vain for another's judgment to appeal to when I could scarcely trust the direction of my own eye and head, they having been so long occupied with the contemplation of a single object, as to become almost incapable of forming a proper idea respecting it." Helen's contrast between mere fixation on the object depicted and the ideas expressed by the artwork demonstrate Anne Brontë's desire to go beyond family autobiography in writing *Tenant*. Gilbert responds, "That…is only one of the many evils to which a solitary life exposes us." Helen agrees, indicating that, although

she values painting in solitude, she could learn to value such conversations with an equal in both intellect and perception.

Near the end of the novel, Gilbert appears to question his own perceptiveness by noting (in his letter to Halford) that he initially failed to understand the symbolic significance of the rose that Helen presents to him. Upon picking the "half-blown Christmas rose" and removing the snow from it, Helen remarks, "'The rose is not so fragrant as a summer flower, but it has stood through hardships none of *them* could bear....Look, Gilbert, it is still fresh and blooming as a flower can be, with the cold snow even now on its petals.—Will you have it?'" (465; ch. 53). Because Gilbert does not immediately understand the rose's significance, readers must form their own interpretations, keeping in mind the previous significance of such symbols. The symbolism here seems straightforward: the rose represents Helen, who has been made stronger, though no less attractive, by her trials. In offering the rose to Gilbert, she offers herself as well; like the rose, she has unfrozen herself. Though he eventually holds out his hand and accepts Helen's gift, Gilbert hesitates to grasp the rose—both in literal and symbolic terms. However, Gilbert's hesitation in fact marks him as a more careful perceiver than Arthur Huntingdon, who too quickly (and wrongly) assumes symbolic understanding of Helen's paintings.

Moreover, Gilbert points out that the interpretive blockages in this scene are not his alone, as Helen misinterprets his actions: "Misconstruing this hesitation into indifference—or reluctance even—to accept her gift, Helen suddenly snatched it from my hand, threw it out on to the snow, shut down the window with an emphasis, and withdrew to the fire" (465-66; ch. 53). Gilbert again fails to understand the symbolism behind Helen's gestures, asking "'Helen! what means this?'" (466; ch. 53). Helen complains, "'You did not understand my gift,'" to which he responds, "'You misunderstood me, cruelly.'" Brontë emphasizes the importance of mutual understanding in this scene; her duty as a novelist is to make her art clear for readers to interpret its life-like and symbolic qualities. Helen reveals the meaning of the rose only after allowing Gilbert (and the reader) time to decipher on his own: "'The rose I gave you was an emblem of my heart.'" Gilbert still does not grasp Helen's full meaning, as he needs to ask if he may have her "hand" in marriage. He remarks in his letter to Halford, "Stupid blockhead that I was!—I trembled to clasp her in my arms, but dared not believe in so much joy" (467; ch. 53). Despite the initial confusion, Gilbert's point is that he has learned to interpret Helen's actions, complementing his ability to read her art for symbolic meaning.

This increased symbolic acuity, coupled with Gilbert's astuteness in formal matters, positions him as an ideal reader—not only of Helen's history, but also of the novel as a whole. The same can be said of Helen, who develops both her own symbolic interpretations and her aesthetic techniques. Given the interpretive models that *Tenant* itself provides, we should take Anne Brontë seriously as a significant contributor to nineteenth-century discourse about aesthetics, including the differences between real life and its more figurative rendering in art. Read in this way, Anne Brontë can be seen as not just the equivalent of her sisters but also as making her own distinct contribution to nineteenth-century realism.

Ohio Northern University

Works Cited

Alexander, Christine. "The Influence of the Visual Arts on the Brontës." *The Art of the Brontës*. Ed. Christine Alexander and Jane Sellars. New York: Cambridge UP, 1995. 9-35.

Allot, Miriam, ed. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974.

Berg, Margaret Mary. "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: Anne Brontë's *Jane Eyre*." *Victorian Newsletter* 71 (1987): 10-15.

Brontë, Anne. *Agnes Grey*. 1847. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.

_____. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. 1848. Ed. Herbert Rosengarten. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.

Brontë, Charlotte. "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell." *Agnes Grey*. By Anne Brontë. New York: Penguin, 1988. 51-59.

_____. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Ed. Q. D. Leavis. New York: Penguin, 1988.

Chitham, Edward. *A Life of Anne Brontë*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991.

Harrison, Ada and Derek Stanford. *Anne Brontë: Her Life and Work*. 1959. New Haven CT: Archon Books, 1970.

Jacobs, Naomi. "Gender and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 16 (1986): 204-19.

Langland, Elizabeth. *Anne Brontë: The Other One*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1989.

Losano, Antonia. "Anne Brontë's Aesthetics: Painting in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *The Brontës in the World of the Arts*. Ed. Sandra Hagan and Juliette Wells. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008. 45-66.

_____. "The Professionalization of the Woman Artist in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 58:1 (2003): 1-41.

_____. *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature*. Columbus: Ohio State U P, 2008.

McMaster, Juliet. "'Imbecile Laughter' and 'Desperate Earnest' in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Modern Language Quarterly* 43.4 (Dec. 1982): 352-69.

Moore, George. *Conversations in Ebury Street*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924.

Nash, Julie and Barbara A. Suess. Preface. *New Approaches to the Literary Art of the Brontës*. Ed. Julie Nash and Barbara A. Suess. Burlington: Ashgate, 2001.

Prettejohn, Elizabeth. "Aesthetic Value and the Professionalization of Victorian Art Criticism 1837-78." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2.1 (Spring 1997): 71-94.

Sellars, Jane. "The Art of Anne Brontë." *The Art of the Brontës*. Ed. Christine Alexander and Jane Sellars. New York: Cambridge UP, 1995. 134-52.

Stewart, Garrett. "Narrative Economies in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *New Approaches to the Literary Art of the Brontës*. Ed. Julie Nash and Barbara A. Suess. Burlington: Ashgate, 2001.

Westcott, Andrea. "A Matter of Strong Prejudice: Gilbert Markham's Self Portrait." *New Approaches to the Literary Art of the Brontës*. Ed. Julie Nash and Barbara A. Suess. Burlington: Ashgate, 2001.

Wise, Thomas, ed. *The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships, and Correspondence*. 4 vols. Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1980.

Emily Brontë's Defeat of Death and Unintended Solace for Grief

by Laura Inman

"What is this death?" Lord Byron asks in a fragment poem written at Diodati in July 1816. He responds with more questions than answers and concludes with a vision of what he "would" wish of the afterlife (191). Emily Brontë took the question to heart more than any other poet of her era, exploring in poem after poem the many facets of death; however prominently death figures in Victorian poetry, it is for her more a topic of study than an inspirational muse. Critical observations and analyses note her pronounced "orientation" toward death (Buchen 63) and her influence on later "graveyard poets" (Denisoff 128-30). Brontë's depiction of the full spectrum of death-related emotion—not just her own feelings—exhibits the negative capability identified by John Keats as the hallmark of a poet; however, amidst her objective and empathetic depictions of individuals facing death lies a uniquely personal mode of reconciling life and death. Differing from criticism that explores Brontë's notion of immortality, this analysis of a progression of poems culminating in "No coward soul" reveals the poet's belief that the imagination annihilates death.[1] Beyond simply exploring the emotions evoked by one's mortality, Brontë understands the complexities of grief in ways that anticipate modern psychology.

Facing Death

Brontë's poetry describes four potential emotions that arise upon the contemplation of mortality: fear, relief, desire (albeit at times in conflict), and resignation. In these poems, her propensity for depicting individuals all variously placed, yet confronting the same ultimate conflict, indicates not only negative capability but also her perspective as a novelist. Further, as revealed in this analysis, she develops her own particular and unusual method of

[1] See, for example, Lawrence Starzyk, "The Faith of Emily Brontë's Immortality Creed." *Victorian Poetry* 11.4 (1973): 295-305.

reconciliation, adding a fifth noteworthy approach: the conspicuous absence of clichéd expressions of Christian submission to the will of God and the comfort of heaven.

Regarding the sentiment of fear and its companion feelings of dread and sadness, Brontë recognizes that, for people who are engaged with life, death looms as "awful": the "awful thought" (l; no. 9, l.37) and the "awful time" (57; no. 37, l. 12). To depict that emotion, she frequently sets a poem on a battlefield where death is, as Byron states, "less often sought than found" (202). The soldiers in her poems succumb to death with a "choking sob" and "tortured moan" (89; no. 89, l.8); for another fallen fighter, "each pulse in horror fluttered / As the life would pass away" (89; no. 88, ll.11-12). Representative of this group is one describing the death experience of a wounded man, perhaps also a soldier. Brontë creates a sense of the awful and unwanted nature of the event by contrasting life and its exquisite pleasures with death, which ensnares the victim in the gradual lowering of an eerie, perpetual dusk:

> Shuddering to feel the ghostly gloom
> That coming Death around him threw—
> Sickening to think one hour would sever
> The sweet, sweet world and him forever,
> To think that twilight gathering dim
> Would never pass away to him—
> No—never more! That awful thought
> A thousand dreary feelings brought[.] (34; no. 9, ll. 31-38)

Not until the World War I poets would there be such a lament for the fallen in battle, even though Brontë's battlefields are imaginary. She writes of the cost of war in tones befitting a war memorial:

> Thou didst purchase by thy fall
> Home for us and peace for all;
> Yet, how darkly dawned that day—
> Dreadful was the price to pay! (103; no. 97, ll. 25-28)

Like soldiers, the young dread death because they value their as-yet unlived-lives. As A. E. Housman stated years later in "Here Dead We Lie": "Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose; / But young men think it is, and we were young" (*Prose and Poetry* 158). Brontë

imagines Death, like a predatory ghoul, entering the room of a child, whose "tiny hands in vain essay" strive "To thrust the shadowy fiend away" (40; no. 14, ll. 33-34). Further, she understands the dread of those who are confined to lonely quarters, either from age or illness. Death itself warns, "I'll come when thou art saddest / Laid alone in the darkened room" (56; no. 37, ll. 1-2). Then, in an accelerated rhythm, Death poses a sinister question: "Dost thou not feel upon thy soul / a flood of strange sensations roll?" (57; ll.13-14). Thus Brontë dramatizes death's approach to express the perception of a dreadful end. In addition to soldiers, children, and the bedridden, contemplative types also experience a morbid sadness from the example of nature, where death is an annual event. Darkness and gloom are death's calling card, and Brontë describes the sight of the flowers giving way to the harshness of winter as a *memento mori*:

> Yet their lives passed in gloomy woe
> And hopeless comes its dark decline,
> And I lament, because I know
> That cold departure pictures mine. (162; no. 145, ll. 13-16)

Such feelings of anguish, dread, and sadness at the prospect of death are not shared by all, and Brontë enters into the mindset of those who consider the arrival of death a relief from life's suffering and pain. In poem no.136, the narrator views the imminent death of another—not with sadness but gloomy envy:

> So if a tear, when thou art dying,
> Should haply fall from me,
> It is but that my soul is sighing
> To go and rest with thee. (142; ll. 13-16)

Brontë identifies two types of suffering that make death welcome; first, death is preferable to having to witness the suffering of loved ones: "But the glad eyes around me / Must weep as mine have done, / And I must see the same gloom / Eclipse their morning sun" (107-08; no. 101, ll. 21-24). Death is also repeatedly depicted as an escape from the torments of sorrow, as discussed below in relation to grief.

Death as a relief becomes at its extreme an active desire for death; contrary to Victorian social convention, Brontë wrote a number of poems validating that desire without invoking

either religion or earthly consolation to continue living. Her "to be or not to be" poems follow the literary tradition of Shakespeare, Keats, and Byron rather than the Christian tradition of her everyday life. She does not shy away from depicting circumstances that justify a desire for death; for example, "Castle Wood" depicts a forlorn soul, the unloved "mate of care, / The foster child of sore distress" (195; no. 167, ll. 19-20), who pleads for release from life:

> No sighs for me, no sympathy,
> No wish to keep my soul below;
> The heart is dead since infancy,
> Unwept-for let the body go. (195; ll. 21-24)

Central to the desire for death is the absence of hope. How one reaches the point of despair is explained in poem no. 165 through the image of an ethereal, yet flighty and callous acquaintance, who has failed the sorrowful prisoner of life too many times to be trusted (192-93). Brontë associates despair with a desire to die in poem no. 32, in which the narrator views from above and with an expansive geographic and temporal scope a weary traveler, trudging down a path heavily burdened, who wishes metaphorically as well as literally to "render up life's tiresome load" (53; ll. 5-12). The traveler lacks hope, that crucial alloy to steel his soul against suffering: "Dark his heart and dim his eye; / Without hope or comforter, / Faltering, faint, and ready to die" (ll. 6-8). Despair again tips the scale in favor of dying in poem no.181. A character, grappling with a deep dissatisfaction with life, consults a "philosopher" who has shut himself away to ruminate. When asked about his conclusions, the philosopher pronounces in favor of death. The character agrees, having never succeeded in recapturing the sense of the bright spirit that would have annulled the desire for death; even a glimpse would have made life endurable. That spirit is akin to hope in poem no. 165, which the narrator tries to glimpse "through the bars" of the "grated den" (192; ll. 2, 6). Lacking any indication of the bright spirit's existence, the narrator, in agreement with the philosopher, gives up in despair:

> Oh let me die, that power and will
> Their cruel strife may close,
> And vanquished Good, victorious Ill
> Be lost in one repose. (221; no. 181, ll. 53-56)

True to the impartiality of her treatment, Brontë explores reasons for continuing to live. First, there is the possibility, even for the despairing, that "this soul forget its sorrow; / And the rosy ray of the closing day / May promise a brighter morrow" (66; no. 53, ll. 6-8). A second reason tempering the desire for death lies in the possibility one might be mistaken about the benefits of dying. For example, one might consider the world a cold, unsympathetic place and believe that after death one's memory would be more cherished than one's presence had been. Poem no. 163 entertains that possibility but concludes that such a desire for death is misguided, because no one would be broken hearted except the deceased (190). Finally, Brontë posits that there is no need for suicide because death will arrive in due time, thus advocating stoic patience for the despairing: "You shall reach the final goal, / You shall win the land of rest" (53; no. 32, ll. 19-20).

Distinct from fear, relief, and desire, Brontë explores a fourth sentiment about death: the resignation to dying as a part of the natural world and intended culmination of life. In "Death that struck when I was most confiding," the narrator compares herself to a tree branch and calls for death to complete the natural cycle by striking her down, after which other branches will blossom (224-25; no. 183). Death also seems natural to those who view it as a return to "home," as in poem no. 126, whose narrator counsels a companion to make his or her way stalwartly through the churchyard shadows and graves, though they are harbingers of death: "What though our path be o'er the dead? / They slumber soundly in the tomb; / And why should mortals fear to tread / The pathway to their future home?" (135; ll. 9-12). Another path to resignation lies in viewing death as freedom, in which one's soul, like a caged bird, is liberated: "But let me think that if to-day / It pines in cold captivity, / To-morrow both shall soar away, / Eternally, entirely Free" (162; no. 144, ll. 17-20).

Among the many poems arising from the contemplation of one's death, "No coward soul" stands out as Brontë's culminating statement on her personal reconciliation of life and death. This poem is distinct from the foregoing views defined by fear, relief, desire or resignation by advocating the power of the imagination and the capacity of mind to create a view of rewarding eternity. Attributing sentiments in any given poem to Brontë herself might seem problematic because so many are Gondal poems, spoken by a character from the juvenilia saga (even when written in the first person), or because they reflect Brontë's negative capability or novelistic bent. Nonetheless, "No coward soul" (along with others promoting reconciliation) expresses a mindset that biographical information supports. In

brief, she lacked interest in traditional religion, exhibited pronounced reclusiveness and self-reliance, and immersed herself in an imaginary world—all befitting a belief system founded on imagination and the power of the solitary mind. This orientation was endemic to the Brontë family; father Patrick wrote that "the mind is its own place" (Chitham 14), an idea expressed in *Paradise Lost*. Milton's Satan pronounces this apotheosis of the capability of thought:

> Farewell happy fields
> Where joy for ever dwells: hail horrors, hail
> Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
> Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
> A mind not to be changed by place or time.
> The mind is its own place, and in itself
> can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n. (Book I, 9: ll. 249-55)

Poem no. 148 from 1841 demonstrates this capacity by portraying the power of "sweet thoughts" and "fancy" (165; ll. 2, 8). There are ostensibly two characters: one who speaks, addressing the other, who is silent. Apparently, the speaker refers to herself when addressing the second character, so well is she able to describe the mind of the other, particularly the effects of fancy. Sweet thoughts, like a "glorious wind," swept away the real world, "dashed its memory from thy mind" (l. 11); she becomes a "spirit," free from herself, the essence of all things, and unburdened by mortality. In such a state, death holds no sway, and the soul is free to rise from its earthly bonds. Although the sweet thoughts "will not die" (l. 2) and are immune from death, they are not always available; pleasantly surprised—"Aye, there it is! It wakes to-night" (l. 1)—, the narrator recognizes a sensation from bygone years. Such intimations of immortality generated by the imagination continue in "How Clear She Shines," written two years later (184-85; no. 157). The narrator addresses two entities: "Fancy" and the real world, bidding the former to come and the latter to fade away under the silver light of thought. Just as the "sweet thoughts" in the previous poem were welcome, here the imaginary world is not yet firmly entrenched; it is only a "dream" that there is a "heaven of glorious spheres…rolling on its course of light / In endless years bliss through endless years" (185; ll. 22-24). Similarly, in "A Day Dream" a spirit has revealed the beauty of the

world that follows death; the narrator admits that it was pure imagination that brought the vision yet s/he still considers it true—although, as in the preceding poems, only sometimes:

> The music ceased—the noonday Dream
> Like dream of night withdrew
> But Fancy still will sometimes deem
> Her fond creation true. (198-200; no. 170, ll. 65-72)

Two poems from 1844 advance imagination's power toward its consummate role in nullifying death. "To Imagination" is less cryptic; here, she and her imagination are bound together, sharing "a bright unsullied sky / Warm with ten thousand mingled rays / of suns that know no winter days" (206; no. 174, ll. 16-18). Her imagination permits her to exist in a world where there is no blighted spring that cannot be redeemed, no death that cannot yield to an even lovelier life than before. Although the bliss of the imaginary world is still "phantom" (l. 25), it is also ever ready to evoke the visions of another world, which are never far away. Brontë's progression to creating inner divinity through her own powers of thought goes a step further in "O thy bright eyes must answer now" (208-09; no. 176), when she calls imagination her god: "Speak, God of visions plead for me / And tell why I have chosen thee!" (209; ll. 39-40). This poem manifests a spiritual creed based on the powers of her mind and imagination: it is her slave, her comrade, her darling pain, her king, and her god. Choosing to follow the inspiration of her mind, she here speaks in terms of religion advancing from a sensation in earlier poems to a creed: "And am I wrong to worship where / Faith cannot doubt nor Hope despair / Since my own soul can grant my prayer?" (209; ll. 35-38). Brontë continues to speak in a religious tone and to invoke her imagination-born god in the last poem of this progression, "No coward soul," dated 1846. In that poem, any control over her visions expressed in earlier poems succumbs to her powers of mind (243-44; no. 191). This religion of the mind prepares her to confront death directly and proclaim her reconciliation of life with death. She declares that death has no meaning: "There is not room for Death / Nor atom that his might could render void" (243; ll. 25-26). Her faith in eternity resides in her god, immune from worldly creeds and reality. The "God within my breast" (243; l. 5) "may never be destroyed" (244; l. 28), because it never had an existence in the real world. Her world out of existence, in its sublimity and power, shares the same logic that underlies John Keats's appeal in "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Heard melodies are sweet, but

those unheard / Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on; / Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd, / Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone" (ll. 11-14). Keats extols the songs that never are sung and the love that is never enjoyed because, being imaginary, they cannot fade and die. In "No coward soul," Brontë rejoices in faith in her own mind. A literary genius has applied her powers to her own life and for her own use; she has created her eternity and has no need to fear.

Grief and an Unintended Solace

Interestingly, given the clarion call of imagination to herald the defeat of death, the poet does not appear to rely on the powers of her mind as an antidote to grief; if she did in fact take comfort through her imagination, she does not, as she did with mortality, trace the ways that imagination also serves that purpose. Instead, she ranges through the terrain of grief, takes it in from every vantage point, and finds little, if any, shelter from the storm. Grief was not a topic of study until psychology took an interest in the emotions, with the earliest attempt at a psychological investigation of grief dating over half a century after Brontë's death. In the twentieth century, psychologists approached analysis scientifically: they observed individual and group grief, conducted case studies and interviews, distributed questionnaires, and compiled data to understand how people grieve.[2] These endeavors aimed at understanding understand the nature of grief and validating its inevitability and importance. Brontë's poetic treatment of grief anticipates modern psychology; she departs from her milieu in not prescribing submission to God's will, treating grief as a topic to be analyzed and understood by describing its intensity and modulations. Also consistent with modern psychology, she presents grief as a process that is not linear; she recognizes that grief is intensely personal, and she repeatedly discounts the idea of closure. Last, ironically, her poetry effectually offers a fundamental precept of modern grief counseling by facilitating the sharing of sadness with others similarly situated, albeit indirectly.

Offering the solace of religion would be expected of a Victorian poet and daughter of a clergyman. Even today, the prospect of an afterlife is an important and for many effective consolation; yet, none of the voices in her poems offer religion as a comfort to the grieving.

[2] See Archer for examples of research and studies on grief (16-27).

How religion fails to ease the pain is depicted in "I. M. to I. G.," in which a daughter, adhering to what she has been taught, chides her father for grieving:

> O not for them should we despair;
> The grave is drear, but they are not there:
> Their dust is mingled with the sod;
> Their happy souls are gone to God!
> You told me this, and yet you sigh,
> And murmur that your friends must die.
> Ah, my dear father, tell me why? (219-20; no. 177, ll. 38-44)

The father cannot explain why, and his inability serves a thematic purpose; his presumed experience and wisdom cannot save him from grief. Contrary to John Donne's famous admonition, death *should* be proud.

To convey the nature of grief, Brontë equates the irrevocable loss of happiness with a change in the natural world: "Besides, the mist is half withdrawn; / The barren mountain-side lies bare; / And sunshine and awaking morn / Paint no more golden visions there" (141; no. 135, ll. 5-8). The intensity of grief can annihilate all other emotions:

> A thousand sounds of happiness,
> And only one of real distress,
> One hardly uttered groan—
> But that has hushed all vocal joy,
> Eclipsed the glory of the sky,
> And made me think that misery
> Rules in our world alone! (227; no. 185, ll. 1-7)

In addition to exploring the nature of sorrow, Brontë insightfully reveals that mourning is not a linear process but a fluctuating one; individuals experience sadness even if grieving is not justifiable by relationship. In poem 171, even after the deceased has been generally forgotten, the narrator is surprisingly moved by a sense of woe, brought on by memories; and however senseless it may be, given that the narrator does not claim the status of friend or lover, the "heart will be / A mourner still" (202; ll. 38-39).

Brontë depicts the stage of incomprehensibility suffered by the newly aggrieved in poem no. 104. Mourners look toward the door in expectation; unable to find words, they fall silent, listening for footfalls that they will never again hear. Falling prey to memories of where the dead have walked, they are overwhelmed by the feeling that "This very crowd is a vacancy" (111; l. 37):

> And we must watch and wait and mourn
> And half look out for their return,
> And think their forms we see;
>
> And fancy music in our ear,
> Such as their lips could only pour;
> And think we feel their presence near,
> And start to find they are not here,
> And never shall be more! (111-12, ll. 38-45)

Brontë investigates another crucial concern of modern psychology: the resolution of grief. The preponderance of poems on resolution suggests she experienced grief as impervious and unending. Modern psychologists recognize that, in many cases, closure never occurs; according to John Archer, "There is abundant evidence of prolonged, apparently unresolved grieving" (115). Brontë rejects standard palliatives offered to the grieving as useless. She discounts the claim that others having been spared death is itself a comfort; the failure of even *one* person to return from combat banishes joy, there being no acceptable number of casualties, as poems no. 102 and 103 indicate:

> From our evening fireside now,
> Merry laugh and cheerful tone,
> Smiling eye and cloudless brow,
> Mirth and music, all are flown; (102; no. 97, ll. 1-4)
>
> So it is by morn and eve—
> So it is in field and hall:
> For the absent one we grieve,
> One being absent saddens All. (103, ll. 41-44)

Brontë also repudiates memories as a comfort, expressing the idea that, contrary to the common notion, forgetting is a mercy:

> It is too late to call thee now:
> I will not nurse that dream again;
> For every joy that lit my brow
> Would bring its after-storm of pain. (141-42; no. 135, ll. 1-4)

Distinct from Tennyson's view, one immersed in grief might feel that it would have been better not to have loved at all than to have lost one's love.[3] This narrator prefers to strike a disadvantageous financial bargain of sorts than to continue suffering:

> Yet could I with past pleasures
> Past woe's oblivion buy,
> That by the death of my dearest treasures
> My deadliest pains might die. (130; no. 120, ll. 17-20)

Alternatively, Brontë does not neglect the passage of *time* as the most prescribed solace for grieving. "Cold in the earth" (222-23; no. 182) offers the possibility that "Time's all-wearing wave" (l. 4) has caused the speaker to forget the deceased, echoing the notion in another poem that time has an erosive power: "And surer than that dwelling dread, / The narrow dungeon of the dead, / Time parts the hearts of men" (204; no. 172, ll. 30-32). However, the absence of sorrow is only a tenuous circumstance in "Cold in the earth." The speaker is easily overwhelmed by grief, even fifteen years after the initial event, dwelling on memories that revive the desire for death and reunion in the grave. Brontë observes that not only do memories and time fail to console, but grief defies sleep: "Sleep brings no rest to me; / The shadows of the dead / My waking eyes may never see / Surround my bed" (54; no. 34, ll. 5-8). The only satisfactory rest would be "In sleep of death" (55; l. 24).

---

[3] See Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*: "I hold it true, whate'er befall; / I feel it, when I sorrow most; / 'Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all" (canto xxvii).

Given Brontë's propensity to depict inconsolable grief, poem no.138 might appear as a treatment of unrequited love but instead resonates as an expression of sorrow that knows no solace short of death:

> If grief for grief can touch thee,
> If answering woe for woe,
> If any ruth can melt thee,
> Come to me now!
>
> I cannot be more lonely,
> More drear I cannot be!
> My worn heart throbs so wildly
> 'Twill break for thee.
>
> And when the world despises,
> When heaven repels my prayer,
> Will not mine angel comfort?
> Mine idol hear?
>
> Yes, by the tears I've poured,
> By all my hours of pain,
> O I shall surely win thee,
> Beloved, again! (144-45)

The lover will win the beloved again in the grave, offering an analogy to *Wuthering Heights*' Heathcliff, perhaps the most inconsolable mourner in literature (Inman 196). The lover mourns, "Will not...Mine idol hear?" just as Heathcliff, also outcast by heaven and earth, longs for Catherine, his "idol." Epitomizing the inconsolable mourners of the poems is one whose only desire is to join the dead in the grave (again, like Heathcliff):

> In mercy, launch one arrow more;
> Life's conscious Death it wearies sore,
> It tortures worse than thee.
> Enough of storms have bowed his head:
> Grant him at last a quiet bed,

> Beside his early stricken dead—
> Even where he yearns to be! (228; no. 185, ll. 33-40)

Emily Brontë does not depict every death as occasioning unending sorrow, but she does recognize that, for many who mourn, there is no closure. Given the depiction of relentless grief, it might appear that she did not intend her poetry to offer solace to the grieving; nonetheless, it might indeed serve to comfort. A. F. Shand, a pioneering British psychologist, wrote in 1914 what is considered the first full treatment of the psychology of grief. In *The Foundations of Character*, he analyzed the nature of various emotions, devoting one third of the book to aspects of sorrow: "[T]hough it shocks us to recognize it...sorrow is lessened or consoled by the perception or the knowledge that others suffer around us or have similarly suffered in the past" (338). Although Emily Brontë's poetry anticipates the psychological study of grief in many ways, it does not directly advocate sharing experiences with other mourners. Perhaps that omission stems from her personality: reclusive, self-reliant, and painfully uncomfortable in drawing attention to herself. Yet her poems, in revealing personal sorrow so intensely and in so many ways, serve something of the same purpose: they represent a shared experience and, in that respect, offer solace.

Independent Scholar

Works Cited

Archer, John. *The Nature of Grief: The Evolution and Psychology of Reactions to Loss*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Brontë, Emily Jane. *The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Brontë*. Ed. C. W. Hatfield. New York: Columbia UP, 1941.

Brontë, Emily Jane. *Wuthering Heights*. London: Penguin, 2003.

Buchen, Irving H. "Emily Brontë and the Metaphysics of Childhood and Love." *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 22.1 (1967): 63-70.

Byron, George Gordon, Lord. *The Selected Poetry of Lord Byron*. Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2009.

Chitham, Edward. *A Life of Emily Brontë*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

Denisoff, Dennis. "Grave Passions: Enclosure and Exposure in Charlotte Mew's Graveyard Poetry." *Victorian Poetry* 38.1 (2000): 125-40.

Housman, A. E. "Here Dead We Lie." *Prose and Poetry of England*. Ed. Harriet Lucas. Syracuse: L. W. Singer, 1950. 158.

Inman, Laura, "'The Awful Event' in *Wuthering Heights*." *Brontë Studies* 33.3 (2008):192-202.

Keats, John. *The Complete Poems of John Keats*. New York: Modern Library, 1994.

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Ed. John Leonard. London: Penguin, 2003.

Shand, Alexander Faulkner. *The Foundations of Character: Being a Study of the Tendencies of the Emotions and Sentiments*. London: Macmillan, 1914.

Tennyson, Alfred, Lord. *Poems of Alfred Lord Tennyson*. Ed. G. F. Maine. London: Collins, 1973.

Book Reviews

Tamara S. Wagner. *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction: Plotting Money and the Novel Genre, 1815-1901*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-8142-1119-9. 232 pp. $44.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Albert D. Pionke

In 1855, largely in response to widespread financial losses incurred by Britain's rapidly expanding but improvidently managed railway network, Parliament passed the Limited Liability Act (18 & 19 Vict c 133), which protected investors in companies of 25 or more shareholders from being held financially accountable for more than the amount of their initial investments. If a company went bust, then its shares were deemed valueless, and the stockholders lost their principal, but were no longer in danger of being sued by the company's creditors to the limit of their last farthing. As Tamara Wagner observes, in her meticulously researched and conceptually ambitious new book, *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction*, many Victorian novelists equated the limitation of individual liability with the abrogation of personal responsibility, and so remained skeptical of this crucial legislative basis of modern finance capitalism. According to one character from Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Charlotte's Inheritance* (1868), cited in Wagner's introduction, "limited liability now-a-days seems only another name for unlimited crash."

It is her primary contribution to the burgeoning field of Victorian economic criticism that Wagner reconnects the ubiquitous specter of financial collapse to the development of the Victorian novel. She thus both builds upon and departs from the distinguished trajectory of earlier work by James Vernon, Barbara Weiss, Gail Turley Houston, Jeff Nunokawa, Patrick Brantlinger, Paul Delany, Claudia Klavner, Mary Poovey, and Catherine Gallagher. In her own words, *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction* represents both "a much needed reappraisal of the Victorians' fascination with financial speculation" and "a close reading of the versatile ways in which the novel genre was remodeled by, and in turn redefined, attitudes to the various instruments of finance capitalism as they developed over the course of the century" (13). A self-conscious response to Mark Osteen and Martha Woodmansee's call

for a new economic criticism that simultaneously enacts what Herbert Tucker and others have labeled "new formalism," the book covers an impressive range of ground: historically, it ranges from the aftereffects of the eighteenth-century South Sea Bubble to the mid-nineteenth-century speculations on suburbia to the late-century professionalization of the stock broker; textually, *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction* engages with both canonical and lesser-known novels of the silver fork, social problem, domestic, sensational, realist, and detective varieties.

Wagner divides her study into four chapters, the first two progressing chronologically by subgenre, and the latter two arranged according to recurrent motifs and narrative devices across a diversity of novels. Chapter 1 identifies the origins of the standard Victorian stock-market villain in the silver-fork novel, the formative influence of which she traces from Jane Austen's *Sanditon* (1817) through both social-problem fiction like Catherine Gore's *The Banker's Wife* (1843) and the mid-century domestic novel. In Wagner's account, fiction-writers deploy the figure of the disreputable speculator/gambler as a more or less ironic double for the respectable investor/man of business, thereby exploring both the dangerous attractiveness of indeterminacy and risk, and the inherent potential for self-destruction in a speculative economy. Chapter 2 calls attention to sensation fiction's self-reflexive appropriation of narratives of financial accountability. Offering extended readings of, among other works, Anthony Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?* (1865), and Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* (1863), Wagner reveals novelists grappling with the fundamental problem of trust in a credit economy. Chapter 3 examines fictional intersections between speculation and foreignness that defy both British national chauvinism and simplistic critical models of Orientalism. Juxtaposing William Makepeace Thackeray's *The Newcomes* (1855) with Charles Reade's *Hard Cash* (1863), Wagner compares the ambiguous affiliations between speculation and "the East" present in fiction of the 1850s with the dramatic imbrication of Empire and the threat of financial calamity in novels of the 1860s. Finally, in chapter 4, she notes how a plethora of writers working in a number of subgenres disallow any "easy divorce of business from the confines of home" (127), by concentrating on the ubiquitous presence of financial speculation in Victorian suburbia. This chapter also discusses the emergence of the professional stockbroker, who is distinguished from the reckless amateur, often female, speculator.

In addition to redirecting critical attention toward numerous under-read novels, many of them by women writers popular in their own time, Wagner maintains a consistent and broad-minded focus on the intersections between financial speculation and the subgenres of Victorian fiction that yields frequent interpretive dividends. As evidence for her assertion that novels do not merely reflect but also shape economic discourse of the period, she cites fascinating examples of finance journalism that appropriate fictional tropes, literary devices, and sensational plots to describe the state of the economy in the 1860s (16-20). Wagner also offers a compelling apology for the often-underrated silver-fork fiction of the 1820s and 1830s, arguing not only that it established patterns of conspicuous consumption as strategies for fictional characterization, but also that the speculative nature of silver-fork publication guaranteed a high level of self-reflexivity in financially-attuned fiction of subsequent decades (31-32). Elizabeth Gaskell becomes an intriguing test-case for this genealogy, and chapter 1 includes an extended reading of *North and South* (1855) as a surprising and persuasive example of silver-fork-indebted fiction of financial speculation (52-60). The epistemological problem of trust to which Wagner refers in her reading of *Aurora Floyd* reappears at the conclusion of her reading of *Hard Cash*, which, she argues, fundamentally "asserts the value of suspicion in a modern financial world anywhere," whether in the South Seas surrounded by pirates or in England at the mercy of bankers (121). Wagner's brief history of how predatory speculation in the middle-class housing market led to the tentacle-like growth of suburban slums is also especially informative and uncomfortably resonant in today's weak economy (130-40).

In the face of such an embarrassment of riches, it may seem ungenerous to wish for more. Nevertheless, although she makes several cogent observations about how the profession of Victorian novel-writing was, itself, fraught with economic risk, Wagner does not fully exploit the bivalent possibilities of her main title. There are hints of the economics of writing and publishing in her brief account of Henry Colburn and Charles Westmacott at the beginning of her silver-fork chapter (32-33); in her discussion of *Charlotte's Inheritance*, plagiarism, and copyright reform in chapter 2 (64-65); and in her passing observation that Charley Tudor, in Trollope's *The Three Clerks* (1857), spends his time in domestic suburbia writing (140). Wagner's most sustained focus on writing and other forms of cultural production as both deeply affected by economic uncertainty and metonyms of financial speculation appears most forcefully in her more extended treatment of Margaret Oliphant's

At His Gates (1872), in which the collapse of Burton's bank leads unsuccessful portrait-painter-turned-joint-stock-shareholder Robert Drummond, first, to contemplate suicide and, last, to produce a commercially and critically successful masterpiece. Attention to another novelistic subgenre, the Künstlerroman, as represented by, for instance, Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) and Thackeray's *History of Pendennis* (1850), might have revealed even further how novels of speculation could also exemplify novels as speculation.

It is entirely to Wagner's credit that her capacious interrogation of the links between finance capitalism and the Victorian novel leaves me wanting more. *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction* is already a methodologically astute, historically informative, and textually wide-ranging book. Put in terms suggested by its own objects of analysis, the book represents neither a speculation nor a gamble, but rather a valuable investment by a professional Victorianist who deserves our critical trust.

University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa

****

Emily Eells (ed. and tr.), *Two Tombeaux to Oscar Wilde: Jean Cocteau's Le Portrait surnaturel de Dorian Gray and Raymond Laurent's Essay on Wildean Aesthetics* (High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, 2010), **251 pp., ISBN 978-1904201182, £40.00/$65.00**

Reviewed by Nikolai Endres

Within a year, two new Dorians have emerged. In *Two Tombeaux to Oscar Wilde*, Emily Eells collects two homages to Oscar Wilde: an unperformed play by Jean Cocteau (written, in conjunction with his one-time lover Jacques Renaud, in 1908) based on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and one of the first scholarly essays on Wilde by Raymond Laurent (1910).

In the "Introduction," Eells establishes how deeply impressed Cocteau was by Wilde's *Dorian Gray*: "How the book enchanted, bewitched and drew me in!" (14)—not the least for its homoerotic subtext. Cocteau's theatrical adaptation, *Le Portrait surnaturel de Dorian Gray*, completed when he was eighteen years old, however, languished in obscurity. As an explanation, Eells tells a heartbreaking story.

In the fall of 1908, Cocteau travelled to Italy with his mother, ending their voyage in Venice. Twenty-one-year old Raymond Laurent, Cocteau's former schoolmate, was there as well, staying at the Hotel Europa with his boyfriend, the American Longhorn H. Whistler (no relation to the painter, it seems). In the evening of September 23rd, following a quarrel with his lover, Laurent took a gondola to the Church of Santa Maria della Salute, where he shot himself as the bells in St. Mark's Square chimed two in the morning. Most incredibly, while sightseeing on the marble steps, Wilde's son Vyvyan Holland witnessed the suicide. (What brought Vyvyan Holland to Venice and whether he knew Cocteau remains unclear, though.) Cocteau, who had plans to meet Laurent during their trip, then composed two poems to commemorate his friend: "En manière d'épitaphe" ("As an epitaph") and "Souvenir d'un soir d'automne au jardin Eaden" ("Remembrances of an autumn evening in the garden of Eaden"—"Eaden" being Cocteau's quirky spelling for "Eden"). Both are included in *La Lampe d'Aladin* (1909), Cocteau's very first collection of poems (which Cocteau later repudiated).

These poems are both little known and difficult to access. Since they pay tribute to a young man who suffered a Wildean fate, I translate a few lines. In "Eaden," Cocteau remembers when the four of them (Cocteau and a friend plus Laurent and his partner) used to enjoy their chats in a garden—where death came unannounced:

> A gesture… a revolver shot,
> Red blood on the white steps,
> People rushed over and bending down,
> A gondola… a covered corpse…
> A gesture… a revolver shot,
> Red blood on the white steps…
>
> And that was the end of it!... Some moments of dread,
> Some nice words,
> And in those joyful gondolas,
> The sadness of being reduced to three!
> And that was the end of it!... Some moments of dread,
> Some nice words….

Garden, so exquisitely fatal!
A sepulchre overgrown by roses,
So far away from the fretful city,
So far, so far from the hospital!

Because of those tragic circumstances, which uncannily linked Wilde and Laurent as gay martyrs, Cocteau abandoned *Le Portrait*.

Eells next provides background information on Laurent (1889-1908). He was a poet who composed a 320-page study on nineteenth-century English literature and art, *Etudes Anglaises*, published posthumously in 1910. In *Etudes* (only one copy of which, with uncut pages, survives in the French library network), among other things, the twenty-year old Laurent turns Coleridge into a precursor of the Pre-Raphaelites, with Wilde and Pater as their extension. "Laurent boldly welcomes Wilde as a salutary figure after a long period of aestheticism, revelling in his sense of corporal vitality after all the insipid superficiality of the art for art's sake movement" (30).

What follows is a bilingual presentation of the texts, edited and translated by Eells. What are some of the differences between novel and play? Lord Henry's Aunt Agatha becomes an older cousin, possibly because of French *tante*'s slangy connotation with queers. On the other hand, Sybil Vane's name for Dorian becomes "Jack"—Cocteau's nickname for his lover Renaud—and Basil's relationship with Dorian is *intime*. The picture is more prophetic, predicting rather than registering Dorian's downfall. In the first half, the painting is also displayed on stage (rather than hidden in the attic), but the front remains invisible to the audience. The Alan Campbell and James Vane episodes are merged, producing a double threat to Dorian. And of course modern technology heightens dramatic tension: electric lighting and the telephone both impinge on Dorian's closet. Finally, Lord Henry (Harry here) is with the servants when they find Dorian's corpse.

Eells sees *Le Portrait* as an important text, "a portrait of the artist as a young man" (23), that paved the way for Cocteau's later adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* (1924), *Beauty and the Beast* (1945), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1949), his first film *The Blood of a Poet* (1930), and his play *The Human Voice* (1930).

Unfortunately, the volume suffers from sloppy editing, such as missing auxiliary verbs, typos, or spelling errors in English and in French. Cocteau's date of birth is variously given as 1889 (correct) and 1891; the man at the heart of a homosexual scandal in Wilhelmine

Germany was Eulenburg, not Eulenberg; Dorian reads a poisonous book, not a "poisoned book" (16); highfalutin jargon, such as "antonomasia" or "prolepsis," mars an otherwise reader-friendly introduction.

There is also something curious about the "translation": "The manuscript of the play explicitly presents itself as an adaptation of the first French translation of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Given that the majority of the lines are copied directly from that first French version of the text [by Eugène Tardieu and Georges Mauvert, published in Paris in 1908], I have reverted back to Wilde's original phrasing rather than re-translate the translation. The apparent semantic variations between the French and the English versions of Cocteau's script therefore reflect the discrepancies between Wilde's text and its first translation into French" (35). As a result, Cousine Agathe reappears as Aunt Agatha.

Western Kentucky University

******

Nicholas Frankel (ed.), *The Picture of Dorian Gray: An Annotated, Uncensored Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 295 pp., ISBN 978-0674057920, $35.00

Reviewed by Nikolai Endres

Nicholas Frankel has prepared a new edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. As is well known, the story was first serialized in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* before Wilde published it as a novel. The changes from serial to novel are easy to trace for scholars and students alike. The Norton Critical Edition, for example, prints both versions. However, what Frankel provides is the original typescript submitted to *Lippincott's* and the alterations imposed by the editor, J. M. Stoddart, before the text appeared in the magazine. As a result, we now have an uncensored Dorian, which is very exciting. Some 500 words were excised prior to its release and are restored here. Unsurprisingly, many of these references touch on sexuality. Fascinatingly, a clearly traceable development of sexual expurgation has now been exposed: typescript, censored serial version, even more censored book.

For example, in the first chapter in *Lippincott's*, when Lord Henry asks Basil how often he sees Dorian, Basil answers: "Every day. I couldn't be happy if I didn't see him every day. Of course sometimes it is only for a few minutes. But a few minutes with somebody one worships mean a great deal." In chapter 7, Basil feels something "purely feminine" in Dorian's tenderness and worships Dorian "with far more romance of feeling than a man usually gives to a friend," adding "Somehow, I had never loved a woman." The first quotation was toned down in the novel, all the others were cancelled.

What, then, are the most dramatic deletions from the typescript? "There was love in every line, and in every touch there was passion," Basil describes his eroticized painting (ch. 7). Dorian reflects on Basil's friendship as "something infinitely tragic in a romance that was at once so passionate and so sterile" (ch. 7; sterility would have been a Victorian euphemism for homosexuality). After dumping Sybil Vane, Dorian is implicated in a pick-up scene in the dead of night: "A man with curious eyes had suddenly peered into his [Dorian's] face, and then dogged him with stealthy footsteps, passing and repassing him many times" (ch. 5). A specific reference to the "yellow book," *Le Secret de Raoul, par Catulle Sarrazin* (a fictional title, possibly evoking Rachilde's gender-bending *Monsieur Venus*, and composite of two decadent authors, Catulle Mendès and Gabriel Sarrazin), also disappeared (ch. 8).

Basil's declaration of love, "I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man should ever give to a friend," is subtly modified to "I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man usually gives to a friend" (ch. 7). Moreover, Dorian's illicit relations with women were cleaned up, including the most substantial cut: "Upon the other hand, had she [Hetty Merton] become your mistress, she would have lived in the society of charming and cultured men. You would have educated her, taught her how to dress, how to talk, how to move. You would have made her perfect, and she would have been extremely happy. After a time, no doubt, you would have grown tired of her. She would have made a scene. You would have made a settlement. Then a new career would have begun for her" (ch. 13). Finally, several other allusions to decadence, paganism, and murder were erased.

Frankel argues that Wilde was not consulted regarding those cuts (which apparently was common editorial practice in those days) and therefore did endorse them: "The *Lippincott's* version represents what one relatively liberal-minded editor and his associates thought was permissible in 1890" (42). Frankel also asks, though does not answer, why it took so long for

this typescript to be published. In any case, "The present restoration of matter excised by Stoddart and colleagues gives us a more scandalous and daring novel than either of its two subsequent published versions. By presenting the typescript Wilde submitted for publication, this edition presents *Dorian Gray*, for the first time, as its author envisioned it in 1890, before commercial, social, and legal pressures motivated a number of changes to Wilde's text.... The appearance of Wilde's novel, in its uncensored form, 120 years after its submission to *Lippincott's*, is reason for celebration" (54). Indeed.

A "General Introduction," a "Textual Introduction," "Textual Notes" (which list substantive emendations that affect meaning and interpretation), an appendix on accidental changes (focusing on spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and the like), an appendix with the 1891 "Preface" to *Dorian Gray*, and "Further Reading" accompany the text in a beautifully produced volume: lots of white space, helpful annotations, crisp color illustrations and photographs, and a good deal for $35.

"There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written." Oscar would approve, although there is still one unfinished task. To this day, the holograph manuscript, which Wilde submitted to Miss Dickens' Typewriting Service in the Strand for production and which is currently housed in the Morgan Library in New York, awaits publication. After all, it is the *Ur*-text of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Western Kentucky University

****

Announcements

Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies is published three times a year—spring, fall and a specially-themed summer issue—and accepts both scholarly articles and book reviews year-round. We welcome articles of 5,000-8,000 words on gender studies and British literature, art and culture during the long nineteenth century. Submissions should be in MLA format and must include a brief biographical note which will be posted if accepted for publication. Please send an electronic version of your submission in Word to both: Stacey Floyd

(sefloyd@stritch.edu) and Melissa Purdue (melissa.purdue@mnsu.edu). For more information, please visit the journal at: www.ncgsjournal.com

****

Victorian Literature and Culture invites papers for a special issue devoted to Victorian India to be published in 2013.

What was "Victorian India"? Papers may treat any aspect of Victorian India, its Victorian culture and Anglophone Indian writing. For fuller details or inquiries, contact Mary Ellis Gibson, megibson@uncg.edu. Completed papers should be formatted according to MLA style and submitted electronically in Word format to megibson@uncg.edu, no later than October 15, 2012. A hard copy is not required but would be appreciated for submissions originating in the U.S. Submit two paper copies along with electronic text to Mary Ellis Gibson, Elizabeth Rosenthal Professor of English, Department of English, 3143 MHRA, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC 27412.

All papers will be reviewed by the special topics editor, as appropriate by members of the editorial board, and by the editors of *Victorian Literature and Culture,* Adrienne Munich and John Maynard. For further information about the journal see http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/english/journal/victorian.

****

Victorians Journal of Culture and Literature invites submissions for a special edition celebrating the bicentenaries Robert Browning and Charles Dickens, to be published in Fall 2012. Most welcome is new work on these authors from feminist and post-colonial viewpoints. Please send electronic submissions of 20-25 pp., in MLA formatting, to deborah.logan@wku.edu -- or to -- victorian.newsletter@wku.edu.

Contributors

Daniel Brown recently defended his PhD in English at the University of Florida. His interests include Victorian novels and poetry, Pre-Raphaelite painting, digital humanities, postcolonial theory, and masculinities studies. He has published articles in *The Blackwell Companion to Sensation Fiction* (2011) and the e-journal, *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* (Winter 2007). He has presented conference papers on Charles Dickens, Charles Kingsley, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Paul Gauguin, and the contemporary South Asian writer, Bapsi Sidhwa. He currently teaches writing at the University of Florida and Santa Fe College, both in Gainesville, Florida.

Nikolai Endres is Associate Professor of English and World Literature at Western Kentucky University. His recent and forthcoming publications include translations of Franz von Schönthan's *Sodom und Gomorrah* and Bayard and Wailly's *Le mari à la campagne ou Le Tartuffe modern* (Fairleigh Dickinson UP); "Gore Vidal," *The Wadsworth Anthology of American Literature* (2012); "Athens and Apartheid: Mary Renault and Classics in South Africa" (2012); "Difficult Dialogues about a Difficult Dialogue: Plato's *Symposium* and its Gay Tradition" (2012); and "Horses and Heroes: Plato's *Phaedrus* and Mary Renault's *The Charioteer*" (2011).

Shannon Gilstrap is Assistant Professor of English at Gainesville State College in Georgia. He received his PhD in English Literature in 2011 from Georgia State University in Atlanta. His dissertation is titled "'A Revolution by Due Course of Law': Matthew Arnold, G.W.F. Hegel, and the State's Revolutionary Role." His research focuses primarily on the prose and poetry of Matthew Arnold.

Laura Inman practiced corporate and securities law in New York City for seventeen years and is now teaching high school English and French. Her article, "The 'Awful Event' in *Wuthering Heights*" was published in *Brontë Studies* (2008). Her short story "The Philosophers' Soccer Match" appeared in *The Cynic Magazine,* www.thecynicmagazine.com (2011). Her current research includes a study of John Keats.

John Paul Kanwit is Assistant Professor of English at Ohio Northern University, where he teaches Victorian literature, the British novel, children's literature, and general education courses. His current book project examines the intersections between Victorian art criticism and the novel, especially in the works of Charlotte and Anne Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Anna Jameson, Elizabeth Eastlake, and Emilia Dilke.

Albert D. Pionke is Associate Professor of English at University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. He is the author of *Plots of Opportunity: Representing Conspiracy in Victorian England* (2004) and co-editor of *Victorian Secrecy: Economies of Knowledge and Concealment* (2010).

Inna Y. Volkova, a PhD Candidate in English at Michigan State University, is currently working on her dissertation project entitled "'There is something in all this very like democracy': Cultures of Political Discussion in the Victorian Novel." Her research interests include Victorian fiction and nonfiction, public sphere theory, critical theory, cosmopolitanism, and notions of community. Her articles have appeared in *George Eliot—George Henry Lewes Studies, English Association of Pennsylvania State Universities Online, Ecloga,* and *Luminary.*

Tamara S. Wagner obtained her PhD from Cambridge University and is currently Associate Professor at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Her books include *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction: Plotting Money and the Novel Genre, 1815-1901* (2010); *Longing: Narratives of Nostalgia in the British Novel, 1740-1890* (2004); and *Occidentalism in Novels of Malaysia and Singapore, 1819-2004* (2005). Edited collections include *Consuming Culture in the Long Nineteenth-Century* (2007; paperback edition 2010); *Antifeminism and the Victorian Novel: Rereading Nineteenth-Century Women Writers* (2009); and *Victorian Settler Narratives: Emigrants, Cosmopolitans and Returnees in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (2011). Forthcoming is her scholarly edition of Frances Trollope's 1843 novel *The Barnabys in America*. Wagner's current projects include a study of Victorian narratives of failed emigration and a special issue on colonial girlhood for the journal, *Women's Writing.*