

The Victorian Newsletter

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Cover: Matthew Arnold, on the centennial anniversary of his death,—from James Jacques Tissot's ("Coide") caricature in *Vanity Fair*, 11 November 1871.

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Inventing Victorians: Virginia Woolf's "Memoirs of a Novelist"

Mary Kaiser Loges

Virginia Woolf's "Memoirs of a Novelist" has been published in the recent collection of her shorter fiction, although it was originally submitted to *Cornhill Magazine* in 1909 as a book review (Bell 154). Ostensibly a review of a Victorian biography, by Miss Linsett, of a Victorian novelist, Miss Frances Willatt, "Memoirs of a Novelist" is actually a work of fiction; both the biography and its subject are imaginary. Claiming to have found the *Memoirs* in a Charing Cross bookshop, "wedged between Sturm 'On the Beauties of Nature' and the 'Veterinary Surgeon's Manual' on the outside shelf" (64), Woolf proceeds to invent passages from the biography, excerpts of Willatt's novels and letters, and even quotations from contemporary reviews, as she constructs a portrait of a second-rate Victorian novelist, renowned in her own century but forgotten in ours, a woman threatened not only by social convention but even more deeply by the tendency of her admirers to objectify their heroines.

Quentin Bell notes in his biography of Woolf that "Memoirs" was planned as the first in a series of hoax reviews, but after it was rejected by *Cornhill*, Woolf abandoned any further fictional reviews. However, the fact that the hoax review, though laborious and risky, appealed to her, suggests that it allowed the young Virginia Woolf a freedom of expression she did not find elsewhere. While the review form presented a familiar context in which to experiment with fiction, the fictional subject presented a safe target against which to advance a young critic's challenging response to the Victorian period.

"Memoirs" is written with a high-spirited wit that cannot disguise Woolf's anxieties about the direction of her own career. She was twenty-seven, at work on *The Voyage Out*, her first novel, and deeply concerned with her future as a writer. The subject of "Memoirs," Miss Frances Willatt, bears a strong resemblance to Woolf's later portrait of George Eliot, but the character as a young woman also resembles Virginia Stephen. Like Virginia Stephen, Frances Willatt was surrounded as a child by a distinguished father and intellectual brothers. After her father's death, the reviewer writes, Miss Willatt's "spirits rose, and she determined to find scope for the 'great powers of which [she was] conscious' in London." Living in Bloomsbury, Miss Willatt tried and failed at philanthropy, then turned to novel writing. Unlike Virginia Woolf, however, Miss Willatt was too circumspect to use her own family as material for her work, instead performing an exotic displacement of her experience, as Woolf the reviewer explains:

Miss Willatt . . . thought it indecent to describe what she had seen, so that instead of a portrait of her brothers (and one had led a very queer life) or a memory of her father (for which we should have been grateful) she invented Arabian lovers and set them on the banks of the Orinoco. (69)

In her portrait of Frances Willatt, the young Virginia Stephen is clearly exploring some of her own choices as a writer. A biography of her father, Leslie Stephen, would have been a logical choice, perhaps one that she seriously considered. The

temptation to choose an exotic setting for her fiction was strong for Miss Stephen as for Miss Willatt, as evident in the jungle setting of *The Voyage Out*. Phyllis Rose, in *A Woman of Letters*, has pointed out several other parallels between "Memoirs" and Woolf's first novel. Throughout "Memoirs," however, Woolf is acutely aware of the difference between her own time and that of Frances Willatt and her biographer, and the tone of the review is occasionally complacent about the advantages of living in the fresh air of Modernism.

Woolf is most complacent about her modernity in her picture of the biographer Miss Linsett. This portrait is a parody of the personality and method of the Victorian hagiographer, a type Lytton Strachey was busy satirizing in 1909 for his forthcoming *Eminent Victorians*. Woolf's Miss Linsett, granted permission from Miss Willatt's brother to record his sister's life, is cautioned not to "break down the barriers," and thus, the reviewer suggests, reveal anything of real importance about Frances Willatt's life. In conventional fashion, Miss Linsett begins the biography with details of the Willatt ancestry, in the process omitting the first seventeen years of Frances Willatt's life. Similarly, the biographer ignores the life of Willatt's mother, remaining more comfortable with male subjects. Miss Linsett must be "forced," writes the reviewer, to describe Frances, and "not . . . her uncles" (65). According to the reviewer, the "nervous prudery and the dreary literary conventions" of Miss Linsett's writing prevent her from revealing what the reviewer calls "the most interesting event in Miss Willatt's life," her disappointed love affair. In Woolf's parody of the Victorian biographer's style, Miss Linsett refers to the affair obliquely: "no one who has read the book (*Life's Crucifix*) can doubt that the heart which conceived the sorrows of Ethel Eden in her unhappy attachment had felt some of the pangs so feelingly described *itself*, so much we may say, more we may not" (67). The reviewer concludes, "it is clear that one must abandon Miss Linsett altogether, or take the greatest liberties with her text" (68), because she falls victim to what Woolf considers the occupational hazard of the Victorian biographer, who, she wrote in a 1927 essay, "The New Biography," "was dominated by the idea of goodness" (231).

Though Miss Willatt is plagued by doubts about her work, her faith, and her purpose in life, the *Memoirs* persist in portraying her as virtuous and serene. "She was justly esteemed for her benevolence," the *Memoirs* continues, "and her strict uprightness of character, which however never brought upon her the reproach of hardness of heart" (68). This is one of several judgments the reviewer supplies from the biography, commenting, "It seems incredible that human beings should think that these things are true of each other, and if not, that they should take the trouble to say them" (68). The reviewer believes that Miss Linsett's biography says more about the Victorian temperament, which she likens to "a closed room hung with claret-coloured plush, and illustrated with texts," than it does about its subject, whose real character must be pieced together by re-imagining her in the "daylight" of a

modern vision.

Woolf's comments on the *Memoirs* exhibit the Bloomsbury group's rejection of Victorian values, and their ridicule of Victorian conventions. Although she avoids the temptation to caricature in her portrait of Miss Willatt the novelist, Woolf's parody of the biography is merely grotesque. The Bloomsbury group's contempt for Victorian valorization of public figures, and for the Victorian fascination with sickness and death carries this parody beyond cogent critique into facile caricature. Unlike Frances Willatt, with whom Woolf sympathizes and even identifies, Miss Linsett is portrayed as the conventional, sentimental victim of her own pious fantasies.

In her discussion of Miss Willatt's adult life, the reviewer dismisses Miss Linsett and proceeds with her own interpretation of the life of the lady novelist. The reviewer is acutely aware of the psychological pressures peculiar to Willatt's Victorian world. In particular, Willatt must resist the "Angel in the House" ideal of femininity, and as an artist, she must confront the Victorian double image of the female artist: as moral monster and as witch—the detached, powerful sibyl. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out in *Madwoman in the Attic*, these chimerical images of women artists haunt many novels by Victorian women, but the "Memoir's" Frances Willatt actually lives them out. Her biography attempts to paint the young Frances as a devoted philanthropist, but the reviewer adds, "to imagine her then, as the sleek sober woman that her friend paints her, doing good wearily but with steadfast faith, is quite untrue; on the contrary she was a restless and discontented woman, who sought her own happiness rather than other people's" (69). Frances Willatt's natural egotism appears monstrous, not only to the Victorian world at large, but to herself as well, and so her writing becomes a project in self-justification: "she bethought her of literature . . . more to justify her complicated spiritual state than to say what must be said," the reviewer explains.

Having made a name in popular literature, and in success freeing herself of the taint of moral depravity, Miss Willatt then succumbs to the second image of the female artist—she becomes a sibyl, feeding on adulation. "She went on to prophesy for others," the reviewer laments, "dwelling in vague regions with great damage to her system" (71). Gathering around herself a coterie of devoted readers, Miss Willatt becomes, for the first time in the reviewer's opinion, truly monstrous. She describes the elderly Miss Willatt as a "gorged spider at the centre of her web, and all along the filaments unhappy women came running, slight hen-like figures, frightened by the sun and the carts and the dreadful world, and longing to hide themselves from the entire panorama in the shade of Miss Willatt's skirts" (72).

"A deluded woman who held phantom sway over subjects even more deluded than herself" (196)—this description, not of Frances Willatt, but of George Eliot, opens Woolf's 1925 *Common Reader* essay on the great Victorian woman of letters. This, Woolf writes, is the "late Victorian version" of Eliot, a view of her that "one had accepted . . . half consciously and half maliciously," and a view that Woolf claims to have revised sixteen years after her "Memoirs" hoax. However, even in the 1925 essay enough striking parallels exist between Frances

Willatt and George Eliot to suggest that the subject of "Memoirs" is a version of Eliot.

Woolf quotes Edmund Gosse's description of the elder Eliot, for example: "a large, thick-set sybil, dreamy and immobile," and that of Lady Ritchie, who sounds very much like Miss Linsett when she remembers, "I felt [George Eliot] to be a friend, not exactly a personal friend, but a good and benevolent impulse" (197). In addition, Eliot shares with Miss Willatt a remarkable lack of feminine charm, Woolf describing as "not strongly feminine," "the long, heavy face with its expression of serious and sullen and almost equine power." Like Miss Willatt, who in "Memoirs" is portrayed as so determined to educate herself that she leans "out of bed, book in hand, so as to get the benefit of the chink of light which came through the door from the other room" in order to "read the whole of Bright's history of the Church" (65), Eliot in the 1925 essay is pictured as working with ugly persistence: "there is a dogged determination in her advance upon the citadel of culture which raises it above our pity," Woolf comments, after quoting Eliot herself saying, "I used to go about like an owl" (198).

Like Frances Willatt, Eliot turned to fiction when no longer young, "and by that time," Woolf continues in the 1925 essay, "she had come to think of herself with a mixture of pain and something like resentment." As it did in Miss Willatt's fiction, Eliot's need for self-justification surfaces in her novels to distort characterization, especially when, Woolf argues, "her heroines say what she herself would have said." Miss Willatt, according to the reviewer, "could not say 'I love you,' " in her novels, "but used 'thee' and 'thou,' which with their indirectness, seemed to hint that she was not committing herself" (70). George Eliot, Woolf argues, was also unable to portray intense feeling directly: "the more one examines the great emotional scenes," she writes, "the more nervously one anticipates the brewing and gathering and thickening of the cloud which will burst upon our heads at the moment of crisis in a shower of disillusionment and verbosity" (203).

However, in their response to the adulation which attended the fictional Miss Willatt and the real George Eliot at the conclusions of their careers lies a crucial difference between the mediocre Willatt and the woman Woolf calls one of the "great originals" (200). Whereas Miss Willatt enters into the role of sibyl, because, the reviewer explains, "power, which should have been hers as a mother, was dear to her even when it came by illegitimate means," Eliot never accepted the role her admirers sought to impose on her. In the conclusion of her 1925 essay, Woolf described the elder Eliot as "inordinately praised and shrinking from her fame," and as unwilling to "renounce her own inheritance" as a woman: "the difference of view, the difference of standard—nor accept an inappropriate reward" (204). Integrally linked with Eliot's personal integrity, her refusal to "accept an inappropriate reward," is the authenticity of her fictional world, a quality missing from Miss Willatt's fiction, and accounting, perhaps, for the judgment of the Victorian reviews, invented for "Memoirs," that Willatt's tone was " 'more satisfactory' " than George Eliot's (70). Using the standard she employs for all her evaluations of the novel, Woolf judges Eliot's work for its ability to come to life. Eliot's characters, she writes, "have put on flesh and blood and we

move among them, now bored, now sympathetic, but always with that unquestioning acceptance of all that they say and do, which we accord to the great originals only" (200).

This view of Eliot as an insatiable seeker after "something that is perhaps incompatible with the facts of human existence" (204) seems to be the revision in her assessment of Eliot that Woolf refers to in the opening paragraph of her essay. As she concludes, Woolf no longer sees Eliot as a "deluded woman," but merely as an unsatisfied one, and she sees that dissatisfaction, not only as a symptom of the Victorian female malaise, but suggests that Eliot's is the inevitable position of the woman artist, "reaching out with 'a fastidious yet hungry ambition' for all that life could offer the free and inquiring mind and confronting her feminine aspirations with the real world of men" (204).

Woolf's starting place for the character of Frances Willatt in "Memoirs of a Novelist" is clearly George Eliot. However, Woolf invents a character who finds herself in Eliot's position, but without Eliot's massive intellectual powers. Willatt, then, is Woolf's way of asking a question similar to her famous "Shakespeare's sister" question: what if George Eliot had had a sister who, while aspiring to write, was neither a paragon of strength nor a creative genius? In the life of Frances Willatt, Woolf sketches the debilitating effect of Victorian social forces on the creative energy of an ordinary woman, and in so doing, she calls more attention to those forces than a portrait of a triumphant figure like Eliot could give.

This image of the Victorian woman struggling for creative freedom reappears several times of Woolf's work, notably in

A Room of One's Own, in her essays, and in *Orlando*, always with the conviction that the Victorian age was a suffocating time for women writers, who developed artistic identities at a period when conventional roles for women did not include the egotism and wide acquaintance with the world of affairs that Woolf considered requisite for the successful novelist. She sums up this quandary for Frances Willatt when she writes that for the budding writer, "with self-consciousness came . . . a terrible depression" (66). It is important to note, however, the change of tone with which, in 1925, Woolf treats the experience of George Eliot not as peculiarly Victorian but as a chapter in the universal experience of women of letters, reflecting a deeper identification with her Victorian precursor as Woolf encountered both the failures and the successes of her own "fastidious yet hungry ambition."

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Viterbo College

Distortion Versus Revaluation: Three Twentieth-Century Responses to Victorian Fiction

Jerome Meckier

Magwitch (1983) alludes by title to a personage missing from its pages; the novel transpires during the interval between the convict's death and Pip's re-encounter with Estella. Michael Noonan chronicles Mr. Pirrip's search for a second fortune that his grizzly benefactor supposedly left hidden down under. Although set almost entirely in Australia, this novel would evaporate if it could not borrow Dickens's universally known characters—a case of repetition that amounts to flagrant misuse.

Besides Pip, who is older, wiser, yet still a prig, one meets Charlotte, a willful young woman presumably fathered by Abel Magwitch and thus Estella's half-sister. Heartlessness supplies sufficient proof of consanguinity: when Magwitch re-entered England illegally, it was probably Charlotte who informed the transported felon's enemies.

Having arrived to investigate "business prospects" for Clariker and Co. (8), Mr. Pirrip quickly develops an acute case of *déjà vu*. Even before the unnamed convict for whom he

interceded enroute to New South Wales returns the favor, Pip detects "something of Miss Havisham" in Lucy Brewster, a "short plump woman of fifty" wearing the contents of "a dozen" jewelry cases (44, 38). Unaccountably, Lucy turns out to be the forsaken bride's illegitimate daughter (144), and illegitimate becomes the perfect adjective for Noonan's anemic clone from Dickens's classic novel.

Nearly everyone in Dickens's fiction resurfaces in Noonan's Australia: for Tolchard, read Tulkinghorn; for Mr. Chilblud, substitute Chadband. Disbarred for killing Molly (Estella's mother) in self-defense, Jaggers reappears as himself but seems doubly out of place as gatekeeper for the Rushmore estate (139). The novel's climax is also depressingly derivative; when Charlotte sets fire to a portrait of Pip, Lucy's mansion burns to the ground as if it were another Satis House.

Perusing all that remains to him of Magwitch's legacy (a deck of playing cards and a copy of the New Testament), Pip

decodes a map indicating the treasure's whereabouts; it was shipped back to England in coffins supposedly containing the remains of ten felons who wanted to be repatriated before burial. Pip retreats to the graveyard in the marsh country where *Great Expectations* (1860-61) began, only to find that others have beaten him to the gold. While in the neighborhood, however, he revisits the ruins of Miss Havisham's dwelling, meets Estella again, and rejoins Dickens's novel.

Noonan stigmatizes New South Wales as "a whirling cesspool of bribery and betrayal" (179),¹ but the novel is actually quite turgid. A clumsy interpolation rather than a vital interposition, it introduces a 200-page digression between chapters 58 and 59 of *Great Expectations*; Magwitch's fifteen-year ordeal in Australia is no more a lacuna than Pip's eleven years of self-exile to Egypt. Although Noonan has no quarrel to pick with Dickens's satirical world view, *Magwitch* inadvertently makes the second Mr. Pirrip's journey to "the far underside of the earth" (21) morally regressive: "But now," the hero reflects, "I find I have occasion to abhor [Magwitch] the more I learn of the lengths he went to try to make a gentleman" (109). Unlike the original Pip, Noonan's imposter seems more comfortable financially and is certain of keeping Estella but finds the albatross of unwelcome benefaction back around his neck.

The tragedy that overtakes young Rochester and Antoinette Bertha Cosway in the West Indies of the 1830s would also be less comprehensible were Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) unable to draw much of its energy and significance from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). The early years of Rochester's involvement with Bertha are no more absent from Brontë's novel than Magwitch's Australian career "fills a gap" in an earlier work.²

Antoinette Cosway narrates the first and third parts of Rhys's story as child and madwoman respectively; Rochester relives his disastrous first marriage in the middle section. Not unaware that madness has been hereditary for the Cosways, Richard Mason disposes of his unwanted relation to a needy Englishman attracted about equally to her beauty and her dowry.³ Ironically, after Rochester has sold himself into bondage, he learns that his father and older brother have both died, leaving him the family estates. But Rhys's extended championing of Bertha as a misused underdog and the presenting of Rochester as yet another—he is an unloved younger son—only muddles matters; in the Brontë novel, Jane has already occupied the underdog's position.⁴

Rhys's best scene is her last, the demented Bertha's interior monologue that fuses *Wide Sargasso Sea* to *Jane Eyre*. Carrying a flickering candle as she leaves her room in Thornfield Hall, Bertha is about to fulfill her threat to Rochester: "before I die

I will show you how much I hate you" (147). But she is also ready to relive the trauma of her childhood: the fiery destruction by former slaves of her father's house in Jamaica, only this time it is she who seeks revenge after release. Burning down the Edenic Coulibri Estate was a wanton act by a mob inferior to what it destroyed. Brontë's Bertha, by contrast, existed both in Rochester's attic and within his mind as a symbol of male dominance, an enormity that Charlotte insisted must be consumed in flames to Rochester's ultimate advantage through his first wife's self-liberating but self-destructive arson. The madwoman who walks only at night also functioned as Jane's unacknowledged passionate self; Brontë had to allow this secret sharer egress if Jane was to preserve her equilibrium.⁵

Unfortunately, as Rhys increases reader sympathy for Bertha, the latter ceases to be the mysterious madwoman Brontë's novel required. Rounding out this demonic pyrotechnist⁶ with a complete history humanizes her at the expense of her emblematic effectiveness as surely as reconstructing Magwitch's Australian crimes lessens his symbolic efficacy as a test case for the stuck-up Pip's compassion.

Meant to signify something else as well as to exist on its own, a symbol has a range of meaning beyond itself that automatically contracts if the symbolic object or person is made to assume too much literal import. When Dickens wanted to outclass a predecessor with his own version of a woman in white, he displaced one symbolic personage with another: he considered Miss Havisham both more powerful and more unforgettable than Wilkie Collins's Anne Catherick.

Rhys's prefix to one novel and Noonan's suffix to another are not of equal merit, yet each distorts the role one or more of the major figures played in the lives of other characters in the parent novel. Rhys's well-written story creates harmful predilections that bend *Jane Eyre* out of shape upon subsequent rereading. An inferior product by any standard, Noonan's continuation inserts a thematically injurious bulge near the conclusion of *Great Expectations*. A Rochester who appears to welcome Antoinette's insanity and who demystifies his wife by calling her Bertha will never bring Jane happiness, although Rhys did not write her prelude to underscore this suspicion. Similarly, Noonan's sequel never set out to test the credibility of Pip's hard-earned, humanistic acquiescence in Magwitch's avuncularity; still, as the convict's dark dealings come increasingly to light, poor Pip is compelled to revise downward the expectations with which he came to Australia.

The Old Wives' Tale (1908) is fundamentally unlike *Magwitch* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, wherein the plugging of imaginary gaps seems parasitic and semi-plagiaristic. Arnold Bennett devised an Edwardian variation on the Victorian practice

1. J. S. Ryan, Australian as is Noonan, finds in *Magwitch* a "further growth experience for Pip" that is able "to give considerable satisfaction to the reader," even if "not all of this 'sequel' may seem to be of the quality of the original" (108).

2. Noonan pays himself this compliment in a foreword (6). For the widely held view that Rhys's novel "exists in its own right, quite independent of *Jane Eyre*," see Francis Wyndham's introduction to *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Refuting Walter Allen's objections, Arnold E. Davidson goes further: he believes Rhys's only masterpiece is "an inverted version of Brontë's" that "calls into question the patriarchal bias implicit in much modern Western literature," but surely Charlotte did so too; see Davidson (16, 43).

3. Antoinette's mother is said to have been mentally disturbed, and Daniel

Cosway insists that "Old Cosway die raving like his father before him" (96).

4. When Rochester complains that "magic and loveliness" have vanished from his life prematurely—"a short youth mine was"—he seems to be stealing Jane's lines (172, 84).

5. Robert Keefe views the madwoman as a "maternal figure," Jane's "Oedipal rival," but, citing other reasons, he agrees that "it would be a mistake to treat Bertha's death realistically," which is what Rhys has attempted; see Keefe 126-27.

6. Nina Auerbach misreads Bertha as a "paradigm of incendiary womanhood who sprang out of the revolutionary forties" (43).

of corrective substitution that I have referred to elsewhere as parodic revaluation: instead of embellishing a predecessor's materials with fictitious particulars, he tried to wrest control of them, reshaping everything he reused to suit his own philosophical ends (see Meckier, *Hidden Rivalries*). Thus he rewrote *Vanity Fair* (1846) to express an anti-Thackerian world view in somewhat the same manner that George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866) redid *Bleak House* (1852-53) to discredit Dickens's brand of realism, or that Dickens combed Wilkie Collins's *Armada* (1866) for incidents of doubling and duplicity to outdo in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). Bennett, however, did not concentrate primarily on specific episodes from Thackeray's masterpiece; he reorchestrated the life rhythms supposedly being played out in them.

Bennett's masterwork can stand on its own, its competition with a famous antecedent unnoticed; yet when superimposed on *Vanity Fair*, it revises the earlier novel's outlook, thus imparting to the experiences of the Baines sisters an additional dimension. *The Old Wives' Tale* is double-purpose, both a telling and a subtle retelling. One must attend equally to the novel Bennett wrote and to his simultaneous reconsideration of an earlier work that he was disagreeing with in order to clarify his own ideas.

Bennett acknowledged the eventual loss of place every mortal suffers as a legitimate reason for preaching "the Vanity of human affairs": namely, that "all...mortal delights are transitory" and that even such sanctuaries as Hyde Park and Belgrave Square and such "gifts and pleasures" as "a carriage and three thousand a year" were really "vanities"—all destined to "pass away" (see *Vanity Fair* 437, 397, 518). But this eminent Edwardian was a practicing romantic realist,⁷ descended from Wordsworth through George Eliot and, like her, scornful of less sanguine novelists for whom the constantly evolving secular world was seldom good enough; so he reminded the Victorian era's Horatian satirist to look at life from both sides as an ever-intriguing succession process. As each generation is ousted by the next—which is the only aspect a maudlin Thackeray emphasized—it is not just displacement that occurs but constant replenishment. Bennett composed *The Old Wives' Tale*, at least in part, to criticize Thackeray for failing to perceive the full extent of "What Life Is" and for not exploring both halves of the cycle evenly.

Thackeray implied that Becky Sharp's aggressive rebelliousness and Amelia Sedley's self-pitying passivity are equally futile; similarly, Constance and Sophia, albeit "sharply differentiated" (Tale 75), find it equally impossible to forestall decrepitude and death or even to transcend the bedrock of Midland Nonconformity in their personalities. Ultimately, it scarcely matters that the stay-at-home Constance, who is

Amelia's substitute, marries her father's assistant and takes over the family shop in St. Luke's Square, while Sophia, who doubles for Becky, elopes from Bursley with a cad and lives most of her adult life as a hardened Parisian.

The difference is that the defeat of Constance and Sophia by time and old age never becomes the whole pattern in the subjecting of provincial life to microscopic inspection. Bennett's concern is not just the one-pointed (or Thackerian) theme that caused Marcel Schwob to remark apropos of Bennett's *Leonora* (1903): "You have got hold of the greatest of all themes, the agony of the older generation in watching the rise of the younger"⁸; on the contrary, his fuller theme, as Bennett himself expressed it, is "the earth's fashion of renewing itself" (Tale 451).

Whoever enjoys a patrimony in *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray sadly reflected, finds himself wished out of it by the beneficiary: "If you were heir to a dukedom and a thousand pounds a day, do you mean to say you would not wish for possession? Pooh! And it stands to reason that every great man having entertained this feeling towards his father, must be aware that his son entertains it towards himself" (486). Here agony from the expectation of gain is followed by dread of its inevitable loss. But Bennett, citing drapers and dry goods instead of dukes and dukedoms, contradicted the scrupulous meanness in what he considered a one-eyed perspective. Although one's "picture over the mantle-piece... will presently... make way for the portrait of the son who reigns" (*Vanity Fair* 634), Bennett added that a total response to this fact of life should include not just the regrets of the "deposed" monarch but the feelings of the newly installed ruler as well; the genuine realist should be curious to see what the latter looks like and the things he will do.

Bennett contended that any dispassionate observer not secretly feeling sorry for himself must find successors as interesting as the persons they succeed. Such is invariably the case for novelist and reader alike in *The Old Wives' Tale*, whether Bennett is depicting the Baines sisters outliving their father and defeating their mother, Mr. Povey taking over as proprietor of Mr. Baines's shop, or Cyril Povey doing a reprise of both.⁹ Life held no more meaning for Bennett than an old wives' tale; but calling it *Vanity Fair*, he objected, falsely implied a higher standard in light of which one could comprehend the mutability of man's temporal concerns, as Bunyan did. The Edwardian novelist believed he could portray life's individual tragedies more graphically than Thackeray had done because he was better qualified to glorify on-going existence for its own sake as a never-ending miracle.

On one hand, *The Old Wives' Tale* belongs to the modern, anti-Victorian effort to live without outmoded theological values; on the other, one must recognize Bennett's ability to

7. The romantic realist takes a Wordsworthian delight in the marvelousness of places and events that at first appear prosaic. Like Bennett, he (or she) believes in "the vein of greatness which runs through every soul without exception," which is a quotation from *The Old Wives' Tale* 417.

8. Quoted in Allen (63). John Lucas attempts to transform Bennett into Thackeray when he criticizes the former for interfering "preacher-fashion" to remind readers of "that vanity of vanities which, as melancholic, [Bennett] takes life to be" (107). John Wain's description of *The Old Wives' Tale*'s "disenchanted look at the realities of modern life" echoes both Arnold Kettle's opinion that it dwells on "the vast melancholy of the

universe" and E. M. Forster's that it "misses greatness" because showing "young girls" inevitably growing "into fat old women" is only a "limited truth" (Wain [3]; Lucas quotes Kettle [104] and Allen cites Forster approvingly [64-66].) Standing next to Thackeray's, Bennett's novel mellows, just as George Eliot's later fictions do when seen as rejoinders to Dickens.

9. Stealing from the old-fashioned till, Cyril overthrows Constance and Samuel the way the latter revolutionized his father-in-law's business; the young man's decision to pursue art, not shop-keeping, re-enacts Sophia's revolt against a commercial existence when she elected to try teaching.

sublimate every case of individual rise and subsequent extinction within the larger rhythms of societal self-renewal.¹⁰ This meant that it was still possible for him to reconcile the individual and the group, to balance the former's fears of impermanence against the stability of the total picture; a sense of personal futility and painful sacrifice does not exclude an awareness of his (or her) contribution to community continuance. As George Eliot's novels had done and just as gloriously in Bennett's opinion, *The Old Wives' Tale* made the roles of seemingly unimportant persons instrumental for society's survival.¹¹

"Mortification" at finding how soon one's "survivors" are "consoled" was Thackeray's keynote, his way of proving that no one in *Vanity Fair* is "ever missed" (434, 645). "However much you may be mourned, . . . the cook will send or come up to ask about dinner," he both warned and lamented (634). Bennett purposely told this part of the story differently. Despite the household confusion at the start of Constance's funeral procession, Fossette wisely reconsiders her decision to forego supper; as *The Old Wives' Tale* ends, an "infirm" dog, hobbling "awkwardly" on old legs, approaches her soup-plate again "on the chance that it might after all contain something worth inspection" (566-67). Bennett is appalled to report that the dog "went to it again," and yet he also applauds. Heartless but heroic, Fossette's doubletake becomes the romantic realist's final symbol for the double vision or twofold response that was missing from Thackeray's satire—the sense that although "the world," as Bennett noted elsewhere, "is, without doubt, a very bad world; . . . it is also . . . very good" (*Craft* 123).

Bennett dismissed *Vanity Fair* as a "great novel" disfigured by its "compromise between falsity and truth."¹² Like Dickens, whose search for "ugliness" Bennett found inappropriately "constant,"¹³ Thackeray stressed life's negative aspects so diligently that he was put off by the world his overly critical approach had slandered. There was truth in satire, but too much of it led to needless rejection of the secular universe, which in turn resulted in tiresome moralizing. A similar blend of excessive criticism precipitating a premature repudiation could be labeled "insincerity in Dickens's case," and George Eliot had charged that such a refusal to accept the world as found prompted him to sentimentalize for compensation; but Thackeray's problem, Bennett stated, stemmed from a defective artistic personality: the Brontës, for instance, "had a sense of beauty which heaven denied him."¹⁴

George Eliot's disdain for Dickens may have inspired Bennett's similar hostility toward Thackeray, who thus became the Edwardian stand-in for Boz. Bennett decided that Dickens "fell short in courageous facing of the truth, and in certain delicacies of perception" (*Craft* 47); he was one of those writers "forever

being surprised by the crudity and coarseness of human nature" (*Craft* 120). Thackeray, Bennett maintained, "could never look life steadily in the face, because he was a bit of a snob and wholly a sentimentalist" (Wright 94); that is, no more able than Dickens to face the grave as life's only conclusion, Thackeray also lacked sufficient nicety to delineate the courage with which successive generations carry on the fight against time's mastery. By contrast, George Eliot had possessed the requisite delicacy when she decreed that Dorothea and Will Ladislaw, although sure to be forgotten, had left life a little better than they found it.

For persons with "a reflective turn of mind," Thackeray wrote by way of introduction, the antics of *Vanity Fair* will not seem hilarious: "the general impression is one more melancholy than mirthful" (xxix). When replying, Bennett insisted upon both a "ridiculous" and a "tragic side," so that the boor's "guffaw," the hysterical fool's "cry," and the wise man's sad meditation were called for equally and all at once (*Tale* 451). Thus Constance, though old and ailing, reviews her life uncomplainingly with "a sort of tart but not sour cheerfulness" (564), which describes the uniquely compounded tone pervading Bennett's novel.

Constance "never pitied herself. She did not consider that Fate had treated her very badlyThe invincible common sense of a sound nature"—precisely what Thackeray lacked—"prevented her, in her best moments, from feebly dissolving in self-pity" (451). "Ah! *Vanitas Vanitatum!*" Thackeray moaned in what Bennett suggested is one of his worst moments, "which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?" (730). To Bennett, such one-sided questions were not merely impertinent but imbued with the sentimentality of self-pity. *The Old Wives' Tale* may be additional proof that Bennett achieved "the 'absolute realism' desired of modern fiction without abandoning the humanistic perspective to be found in the great nineteenth-century [Victorian] novels," which blend "acutely realized description and intensely conveyed compassion."¹⁵ But he did so only after dispatching what he considered the mixture of satire and softness in Dickens and Thackeray as a way of endorsing George Eliot's scientific sociology.

George Eliot despised novelists who "made an amazing figure in literature" by voicing their "general discontent with the universe" (473). Bennett voiced an equivalent dislike for the "morbid Flaubertian shrinking from reality" in Victorians like Dickens and Thackeray (*Craft* 120). Flaubert expected readers to appreciate the artistry used to show that life should be distasteful to Romantic and realist alike¹⁶; Bennett saw artistry in life itself: a compendium of triumphs turning into tragedies, it

10. This explains how Bennett could "sit down and spin out an immense realistic affair" that a novelist like Aldous Huxley decided had "a purely factitious interest" (*Letters of Aldous Huxley* [228]). The alleged factitiousness Huxley condemned in *Riceman Steps* (1923) expounded a philosophy of life as insistently as Thackeray's interjections about *vanitas*.

11. Thus E. M. W. Tillyard's seventh chapter comparing "Middlemarch and Bursley" still seems insightful.

12. Walter F. Wright quotes this passage from "My Literary Heresies" (1904) to support the view that Bennett always opposed "sentimental evasion of harsh realities" (93).

13. After quoting this remark, Wright adds Bennett's contention that he was

never able to finish a Dickens novel (94).

14. This comment from "On Re-reading the English Novelists" (1927) also appears in Wright (104).

15. Stone (44-45, 21). Stone agrees that Bennett looked back to George Eliot as "the main exponent of compassionate realism" or a non-satirical world view; "absolute realism" is an allusion to Lucas's use of the term (98) for a Chekovian kind of writing "in which nothing is idealized, sentimentalized, or etherealized"; "no part of the truth is left out, no part is exaggerated."

16. Throughout *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert's examination of "The Patterns of Provincial Life," drab realities undercut Emma's romantic daydreams which, in turn, heighten the drabness of the everyday.

was splendidly done with a modernist's sense of irony.

Storylines diverge in Books II and III, which seem respectively nineteenth-century English (Dickensian) in style and mood for Constance, then more modern (Balzac, Flaubert) for the exotically named Sophia. But the stories converge again in Book IV to demonstrate, contra Thackeray, a long-range even-handedness in the admitted harshness of the sisters' fates: an exponent of change and a taker of drastic measures, Sophia is fatally traumatized by the ravages time has worked on Gerald Scales, whom she remembers only as a young rake; Constance dies voting against change, the federation that absorbs Bursley much the way individual lives cease while the species continues. Life's even-handedness does not simply replace the Victorian sense of providence; it constitutes an artist's fondness for symmetrical design which Bennett tried to emulate structurally in his multiplot novel.

Everything is seen in more than one light; that is, from more than one perspective—Bursley versus Paris, English against French, old against new, youth versus age, Constance versus Sophia. *The Old Wives' Tale* is both satirical and elegiac toward Bursley's bye-gone provincialism; at the same time, Bennett both mocked and accepted the superiority of an incoming cosmopolitan age that would soon seem old-fashioned to its successors, just as Sophia and Constance, young and vigorous initially, become similar old wives. He added extra layers of doubleness, however, not only by recording the lives of two old women where Maupassant had restricted himself to one,¹⁷ but by pitting his own sense of reality against Thackeray's.

The "comic" in Shakespeare and elsewhere has been rightly characterized as any attempt to "celebrate the renewal of the race in its perpetual displacement of the decadent and dying with a vigorous if callow youth" (Bryant 2). Bennett undertook the tremendous task of co-ordinating displacement and renewal by trying to show how one of the greatest Victorian multiplotters had botched it. *The Old Wives' Tale* did not just attest to life's uncanny ability both to cancel and perpetuate itself *ad infinitum*; immediately upon coming into existence, it illustrated the double movement of revocation and progression that Bennett was writing about. It censored Thackeray and the gloomy school of Victorian multiplotters, epitomized by Dickens, while also claiming to have forged beyond them—indeed beyond George Eliot as well—toward an unbiased, bipartisan realism that neither defended nor accused the life process.

In chapter 6 of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), D. H. Lawrence skilfully redid the climactic scene from *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916); just as Stephen Dedalus, prowling the seashore encountered the wading girl, Connie enters the sacred wood and spies Mellors washing himself. (Joyce 171-73, Lawrence 62). She has "a visionary experience," and the epiphanic re-awakening to her bodily self, which Mellors sets off, impressed Lawrence as a genuine resurrection for the

erotic urge, a recall not only to life but to its furtherance through procreation.

Joyce's unrealistic scene needed to be redone, Lawrence contended, because it is aesthetic and spiritual to the point of being sexless. Stephen responds to the girl as if she were already as bloodless as a work of art; Lady Chatterley's attraction to "a body" with its "warm, white flame" is said to be the truer, healthier response, a more valuable epiphany both for Connie and all mankind. Although Connie and Stephen both come upon a living signpost through whom each can discover a vocation, Lawrence objected that the modern world does not need another self-centered aesthete; rather, it requires a reincarnation of the life force, a rebirth for atrophied physical drives and desires. Knowing the way Victorian realists tried to improve upon Dickens by being more affirmative when reusing his material helps one to detect Lawrence's parody; one of the finer scenes in his last novel, a scene explicit for its time, is Victorian in methodology, no matter how modern in content.

Mr. Scogan, disguised as Madame Sesostri in *Crome Yellow* (1921), tells an attractive young girl when and where she will meet the "fascinating" male of her dreams (285-86). He is, of course, describing himself and setting up a rendezvous. Huxley parodied the famous episode from *Jane Eyre* in which Rochester, concealed in a fortune-teller's clothes, tries to learn whether Jane loves him.¹⁸ Sexual innuendo and masculine unscrupulousness, ludicrous exaggerations of elements latent in Brontë's scene, come to the forefront in a parody that is obviously funnier than Lawrence's; that is, irreverent and anti-Victorian in both strategy and content. Nevertheless, it is parody in its traditional form—the making worse of something already bad enough, which is quite different from the less noticeable Victorian variety of corrective substitution that Lawrence perpetuated into modern, post-war fiction.

Huxley ridiculed Charlotte Brontë in the modern manner Evelyn Waugh later used to subvert Dickens in the Brazilian jungle episodes of *A Handful of Dust* (1934); both satirists showed the sordidness of the human situation to be more absurd than the targeted author realized (Meckier, "Why the Man" 171-87). Dickens's secular humanism, which Waugh deplored as a sentimentalist's perversion of Christianity, was made to seem unrealistic because ineffectual when applied to grim modern realities, a strategy the converse of the Victorian response that found the later Boz unacceptably bleak. But Lawrence scolded Joyce and Bennett reproved Thackeray in the uniquely Victorian way that Dickens's rivals invented to brighten his darkening world view: the goal was to substitute an allegedly broader, enriched sense of reality for an outlook either too pessimistic (Thackeray's) or not sufficiently full-bodied (Joyce's). Both modes of parodic reevaluation—worsening the already bad to prove the modern plight unprecedented or replacing so-called narrowness with a more expensive rendition—seem inherently superior to Noonan's appropriation of Magwitch and

17. Bennett obscured his anti-Thackerian inspirations when recollecting his novel's inception: the "extreme pathos in the mere fact that every stout, ageing woman was once a young girl" overwhelmed him and he resolved that his book would be "the English *Une Vie*" (*Tale* vi-vii).

18. See *Jane Eyre* 221-32. Compare Scogan's explicit directions to his client with the gipsy's indirection: Sesostri predicts a meeting "Next Sunday

afternoon at six o'clock . . . on the second stile on the footpath that leads from the church to the lower road"; Rochester says: "Chance has meted you a measure of happiness; that I know. I knew it before I came here this evening. She has laid it carefully on one side for you. I saw her do it. It depends on yourself to stretch out your hand, and take it up."

Rhys's of Bertha.

The Edwardian era was fated to be only an Indian summer for the Victorian style of parodic reevaluation. Writing to point out that life is not as wearisome collectively as a famous Victorian novelist had claimed it was individually must have seemed increasingly repugnant in the twenties. Lawrence succeeds in a post-Edwardian context because corrective substitution is merely an ingredient in one scene of an otherwise overwhelmingly negative work. The point in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is that factories, mines, and new machinery for working them have sapped the individual's life-blood; therefore, Lawrence was ultimately being critical of the modern situation even when he rebuked Joyce for awarding Dedalus an inadequate antidote: an epiphany not full-blooded enough.

If Bennett was one of the first English novelists to emulate the French realists, he was also the last to profit extensively from the example of the great nineteenth-century multiplotters, each of whom regularly questioned a rival's novel to boost his (or her) own credibility. Unfortunately, the life process Bennett celebrated has been doubly unkind to him. He tried to downplay equally society's utopian and dystopian tendencies, as seen respectively in the opposition between George Eliot's cautious reference to "the growing good of the world" and Dickens's railing against "the perpetual stoppage." Thus even though defeat and death render each life, in retrospect, a prolonged "martyrdom" (*Tale 73*), the human race continues to flourish, perhaps nourished by its plethora of martyrs. But this striving to reproduce life's rhythms without either cheering or jeering has made Bennett appear noncommittal rather than unflinching.

A turn-of-the-century turn of mind stimulated Bennett to compare the century he had been born into with the one for which he was writing; none of the Victorian multiplotters who argued with each other's social analysis had enjoyed so broad a perspective. A period of cultural transition coinciding with the chronological change from one era to another furnished life's succession process with engrossing complications; moralizing toward mid-century, Thackeray had necessarily underestimated them. Six years after *The Old Wives' Tale* was published, however, war brought the loss of an entire genera-

tion. This catastrophe overshadowed Bennett's use of the rise and fall of Constance and Sophia as "enchanted proof of the circulation of the blood" (*Tale 18*).

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The Dover Bitch: Victorian Duck or Modernist Duck/Rabbit?

Gerhard Joseph

The Dover Bitch
A Criticism of Life

So there stood Matthew Arnold and this girl
With the cliffs of England crumbling behind them,
And he said to her, "Try to be true to me,
And I'll do the same for you, for things are bad
All over, etc., etc."
Well now, I knew this girl. It's true she had read
Sophocles in a fairly good translation
And caught that bitter allusion to the sea,
But all the time he was talking she had in mind
The notion of what his whiskers would feel like
On the back of her neck. She told me later on
That after a while she got to looking out
At the lights across the channel, and felt really sad,
Thinking of all the wine and enormous beds

And blandishments in French and the perfumes.
And then she got really angry. To have been brought
All the way down from London, and then to be addressed
As a sort of mournful cosmic last resort
Is really rough on a girl, and she was pretty.
Anyway, she watched him pace the room
And finger his watch-chain and seem to sweat a bit,
And then she said one or two unprintable things.
But you mustn't judge her by that. What I mean to say is,
She's really all right. I still see her once in awhile
And she always treats me right. We have a drink
And I give her a good time, and perhaps it's a year
Before I see her again, but there she is,
Running to fat, but dependable as they come.
And sometimes I bring her a bottle of *Nuit d'Amour*.

Anthony Hecht

Anthony Hecht's parodic "The Dover Bitch" is probably the best-known modernist adaptation of a Victorian poem, moreover, of a poem, "Dover Beach," that is as representative as any other short text of what we mean by the term "Victorian." Consequently, I sometimes open my undergraduate Victorian survey with a contrast of the two works to convey an initial, ballpark sense of what one means by "Victorianism" on the one hand and "High Modernism" on the other. And the difference I emphasize is primarily the epistemological shift I would like to spell out.

The history of "Dover Beach" criticism has of course thrown up very different kinds of readings—biographical, phenomenological, psychoanalytic, Marxist, feminist, etc.—depending upon the signifying context (in E. D. Hirsch's sense of "significance"). But "Matthew Arnold's" point—fidelity in love as a redoubt against the chaos of the darkling plain—has never been in serious question. (And I put quotation marks around the name "Matthew Arnold"—as around the "Anthony Hecht" to come—to indicate my acceptance of the current notion that the author's name is a convenient and conventional marking for a body of texts rather than for a readily accessible biographical consciousness.) At any rate, whatever the signifying context, the moral identity of "Matthew Arnold" and the poem's speaker and therefore the moral thrust of the poem's Arnoldian "criticism of life" has not, it seems to me, been a matter of much critical debate (although Norman Holland's account of "Dover Beach" in *The Dynamics of Literary Response* might be advanced as the exception to prove the rule). That is, our interpretive community has converged upon a meaning for the poem that has not changed much with the years. To the extent that this is so, our agreed-upon reading of certainty in love as the poem's central emphasis is in touch with our readerly construction of a pre-Paterian, High Victorian certainty (and Pater is the swing figure in the matter)—a certainty that, whatever the difficulties of accurate perception, one can finally "see" with a certain degree of disinterestedness and clarity. Even within the context of "Dover Beach's" murky darkling plain, the Arnoldian mind thus seems to have a capacity for cognitive fidelity to the "real." As one of Paul De Man's "allegories of reading," the speaker's belief in the possibility of emotional fidelity is thus a figure for epistemological legibility, though that Arnoldian point is perhaps made more explicit in "The Buried Life," where the eyes of the beloved provide the speaker with a mirror within which he can "read clear" ultimate meanings (1.81). I would thus venture a highly debatable historical construct that bothers me less when I try it out on an undergraduate class than when I have the temerity to advance it before an audience of Victorian specialists at the MLA: namely, that with all their hedging about and skepticism and "Disappearance-of-God" anxiety, the major Victorian poets—Tennyson, Arnold, and Browning (not to mention Hopkins)—imply a confidence (or at least a faint trust in the larger hope) that there is an epistemological ground somewhere, that things can at least in theory be seen as in themselves they really are. That, at any rate, is the foundationalist allegory I would extract from my impression that the value system implicit in "Dover Beach" is unequivocal.

Such clear determinacy, however, is not the case with "The

Dover Bitch," a poem which seems to call for two very different and finally irreconcilable kinds of readings, one that permits two very different "criticisms of life" (as the poem's Arnoldian subtitle would have it). And the criticism elicited depends upon one's response to the lovers and/or upon one's sense of "Anthony Hecht's" values—or even upon the values of Anthony Hecht without the quotation marks. In exemplification of that last "intentionalist" kind of reading, let me give you the interpretation of Christopher Ricks, the most combative of the non- (not to say, anti-) textualists, perhaps our most authoritative Arnoldian reader of Arnold and the other Victorians in that Ricks is a no-nonsense defender of the principle that we can read the intention of the poet more or less as it really was.

"Hecht's brilliant and poignant poem" [according to Ricks] is by no means flippant . . . It takes Arnold and 'Dover Beach' seriously, so seriously as to consider awe or reverence insufficiently heartfelt as a response. And then, having subjected Arnold to an unprecedented skepticism, it turns in its own light and we suddenly see the superiority of Arnold—and of all he epitomized—to that knowing speaker whose worldliness was at first refreshing. The poem, we realize, is in important ways a tribute to Arnold, though hardly a reverential one, just as it effects a 'Criticism of Life' even after it toyed with the phrase. (539-40)

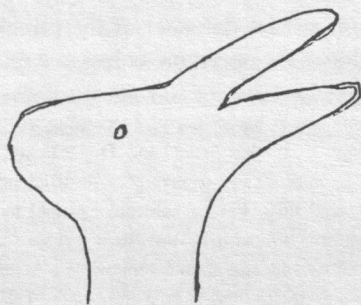
For Ricks, thus, the attack, however Janus-faced, is *essentially* upon the heartlessness, the hollowness, and the vulgarity of the modern lovers, particularly the callous narrator; in its clear-cut irony that reminds us of nothing so much as a Browning monologue, the poem is a criticism of "modern" much more than of "Victorian" love. Whatever irony the poem contains, Ricks insists upon its stability. And that formal stability, in touch with the thematic stability of the poem's idea of "love," determines the poem's unmistakable, univocal meaning.

But I would suggest that a second reading makes equally good sense: in that one the attack, however Janus-faced, is *essentially* upon Victorian earnestness and melancholic romantic posturing against which the pre-AIDS era, modern lovers' guilt-free enjoyment of brief erotic engagements is seen as a healthy anodyne, as an undeceived, exhilaratingly vulgar embrace of existential contingency. It depends in large measure, of course, upon how one feels about a *nuit d'amour*, the transient erotic ideal in the climactic guise of a perfume that is pitted against the permanent love of "Dover Beach"—or upon what one attributes to "Anthony Hecht" in the matter. In this second, counter-reading, the vulgarity of the title and of the perfume is thus precisely the virtues that undermine the arguably self-deceived and sentimental posturing of "Matthew Arnold."

Now, if you will grant the premise that at least two such diametrically opposed readings of the "The Dover Bitch" are warranted by the text (whether one privileges the reader, "Anthony Hecht," or some combination thereof as its source), it is the very "undecidability" or "indeterminacy" of meaning that, I would suggest, constitutes the constructed "modernity"—or is it the "post-modernity"?—that we attribute to the poem. Like *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, which strikes me as its novelistic counterpart on the subject of the modern fate of Victorian love, the poem seems to opt for open-endedness

rather than closure of meaning.

For me, the theoretical issue thus raised is most succinctly focused in recent literary application of the duck/rabbit perceptual conundrum. That cognitive problem of the cartoon figure which looks now like a duck, now like a rabbit, most famously commented upon by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* (194-96) and Gombrich in *Art and Illusion* (4-7), has in recent years been bruited about in hermeneutic controversies by literary critics like Ralph Rader (83-87), Wayne Booth (127-28), and James Kincaid (785-78).



In encapsulation of the extremely nuanced and complex argument as it has proliferated within the journals, I would say that theorists like Rader and Booth have argued for the "coherence," the "univocal meaning," and the "stability" of the text; they assert that even when the mind recognizes the possibility of multiple readings, of a duck and a rabbit—of a whole menagerie of animals if need be—that constitute a coherent bitch, it cannot help choosing one interpretive figure over all the others—and that such privileging is triggered by what is actually "in" the text. In contrast, Kincaid wants to keep the carnivalesque play of textual beasts alive, insisting that all texts are in some sense incoherent, indeterminate, and in constant motion, and that what momentary coherence they have the individual reader or the evolving interpretive community supplies.

My own sympathy in the matter is with Kincaid's anti-intentionalism, and his consequent insistence upon the Heraclitian flux of *all* texts. But I would add that some texts nevertheless seem more indeterminate than others—and that such "seeming" is a matter of the inclination we attribute to a literary period. (A modernist work like "The Dover Bitch" thus *appears* more

open-ended than a Victorian work like "Dover Beach." And when we attribute indeterminacy to a Victorian poem—as in, say, recent clashes over Tennyson's "Ulysses," such insight is the necessary blindness of our modernist optic.) It is not merely that we today "see" indeterminacy everywhere, but that the mark of the "modern" and the "post-modern" is the cultivation of "open" as opposed to "closed" meaning, whether the source of that meaning is said to be in reader, writer, or depersonalized "text." We both attribute such openness to the "intention" of the modern writer—if we should believe in the ability of the reader to fathom such authorial consciousness—and we cultivate within ourselves as readers (or at any rate *this* reader does) a willingness to rest content in such indeterminacy as we accept some version or other of a reader-response ethos. With respect both to individual phrasal signs (say, the force of "*nuit d'amour*") and larger thematic pattern such as the issue of fidelity in love, modernist works such as "The Dover Bitch" or *The French Lieutenant's Woman* with its double ending seem to achieve, even when they do not explicitly work for, instability and undecidability.

Thus, my single hypothesis is that the movement from an apparently "univocal" "Dover Beach" to an apparently "equivocal" "Dover Bitch" may be read as an allegory of the shift in our (or is it just my?) hermeneutic narrative—of a turn from what we have fashioned as "Victorian determinacy" to what binarily follows it in our literary historical plot, "Modernist and Post-Modernist indeterminacy."

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Carlyle's Denial of Axiological Content in Science

Charles W. Schaefer

In his famous essay, "Signs of the Times" (1829), Thomas Carlyle characterized his age to his contemporaries as "the Mechanical Age," by which he meant an age which "with its whole undivided might . . . teaches and practices the great art of adapting means to ends" (*Works* 13: 465). At the feet of no particular scientist, it is true, did he place the blame for this mechanistic world-view, but there is evidence that he was familiar with the work of Lagrange (1788) and Laplace (1805), and that if he did not precisely blame these two for having

forged the mechanistic world-view of the age, he thought of them as having abetted the process:

The science of the age, in short, is physical, chemical, physiological; in all shapes mechanical. Our favorite Mathematics, the highly prized exponent of all these other sciences, has also become more and more mechanical. Excellence in what is called its higher departments depends less on natural genius than on acquired expertness in wielding its machinery. Without undervaluing the wonderful

results which a Lagrange or Laplace educes by means of it, we may remark, that their calculus, differential and integral, is little else than a more cunningly constructed arithmetical mill; where the factors being put in, are, as it were, ground into the true product, under cover, and without other effort on our part than steady turning of the handle. We have more Mathematics than ever; but less Mathesis. Archimedes and Plato could not have read the *Mécanique Céleste*; but neither would the whole French Institute see aught in that saying, "God geometrizes!" but a sentimental rhodomontade. (*Works* 13: 469)

Laplacian physics was characterized by a heavy emphasis on the mathematization of molecular activity as the fundamental, unified world-view, together with an advocacy of "exact experimental methods" (Harman 19). It was Laplace's conscious desire to "bring the study of terrestrial physics to the level of perfection that Newton's law of universal gravitation had attained for the study of celestial physics" (Harman 15).

It is sufficient for our purposes to understand that Carlyle viewed the Laplacian world-view in its seconding of the Newtonian celestial view as essentially mechanistic, and for this reason to be pondered warily. His point that neither Archimedes nor Plato could have read Laplace's *Mécanique Céleste*, while the entire French Institute would miss the significance of Plato's elevation of geometry to an act of Deity, is meant, surely, to reverse the tendency of his age from "adapting means to ends" to freeing ends from preconceived limits and hence freeing means from preconceived adaptations. For Carlyle, nineteenth-century science was impotent to engender any theory of value, for, as he wrote at the conclusion of "Signs of the Times,"

This faith in Mechanism, in the all-importance of physical things, is in every age the common refuge of Weakness and blind Discontent; of all who believe, as many will ever do, that man's true good lies without him, not within.

...Nay after all, our spiritual maladies are but of Opinion; we are but fettered by chains of our own forging, and which ourselves also can rend asunder. This deep, paralyzed subjection to physical objects comes not from Nature, but from our own unwise mode of viewing Nature. (*Works* 13: 484-85)

A few years later, with the publication of *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34), Carlyle took science to task for more than merely helping to forge a mechanistic world-view. It fails to penetrate to the ultimate realities, he thought, because it limits itself to investigating only the "clothing" of truth. Secondly, it tends too readily to encourage scientific thinking, or to lapse into scientism itself. Third, it stifles reverence by hiding truth under the cover of explanations which do nothing but stupefy the human mind. Last, scientific knowledge, so far from being comprehensive, is really quite minute, and must be applied minutely to prevent the world-view (Carlyle refers to it as the Time-Spirit) from transvaluing from an essentially reverential-poetic one to a mechanistic-scientific one.

On the first page of *Sartor Resartus* the perceptive reader could intuit an impending confrontation with Science (to adopt the capitalization patterns of Teufelsdröckh's editor), for that is precisely the subject with which Carlyle began what to many was—and is—the most enigmatic book of the period:

Considering our present advanced state of culture, and how the Torch of Science has now been brandished and borne about, with more or less effect, for five thousand years and upward; how in these times especially, not only the Torch still burns, and perhaps more fiercely than ever, but innumerable Rushlights, and Sulphur-matches kindled thereat, are also glowing in every direction, so that not the smallest cranny or doghole in Nature or Art can remain unilluminated....

The confrontation was not to achieve the likeness of a frontal attack until well on in Book III with the renowned chapter entitled "Natural Supernaturalism." En route to that crescendo, Carlyle allows an occasional premonitory rumbling to be heard as, in developing his thesis that no inquirer has to date sought to explain the phenomenon of Clothes, he implies more and more directly that in the case of human inquiry, science included, it is only the covering, i.e., the garment, of truth which is being investigated. Philosophies and sciences are failing to penetrate to the most urgent questions because they are encumbered with the husks and shells in which the most urgent questions (the ultimate realities) are encased. Hence, already in Book I, Chapter V, Carlyle has Teufelsdröckh cry,

Let any Cause-and-Effect Philosopher explain, not why I wear such and such a Garment, obey such and such a Law; but even why I am here, to wear and obey anything!

Intentionally or unintentionally, Carlyle is here reiterating the rhetorical question of Leibniz (1646-1716), "Why is there something rather than nothing?" the question which in modern times has become the starting-place of Martin Heidegger's thought concerning being. For Carlyle, however, it is an early indication of the fault he will find with science (the "Cause-and-Effect Philosopher" embraces but is not limited to scientists): it investigates only the clothing of truth.

It is not the biologist perfecting his knowledge of musculature, nor the astronomer calculating the distance between stars whom Carlyle characterizes as somnambulists clutching at shadows as if they were substances (in the passage cited below), but rather it is the biologist who, in explaining the function of muscles, or the astronomer who, calculating the distance between stars, thinks he has advanced one whit on the mystery of why there are any muscles to be counted or stellar distances to be calculated whom Carlyle especially scorns.

Creation, says one, lies before us, like a glorious Rainbow; but the Sun that made it lies behind us, hidden from us. Then, in that strange Dream, how we clutch at shadows as if they were substances; and sleep deepest while fancying ourselves most awake! Which of your Philosophical Systems is other than a dream-theorem; a net quotient, confidently given out, where divisor and dividend are both unknown? ...This Dreaming, this Somnambulism is what we on Earth call Life; wherein the most, indeed, undoubtingly wander, as if they knew right hand from left; yet they only are wise who know that they know nothing. (*Sartor* 47)

A number of critical questions immediately emerge. Did the science of the nineteenth century deserve this kind of characterization? What is the meaning of the caricature of confidently giving out a quotient without knowing the divisor nor the di-

vidend? Is science performing more (or less) than its announced function?

Before Carlyle can be peremptorily discarded it must be understood that he is calling attention to the furtive tendency of science to lapse into scientism. Scientism broadly understood is not limited to the assumption that scientific methods of investigation should be applied to all fields of inquiry; more insidiously, *scientism is the presumption that the observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of natural phenomena exhaust the crucial attention owed to natural phenomena by man, or replace the necessity to wonder why there should be any phenomena at all.* This is precisely the secret tendency (advertently or inadvertently wrought by science upon the Time-Spirit) that Carlyle dares to expose. It is the attempt to replace wonder with explanation in the name of science which Carlyle defies. It is in laying the matter of a muscle or a star to rest by observing, identifying, describing, experimentally investigating and theoretically explaining it that science "clutches at shadows as if they were substances," and "sleeps deepest while fancying itself most awake!" Therefore, to the extent to which either science or its impact on the Time-Spirit or both would allow such a subtle lapse, Carlyle was justified in characterizing either or both as somnambulistic, and was not indulging in unwarranted hyperbole.

The analogy of confidently giving out a quotient without knowing the divisor or the dividend is a deliberately caustic caricature of science, but an important one if Carlyle's distinctive objection to it and its subsequent degeneration to scientism is to emerge more clearly. Carlyle was intrigued by the philosophy of mathematics (we see him deploying numerators and denominators in "The Everlasting Yea"). Since no quotient is obtainable without divisor and dividend, Carlyle must mean in the present instance that science's achieved epistemology (quotient) is without validity because it cannot produce its divisor or dividend, or if it can, they will be found to contain quantities and qualities not compatible with nor derivative in the quotient. Such would be an impeccable caricature of scientism, for scientism begins by examining a minute facet of nature with a methodology admirably suited to it, and then, prodded by a species of success, examines a more encompassing facet of phenomena with the same methodology, and later, a still more encompassing facet with the same methodology. As the facets under investigation become less minute and more sweeping, it becomes questionable whether they are the same species of phenomena formerly investigated with the admirable methodology. When scientific methodology is applied to the investigation of facets of reality whose properties are not strictly the same as those of a minute facet of natural phenomena the quotient is scientistic rather than scientific; the divisor and dividend do not compute to that quotient, and the quotient is being "given out" to the mutilation of divisor and dividend beyond remembrance.

A scientist of Carlyle's time whose writings occasionally exemplify the kind of reasoning which Carlyle would most certainly have caricatured in this manner was Thomas Henry Huxley. Huxley, whose works began to appear thirty years after *Sartor Resartus*, is of particular interest because of his

frequent debates with humanists and divines. Even Matthew Arnold held him in great esteem as a debater.¹

A cardinal presupposition which underlay Huxley's polemical writings is that there is no such thing as two epistemic mechanisms—one for ascertaining or verifying scientific truth and another for ascertaining or verifying axiological-moral truth—but rather one and only one way of obtaining all truth: the empirical or scientific method.

Passages as diverse as the following may serve to illustrate Huxley's insistence that all truth is obtainable exclusively by means of the scientific method.

Now that which I thought it desirable to make perfectly clear, on my own account, and for the sake of those who find their capacity of belief in the Gospel theory of the universe failing them, is the fact, that, in my judgment, the demonology of primitive Christianity is totally devoid of foundation; and that no man, *who is guided by the rules of investigation which are found to lead to the discovery of truth in other matters, not merely of science, but in the everyday affairs of life*, will arrive at any other conclusion [Italics added]. (*Essays* 5: xv)

The present antagonism between theology and science does not arise from any assumption by the men of science that all theology must necessarily be excluded from science, but simply because they are unable to allow that reason and morality have two weights and two measures; and that the belief in a proposition, because authority tells you it is true, or because you wish to believe it, which is a high crime and misdemeanor when the subject matter of reasoning is of one kind, becomes under the *alias* of "faith" the greatest of all virtues when the subject matter of reasoning is of another kind. ("Mr. Darwin's critics" 443)

It is important to note that the principle of the scientific Naturalism of the latter half of the nineteenth century, in which the intellectual movement of the Renaissance has culminated, and which was first clearly formulated by Descartes, leads not to the denial of the existence of any Supernature; but simply to the denial of the validity of the evidence adduced in favour of this, or that, extant form of Supernaturalism. (*Essays* 5: 38-39)

And footnoting himself in the same place, he writes:

I employ the words "Supernature" and "Supernatural" in their popular senses. For myself, I am bound to say that the term "Nature" covers the totality of that which is. The world of psychical phenomena appear to me to be as much part of "Nature" as the world of physical phenomena: and I am unable to perceive any justification for cutting the Universe into two halves, one natural and one supernatural. (*Essays* 5: 39n)

Huxley's fundamental presumption that there is one epistemic means of obtaining scientific, psychical, and moral (axiological?) truth, and that that means is the scientific method, variously called by him "the rules of investigation" and "the principle of the scientific Naturalism of the latter half of the nineteenth century" is far more problematical than Huxley thought. Writers on science, even men of Darwinian cast as

1. Arnold referred to Huxley as "a man of science, who is also an excellent writer and the very prince of debaters...." See "Literature and Science" in Arnold 383.

was Huxley, may be found who will contradict him on this, his so tightly-held postulate. For example, Morse Peckham, who wrote the introduction to the 1959 Variorum Text of *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin has written:

...that a value statement may be verified in the same way that an empirical or predictive statement is verified is an attitude that only a small fraction of human beings have yet outgrown, and that in only a small part of their behavior. ("Darwinism and Darwinism" 20)

For the purposes of this essay, the act of employing the empirical methodology to verify both a value statement and an empirical statement is an act of scientism. The "quotient"—as Carlyle called it—is being "given out" without strict regard for its divisor and dividend.

This zealous tendency to generalize in the behalf of science and the scientific method appears elsewhere in the writings of Huxley. In the last of the six "Working Men's Lectures," which he delivered in 1862 at the Museum of Practical Geology, Jermyn Street School of Mines (*On The Origin of Species*), he discusses the relationship between organic structure and function, pressing toward his culminating thesis that "there is no faculty whatsoever which does not depend upon structure, and as structure tends to vary, it is capable of being improved" (*On The Origin of Species* 140). Yet, he seems to forget that a few pages earlier he removed the grounds for such a thesis by observing that at least one function—or ceased function—is completely independent of structure:

There are some animals which will not breed in captivity; whether it arises from the simple fact of their being shut up and deprived of their liberty, or not, we do not know, but they certainly will not breed. What an astounding thing this is, to find one of the most important of all functions annihilated by mere imprisonment! (*On The Origin of Species* 136)

And so, armed with the observation that function may be annihilated by something other than the annihilation of structure, and hence need not bear a specific relation to structure, Huxley persists in his drive to assert precisely that dependent relation, and to demolish, by implication, the poetic-reverential view that human distinctives, so far from being completely dependent on structure, depend in part on man's having received a transcendent "breath of life" and having then become something qualitatively different from the animals. How quickly (some four pages) Huxley loses sight of his divisor and dividend in propounding his quotient.

In a paper appearing in the *Westminster Review* for April, 1860, ("Thomas Henry Huxley: The Origin of Species [1860]" 434-38), Huxley, writing about Darwin's *Origin of Species* of a year earlier, made the following statement:

A phenomenon is explained when it is shown to be a case of some general law of Nature; but the supernatural interposition of the Creator can, by the nature of the case, exemplify no law, and if species have really arisen in this way, it is absurd to attempt to discuss their origin. (438)

Calling the discussion of supernatural interposition absurd on the grounds that it exemplifies no general law of nature also places the discussion of non-supernatural origination within the realm of the absurd on the same grounds (origination cannot by definition partake of the general). If it be objected that Huxley only intended to disqualify the subject of origins from specifically *scientific* discussion, Huxley may be seen to be dwindling the field of importance not of cosmogony and ontology, but of science itself, and hence to be in concord with the warnings of Carlyle. If, on the other hand, by thus placing the topic of origination outside the purview of legitimate discussion Huxley is seen to be advocating the displacement of cosmogony and ontology by science, such a claim would be the height of scientific usurpation.

It is in "Natural Supernaturalism" (Book III, Chapter VIII of *Sartor Resartus*) where, in the persona of Professor Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, Carlyle achieves not only his most rhapsodic prose—within the limits of his propensity for starkness—but mounts his most ambitious assault on science and the positivist outlook in general. Almost as if Carlyle could anticipate Huxley's personal antipathy for demonology some sixty years before Huxley penned it, he wrote in "Natural Supernaturalism,"

Witchcraft, and all manner of Specter-work, and Demonology, we have now named Madness, and Diseases of the Nerves. Seldom reflecting that still the new question comes upon us: What is Madness, what are Nerves? Ever, as before, does Madness remain a mysterious terrific, altogether infernal, boiling up of the Nether Chaotic Deep, through this fair-painted Vision of Creation, which swims thereon, which we name the Real.

Here Carlyle intercepts the tendency of science to dissipate wonder and reverence by transforming the wonder-full and mysterious into manifold components, each neologically labelled, or, expressed another way, dwindling the field of vision of the Time-Spirit to exclude the ontological, cosmogonical, even the theological, and most certainly the poetical, perspectives. These neologicistic labels, these scientific names, Carlyle calls "wonder-hiding stupefactions" (*Sartor* 238) in the same chapter. Because all of *Sartor Resartus* reduces ultimately to a "Clothes-Philosophy," that is, a probing of the appearances—among which are names—in which the truths of the universe are cloaked, it is in complete accordance with Carlyle's overarching purpose to challenge the Time-Spirit to beware the manner in which it has allowed itself to become stupefied (stupefactions) by supposedly explanatory (wonder-hiding) names.

Critically, it must be asked to what extent wonder and belief are vitiated by the object of wonder having been analyzed into its component parts: whether to disbelieve in demons plaguing human beings and God healing human beings because science has "explained" the maladies by discovering nerves and plotting the prognosis of madness. Carlyle finds absolutely no reason to dispense with the demonic realm, and in fact extends his claim to the point of declaring that the luminaries of this world have derived their systems of wisdom while precariously perched over their own demonic depths.

In every the wisest Soul lies a whole world of internal Madness,

an authentic Demon-Empire; out of which, indeed, his world of Wisdom has been creatively built together, and now rests there, as on its dark foundations does a habitable flowery Earth-rind. (*Sartor* 236)

“Every the wisest soul” presumably includes both Huxley and Carlyle himself!

Carlyle persists in his attempt to expose the wonder-hiding and quite illegitimate—to him—machinations of science as it merely discovers a plurality of parts in the phenomena formerly perceived as unitary and instantaneous. He asks,

The stroke that came transmitted through a whole galaxy of elastic balls, was it less a stroke than if the last ball only had been struck and set flying? (*Sartor* 239-40)

He is inquiring whether to disbelieve that Zeus has made the thunder to sound in the sky, simply because science has shown that the same water which fell on our heads last month has run to the sea and been vaporized to rejoin the firmament from which it fell, and has there impacted with diverse temperature masses. Have science and positivism indeed triumphed over the reverential-poetic perspective, or merely fatigued (stupefied) it by counting an almost innumerable media between the unknown origin and the wonder-full phenomenon? Implicit in the phrasing of his rhetorical question quoted above, is, of course, Carlyle’s resolute resistance to wonder-hiding stupefactions, for earlier in *Sartor Resartus* he had made his position absolutely clear with respect to the effect of science on human thought:

That progress of science, which is to destroy Wonder, and in its stead substitute Mensuration and Numeration, finds small favor with Teufelsdröckh, much as he otherwise venerates these two latter processes. ...I mean that Thought without Reverence is barren, perhaps poisonous. (in “Pure Reason” 60)

Last, and perhaps most important to his purposes in *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle’s concern is to challenge the much vaunted comprehensiveness of scientific explanation. He raises the question of just how complete an embrace of cosmic totality the human mind, even the human scientific mind, is capable of. His rhetoric is reminiscent of the great rhetorical question of Deity to Job in the Old Testament book of that name. In Job 36 we read,

Where wast thou when I laid the foundation of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the corner stone thereof; when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddlingband for it, and broke up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?

Carlyle writes:

And now of you, too, I make the old inquiry: What those same

unalterable rules, forming the complete Statute-Book of Nature, may possibly be?

They stand written in our Works of Science, say you; in the accumulated records of Man’s Experience?—Was Man with his Experience present at the Creation, then, to see how it all went on? Have any deepest scientific individuals yet dived down to the foundations of the Universe, and gauged everything there? Did the Maker take them into His counsel; that they read His ground-plan of the incomprehensible All: and can say, This stands marked therein, and no more than this? Alas, not in anywise! These scientific individuals have been nowhere but where we also are; have seen some hand-breadths deeper than we see into the Deep that is infinite, without bottom as without shore. (*Sartor* 232-33)

It is particularly interesting to note Carlyle’s reluctance to grant the scientist detachability from the locus he occupies, other than that of “some hand-breadths.” Is Carlyle naive? Is he jealous of the boasts of science? Or is he contending in earnest against the sometimes exaggerated self-portrait of science? Before very long, we are made to know that his reservations with respect to the comprehensiveness of scientific learning are very grave; they form a sober ingredient in his polemic against scientism, the reaction of the Time-Spirit to science, and against the hyperbolic self-concept of much of science itself.

To the wisest man, wide as is his vision, Nature remains of quite infinite depth, of quite infinite expansion; and all Experience thereto limits itself to some few computed centuries and measured square-miles. The course of Nature’s phases, on this our little fraction of a Planet, is partially known to us: but who knows what deeper courses these depend on; what infinitely larger Cycle (of causes) our little Epicycle revolves on? (*Sartor* 233-34)

Science has set for itself fundamental presumptions the violation of which would render it instantly mute and inoperative. One such presumption is that which has been called the law of parsimony—the expedient and comforting assumption that natural phenomena tend to manifest in themselves the fewest and simplest “laws.” Another such presumption is sometimes known by the name of the law of uniformity, the assumption that the way phenomena dispose themselves in our vicinity and the way they dispose themselves at other loci in the universe are similar enough for any differences to be negligible for scientific and mathematical purposes. Seldom do challenges to these fundamental presumptions quake the scientific community with threats of serious disruption; relativity, the uncertainty principle, entropy, and quasars have been assimilated into the conceptions and equations after some excitement. Blackholes have communicated the most sustained rethinking of recent years, but with the assistance of other departments, such as relativity, are being integrated into the system. Biological evolution, rather than a threat to the fundamental presumptions, was a bold application of them.

Carlyle’s emphasis in the above passages is perhaps best understood as a reminder that science is conducted in its own presumptive ether, its own medium, and that that medium is constituted of the axioms of parsimony, uniformity, et al,

axioms which not only have never been securely verified as descriptive of the not-here, but are incapable of such verification since they are the assumptions which must be made to ascertain their verifiability. Further implicit in Carlyle's focus is the reminder that such assumptions as we necessarily make of the not-here are born specifically of the conditions of the here. Hence, the need for Carlyle's Minnow Analogy, a prose-poem of extreme poignancy:

To the Minnow every cranny and pebble, and quality and accident, of its little native Creek may have become familiar: but does the Minnow understand the Ocean Tides and periodic Currents, the Trade-winds, and Monsoons, and Moon's Eclipses; by all which the condition of its little Creek is regulated, and may from time to time (unmiraculously enough), be quite upset and reversed? Such a minnow is Man; his Creek this Planet Earth; his Ocean the immeasurable All; his Monsoons and Periodic Currents the mysterious Course of Providence through Aeons of Aeons. (*Sartor* 234)

The supreme suitability of this Minnow Analogy to Carlyle's purposes as guardian of the reverential-poetic construction of the universe resides in the urgency with which its images and metaphors have been measured and deployed. The mature minnow (man) is one of the smallest of fish; a creek, as a siding of a river or a run-off from a lake or a spill-way to the ocean, is a metaphor of man's familiar environs; replete with home-spun axioms and "principles," it conveys the picture of a transient and peculiar eddy gurgling eccentrically askew from the illimitable and irresistible ocean; but the little eddy at its connecting spill-way lies open to the Irregular, the Chaotic and Unlawful Vortex, which irregularly "quite oversets" the conditions of the eddy, while the intervals between irregular oversettings seem like forevers.² Near its junction with the coursing Vortex, the little creek's "laws" mutate not only beyond recognition but beyond the status of "law," as the minnow's crannies, pebbles, qualities and accidents become abysses and insurmountable submarinal summits, the little creek becoming lost in the unimagined and everlasting ocean.

Fundamentally, Carlyle's reservations with respect to nineteenth-century science were undergirded by his dismissal of space and time, the two main "garments" in which science clothes itself. Of them he says in *Sartor Resartus*, "Deepest of all illusory Appearances are your two grand fundamental world-enveloping Appearances, Space and Time." To this conclusion he was helped by his reading of Kant, and it is not important for our purposes whether or to what extent Carlyle misunderstood, even misappropriated, Kant. It is merely one more thrust at science, materialism and the mechanical age. If one were inclined to reduce the arguments of Carlyle in opposition to science and scientism to their barest syllogistic elements, his deconstruction of the objective reality of space and time would doubtless prove to be the most lethal blow, but allowing the Carlylean voice to reassume its unique, steep-stepping prose, the dismissal of space and time is sounded almost as an undeveloped afterthought, powerful in its implications,

but unbelabored in contrast with the other major insights.

The larger question to which Carlyle brings us is the epistemological one: in assuming the early-nineteenth-century scientific world-picture, that is, the mechanistic (mechanical) one of the Newtonian-Laplacian synthesis (but not strictly confined to these), to what extent is axiology irrelevant, even absurd?

An important aid in fathoming Carlyle's incisive objection to mechanism and science is his definition of "the Mechanical Age" as an age which "with its whole undivided might... teaches and practices the great art of adapting means to ends," cited on the first page of this essay. It is often Carlyle's manner to strew pithy and provocative but unexplained analyses such as this on his expository way. It is to the reader that he leaves the full, sometimes delayed, realization of meaning. Surely he is saying something urgent about the cultural effect on the Time-Spirit of science's tampering with means and ends. Value, or the likelihood of it, is destroyed by the removal of open-ended, or opulent, ends, and open-ended ends are removed when experimental science specially adapts its means to issue in preformed, preconceived and pre-ordained ends. There can be no theory of value without the beckoning of opulence, of transcendence, of infinity-without, that is, freeing "means" from the experimenters "adaptations," which actually result in partly foregone, and therefore limited, conclusions. Within this framework, axiology was for Carlyle not only irrelevant but absurd.

In our own time, the later writings of Whitehead interestingly rewind the thread of the Carlylean warning. In *Modes of Thought* (1938) Whitehead was to sound, in his second lecture, a note to which he would return with fascination a number of times.

In some sense or other, Importance is derived from the immanence of infinitude in the finite. (28)

In striving for a refined understanding of "Importance," Whitehead came inexorably to ponder the effects of science and scientific method on the understanding. "As science grew," he wrote in his third lecture, "minds shrank in width of comprehension" (61). And reminiscent of Carlyle's dread of creeping scientism and the manner in which it must surely cripple any hope of value, Whitehead wrote in the same lecture, "As the subject matter of a science expands, its relevance to the universe contracts. For it presupposes a more strictly defined environment" (77).

For Whitehead, value in a totally scientific universe is irrelevant:

But the assignment of the type of pattern restricts the choice of details. In this way the infinitude of the universe is dismissed as irrelevant. The advance which has started with the freshness of sunrise degenerates into a dull accumulation of minor feats of coordination. The history of thought and the history of art illustrate this doctrine. (79-80)

2. George Eliot, writing in *Silas Marner* some thirty years after the appearance of *Sartor Resartus*, precisely seconded, but in her inimitable novelist's style, this sentiment, for it is a sentiment rather than an objective observation: "This lapse of time during which a given event has not happened,

is...constantly alleged as a reason why the event should never happen, even when the lapse of time is precisely the added condition which makes the event immanent."

As Carlyle's Minnow Analogy serves to dislodge human thinking from stifling confines, Whitehead's "process" delivers the universe from "bounds."

By means of process, the universe escapes from the limitations of the finite. Process is the immanence of the infinite in the finite; whereby all bounds are burst, and all inconsistencies dissolved. (75)

Toward the end of his last lecture in *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead sounds a danger signal which, in addition to being a warning in its own right, gives twentieth-century currency to the nineteenth-century and sometimes seemingly antiquated and far-off Carlyle:

The sharp-cut scientific classifications are essential for scientific method. But they are dangerous for philosophy. Such classification hides the truth that the different modes of natural existence shade off into each other. (215)

Ending his series of lectures on an abrupt note which seems as if it should really be the point of departure for a new lecture, the last sentence of Whitehead's *Modes of Thought* is almost a plea for the likes of Carlyle to take pen in hand:

The aim at philosophic understanding is the aim at piercing the bluntness of activity in respect to its transcendent functions. (232)

The final effect of Carlyle's polemic is to justify belief in the sacred and its antipode, the demonic, such belief to accompany a profound sense of life-long wonder at the abounding specter of miracle that both encompasses us and is us. He assists the reverential-poetic perspective by boldly impugning science for the manner in which it entangles itself in the "clothes" which cover the most urgent questions; by reminding his age that just our being here at all is the chief wonder; by exposing the tendency of science to lapse into scientism; by calling attention to the fact that rather than confuting the reve-

rential-poetic outlook science fatigues and stupefies it, as it were, by over-abundant enumeration of the intermediate components and processes involved in phenomena (frustrating wonder through the use of "wonder-hiding stupefactions"); and by impugning both the scientist's comprehensiveness and his reliability in descrying the larger reality beyond his or his instrument's purview, as well as the effects of that larger reality on his own vicinity, and by implication, on his own perception.

The challenge of Carlyle is that the scientist must tread lightly and with humility, for the fertility of his learning and the readiness with which nature in its local propinquity has opened to his prying are of minute proportions and hence of minute value for application.

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Mixed Metaphor, Mixed Gender: Swinburne and the Victorian Critics*

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The sexual themes and the complex metaphorical style of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads, Series 1* (1866) are well known. Less fully understood, however, is exactly why Swinburne aroused such alarm among so many nineteenth-century critics when Dickens was concurrently writing about seduction, sadism, and lesbianism in such novels as *Bleak House*.¹ Although what the critics said about Swinburne's immoral subjects is frequently quoted in Victorian studies, I would suggest

that we need to pay closer attention to the stylistic criteria used to condemn his poetry. For, as Isobel Armstrong and others have pointed out, the mid-Victorians made little or no distinction between the rules for language use and the rules for moral conduct.² More specifically, I am interested in the recurrent association of Swinburne's use of mixed metaphors with questions of gender, on the one hand, and questions of social control, on the other.

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1. As Geoffrey Carter points out, it was "dishonest" of both the Victorian critics and later writers, such as Mario Praz, "to be shocked at *Poems and Ballads* because much of the subject matter is to be found in the

vastly popular Dickens" (155).

2. Armstrong discusses the vocabulary and assumptions of early and mid-Victorian critics, noting their emphasis on, not to say obsession with, "what the poem should be about." Typically, this concern with subject matter entails a primarily moral criterion for judging poetry: "More than hovering behind this discussion is the assumption that it is not morally possible or permissible to sympathise with some areas of experience," including

Among dozens of reviews of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* which were published in Victorian periodicals between 1866 and 1886, one finds again and again the declaration that a man's moral character and social worth may be judged by his style of speech or writing. An especially clear example of this assumption occurs in a piece by Thomas Spencer Baynes for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1871. Baynes confidently infers Swinburne's "perverted moral perceptions" from the "unpruned exuberance of language and imagery" which characterizes all of the poet's work, lyric and dramatic (71). Everyone knows, Baynes declares, that excessive use of figures corresponds to "a feverish sensuality," a "glorification of sensual appetites and sensual indulgences as the highest exercises and elements of human nature" (71-72). Therefore, when judged on "literary and artistic" grounds—supposedly leaving aside any moral bias—Baynes finds that Swinburne's poetry is "not virile or even feminine, but epicene; and, that so far from being chaste or noble in the masculine or any other sense, it is impure and base to a degree unparalleled in English literature" (73). Baynes feels sure his readers will agree that a man who uses language in this way is "dangerous" and "subversive of domestic life, social order, and settled government..." (72).

Where does this well organized system of parallels between language and gender, language and citizenship, come from? One is tempted to refer to the Victorians' prudishness and repression of erotic desire.³ However, I would argue that neither Baynes nor the other hostile reviewers of Swinburne are displaying assumptions unique to their period. Rather, the Victorian critical establishment participates in a dominant tradition of ideology which can be traced back to classical rhetoric. Briefly put, this tradition is determinedly heterosexual and masculinist; it believes that social control depends on control of the body and on control of language as a representation of the body.⁴

Beginning with Aristotle, rhetoric or the art of public persuasion is treated as both a necessity and a danger precisely because language is invested with great political power. The whole aim of rhetoric, Aristotle says, is the praise of virtue and the blame of vice; "proper" values must be represented in "proper" language. One can tell a "proper" man by what he says (the "proper" *topoi*) as well as how he says it (the choice of "appropriate" diction) (I.ix). Significantly, Aristotle emphasizes "self-control," or restraint in regard to what he quite bluntly calls "the pleasures of the body," as crucial for any orator (I.ix.7-15).

explicit heterosexual relations and even the faintest allusion to same-sex relations (10).

Similarly, Wellek comments of two representative Victorian critics that Walter Bagehot "is too wary of the abnormal," while Leslie Stephen requires that literature assert " 'the surpassing value of manliness, honesty, and pure domestic affection' " (184, 186). Note that "pure domestic affection" implicitly restricts love to heterosexual and married couples.

3. Steven Marcus has given the best known exposition of the hypothesis of sexual repression as particular to Victorian England. Roger Fryer discusses "prudishness" in a somewhat longer period, or from the later eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries, but his main assumptions about sexuality, language, and literature seem to parallel those of Marcus.
4. Here and throughout, I am indebted to Michel Foucault's work on sexuality and the institutions of power. See especially: *The History of Sexuality* 1, and his later reflections on the "archaeology" of the body and discourse in *Power/Knowledge*.
5. Although space does not permit full tracing of the association of gender

His explanation for this restriction sounds strikingly like Baynes' reasons for condemning Swinburne in 1871: moral turpitude or "licentiousness" in the man is always signaled by his use of "improper" language, and this, in turn, should discredit the orator in the public eye. Implicit is the fear of seduction by language: talk of illicit sexuality might persuade and arouse people in the wrong way. In short, only he who can control his erotic desires knows how to control his words and, consequently, how to exemplify and uphold the order of the state.

In Book III of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle lays down rules for metaphor that will be repeated with remarkable consistency by Cicero, Quintilian, and Longinus, late classical rhetoricians whose dicta reappear, often only slightly rephrased, in Campbell, Blair, and Whately—three of the most influential stylistic guides during the Victorian period.⁵ Given the requirement of an "appropriate" or "proper" ground of resemblance for every metaphor, Aristotle rules out mixed metaphor, or the "juxtaposition" of "contraries." "We must consider," he says, "as a red cloak suits a young man, what suits an old one; for the same garment is not suitable for both" (III.ii.7-10). The implication here is that mixing metaphors is like mixing clothes and mixing identities: just as the "proper" orator should not wear someone else's clothes, so also he should not borrow "far-fetched" or "improper" words for his metaphors. Aristotle also associates lack of verbal self-restraint or the use of too much metaphor with immorality and duplicity: "For men become suspicious of one whom they think to be laying a trap for them, as they are of mixed wines" (III.ii.3-6).

The motifs of intoxication, trickery, and cross-dressing recur with almost strident frequency in the rhetorical tradition whenever either mixed or extended metaphors are at issue. A complex stereotype is constructed on the assumption that the immoral man will always abuse his body, the body of others, the body or "figures" of language, and ultimately the "body politic." Thus, Cicero remarks in *De Oratore* that there is a proper and an improper "form and, as it were, complexion of eloquence." The line for rhetoric must be drawn on the basis of gender as well as morality. "Just as some women are said to be handsomer when unadorned...so [the] plain style" is to be taken as the norm, for it is the more natural, the more honest, and hence the more "manly" manner of speaking (XIII.78-79). In contrast, excessive or so-called "vicious" use of metaphor and other figures of speech has the effect of dres-

and mixed metaphor in all of these authors, the following passages may be taken as representative. In *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), George Campbell warns that "transgression" of "the virtues of elocution" is a "criminal" "violation" (2:3). In particular, "that impropriety which results from the use of" "a mixture of discordant metaphors" is discouraged as "puerile" or unmanly (2:6-7)—a condemnation taken over directly from Longinus (*On the Sublime* 3:2-5).

The relationship between effeminacy and mixed metaphor is even more pointedly drawn by Hugh Blair in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), perhaps because of his greater reliance on Cicero and Quintilian: "The excessive, or unreasonable employment of [metaphors] is mere foppery in writing. It gives a boyish air to composition..." (ch. 15). Further: "The affectation and parade of ornament, detract as much from the author, as they do from a man." Perhaps most significantly, Blair establishes a connection between "mean, vulgar, or dirty ideas" and the improper choice of metaphors (ch. 15). This belief is still widely held by the Victorian reviewers of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*.

sing up language like a harlot: "...all noticeable ornament, pearls as it were, will be excluded; not even curling-irons will be used; all cosmetics, artificial white and red, will be rejected..." For Cicero, the figures of language are as dangerous to the male orator as the body of a woman who has fancied herself up to attract him away from his civic duties.

In a scathing review of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* in *The Pall Mall Gazette* for 1866, we hear a similar charge against the seductions of metaphor: "To be sure, the worst of these poems abound with fine language; but when that is said you only say that Libitina has fine limbs..." (10). The sexual content as well as the figures of Swinburne's language earn him the epithet of "a lady's gentleman in a seraglio." The reviewer also complains that the author of "Anactoria" "has got maudlin drunk on lewd ideas and lascivious thoughts" (10)—a nice echo of Aristotle's warning that "mixed wine" goes down as badly as mixed metaphor. Overall, it is clear that the Victorian reviewer still strongly subscribes to the classical assumption that bodily self-control is the key to moral rectitude, with the corollary view that deviation from the norms of style signals sexual deviation, as well as moral deviousness, in the author.

It is interesting that the *Pall Mall* article is entitled "Swinburne's Folly," for perhaps the most damning thing said about the poet is that he is "unmanly" because he hasn't had the common sense to keep quiet about his strange sexual desires. The man who admits the power of the body is a fool at best, and a homosexual at worst. Swinburne, says this reviewer, "has notions of virility—a flaunting ineffectual hotbed crop—which bring precisely the kind of sneer to a man's lips which is least liked" (10). The same nasty sneer appears on Quintilian's lips in *Institutia Oratoria* as he describes the effect of using too many mixed metaphors in public speaking: such orators are like those who "...pluck out superfluous hair or use depilatories, who dress their locks...with the curling iron and glow with a complexion that is not their own...so that it really seems as if physical beauty depended entirely on moral hideousness" (II.v.12). Baynes, the reviewer for the *Edinburgh Review* mentioned above, comes right out and accuses Swinburne of being a poet in drag, paraphrasing Quintilian as he does so: "Not satisfied...with selecting the materials of his poetry amongst what is lowest, most perverted, and extreme in nature, Mr. Swinburne resorts to the pigments, cosmetics, and stimulants of art, in order to heighten its meretricious effect" (92). To support the insinuation that Swinburne is a cross-dresser in his personal life as well as in his literary language, Baynes finds the following symptoms of "incontinence" in the poems: "strained and violent language," "hot and garish imagery," "verbal tricks" and "conceits," and "sweet but cloying melodies" (75).

Robert Buchanan's accusations against Swinburne in an *Athenaeum* review of 1866 and in the 1872 pamphlet entitled "The Fleshly School of Poetry and other Phenomena of the Day" represent perhaps the most famous and the most injurious case of the identification of mixed metaphor with immorality

and sexual perversion. In the review, Buchanan suggests that Swinburne is a sort of castrato who, in his plays and poems, obsessively revisits "the land where Atys became a raving and sexless maniac..." (30). Buchanan's prime criterion for good writing, or "sincerity," is less romantic passionateness and commitment to ideals than a way of distinguishing between the straights and the gays of the Victorian world of arts and letters.⁶ From Swinburne's "false and distracted" "images," from his "elaborate attempts at thick colouring" and other verbal cosmetics (32), Buchanan concludes—as Quintilian would surely have agreed—that the poet is "quite the Absalom of modern bards,—long-ringed, flippant-lipped, down-cheeked, amorous-lidded" (31).

That the politics of rhetoric and the rhetoric of gender have much to do with the Victorian critical establishment's persecution of Swinburne becomes even more evident in Buchanan's diatribe on the "fleshly school." "There is on the fringe of real English society...a sort of demi-monde," a "Bohemian class," whose poems and paintings are the "canker" that is eating "down into the body social" (5-7). Now this body social is conservatively albeit anxiously male; its interests are threatened equally by the ubiquitous bare "Leg" of the new generation of brazen females, and by the "singers of the falsetto school" who celebrate the desires of the body, male or female or other. Manly women and effeminate men are thrust into the same category, to be safely quarantined in the Bohemian ghetto along with the other "public offenders."

If Buchanan fears that Swinburne's mixed metaphors will lead to a national breakdown of "proper" sexual difference, Alexander Hay Japp sees the blurring of generic types in mid-Victorian literature as another sign of the decadence of the times. In "The Morality of Literary Art," published in *The Contemporary Review* in 1867, Japp declares that Swinburne's poems are a problem for the "public constable" (168). Appealing to his readers' fear of revolution and anarchy, Japp calls on the powers of state to suppress Swinburne's "bold and declared attack upon ideas and forms which the common sense of the mass holds to be hallowed" (173). In particular, Japp singles out Swinburne's use of the dramatic monologue as a "cunning" "trick" perpetrated upon the unsuspecting British public: "The more common form...in which we have immorality nowadays is the confusing of...the lyrical and the dramatic; which has a decided tendency to pruricy and vice" (187). Mixed metaphor, mixed genre, mixed gender: Swinburne poses a threat to the language, the literature, and the social body of England.

In closing this brief survey of the ideology of gender in Victorian literary criticism, I cannot overlook one other thread that runs not only through Swinburne's reviewers but through his own criticism as well. The exclusion of anything that appears feminine or effeminate from the canons of good style entails the exclusion of women from the position of speaker or writer, and hence their exclusion from the political power that may be gained through rhetoric. Homophobia walks hand in hand with misogyny in rhetorical as well as literary critical

6. In "Immorality in Authorship" (1866), Buchanan maintains that sincerity saves literature from immorality: "An immoral subject, treated insincerely, leaves an immoral effect on those natures weak enough to be influenced

by it at all" (296). Insincerity here is a blanket term for all writers who do not adhere to Buchanan's canon of proper topics for literature—a canon that pointedly excludes eroticism and any reference to sexual desire.

history. Decisively, Aristotle places both public speech and morality in the domain of the masculine: "Virtues and actions are nobler, when they proceed from those who are naturally worthier, for instance, from a man rather than from a woman" (*Rhetoric* I.ix.16-23). Likewise, Cicero and Quintilian ground their disparagement of effeminate figuration, not to say the feminine figure or body itself, on an implicit bonding between "vir" or manliness, and "vis" or power, also the word for morality (from "virtum": virtue). Still thinking within this ideological formation, a Victorian critic for the *London Review* in 1866 rejects Swinburne's defense of "Anactoria" as a faithful translation of the great classic author, Sappho, on the basis of gender as much as language. "Grant that Sappho made a wonderful poem out of a grievous aberration; is that any reason why a modern Englishman should seek to rival her in her Bedlam flights of eroticism?" (662). As a woman, Sappho is pitiable, even sympathetic, when she reveals her "mental and moral disease" "in an interval of hysterical emotion," but as a man, Swinburne is repulsive, morally and aesthetically, for adopting the voice of a hysterical woman as if it were his own: "Swinburne lengthens what Sappho had said briefly in her poem, and therein lies the offense" (662).

Similarly, in his diatribe against Tennyson, Browning, and Swinburne as the unholy "Trinity" of mid-Victorian poetry, Alfred Austin continually harps upon the effeminacy of these writers. Swinburne is especially reprehensible for his abuses of the "masculine" ideal of the classics in poems such as "Hymn to Proserpine." "Intensifying what was not masculine by the aid of his modern feminine lens," Swinburne produces only a "travesty" of classical literature (96-97). Travesty and also transvestitism, for as Austin fears the "feminine element" which "has ceased to be domestic" and runs about the streets, "unrestrainedly rioting in any and every arena of life," including the popular novel, so also he fears Swinburne, possessor of the "improper" feminine muse," and that "emasculated poetic voice," whose impersonation of Sappho is not the least of his crimes against mid-Victorian masculinist culture (105).

One wonders, indeed, whether in speaking through Sappho, Swinburne was pronouncing himself in favor of "the love that dare not speak its name." Certainly not, according to Swinburne's own explanation of his motives in "Notes on Poems and Reviews." For "the office of adult art is neither puerile nor feminine but virile," Swinburne affirms, thereby seeming to fall in with his own critics concerning the inferiority of the feminine in art as in life (32). It would seem, then, that Swinburne, like Byron before him, is caught in the dominant discourse of gender and is using the very same terms of masculinity and morality to defend himself that others use against him.⁷ On the other hand, cannot the same writer who speaks through Sappho's voice ventriloquize the voice of a muscular Christian? Perhaps, then, Swinburne offers us exactly what the Victorian

critics feared most: a true "intellectual hermaphrodite," a label which Buchanan meant as an insult but one which Virginia Woolf in her search for an androgynous discourse might have found quite sympathetic.

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7. For an important discussion of gender, power, and discourse in regard to the writing of gay poetry, see Louis Crompton. Crompton's comment on Byron's ambivalence towards the masculinist discourse of his time has bearing on Swinburne's position a generation later: "...violently condemnatory language was the coin demanded of anyone who had the temerity to mention homosexuality [and, in Swinburne's case, lesbianism] in print"

(121). Crompton also points out that in their sexual politics gays were divided in their attitudes to women—a difficult problem for Swinburne as well and one which I plan to address in a separate article. For a sharp analysis of the bonding of "effeminate" with "manly" men against women in Victorian culture, see Jane Marcus's review of Ian Anstruther's biography of Oscar Browning.

The Humanities Tradition of Matthew Arnold

William E. Buckler

The humanities tradition to which Matthew Arnold contributed, both in general outlook and in considerable working detail, is that for which Plato was the first, most complete, and finest spokesman. Like Plato, Arnold was a realist or reist, insisting that "to see things as they in fact are" is the beginning of all knowledge, factual as well as imaginative. Arnold was a secular idealist, like Plato holding steadfastly to "perfection" as the ideal human motive and regarding as happiest those persons who feel they are making some progress in perfection.¹ Arnold recognized, as did the Platonic Socrates, the crucial role of self-examination as both a means and an end of the critically examined life. Although he did not, like Walter Pater, designate it as the "first step" in a critical formula ("Preface," *The Renaissance* XIX), he had previously discovered the principle in Plato and Goethe, where Pater would also have discovered it, and it was in Arnold's practical application of it in his essays that Pater would first have witnessed it at work in English criticism.

Although Arnold would have acknowledged the theoretical force of Newman's crisp distinction between knowledge and virtue in *The Scope and Nature of University Education*,² he would have had serious reservations about its practical cogency. Like Plato, he believed that the need to relate what one knows to what one is and does is inherent in man's nature. He took the highest moral ground an issue was susceptible of and regularly returned intellectual issues to their first principles, cutting through more conventional views that had been formulated without adequate regard for the key premises on which the architecture and persuasiveness of the argument depended. However, in "Literature and Science," he speaks of even "the 'great conceptions of the universe' " as "knowledge only" (10: 65), and his summary statements about education and culture have both an epistemological and an ethical content. For example, he endorses as sound Plato's "description of the aim of education"—"an intelligent man will prize those studies which result in his soul getting soberness, righteousness, and wisdom"³—and introduces the intricate subject of *Culture and Anarchy* as follows: "in my opinion the speech most proper, at present, for a man of culture to make to a body of his fellow countrymen. . . is Socrates's: "Know thyself!" ("Introduction" 5:88). Most importantly, Arnold, like Plato, used human nature itself, including one's own nature, as the ultimate reference point in examining representative tendencies—the habits, dilemmas, potentialities—of representative men.

Many of the literary strategies that we customarily think of as typical of Arnold's critical writings also have their correspondences in Plato's dialogues: a substantial portion of irony without any undertone of cynicism; the addition to topical realism of a metaphoric or symbolic quality; the conception of critical

discourse as essentially a spirited conversation or "dialogue" with oneself; a conviction of the profound influence on our memories and imaginations, on the "very fastnesses of [our] character,"⁴ of what we see and hear and hence an emphasis on the very "best that has been thought and said"; an innate sense of the "perfect manner" and a judgment that the good taste inherent in the style in which a critical matter is handled, its literary treatment, is often more affective or influential than the matter itself; the classical view, more commonly associated with the drama, that in critical discourse, as in other forms of creativity, originality consists, not in invention, but in relevance of insight.

Arnold would not have quarreled with Newman's assertion that Aristotle had taught the world how to think,⁵ but the more generally creative and constructive he perceived the role of criticism to be in the on-coming modern world, the more he took Plato as his model. For the very reason Newman would have found Plato dangerous, Arnold found him indispensable—a great artist and a great moralist who reached ideal outcomes by applying to life in an exemplary manner the ideas he had acquired for himself through such wholly natural means as wide reading, critical observation, and imaginative thought.

To say that Arnold took instruction from the example of Plato on the art and purpose of authentic criticism is not to suggest any extravagant comparisons between their respective achievements or even that Arnold was a disciple of Plato's in any imposing systematic philosophical sense. Arnold saw in Plato's example incontrovertible proof that creative or imaginative criticism could, like other forms of artistic expression held generally in higher esteem, make a worthy contribution of lasting value to the individuals practicing it and, through them, to their society. Moreover, it seemed to Arnold that criticism could be especially constructive in periods when those higher forms of imaginative synthesis were faltering—periods like his own and like that of the Athens to which Plato addressed his *Republic*. Those are the times—the days of the sophists, the cynics, and other prophets of immediate redemption or imminent doom—when "an intelligent man will prize those studies which result in his soul getting soberness, righteousness, and wisdom," when, according to the imperatives of human nature and human history, the humanities become a critical necessity.

The constructive culmination of Plato's idealism was his creative doctrine of Ideal Forms and the ascetic utopianism of *The Republic*. Arnold's idealism was shorter-ranged; he did not create a "philosophical literature," as Plato did, but a critical literature infused informally with Platonist principles, including the principle that the humanist, like the humanities, must serve a constructive purpose.

The constructive purpose of Arnold's criticism was *reconcili-*

1. Arnold quoted Socrates to this effect in *Culture and Anarchy* 5: 167-68.

2. "Knowledge is one thing, virtue is another; good sense is not conscience, refinement is not humility, nor is largeness and justness of view faith."

3. "Literature and Science" 10: 54-55. The quotation from Plato is from the *Republic* 9: 591 B-C, as cited in *Works* 10: 467.

4. The phrase is Pater's, in "Plato's Aesthetics," *Plato and Platonism* 272.

5. Newman (90): "In many subject-matters, to think correctly is to think like Aristotle; and we are his disciples whether we will or no, though we may not know it."

ation, the spirit of which may be clarified by observing that in Arnold's most successful prose writings there are two integrated but distinguishable levels at work simultaneously. One is the manifest, argumentative, logical level through which Arnold attempts to put his *thesis* firmly into place. The other is the latent, suggestive, persuasive level—what is sometimes called the subliminal or, less precisely, the subtextual level—in which his effort is to implant in the consciousness of his audience a *theme*, a *moral theme*, without which the intellectual conviction supported by the thesis would be less likely to root itself in character and express itself in action. In his critical essays, Arnold's thesis differs with the subject-matter and its relevant data—to quote Bacon, with “the inclusions and exclusions required by the nature of the subject” (qtd in Pater, *Plato and Platonism* 160). Arnold's theme, on the other hand, despite variations necessitated by changes in subject-matter, holds steady throughout his career as a critic, giving to his prose a resolution that in his poetry he persistently sought but did not or could not find. It is in this thematic sense that the term *reconciliation* is being used, and, in my judgment, it is not only a major source of Arnold's effectiveness as a creative critic, but also the one condition his critical canon as a whole sets for those working in the humanities tradition—namely, that they be constructive, despondency and violence of the kind represented by Empedocles being just as alien to Plato as they were to Jesus Christ.⁶

Indeed, one might even call Arnold's constructive purpose his anti-Empedoclean theme and thus see it as emerging at the very threshold of Arnold's critical career. Despair of reconciliation—the conviction that he will “sink in the impossible strife,/ And be astray forever” (“Empedocles on Etna” 2: 389-90)—is the source of the intolerable despondency that leads Empedocles to do violence to himself. In turn, it was the debilitating pain suffered by the reader engaged by Empedocles's despair that led Arnold to condemn his handling of the poem's subject in the preface of 1853 and to enunciate his conviction that the “business” of poetry is to “afford” people “the highest pleasure which they are capable of feeling” by appealing “powerfully and delightfully” to the soul's permanent craving for what is grandest and noblest and most reconciling in human experience—that is, great actions so conceived and so treated as to renew man's “invincible desire” to keep faith with himself. (“Preface to First Edition of *Poems* [1853] in *Works* 1: 1-15).

Variations on the reconciliation theme persist throughout Arnold's critical writings. In *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, for example, Arnold's theme is moral, psychological, and cultural. There are strong and salutary Celtic elements in English literature, the most trustworthy mirror of the internal or spiritual organization of the people who produced that literature, and to recognize and be reconciled to their Celtic heritage would contribute substantially to the transformation of the modern Englishman into a “new type,” “more intelligent, more gracious, and more humane” (3: 395). “*Know thyself!*” is also the

theme of *Culture and Anarchy*. The dramatic conflict between two metaphoric antagonists, culture and anarchy, is an expression of the inner dualities of Arnold's middle-class readers, and the theme it supports is that the indispensable first step toward reconciling the contending forces of order and chaos in one's society—what in Plato are called its centripetal and centrifugal forces—is to reconcile them in oneself. In *Literature and Dogma*, finally, Arnold seeks to give his readers who still “feel attachment to Christianity, to the Bible” an intelligent way of reconciling themselves to the “discredit” into which “miracles and the supernatural have fallen.” He does this “by insisting on the *natural* truth of Christianity” (“Preface to [the Popular] Edition” in *Works* 6: 142-43), through an erasure of the orthodox clichés that have been overlaid on the Bible and a recovery of the Biblical writers' original—that is, their *literary*—intuitions.

“Literature and Science” illustrates how these characteristic elements actually work in Arnold's critical writings and provides in addition an opportunity to notice particularly the literary or artistic qualities for which his criticism is said to be creative. Arnold called the essay “in general my doctrine of Studies as well as I can frame it” (10: 462-63), and in it he most specifically addresses the topic of the humanities in relation to the natural sciences as means of education.

Plato is given a very large thematic presence in “Literature and Science.” It is the dramatic discrepancy between Plato's seemingly “unpractical and impracticable” ideas, on the one hand, and the needs of “a great work-a-day world like the United States,” on the other, that Arnold implicitly undertakes to reconcile. He achieves that implicit reconciliation by drawing on Plato's observation of the inexplicable but undeniable fact that there is such a seamless connection between knowledge, conduct, and beauty in the way the great generality of men pursue their lives that a reasonable observer of “things as they in fact are” must conclude that both the diversity of man's powers and his desire to relate them are constitutional in man's nature. Finally, it is the proof the Greeks have left us of the capacity of their artists—their architects, poets, and philosophers—to conceive and combine “all things” into “a supreme total effect,” a “beautiful ‘antique symmetry,’ ” as evidenced by the Acropolis and, implicitly, by Homer's epic poems and the Perfect City of Plato's *Republic*, that the modern humanist is instructed to “possess his soul in patience,” having “a happy faith that the nature of things works silently on behalf of the studies which he loves.”

This, of course, is what I have called the *theme*, as distinct from the *thesis*, of “Literature and Science.” It shows rather clearly, I think, how the constructive purpose of the essay is “*moralised*,”⁷ converted at the thematic level from analysis to action, from the “discovery” of criticism to the “synthesis” of art.⁸

To speak of the creativity of criticism is to speak of criticism's formal literary qualities. Although Arnold's specific subject in

some measure *moralised*; and for moralising him it will be found not easy, I think, to dispense with those old agents, letters, poetry, religion.” *Works* 10: 463.

8. Arnold makes this distinction between creation and criticism in “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” *Essays in Criticism* 3: 260-61.

6. From *Culture and Anarchy* onward, Arnold repeatedly suggests parallels between Socrates's and Jesus Christ's ways of viewing human life. A similar motif can be found in Pater, especially in *Plato and Platonism*.

7. In his General Report for 1876 to the Education Department, Arnold commented: “To have the power of using, which is the thing wished, these data of natural science, a man must, in general, have first been in

the preface of 1853 is poetry, his general subject is literary creation, and the basic criteria he stresses are applicable to creative criticism. Those criteria are the writer's subject, his way of conceiving it being implicit in his choice of it; the architecture or structure by which he gives it body and shape; and the language or diction through which he makes it expressive. No detail of formal treatment is unimportant to a serious writer, of course. It is by his manner that we know him since his matter is "inform[ed] and control[led]" by his way of treating it.⁹ A great many things are included in language, and nothing is untouched by it, criticism being a language art. Still, design is an important key to a literary composition's intellectual adequacy, its compass and logic, and unless an author succeeds in giving his subject a new perspective, puts on it a new complexion, brings to it a brighter illumination, one can fairly say that his view of his subject is not imaginative enough to warrant his having chosen it to begin with.

Arnold's conception of his subject in "Literature and Science" is brilliantly imaginative and fully validates R. H. Super's judgment that it "summed up in itself the essence of all his previous writings on an aspect of human thought—was the epitome, the almost perfect statement of his doctrine" (10: 462). Arnold shifts the grounds for a defense of the humanities so radically as to transform a mere topical issue with such strong political overtones as to promise little more than a perpetual stand-off between contending parties into a subject as large as human life itself. He subjects the relative claims of physical science and the humanities to the critical inquiry to which he had subjected his own poems more than thirty years earlier: what do they "do for you" relative to what, ideally, they *should* do for you? (*Letters* 146). This enables him to cut through all the quibbles, exaggerated claims, calculated strategies, and "invidious comparisons" obscuring the critical issue and to establish a sound basis—rational, historical, comparative—for considering it. What is the goal and how, according to human reason and human experience, are we most likely to achieve it? What, respectively, do physical science and the humanities "as means of education" actually "do for you" relative to what, ideally, they *should* do for you?

The architecture or design of Arnold's *theme*, discussed above, encompasses and is reinforced by the architecture of his *thesis*. Within its modest compass, the essay has the kind of symmetry—"Fit details strictly combined, in view of a large general result"—that Arnold, citing Leonardo da Vinci in corroboration, credited the Greeks with having achieved in a "noble" and "supreme" manner. At its center (61-65) is the crux upon which Arnold's argument turns—the "powers which go to the building up of human life," man's "invincible desire" for spiritual wholeness, the inherent capacity of humane letters to contribute to that desire's fulfillment, its relation to man's "instinct of self-preservation," and the inherent incapacity of physical science to make those connections. In the first half of the essay, Arnold gracefully disposes of such impedimenta to seeing the subject as it in fact is as that humanistic learning is, in the general sense of the term, less scientific than the

physical sciences; that a belles lettrist approach to literature is equivalent to a genuinely humanistic approach; that inadequate practice in either natural science or the humanities is a legitimate basis for discountenancing their ideals; and that a knowledge of the "great results" of science is even a question between the humanists and the physical scientists. In the second half, Arnold responds to certain objections to his thesis and then goes on to show that humane letters do have and do exercise the power he has credited them with. How they exercise it, we do not know and will probably never know, but knowledge that they have and exercise it and a little imaginative thought of what the world would be like if they did not is enough to reconcile us to our ignorance of the process by which they work.

Professor Super's phrase "almost perfect" perfectly applies to Arnold's language in "Literature and Science." The claims Arnold makes for his language—that it is being used to draw plain, simple lines in a "tone of tentative inquiry" having no pretensions to scientific exactness—are fair claims, despite the ironic understatement his language also serves. In his prose writings, Arnold gave critical content and function to a thoroughly public vocabulary, to the language regularly used by men and women with no more than a general interest and intelligence in the matters under discussion. In "Literature and Science" and elsewhere, he made language the natural companion of thought, both its reward and its stimulus, and though he never entertained the illusion that his language could be a clear transparency that all who ran could read, he never fell into the coded or systematized language of a school. His goal was to enlarge as far as possible the social boundaries of criticism while keeping it intact as a literary medium, distinctive, disciplined, and genuinely critical. There is not a word in "Literature and Science" whose meaning is not self-evident or is not made evident by the context in which it is used. Although the perspective Arnold brings to the subject of the essay—his way of regarding it—is quite new, being, as Plato himself would have noted, so old as to have been forgotten, it is neither fanciful nor vague. It is, as Arnold says, "evident enough, and the friends of physical science would admit it."

The humanities tradition of Matthew Arnold, then, is very old, as a respectable tradition should be. He took instruction from Plato, and having learned, he taught. Like other conscientious teachers in the same tradition, he taught both by critical principle and by personal example. His message was essentially three-fold: that criticism has a crucial role to play in the modern world; that the purpose it serves should be a constructive one; and that it serves that purpose best by being as creative as a language art can be. In the meantime, the critic-humanist may "possess his soul in patience," being neither despondent nor violent over the untowardness of contemporary trends. The humanities tradition is a common-law rather than a constitutional tradition. Like Troy and Camelot, it is a city "built/To music, therefore never built at all,/And therefore built forever."¹⁰

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9. The phrase is Pater's, in "Style," *Appreciations* 38.

10. Merlin in Alfred Tennyson, "Gareth and Lynette," *Idylls of the King*, 11. 272-274.

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Oliver (Un)Twisted: Narrative Strategies in *Oliver Twist*

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Although Dicken's *Oliver Twist* was a success to its contemporary readers, modern critics have found it to be a troublesome text. Powerful and mythically effective at certain moments (Oliver's request for "more," Fagin's first appearance, Nancy's murder, Sikes' death, and Fagin's execution come immediately to mind) the novel, nevertheless, has been characterized as amateurish, incoherent, and unsatisfying. Critics see Oliver as a wooden character, the symbolism as perplexing and confusing, the plot as strained and inconsistent, and the novel's thematic issues as muddled in their realization. Typifying much of the critical response, Daleski describes the novel as "bifurcated," with the "thematic confusions of a novel of undoubted imaginative power" (49). Some critics, like Marcus, focus on one side of the bifurcation, the novel's parable-like and allegorical quality; others, of whom Kettle is typical, stress the novel's realistic qualities, emphasizing the social criticism of the early chapters and the psychological realism of the criminals as they confront guilt and death in the later chapters. Nearly everyone concedes what Lankford has called its "incoherence of thought and form" (29), although few have attempted, as he does, to make an argument resolving the text's inconsistencies.

The contradictions that fracture the novel operate on several levels. On the level of plot, Oliver's picaresque journey back and forth between the criminal and respectable worlds shifts at mid-novel to the working out of his inheritance and the hunting down of Fagin, Sikes, and Monks. This odd plot shift is echoed by a difficulty in characterization that suggests the perennial nature/nurture argument: particularly in the early pages, individuals seem to be the product of forces in their environment, but later on the narrative implies that innate character controls behavior. On another level, the ironic voice of the omniscient narrator that is so prominent in the opening chapters is muted considerably by the end of the text, and this muting is linked to the rhetorical shift from the bitter realism of the workhouse section to the predominantly allegorical tone of the last half of the novel. In his 1841 "Preface" to the novel, Dickens can be seen struggling with this rhetorical issue; on the one hand, he asserts (responding to contemporary reviewers of the novel) that he has attempted to present his characters, especially the Fagin group, in the most realistic way:

It appears to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really did exist; to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid misery of their lives; to show them as they really are, for ever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest

paths of life, with the great black ghastly gallows closing up their prospect, turn them where they might; it appeared to me that to do this, would be to attempt a something which was needed, and which would be a service to society. And therefore I did it as I best could. (34)

At the same time, he argues that his intention was also of a more allegorical nature, "to show, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last" (33).

By the close of the novel, we sense that the latter item of each of these pairs is intended to be privileged. The "principle of Good," associated with Dicken's allegorical intent seems to outweigh the novel's realistic thrust, although most critics find this intention to be carried out in an ineffective way, primarily because of the sentimentality attached to the forces of good in the novel, along with our recognition that some of the text's most effective moments and sustained passages emerge from the more realistic aspects of the narrative; as has frequently been noted, the passion and energy in the novel is confined to the "devil's party," while the good characters are pallid and unconvincing. Similarly, the working out of Oliver's inheritance overshadows his earlier developing character, leaving us with a sense that Oliver only becomes what he always already was (see Westburg 14). Although the unmasking of his half-brother's plot seals Oliver's middle-class status and provides him with an identity, critics have dismissed this resolution with comments on its preposterousness and artificiality (see, for instance, Kettle 259-60). As readers, we tend to be put off by this melodramatic plot device in an effort to maintain a belief in Oliver's reward as deriving from his own actions. An examination of these oppositions from a rhetorical perspective suggests that the novel is better viewed not simply as an incoherent failure but as a text that is at odds with itself in interesting ways, making Oliver's origin peculiarly problematic when the novel seems to resolve it so definitively.

As in the case with many of Dicken's novels, the narrative is based on a secret, apparently explaining everything, that is intended to provide the reader with the sense of an underlying order and coherence to events. The "progress" of the parish boy, as the novel's subtitle suggests, consists in part in the revelation of this secret of coherence, leading to a confirmation of Oliver's origin and, consequently, his identity. The entire curve of the narrative requires that Oliver end up in the respectable world of the middle-class, negating the "loss" he suffered

at his birth. But the revelation of this secret does not control the presentation of Oliver over the course of the entire novel; rather, the text exhibits the twisted threads of a double logic in the portrayal of the protagonist's goodness and subsequently makes problematic his "reward" at the end. To put it another way, the text "documents" Oliver's goodness in two incompatible ways. Although the first half—up to Oliver's being taken into the safety of the Maylie household—presents Oliver's development in a "realistic" way, it fails to maintain that perspective over the second half. Until Chapter 28, very near the midpoint of the novel, the narrative suggests that Oliver's goodness is based on his character, that it is a function of his actions—of his will, if you will; he is a person, despite his youth, capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, and of achieving goodness through his actions. But the failure of that narrative thrust to depict Oliver's moral progress consistently and convincingly requires a changed strategy to "make him good." In the later chapters, Oliver's goodness is "documented" by means of a fiction in the form of the written document, his father's will, which is meant to establish his innate goodness. As Westburg says,

Dickens tries to have things two ways: Oliver's inheritance is a reward for trials undergone, temptations and evil resisted; but it is also a confirmation of what he was before any trials—a copy of his parents—and thus is not a reward but a rightful inheritance. He proves he is what he always was—which is what his parents were.
(14)

Although a child and a passive character, Oliver on several occasions does act in ways that apparently suggest the force of an underlying will for goodness. In a famous passage, he confronts the workhouse establishment when he asks for more; while in Fagin's clutches he prays for the strength not to be turned into a thief; and at the time of the burglary attempt, he plans to raise the household and foil the crime. Yet these events are presented in problematic ways, which undermine the impression we are meant to get of Oliver's capacity for right action. It is true that Oliver asks for more, but the force of that demand is qualified by the fact that Oliver's carrying out of this act results from his being chosen by lot: "A council was held, lots were cast who should walk up to the master after supper that evening, and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist" (56). What appears to be a deliberate choice on Oliver's part to confront cruelty is subverted by the randomness suggested by the lottery. In a similar way, at the time of the attempted burglary Oliver "firmly resolved" (213) to alert the household after having prayed to Heaven, "do not make me steal" (212), but he is unable to carry through on his resolution; the burglary is foiled by the actions of the Maylie servants. Actually, Oliver's most "heroic" action occurs at his birth in the first chapter of the novel:

The fact is, that there was considerable difficulty in inducing Oliver to take upon himself the office of respiration—a troublesome practice, but one which custom has rendered necessary to our easy existence—and for some time he lay gasping on a little flock mattress, rather

unequally poised between this world and the next, the balance being decidedly in favor of the latter. (45)

Oliver struggles with "Nature," and wins his chance for life, taking on an existence characterized as "troublesome" (47). But subsequently as a passive character, Oliver makes little "progress" during the first half of the novel towards autonomy. Seldom is he able to generalize from his experience, and the actions of the external world have little impact on his personality as he is passed back and forth between the virtuous and the criminal groups in the novel (see Westburg 6-7). The evidence that Oliver's goodness is based on his actions, that it is a function of his will, that he is a free agent who struggles successfully to resist corruption, simply does not convince.

Consequently, this strategy is placed on hold while another logic—that Oliver's goodness is based on his origin—takes over, as the narrator sets out the machinery that results in the unravelling of the secret of Oliver's birth. Jonathan Culler's distinction between "story" and "discourse" can be helpful in assessing this shift.¹ If we conceive of fiction as consisting of a plot, or story, which contains the events of the narrative and a discourse which controls the presentation of those events, we can observe this novel subverting the relationship between these elements. Typically, this conventional dichotomy privileges events over the discourse which reports them, but the grafting of Monk's plot onto this narrative provides the material to question this privileging. The plot, or story, of Oliver's progress is initially controlled by his response to events, and as a character, he appears to be developing a sense of goodness as he struggles with his problems. But as the narrator finds little success in developing him as a character imbued with an independent personality, he introduces what Culler calls a "structure of signification" (*Pursuit* 180) to produce a fictional or tropological event, the written will that we learn about at the end of the novel, to provide the significance that the novel is unable to bring about through its initial strategy. The narrative not only says that Oliver is a product of his environment but also that he is a product of a metaleptic event that occurred prior to the events of the story.² This narrative shift acts as a supplement to Oliver's blunted efforts at autonomy, creating the uncomfortable recognition involved in supplementarity.³ The narrator's change in strategy forces us to contemplate contradictory interpretations of Oliver's goodness: on the surface, that new strategy is simply an additional way in which Oliver's fate is worked out, but at the same time, it suggests the insufficiency of the earlier presentation of his character. Consequently, Oliver's "will"—in the sense of his character—is supplemented, and undermined, by his father's "will," the written document which verifies his middle-class, respectable, good nature and which provides him with the "origin" that is central to the working out of his destiny.

The events that finally resolve the narrative (which I shall discuss in more detail shortly) further undermine the reader's efforts to admire Oliver's actions and his reward based on such actions; instead the outcome appears as the product of narrative or discursive requirements, and Oliver's success in avoiding

1. See Culler, *Pursuit*, especially 169-72, for a discussion of this distinction.
2. Chase treats this notion brilliantly in her article on *Daniel Deronda*.

3. For a convenient summary of this idea, see Culler, *Deconstruction*, 102-110.

being corrupted is no longer significant. Oliver's character is presented as "original" in the latter part of the novel, determined by the text—or will—, not by what he does. His "progress" is undermined by this confusion of causality, for he contradictorily becomes what he always was; the novel ends up suggesting that he always already was deserving of his inheritance. The novel twists these two threads of narrative strategy together to produce Oliver's twisted arrival at his goal. This doubleness is suggested by the novel's original title, *Oliver Twist; Or, The Parish Boy's Progress*.⁴ If the word "Or" is interpreted not as an explanatory appositive but as a coordinating conjunction, implying alternatives, the title implies a narrative with a protagonist who remains what he always was ("Oliver Twist") as well as one with a protagonist who changes ("The Parish Boy's Progress"). And the threads are again twisted into an interpretive knot.

This narratological twist, however, is not the only way in which the novel leaves the reader uneasy. Even if we conclude that the narrator abandons his efforts to present Oliver as a character who becomes good and decides to rely on the "documentation" of the father's will, we find that one of the novel's crucial dichotomies turns out to be more problematic than it initially appears. The way into such a reading involves examining one of the novel's marginal elements, its only extensive interpolated tale. At the midpoint of the novel, just as Oliver has been taken in by the Maylies, someone in the household summons a pair of private detectives from London, Blathers and Duff, to search out the perpetrators of the failed burglary. Before being taken upstairs to interrogate a recuperating Oliver, the men are briefly entertained downstairs. They somewhat inexplicably suggest that this recent attempted burglary has a parallel with another incident, that of the robbery of Conkey Chickweed.⁵ In that case, Chickweed, a tavern owner, received a magistrate's permission to use a police detective to find out who had robbed him. The tale recounts how, over a period of several days as the detective stakes out the tavern, Chickweed repeatedly sees the criminal, chases him down the lane, and both he and the detective keep losing him. Jed Spyers, the detective of the tale, eventually recognizes that Chickweed is carrying out a diversionary tactic and confronts him as the perpetrator of the crime. Blathers explains the point of the story: "So he had [done it himself]; and a good bit of money he had made by it, too; and nobody would never have found it out [sic], if he hadn't been so precious anxious to keep up appearances!" (280). Coming at the beginning of that part of the novel in which Oliver becomes a passive, secondary character while his friends and supporters proceed to track down and capture Fagin, Sikes, and Monks, the interpolated tale comments on the strategy of the last half of the narrative. Conkweed's tactic of creating a diversion in order to hide the

truth is one that the novel itself now begins to practice. It is a commonplace of *Twist* criticism that Oliver is a pawn between the forces of good and the forces of criminality in the novel, and that the primary impulse of the novel is to restore Oliver to the world of the good characters, leaving the reader with a sense of the purity of that world. The goodness of which Oliver is representative—regardless of the difficulties we may have in drawing firm conclusions about its source—is embodied in the members of the Brownlow-Maylie group. But a close look suggests that the "origin" at which Oliver arrives at the end of the novel is not as pure and unclouded as it seems.

The novel's major dichotomy, consisting of the privileged world of the good people and the excluded world of the criminals, allows for the frequent observation by critics that the world of the thieves contains some features of the good world; despite its corruption, Fagin's world, at least temporarily, does provide Oliver with a sense of security, belonging, and an escape from loneliness. What has been much less often noted, however, is that the characters of the good world have more in common with the criminals than most readings have suggested.⁶ Betrayal, deceit, and selfishness peek through the image of pure goodness attributed to the Brownlow-Maylie group, the good world of Oliver's inheritance, despite efforts to confine these elements to the world of the thieves. If we consider the reader as a detective, like Jed Spyers, attempting to piece together the clues of the novel, we can say that the second half of the text, as the Brownlow-Maylie group pursues the criminals of the larger "tale," deflects the reader's attention from the fact that the good characters exhibit some of the qualities of those characters relegated to the criminal world. An examination of the way Oliver's father, Brownlow, and Grimwig are presented reveals that the text makes problematic the underlying virtues of the good characters of the novel.

One of the primary criminal traits that the good characters share is betrayal. In the treatment of the thieves whom Oliver encounters, we find a common feature of their world to be betrayal, or the fear of betrayal. As early as Fagin's musing over his booty while Oliver is slowly waking up to the world of the thieves on the morning after his arrival, the text stresses the Jew's obsession with traitorous behavior:

Clever dogs! Staunch to the last! Never told the old parson where they were. Never peached upon old Fagin! . . . What a fine thing capital punishment is! Dead men never repent; dead men never bring awkward stories to light. (107)

Fagin's primary reason for recapturing Oliver after his rescue by Brownlow is his anxiety that the boy might tell the police of his experience and identify the location of the hideout for them. And Nancy's betrayal in the last half of the novel, of

"that was done by Conkey Chickweed, that was." (278)

6. Miller, one of Dickens's most perceptive critics, is among those making the former point (*World* 47-48). Miller also briefly mentions the latter point ("Fagin's hidden society of thieves bears a sinister relationship to the good bourgeois world of Mr. Brownlow. The unsettling similarity of the community of outlaws to the community of the good puts the validity of the latter in question" ["Fiction of Realism" 114], but he does not develop the idea.

4. Westburg (5-6) makes the point that Dickens changed the title to *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* in all the editions that he supervised after 1846. Nevertheless, I still think the point to be valid.

5. Their observations are couched as follows:
 "Ah!" said Mr Blathers. . . . "I have seen a good many pieces of business like this, in my time ladies."
 "That crack down in the back lane at Edmonton, Blathers," said Mr Duff, assisting his colleague's memory.
 "That was something in this way, warn't it?" rejoined Mr Blathers;

course, drives both Fagin and Sikes to extremes of behavior. In the good characters also, if we look carefully, we can observe the phenomenon of betrayal in the history of the relationship between Edwin Leeford, Oliver's father, and Agnes, his mother. Despite the veneer of the idea of the "love-match," so important to Dickens throughout his novelistic career, it is worth noting that Oliver is a product of betrayal and subsequent abandonment. The history of the love-match, which is contrasted with the loveless relationship to which Edwin is legally bound, reveals a "stain" on the father's character. Remaining silent about the fact that he is married to someone else, Edwin deceives Agnes and her family in becoming engaged to her. As Brownlow remarks, in his re-telling of events, Edwin seduced Agnes under false pretenses, although Brownlow couches his version in very neutral terms: "The end of a year found him contracted, solemnly contracted, to that daughter; the object of the first, true, ardent, only passion of the guiltless girl" (436). But, since Monks has an ax to grind, he is more direct in his description, made noteworthy by the fact that it remains uncontradicted by Brownlow:

He had palmed a tale on the girl that some secret mystery—to be explained some day—prevented his marrying her just then; and so she had gone on, trusting patiently to him, until she trusted too far, and lost what none could ever give her back. (457-8)

Although we willingly accept Edwin's professions of guilt and regret in the letter that he writes Agnes just before his death, the fact remains that he has committed an act of betrayal, an act that has destructive consequences for both Agnes and her child; she endures the pain and suffering of dying in a lonely, sordid manner and Oliver's early life, in some measure due to his father's acts, is full of suffering and degradation.

A more subtle kind of betrayal occurs in the odd will that Oliver's father writes. The sense of honesty that Oliver presumably has inherited from his father is undermined by the curiously distrustful codicil of the will that is to affect much of what happens to Oliver during the course of the novel:

The bulk of his property he divided into two equal portions—one for Agnes Fleming, and the other for their child, if it should be born alive, and ever come of age. If it were a girl, it was to inherit the money unconditionally, but if a boy, only on the stipulation that in his minority, he should never have stained his name with any public act of dishonour, meanness, cowardice, or wrong. (458)

Edwin's own sense of regret over the "stain" he has caused is perhaps partially responsible for this special condition. Brownlow reports to us, rather paradoxically, that the father introduced this clause in the will as a result of his faith in the goodness of the mother and of the child: "He did this, he said, to mark his confidence in the mother, and his conviction—only strengthened by approaching death—that this child would share her gentle heart, and noble nature" (458). This seems a rather peculiar expression of faith in Oliver, raising as it does a suspicion that the child might very well cause a "stain" on his name, resulting in his exclusion from his inheritance. In a very

important sense, the clause itself is responsible for Oliver's exposure to the machinations of Monks and Fagin. The stipulation, paradoxically, because of the efforts of Oliver's half-brother, almost results in the very stain it implies is unlikely to occur.

A re-reading of these relevant passages, without the blinders of the automatic assumption of middle-class goodness and respectability we attach to the Brownlow-Maylie group, suggests an unexplained undercurrent of "dishonour, meanness, cowardice, or wrong" in Oliver's "origin," his father, qualities that much of the rest of the novel wants us to associate exclusively with the thieves. In a narrative suggesting in its last half that Oliver simply exemplifies his origins, we find that his origins are not precisely a justification of the definitively good and virtuous person he is. We find that Oliver's character has no "origin"; his actions are ungrounded either in the character of his autonomous self (which, as we have seen, is questionable) or in his inheritance. While the first half of the novel unsatisfactorily develops a rationale for Oliver's goodness in its weak handling of Oliver's virtue as a consequence of his own will and actions, the second half makes even more problematic his goodness by presenting us with an external "will" that does not simply confirm his nature but both confirms and denies it.

One could argue that Oliver's father is basically a good man who has temporarily fallen from grace, and that his son is rescued by the other members of the group of good people. But a careful reading suggests that some of them share affinities with the criminal group. Mr. Brownlow, as Oliver's adoptive father, exhibits the kind of suspicion and mistrust that the mythology of the novel apparently attributes only to the thieves. Even though Brownlow is drawn to Oliver, and in the middle of the text will go to the West Indies in search of Monks, he is quick to react suspiciously to Oliver in ways that undermine the goodness we want to associate with him. When, in questioning Oliver, he discovers that the boy's name is not Tom White (as the bailiff at Oliver's trial had led him to believe), he reacts with skepticism, looking "sternly in Oliver's face" (130). He goes on to say that he recognizes it is "impossible to doubt" Oliver because of the truthfulness of the boy's manner, but his kindness and trust have been questioned. In a succeeding chapter, when Oliver mistakenly thinks Brownlow might send him away and pleads to remain, Brownlow provides only a conditional promise: "you need not be afraid of my deserting you, unless you give me cause" (146). Brownlow's threat here not only echoes the implicit threat in the codicil to the will, but it also recalls the more overt threats Fagin makes in Chapter 18 if Oliver betrays him.⁷

The most significant result of this sense of distrust is the outcome of the visit of Grimwig to Brownlow's house during Oliver's convalescence. Although Grimwig is presented as a comic character, his attitudes toward children are much more reminiscent of those of the workhouse masters, of Bumble, and of the thieves. His mistrust of Oliver and baiting of Brownlow have very unpleasant consequences for the boy. Grimwig's pride leads him to take every opportunity to be skeptical of the child's credibility, despite a paradoxical attrac-

7. "Mr Fagin concluded by drawing a rather disagreeable picture of the discomforts of hanging; and, with great friendliness and politeness of

manner, expressed his anxious hopes that he might never be obliged to submit Oliver Twist to that unpleasant operation" (178).

tion to Oliver:

Now the fact was, that in the inmost recesses of his own heart, Mr. Grimwig was strongly disposed to admit that Oliver's appearance and manner were unusually prepossessing; but he had a strong appetite for contradiction. . . .and, inwardly determining that no man should dictate to him whether a boy was well-looking or not, he had resolved, from the first, to oppose his friend. (149)

This causes him to "chuckle maliciously" (149) when Brownlow admits that he knows nothing of the boy's history and Grimwig asks whether the housekeeper has counted the silver, hinting at Oliver's potential for thievery. Grimwig's playing on Brownlow's hesitancy to trust Oliver results in the "test" of Oliver's being sent out to return the books to the bookseller.

At the moment of decision, the narrator tells us that Brownlow "was just going to say that Oliver should not go out on any account; when a most malicious cough from Mr. Grimwig determined him" (151) that Oliver should go on the errand to prove Grimwig wrong. Becoming a pawn in the relationship of these two adults, Oliver will undergo significantly more suffering than he has endured up to this point. Grimwig's stubbornness is also, as the narrator reminds us, a result of pride:

It is worthy of remark, as illustrating the importance we attach to our own judgments, and the pride with which we put forth our most rash and hasty conclusions, that, although Mr. Grimwig was not by any means a bad-hearted man, and though he would have been unfeignedly sorry to see his respected friend duped and deceived, he really did most earnestly and strongly hope at that moment, that *Oliver Twist* might not come back. (152)

Although Oliver's suffering is genuinely relieved by his interlude at the Brownlow residence, the selfishness and uncharitableness that exist along with the gentleness and care in that environment ultimately have the effect of sending him back into a world of pain and emotional torment. Oliver, of course, shortly ends up in the clutches of Fagin, who, in the meantime, has been recruited to corrupt the boy. The narrator, to move the plot along, could easily have arranged for Oliver's errand in other ways, but he has chosen here to develop the undesirable qualities in these two men that run counter to the mythology they project.

The handling of Monks at the end of the novel also undermines the appearance of goodness in the Brownlow-Maylie group. Although Oliver's half-brother is the instigator of the assault on Oliver's innocence, Monks himself escapes significant punishment. Critics have generally ignored this lapse in justice, or have attributed it to Dickens's amateurish novelistic skills in this early work. But the failure to punish Monks, especially given the hysteria and vengeance surrounding the hunting down of Fagin and Sikes, reflects an unexpected and unsettling bias on the part of the good characters to save one of their own. Brownlow goes further when he distributes the balance of the father's estate equally between the sons: "Oliver

would have been entitled to the whole; but Mr. Brownlow, unwilling to deprive the elder son of the opportunity of retrieving his former vices and pursuing an honest career, proposed this mode of distribution, in which his young charge joyfully acceded" (475). Although he serves essentially as Monks' agent in the treatment of Oliver, no such forgiveness is granted to Fagin. Furthermore, Monks' attitudes and actions throughout the novel hardly convince us that his "pursuing an honest career" is even a remote possibility.

The reader's attention to these unsettling qualities in the good characters is deflected in the second half of the novel by the melodramatic hunting down of Sikes, Fagin, and Monks and the sentimental working out of the happy ending. But in the process of unravelling its plots and establishing Oliver in the security of the Brownlow-Maylie world, the text, by twisting together contradictory narrative strategies, leaves the reader questioning what the novel all along has promised—a revelation of Oliver's origin. In a text that implies a secret coherence and order to experience, some of the strategies it uses to achieve that end undermine our understanding of the source of Oliver's goodness, the nature of his progress, and the force of the thematic values that the novel wishes to present. Such a text, in its attempt to unravel the knot that entwines Oliver, twists these contradictory strategies together to end up quarreling with itself ("twist," etymologically, has connections with "two-ness" and "quarrel"). As the text turns back on itself in unexpected ways, it leaves Oliver tied but ungrounded; he has gained a family but in a significant sense he is still bereft of an inheritance, still orphaned. Perhaps the novel owes some of its contemporary success to these linked tropes, providing readers with not only the powerful myth of a link to the past—something to inherit—but also with an image of their unbridgeable separation from that past, a separation that characterized much of the nineteenth-century experience.

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Representation and Homophobia in *The Picture of Dorian Gray**

Richard Dellamora

Although homosexuality in the nineteenth century was often perceived as a disturbance in gender-relations, twentieth-century writers have often regarded it *sui generis*.¹ In her recent book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Sedgwick proposes a persuasive case for viewing desire between men as part of the normal structure of gender-relations. According to Sedgwick, especially in the nineteenth century masculine privilege was sustained by male friendship within institutions like the public schools, the older Universities, clubs, and the professions. Because, however, the continuing dominance of bourgeois males also required that they marry and produce offspring, the intensity and sufficiency of male bonding needed to be strictly regulated. Sedgwick locates the regulating mechanism in homophobia, a term whose current prominence in literary discussions she is responsible for. Homophobia (or what she refers to as "male homosexual panic") regulates the limits of male friendship; the fear of ordinary males that they might be (or might be accused of being) homosexual compels them to direct their energies into marriage. "Because the paths of male entitlement, especially in the nineteenth century, required certain intense male bonds that were not readily distinguishable from the most reprobated bonds, an endemic and ineradicable state of...male homosexual panic became the normal condition of the male heterosexual entitlement" ("The Beast in the Closet" 151). The resulting situation is a double bind in which "the most intimate male bonding" is prescribed at the same time that "the remarkably cognate" homosexuality is proscribed (152).

The opening of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* provides an instance of this contradictory situation. One of the novel's three male protagonists, the painter Basil Hallward, begins by confessing his passion—he calls it "idolatry" (11)—for his young model, Dorian Gray. In a passage that Walter Pater quoted with approval in his 1891 review, Basil codifies his infatuation in terms of the synthesizing cultural ideal prominent in the writing of Matthew Arnold and Pater.

"I sometimes think, Harry, that there are only two eras of any importance in the world's history. The first is the appearance of a new medium for art, and the second is the appearance of a new personality for art also. What the invention of oil-painting was to the Venetians, the face of Antinoüs was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of Dorian Gray will some day be to me....His personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style. I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me before....Unconsciously he defines for me the lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek. The harmony

of soul and body—how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an ideality that is void. Harry! if you only knew what Dorian Gray is to me." (9-10)

Hallward's portrait of Dorian prophesies a Renaissance that is both cause and effect of a new way of life capable of integrating responsibility with an open attitude towards experience. This ideal is based in turn on delight in the male body and on a celebration of masculine desire.

Although the ideal brings to mind the early writing of Pater, especially the essay on Winckelmann (see Dellamora), there is a crucial difference between the homosexual contexts in which Pater affirms the ideal of cultural renewal in *The Renaissance* and *Marius the Epicurean* and the context that Wilde establishes. Wilde chooses what Sedgwick would call a male homosocial context in which to frame Basil's version of Pater's ideal: Basil confesses his "secret" (5) not to Dorian but to an old Oxford friend, Lord Henry Wotton. By definition this context is heterosexual. Wotton is married and pursues actresses. Basil himself is a graduate of Oxford, a well-established artist, and respectable to a fault. Later, he repeatedly enjoins Dorian to conformity. Both older men live in a network of male friendships that ramify through the novel.

Accordingly, even though Sedgwick remarks that "the triangular relationship of Basil, Dorian, and Lord Henry makes sense only in homosexual terms" (*Between Men* 176), one might more accurately say that homosexuality exists here within a heterosexual framework which demands that desire between men be negated. The demand is doubly ironic since the portrait in which Basil has revealed his secret is prominent both at the start and at the end of the novel. The painting suggests how the masculine desire that propels the action may be both acknowledged and objectified in ways that permit it to circulate and yet to be ever evaded in the form of genital contact between men. As a substitute for the desire that motivates it in the first place, the picture functions as a sign of economic, social, and gendered privilege: "the gracious and comely form" (1), a description redolent of the stylish portraiture of Wilde's friend, John Singer Sargent, contrasts to the plebeian awkwardness of the brother of Dorian's fiancé later: "He was thick-set of figure, and his hands and face were large, and somewhat clumsy in movement. He was not so finely bred as his sister" (61).² The form, face, and color that attract Sybil Vane signify the wealth, status, and power of Dorian and other men of his class. Her brother responds instinctively with a self-protective hatred of the "gentleman" (66) while just as spontaneously Basil, Sir Henry, and Dorian worship the representation.

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1. For nineteenth-century views see Weeks ch. 6.
2. Albert Boime makes detailed comparisons between Sargent and Basil Hallward in an essay included in the catalogue of the current exhibition of the works of John Singer Sargent.

The portrait serves yet another function as the noble image of a masculine superego, simultaneously celebrating the male form while forbidding touch. This peculiarly male, homosocial ego-ideal is one aspect of what may also appear as the vengeful "conscience" that in different ways constrains all three men (cf. Wilde, *Letters* 263-264). Later it returns in the obfuscating rhetoric of Platonic idealization. Just before Dorian kills Basil, the painter says: "You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal whose memory haunts us artists like an exquisite dream" (114). But Basil's self-deception is transparent.

The portrait is also a visible sign of self-alienation. When Dorian first sees the completed painting, he is both delighted and roused to self-consciousness: "A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time" (24). Wilde normally regards self-consciousness positively because it implies a more complex awareness, but here it functions negatively, alienating Dorian from spontaneous self-delight.³ He faces what he calls a "shadow" (25) of himself. "Yes, there would be a day when his face would be wrinkled and wizen, his eyes dim and colourless, the grace of his figure broken and deformed. The scarlet would pass away from his lips, and the gold steal from his hair. The life that was to make his soul would mar his body. He would become dreadful, hideous, and uncouth" (25). Dorian's perception of himself as a representation has as an immediate consequence contempt and fear of the body. The instantaneous awareness of temporality is apt too since the conditions of masculine desire in male homosocial culture rule out the possibility of a passionate physical and affective connection between men. Duration loses whatever value it might otherwise have in terms of the development of such relationships. As well, Dorian's revulsion suggests anxiety about the disease that is liable to accompany sexual activity. Wilde himself was syphilitic, and during the 1890s fear of syphilis was a major concern among both male and female novelists (Ellmann 27; Showalter).

Had Wilde written *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1865 instead of 1890, he likely would have resolved the male triangle by arranging a marriage between Dorian and a strong young woman. Charles Dickens uses this solution in his novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865) (Sedgwick, *Between Men* ch. 9). In that book, the effete, useless male protagonist, Eugene Wrayburn, though physically broken, is saved from drowning by a young working-class heroine, Lizzie Hexam, whom he marries in defiance of respectable opinion. Wilde parodies this sort of improbable yet normalizing conclusion in Dorian's attraction to a young East-End actress, whom he discovers while trying to evade the "exquisite poison" (48) of Lord Henry's influence. As Dorian says to Henry: "Your voice and the voice of Sybil Vane are two things that I shall never forget. When I close my eyes, I hear them, and each of them says something different. I don't know which to follow" (50).

Readers of the novel usually remember that Sybil plays the role of Juliet on the evening when she loses both her ability to act and her ability to fascinate Dorian. Less often do they recall that on the evening when he proposes to her, she is playing Rosalind, Shakespeare's cross-dressing heroine. Do-

rian enthuses: "When she came on in her boy's clothes she was perfectly wonderful" (75). While the homosexual subtext is evident, the passage continues in a way that makes clear the homophobia impelling Dorian's rush into Sybil's arms. Dorian envisages her in a variety of roles in which she is murdered or driven to suicide by a lover:

One evening she is Rosalind, and the next evening she is Imogen. I have seen her die in the gloom of an Italian tomb, sucking the poison from her lover's lips. I have watched her wandering through the forest of Arden, disguised as a pretty boy in hose and doublet and dainty cap. She has been mad, and has come into the presence of a guilty king, and given him rue to wear, and bitter herbs to taste of. She has been innocent, and the black hands of jealousy have crushed her reed-like throat. I have seen her in every age and in every costume. (50-51)

The poisonous lover's touch suggests Dorian's guilt about playing the role of heterosexual lover (in point of fact, he does drive Sybil to suicide). But the passage while literally denoting heterosexual love also suggests his fear of being seduced by Wotton. Dorian fears that a male lover will poison him too.

Of course, Sybil's cross-dressing might suggest an imaginative response to sexual difference; but the possibility is submerged by Dorian's sexual panic. The aesthetic image of Sybil proves to be just as estranging and estranged from relationships in time as is Dorian's portrait. Wilde mordantly points out how limited are the possibilities of relationship between the pair. Sybil projects marriage in an infantilizing rhetoric in which she casts Dorian as "Prince Charming." Wilde casts her in the context of fin-de-siècle naturalism. Her family is a reservoir of intense and unresolved sexuality. Her mother hopes to fulfill both her and her son's ambitions by means of Sybil's success; and her brother James has an incestuous regard for her. The stylistic incongruities between these portions of the narrative and Dorian's upper-middle-class and aristocratic milieu indicate how impossible marriage between the two is. Given Dorian's gender, wealth, and status, he is more likely to take Sybil as his mistress, a possibility to which Sir Henry alludes and that appears to be on the mind of "the horrid old Jew" (52) who offers to take Dorian backstage to meet her. The conversion of Sybil by this means into a commodity, though parallel to the similar conversion of Dorian by way of the portrait, would negate her worth to Dorian as a figure of imaginative mobility.

Dorian himself has a plan for Sybil which inadvertently shows again the tendency to substitute the representation of desire for desire itself, although in this case for feminine desire. He hopes to make Sybil the star of a West End theater that he will buy. The plan unwittingly makes clear his intention to take possession of Sybil's marvelous vitality: "I want to place her on a pedestal of gold, and to see the world worship the woman who is mine" (77). In this instance, however, the representation will be public not private since, as the object of Dorian's desire, the actress will reflect his power and attractiveness, a desirability that can be transformed into the literal gold of commercial success. In devising this scheme, Wilde knew whereof he spoke; among several leading actresses who were friends of his, one, Lillie Langtry, had become a star after first being mistress to the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII (Amor

3. Cf. Haley's discussion of Wilde's view of self-consciousness.

66). Dorian, however, has no opportunity to put his plan into action. Predictably, the sudden engagement propels Sybil out of the world of play and into a world at once of sentimentality and calculation. In that reduced environment, she loses the allure of difference that she had momentarily possessed; and to Dorian she becomes nothing.

"Yes," he cried, "you have killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don't even stir my curiosity. You simply produce no effect. I loved you because you were marvellous, because you had genius and intellect, because you realized the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art. You have thrown it all away.... You have spoiled the romance of my life. How little you can know of love, if you say it mars your art! Without your art you are nothing. I would have made you famous, splendid, magnificent. The world would have worshipped you, and you would have borne my name. What are you now? A third-rate actress with a pretty face." (86-87)

Dorian's remarks make clear that Sybil has mattered for him not for herself or even for her interpretative powers but because she realizes and gives shape to the poetry of genius. The specific genius relevant in context is Shakespeare, whom Wilde if not Dorian is acutely aware of as a bisexual writer.⁴ But, leaving bisexuality to the side, genius here denotes masculine genius. And Sybil has been most significant in roles like that of Desdemona, Ophelia or Juliet where she expresses love and desire for men. Sybil lends desire to men by making them objects of desire—a process that lends a sense of reality and "romance" to young Dorian. Naturally, he identifies himself ("my name") with the object of her erotic energy, energy earlier imagined and penned by another male, named Shakespeare. When Sybil fails her designated role as realizer of Shakespeare, she falls back into her identity as metonymically conceived in terms of ethnic, social and economic origins and milieu. She is, in Dorian's phrase, "third-rate."

After the failure of this romance, Dorian's erotic direction becomes more decidedly homosexual. As an indirect consequence of her suicide, Basil confesses his infatuation; and Dorian realizes for the first time the strength of his hold over men of homosexual orientation. As another result too, Lord Henry sends him a copy of Huysmans' *À Rebours* (125-126), a novel whose protagonist, Des Esseintes, at one point strikes up a homosexual relationship with an adolescent (ch. 9). Dorian's subsequent relationships with Singleton, Campbell, and "that wretched boy in the Guards" (150) among others hint that Dorian becomes actively involved.⁵ Like the prospect of marriage or the possibility of keeping a mistress, however, these homosexual entanglements occur at the expense of an awareness of difference. Affairs with other men simply provide Dorian with another pre-scripted role to play. As he says in comparing himself with Des Esseintes: "The hero, the wonderful young Parisian, in whom the romantic and the scientific temperaments were so strangely blended, became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself. And, indeed, the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written

before he had lived it" (127).

Eventually, Dorian kills first Basil and subsequently himself. At this point, the portrait once again is important. When the servants enter the room, they find "hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was" (224). At the moment of Dorian's death, the portrait is magically restored to its pristine state. Magic here means the reasserted symmetry of social and economic power (mastery) with masculine desire ("youth and beauty"). Dorian's bodily presence, however, is reduced to an incongruous jumble of signs: on the one hand of privilege (the evening dress, the rings) and on the other, of venereal disease (cf. Showalter 103).

The restoration of the painting might be taken to suggest that Basil's idealism can surmount its failure in life and continue to remind aware viewers of the possibilities of a more varied and tolerant way of living. Yet the refusal of homosexual love among the three men undermines this ideal. Deprived of implications of social change, the ideal like the portrait masks a continuing homophobia in the rhetoric of high culture. Viewed ironically, the portrait continues to be an idol to which Dorian—and other young men and women—may be sacrificed. It hypocritically conceals the power of an oligarchy to corrupt those who are less clever or advantaged.

Wilde draws the orthodox moral fable of the novel to this sharp, ironic edge. Not surprisingly, literary critics at once attacked both the novel and its author. But in one of the letters to the press that he wrote in defense of himself, Wilde suggests an alternative reading of the novel for a second and covert readership. "The real moral of the story is that all excess as well as all renunciation, brings its punishment, and this moral is so far artistically and deliberately suppressed that it does not enunciate its law as a general principle, but realises itself purely in the lives of individuals" (263). Wilde's statement directs attention to deliberate suppression of significance in the novel but in a way that permits the withheld meaning to be communicated. Basil and Sir Henry both err by renouncing masculine desire, and both are punished.

In his later career, Walter Pater wrote a number of studies in which he updated the myth of Dionysus as an allegory of homophobic assault on young men.⁶ One might draw a number of connections between these works and Wilde's novel, which also contains a dark allegory of the sacrifice of young men to preserve the *status quo*. In this respect, the novel protests against the destruction of relationship and desire between men. Yet Wilde's novel insists on representations and surfaces. In it homosexual reference remains within a heterosexual discourse that focuses on male friendship and on homophobic anxiety about masculine desire, whether homosexual or not. Wilde portrays and to a considerable extent analyzes this unhappy situation, but he does not transform the action in such a way as to suggest that masculine desire might have a place

4. See Wilde's "The Portrait of Mr. W. H."

5. Symonds in his *Memoirs* reports being accosted at night in the West End by a grenadier (186-187).

6. "Denys L'Auxerrois" (1886); "Apollo in Picardy" (1893); see also "A Study of Dionysus" (1876) with its allusion to the homosexual painter, Simeon Solomon, who was arrested in 1873.

in the constructive lives of men who recognize and accept their homosexuality and that of others. Instead in "The Artist's Preface," signed not by Wilde but by Basil, the painter returns, not dead at all, but continuing to swim in the milieu that Pater, reviewing the novel, refers to as "the elaborately conventional, sophisticated, disabused world Mr. Wilde dissects so cleverly, so mercilessly" (144). Of course, Mr. Wilde too is present in Basil's studio; and here we are told "the germ" of the novel is sown. In this atmosphere of contagion, novels like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* may be sown; but a worthy life between men of homosexual orientation cannot be lived.

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Books Received

- Anderson, Nancy Fix. *Woman Against Women in Victorian England: A Life of Eliza Lynn Linton*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1987. Pp. x + 260. \$29.50. "This . . . biography is the first psychological study. . . [It] seeks to explain the seeming contradiction of an emancipated woman opposed to women's emancipation. It aims at understanding rather than judging her, a woman who achieved remarkable success in her patriarchal society, but at the cost of alienation from her own sex, and ultimately herself" (x).
- Berg, Maggie. *Jane Eyre: Portrait of a Life*. Twayne's Masterworks Studies 10. Boston: Twayne, 1987. Pp. xiv + 134. \$17.95. A critical reading of the novel that argues that it is a *fictional* rather than a *fictionalized* autobiography and "as much about itself and its process of being written as it is about Jane" (23).
- Chapple, J. A. V. *Science and Literature in the Nineteenth Century*. Context and Commentary Series. London: Macmillan, 1986 (available through Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities P). Pp. xi + 192. \$29.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper. An introduction and five chapters devoted to: Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Meteorology; Paleontology, Geology, Zoology, Biology; Psychology, Anatomy, Physiology; Anthropology, Ethnology, Philology, Mythology; Science and Literature.
- Indexes to Fiction in "Cassell's Family Magazine," later "Cassell's Magazine" (1874-1910)*. Comp. Sue Thomas. Victorian Fiction Research Guides 12. Queensland, AUS: Dept. of English, U of Queensland, 1987. Pp. v + 94. Price for third series \$25.00 (Aus.), \$7.00 per index. Contact Barbara Garlick, Dept. of English, U of Queensland, St. Lucia, Australia 4067.
- Jay, Elisabeth. *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain*. Context and Commentary Series. London: Macmillan, 1986 (available through Humanities P, Atlantic Highlands, NJ). Pp. xi + 136. \$29.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper. Five chapters devoted to: The Evangelicals, The Oxford Movement and the Catholic Tradition, The Broad Church, Dissent, Doubt.
- Jordan, Thomas E. *Victorian Childhood: Themes and Variations*. Albany: SUNY P, 1987. Pp. xv + 391. \$49.50 cloth, \$16.95 paper. Includes chapters on Development and Health, The Family, Life and Death, Work, Learning, Social Life, Cities, Virtues and Vices, Advocacy and Reform.
- Latané, David E., Jr. *Browning's "Sordello" and the Aesthetics of Difficulty*. English Literary Studies 40. Victoria; U of Victoria, 1987. Pp. 147. \$7.00 paper. "[M]y subject is the nature of the poetics that shaped *Sordello* as published in 1840". . . (12).
- Rice, Thomas Jackson. *Barnaby Rudge: An Annotated Bibliography*. The Garland Dickens Bibliographies 6. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 630. New York & London: Garland, 1987. Pp. xxvii + 351. \$50.00. 845 entries, accompanied by a 25 pp. intro., plus an historical chronology and a chronology of works.
- Ritvo, Harriet. *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987. Pp. [xi] + 347. \$25.00. "By promulgating a coherent and hierarchical interpretation of the animal kingdom, this literature [of popular zoology] provided its readers with a shared set of assumptions, values, and associations that simultaneously confirmed human ascendancy and supported the established social order. The specific discourses that form the subjects of the following chapters show how this rhetorical structure could be adapted to express the concerns of such diverse groups as elite stock breeders, bourgeois pet owners, reformist public officials, and imperial administrators" (41-42).
- Thomas Hardy Annual No. 5* Ed. Norman Page. Macmillan Literary Annuals. London: Macmillan, 1987 (available through Humanities P, Atlantic Highlands, NJ). Pp. xii + 217. \$55.00. Essays by John Bayley, Dale Kramer, Lesley Higgins, Lionel Adey, Fran E. Chalfont, George Wing, Samuel Hynes, Norman Page, Rosemarie Morgan, Richard H. Taylor, Keith Wilson on *The Woodlanders*, editing Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *A Group of Noble Dames*, Hardy's historians, Hardy and 'the world of little things,' inscriptions of self, "Saturday Night in Arcady," and recent Hardy studies, as well as a review essay, five reviews, and the 1984-85 Hardy bibliography.
- Victorian Short Stories: An Anthology*. Selected. and intro. by Harold Orel. Everyman Classics. London & Melbourne: J. M. Dent, 1987. Pp. xxii + 297. \$6.95 paper. 17 stories from Douglas Jerrold (1842) to Conrad (1901).
- Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art, and Literature*. Ed. William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock. Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987. Pp. ix + 268. \$27.50 cloth, \$10.95 paper. Previously published in 1983 (see VN No. 66: 32), this edition includes a revised and expanded intro. essay and an expanded essay by Steven Marcus; the rest is unchanged from the 1983 edition.
- Walter Pater: A Life Remembered*. Ed. R. M. Seiler. Calgary: U of Calgary P, 1987. Pp. xxxii + 317. \$24.95 paper. 50 entries from 1851 to 1946 from commentators on Pater. "My object throughout has been to bring together the most revealing accounts of Pater's life and background, to provide exact transcriptions of these accounts and to identify every contributor and minor figure mentioned in passing, without employing an elaborate editorial apparatus" (xxxii). Includes an 11pp. chronological table, a 9pp intro., and a 9pp. select bibliography.
- Williams, A. Susan. *The Rich Man and the Diseased Poor in Early Victorian Literature*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities P, 1987. Pp. xi + 152. \$25.00. "The subject of this book is the role of disease in the literature of early Victorian Britain. It focuses not so much on the reality of the suffering it caused, as on the significance it assumed in the themes and in the language of fiction and socio-political discourse" (ix).

Victorian Group News

Announcements

Fellowships in the Humanities at Newberry Library

The Newberry Library invites applications for resident fellowships in the humanities for 1988-89.

Although most of the fellowships are designed for post-doctoral scholars, many awards are available for graduate students and others. Terms in residence may be as short as a few weeks or as long as eleven months; stipends fall in an equally broad range.

For further information and application forms, contact the Awards Committee, Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton St., Chicago, IL 60610 or call (312) 943-9090.

NEH INSTITUTE ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN

Yale Center for British Art

The Center will host an Institute June 26-July 23, 1988, to explore certain aspects of culture and society in nineteenth-century Britain. The Institute will be led by George Landow, Linda H. Peterson, Frank M. Turner, and Anthony Wohl.

The Institute will be limited to 25 participants who will be encouraged to live on campus. Further details of accommodation, meals and costs are available from the Center. Each participant will receive a stipend of \$2,500 to defray these and other costs including transport to and from New Haven. It is expected that each participant's home institution will contribute \$250 toward the cost of the institute.

Deadline for application is March 1, 1988. For further information, contact Duncan Robinson, Director, Yale Center for British Art, Box 2120 Yale Station, New Haven, CT 06520 or call (203) 432-2822

Call for Papers

Victorians Institute 1988

October 14-15, 1988

Columbia College and University of South Carolina

Columbia, South Carolina

"CULTURE AND EDUCATION IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND"

Principal Speaker: Patrick Brantlinger

The Institute welcomes 10-page papers on any aspect of culture and education in Victorian England and especially welcomes interdisciplinary approaches. Papers should be submitted by July 5, 1988. Address proposed papers, inquiries about program participation, etc. to the program chair, Professor Patrick Scott, Department of English, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C. 29208

Conference Announcement and Call for Papers

"The Idea of a University: Newman and the Intellectual Life," a conference on the contribution to educational theory and practice, will take place at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, August 5-7, 1988. Papers of approximately 45 minutes reading length, focusing on Newman's educational theory and practice, *interpreted broadly*, or related subjects, should be submitted by April 1, 1988 to Rev. Richard J. Schiefen, CSB, Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas 77006. For registration information, contact: Rev. Vincent J. Giese, Noll Plaza, Huntington, IN 46750.

The annual conference of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals will be held September 16-17 at the Newberry Library, 60 West Walton Street, Chicago, IL 60610. Section topics include Art, History, Literature, Music, Religion, Women's Studies, and a Pedagogy Panel on using Victorian periodicals in teaching. For further information, please contact Susan Dean, 2345 N. Geneva, #301, Chicago, IL 60614.

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