

# The Victorian Newsletter

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Cover: Queen Victoria on her Golden Jubilee,  
100 years ago this year.

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## Arnold among the Contentions of Criticism

Holly Laird

Although he has often been the subject of humanistic criticism in this century, Arnold is probably receiving as much attention now as at any time in the past. But his reception is variable: he may be upheld as a model for objective criticism with large cultural aims, or queried for inconsistencies and uncertainty or even for an incipient deconstruction. Contemporary evaluations are divided, divisive, contradictory, eroding any easy symbolism to be found in Arnold's prose, its power to stand as a foundational model for a rational, consensual criticism. I believe that these debates derive from implicit contradictions and contentious tendencies in Arnold's thought, but I will argue further that they are a productive, perhaps necessary element of speculative criticism and that we might do well to follow Arnold's lead where it has made us most anxious. So in a sense I am reversing the direction of the question of "The Effects of Contemporary Critical Theory on The Study of Victorian Literature" to ask not what impact contemporary theory has had on Arnold, but instead what influence he is having on us, elusively informing our keenest disagreements. To do this, I must look more closely at the issues raised by Arnold's work than at commentaries on Arnold, but, as I will argue, these issues are our own. I will be concerned, then, with Arnold's active and unresolved presence in his future rather than with the ways in which he could be rationalized as belonging to past traditions. For the sake of demonstration, I will focus on "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time." It will be difficult to unfold these arguments adequately in the short space of this paper or in relation to only one essay; but if my arguments were accepted, they would lead to the conclusion that any effect contemporary criticism may have had on Victorian prose cannot yet be seen as superseding or separable from the continuing effect of Victorian thought on our own.

One divisive issue raised by Arnold's essay—the one with which I will be most concerned here—is the question of the comparative value of "criticism" as opposed to "creative" writing, a question implicitly elaborated, as the essay progresses, into the issue of whether or not criticism should also *be* creative. These were the terms Arnold used, and although we may now consider this a vague or false opposition, we still recur to this terminology. Before looking at this issue in Arnold's essay, I would like to consider its reappearance in current criticism of Arnold, to talk in a general way about Arnold's status today, and only then look at the ways he anticipated us. Foremost among issues feeding the "crisis" in modern criticism, this one has received its stimulus most recently from the emergence of critical theory as an autonomous branch of literary studies. In joiners and quitters alike, in Eagleton, Lentricchia, Graff, or most recently, O'Hara, we find old and new methods of formal analysis applied to criticism, to evaluate the self-reflexive properties of critical texts. "Apologies" for criticism split along the same debated line between the claim to prosaic truth and the faith in poetic illusion. An ancient polarity in the history of criticism, whether to teach or delight, whether to present objective, moral lessons or reach for the sublime, is reapplied from

poetry to the practice of criticism.

Thrust into the center of this debate are Arnold and Pater. In his 1985 book on contemporary theory, Daniel O'Hara begins with Pater (Wilde lurks in the background) and links him with post-structuralists running counter to an Arnoldian tradition. Pater may be well-served by that linkage. He has not deserved his enormous neglect, and his prose benefits from critics like Gerald Monsman who value its restless, self-reflecting textures. Much in Arnold would have to be ignored to produce that picture alone. Nonetheless, this debate may also be heard throughout current discussions exclusively of Arnold—when Pater is not on hand to enforce a distinction or comparison, Arnold becomes something more than the symbolic arbiter of an institutionalized humanism.

The articles printed in the March 1983 issue of *Critical Inquiry* on "The Function of Matthew Arnold at the Present Time" diverge in ways that reflect, directly or indirectly, these tendencies to polarization. Whereas Eugene Goodheart stresses the prophet of society and culture, George Levine warns of a Paterian Arnold, creative, crafty, an unreliable guide to social realities. Standing in the wings is Geoffrey Hartman, whose book *Criticism in the Wilderness* is the debated subject also of these articles. According to Hartman, "Arnold's fiction of presence was that. . . a new and vital literature would arise to redeem the work of the critic. What if this literature is not unlike criticism, and we are forerunners to ourselves?" Hartman would reverse Arnold's metaphor—as he reads it—to argue that criticism is not a wilderness of spirit or mind; it is our Promised Land, our literature (15). Arriving after the *Critical Inquiry* issue, Michael Fischer takes an oppositional stance to both Hartman and Arnold, finding in Arnold an unwittingly playful sceptic, in some ways anticipating poststructuralist criticism, mistaken by today's critics as the father of "disinterested" criticism. Against all of these, the article of Morris Dickstein in *Critical Inquiry* would return Arnold to the past, invoking and rendering in all its complexity the various, sometimes contradictory, always lively Arnolds whom we can barely reach from across the long divide of time. Although the vital past is a very Arnoldian place to be, it is just this set of Arnolds which, I would argue, is still operative in the present.

George Levine's essay is possibly the most ambivalent of this group, and so tends to summarize the different positions we find on Arnold. Arnold is seen in at least three divisive guises: as idealist or myth-maker, as guardian of culture or autobiographer, as polemicist or playful humorist. In explanation of these discrepant postures, Professor Levine turns to another Arnoldian distinction between "ideas" and "practice," a distinction not unrelated to the opposition between criticism and creativity, which is, as I have already suggested, central to understanding the essay and which therefore I would like to elaborate here. Professor Levine would say, as I take it, that Arnold's ideas of objectivity and a unified culture are belied by a subjective critical practice. In following Arnold, we become caught up on the one hand by his ideals, on the other



by the fine art of his criticism. It is his imaginative writing that has made him last, and his thought that continues to inspire. But he does not provide a model for a systematic, rationally conducted criticism. Arnold incites us to search for that "best self" which may (in the absence of Platonic "ideas") attain to disinterested understanding; indeed, as an artist, Arnold is capable of confessing and parodying his own failures to attain any such thing. But as a critic, this self-reflexive mood cuts him off from the objects he wishes to address and from the world he professes to discuss, rendering his goals impracticable.

That distinction successfully separates a Victorian Arnold, who did not entirely practice what he preached, from the modern-day scholar in the wilderness, who yearns for a practice that will be "true to" its objects. In neither aim nor method can we yet claim much distance from Arnold; but perhaps we should move beyond his critical practice, to produce something more logical or "disinterested."

Determining what a more responsibly rational criticism should look like, however, may be more difficult than we would like. Another recent theorist, Suresh Raval, has described this as a difficulty that necessarily arises from the intersection of fact with value:

If literary criticism were solely a matter of facts, it would amount to the objectivity of historical scholarship; but that kind of objectivity does not solve questions involving insights into literature because in criticism the question of fact merges with that of value. If, on the other hand, criticism were merely a matter of validity, the problem would be a purely formal one, a question of logic. Criticism requires an aesthetically rich and cultivated sensibility with psychological perspicacity . . . . (254)

"Nevertheless," Raval believes, "competing critical claims do not mean that the only solution to this conflict is outright skepticism. If that were a genuine solution, the concept of criticism itself would not be intelligible (253). According to this argument, the concept of criticism inheres in the operation of competing claims. Arnold's work is probably as resilient as it is because his essays both excite and resist dichotomies. Indeed, as Raval notes, "logic and rhetoric, reason and imagination are deeply intertwined and cannot be conceived as oppositions without simplifying these concepts as well as the discourse in which they are proposed as oppositions," *even while* these distinctions remain essential if we are "to make sense of things" (12). In the rest of this paper, I mean to address primarily the shape of Arnold's ideas rather than the artfulness of his prose, to consider how contradictions in his thought might be seen as important paradoxes rather than inconsistencies. Finally, I will suggest that it was important that Arnold not pose his ideas as paradoxes, that they proved to be more fruitful and more dynamic, in part, because they remained unresolved. At the end I will extend the analysis briefly to a consideration of Arnold's prose style.

Despite Arnold's preliminary assertions to the contrary, he does not value criticism less than creative literature. Although he defers to others at the outset—saying that "the critical power is of lower rank than the creative"—he considers criticism necessary to nourish the "atmosphere" of "many-sided learning" from which great literature emerges. Criticism precedes, even if it does not compete with, creativity. So he concludes that

"it is not denied to criticism to have . . . in no contemptible measure, a joyful sense of creative activity; a sense which a man of insight and conscience will prefer to what he might derive from a poor, starved, fragmentary, inadequate creation (3: 260,285). Arnold collapsed the distinction further when he defined his terms in "The Study of Poetry." While criticism is the cultivation of manifold perspectives, poetry is a "criticism of life" produced under conditions fixed "by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty" (9: 163). In addition to the confusion of terms here, his definition of poetry is circular. The laws of "poetic" truth and beauty which distinguish one kind of writing from another are not and, in Arnold's argument, cannot be defined further. Criticism, too, is mystically indefinable; for if poetic truth and beauty are exalted but unspecifiable values, so is "the best that is known and thought," which is the object of criticism. The "best" will never yield to systematic explanation.

I do not believe that we dispense with Arnold's ideas, however, by pursuing his terms relentlessly or by faulting other errors of reason that occur. In this case, Arnold has defined his terms in such a way as first, to stress their interaction with each other, and second, to endow each in turn with independent value—*independent*, that is, from any merely utilitarian explanation. These are results with which we are very comfortable and which are deeply engrained in our culture.

Another example of Arnold's contradictions has been found in a concept at the heart of his essay: that the critic must be, above all, disinterested, "to see the object as in itself it really is." Here again his statements may falter under scrutiny; without providing a system or metaphysical ideal or science for grounding or discovering objective truth, we are left to trust his way of "seeing." Pater's solution was to accept an open subjectivity, "the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is" (xviii). T.S. Eliot heaped scorn on Arnold's mode of objectivity: "Those of us who find ourselves supporting what Mr. Murry [and Arnold call] Classicism believe that men cannot get on without giving allegiance to something outside themselves" (15). It is not enough simply to "know oneself." So, with Eliot, this pratfall in Arnold's thinking might lead us to postulate an absolute for Arnold, located in Arnold himself: the mysterious, revitalizing "buried self" as the touchstone for Arnold's truths. His writings become merely autobiographical. But this is no truer for Arnold than for other humanists of the modern period. The question remains whether or not he offered a new direction in thought, revising understanding of the "disinterested" in the context of the modern, or whether he was only cloaking gaps in his offerings with lovely words.

The history of criticism in our century suggests that, no matter who else might have been saying similar things, Arnold's new faith in criticism struck home as exactly that, producing new validity for a field that had previously been more heterogeneous, journalistic and impermanent, and producing that field by the very act of generating classically memorable essays. Moreover, chief among his contributions to modern thought are concepts that derive directly from his supposed confusions: first, of course, that a disinterested mind is not one which clings to a single dogma, rather a disinterested mind

is an active mind; and following from the first, a healthy culture is not one which accedes to a rigid system of laws—culture is the lively circulation of ideas. Assertions such as these are not perceived as paradoxes in an age used to accounting for the “facts” of change. Arnold reinstated the contemplative mode, with its command to “know yourself,” by grounding objectivity in the activities of self and in social fluidity.

It would appear that he generated such paradoxes precisely through the slippages in his thought. Far from foreseeing today's dogmas, he reacted against the subjectivisms of his age, in art, philosophy, politics, to promulgate an ideal harmony, unity, objectivity that he could imagine only by looking backward to the Greeks; but because he shared the distress and polemical energy of many of his contemporaries, he ended by giving his ideas the shape of a vitalist, perspectival and artful humanism. Like most complex writers, he assumed *more than one* posture in his writing. Two of these postures were perhaps more at odds with each other than is usual: the first posture was reactionary, standing back from his culture to conserve something from the past; the second was more subversive, cutting culture off from society to promote a situation in which art and criticism could be appreciated for their own sakes—anticipating Pater, as Eliot was quick to point out. Unlike Pater, who in this regard insisted on an approach consistent with what he thought—becoming, frankly, inconsistent—Arnold left these postures unreconciled, their irreconciliation unadmitted. This, of course, made him much more adaptable for later criticism; for his reactionary posture could be attached to future yearnings for institutional approval, while his impressionism suited the modern temper. At the same time, his writing had to produce widely divergent effects (as indeed it has); it could be read in different ways at different times, as pragmatic or idealist, as elitist and statist or potentially anarchistic, as a blueprint for society or a spiritual manifesto.

This is not to say that one should strive—by no means that Arnold himself strove—for inconsistency. Rather, Arnold was endeavoring to accommodate more than one posture. Here lies, in my view, his chief accomplishment, a strategy that would enable his thought to be both productive and practicable for later critics. With this in mind, I would like to outline, in closing, what I take to be the fundamentally pragmatic aspects of Arnold's essay. In doing so, I will still be addressing the substance of Arnold's ideas, for he was aware of the problems raised by pragmatism and, in his own way, resolved them.

From a practical point of view alone, the fact of Arnold's influence in this century attests to his significance; and the fact that he can be used, or read, many times with more than one intention sets one measure of his value. But Arnold might at first have objected to those tests. His essay makes its fiercest attack on “practical considerations” as exemplified by Adderley and Roebuck. Here one might point out yet another discrepancy between his ideas and practice; for while he condemns the pragmatic, he deftly manipulates the ideas of his day to gain and influence the largest possible audience. This incongruity also takes place, however, within the sphere of Arnold's ideas—as elsewhere, the distinction between content and means is not faithful to the working of his thought. Thus the distinction he offers between the practical and the disinterested critic is soft-

ened by his demonstration of those two types: while the writer who is dominated by practical concerns will direct his rhetoric more narrowly to a single context, Arnold's higher critic seeks to bring both (or several) contexts into his scope, balancing different situations, balancing also the different languages that belong to those situations against each other, to arrive at a wider set of perspectives. As opposed to partisan positions, which refuse to acknowledge the validity of antagonistic views, Arnold looks to multiple postures as the foundation for a more ample and stable philosophy.

This last point rests on especially tricky ground, however, opening Arnold to the severest objections that have been offered, then and now; for Arnold was less than fair to many of his antagonists, particularly so to those he liked to juxtapose against each other. The demonstration of his ideas, when he exclaims against Wragg—so crucial a point in his argument, a climactic moment in his rhetoric, and a very funny one at that—is one of his least innocent. The presumably disinterested Arnold is a ruthless polemicist, citing writers out of context, hammering away at their excerpted opinions without regard to mitigating or relevant circumstances. This was to cut culture off from society for the sake of cutting. This is also the Arnold most difficult for us to come to terms with, the Arnold we disparage—separating him out from his other postures—or whom we ignore. Yet if Arnold's essay makes sense, as I have tried to suggest, as an argument that is in the process of thinking itself out—an argument I would also describe as “in transition”—then we might view even his polemics as an integral and eloquent element of his criticism.

Following Carlyle, the most imposing figure on his horizon, Arnold's writing places action and rhetoric above a Utilitarian logic: acting to wrestle down inadequate theories or formulas, which pretend to be complete, acting to separate itself from other debaters of its day, acting to substitute for those rejected ideas and authors a lyrical picture of culture. Although he is somewhat less obvious about this than Carlyle, there can be no doubt about the uses he makes of sarcasm, snobbery and high seriousness. Never does he suggest that his arguments should take effect without rhetoric, as today's apolitical essay-writing often assumes. I have been dwelling until now with Arnold's thought, but his manner is also at issue in this case, extruding at last from his prose as yet another fault-line. First, his method is in general to combine reasoned argument (objectively to form distinctions, to reveal limitations in various stances, to adjudicate positions) with poetry (producing golden words like “curiosity,” “disinterested,” “sweetness and light,” to mythologize culture into something worth reaching for, to guide the course of his essay through a lyric process of loss, struggle and a final retrieval of conscience). If the crossing of these two methods modifies and, often, replaces logic with persuasion, their combination also reflects at the level of style the merging of discrepant postures, of the objective with the subjective, of the probable with the ideal. But it is in his third manner, the polemical character of his writing, that his prose is most efficacious in rendering his ideas: rendering a culture that is contentious, vigorous, by turns gaily abandoned or profoundly earnest in debate—a culture in which many lines of reason may confront each other.



To argue in this way is to allow prose more than is normally or overtly permitted: to evaluate its inconsistencies, its attitudes, its desires and energy, its political nature, and to reconsider what place and value these matters have in a literature of ideas. This is not to say that all criticism should look like Arnold's. But as long as we go on condemning these aspects of scholarly prose, or ignoring them, we will be missing much of their point. The result of paying attention may be that we find ourselves in somewhat greater agreement, though this is not likely to alter criticism's contentious character. In either case, in reviewing Arnoldian criticism—in reviewing the discrepant and complex relations that still hold between Arnold and his audience—it strikes me that we might consider a less anxious view of ourselves than that of "crisis": here is a criticism happy with argument, resistant to decree.

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## Closure and the Victorian Novel, 1986

Marianna Torgovnick

I am going to begin with neither a contemporary nor a Victorian novelist and make clear in a minute why I choose to do so. Where I'd like to begin is with the ending of William Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech, which is to the affirmation of the novelist's mission roughly what the kind of ending to Victorian dramas Dickens parodies in *Nicholas Nickleby* was to the affirmation of British patriotism. You may recall that Faulkner ends with a rousing invocation of the writer's function in a fallen world:

The poet's, the writer's duty...[is] to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail. (Faulkner 120)

There are only two kinds of reactions to Faulkner's statement: cynicism and suspicion, or belief and admiration. Most of us have experienced both reactions at different times or even perhaps simultaneously. I quote his speech because it seems nicely to establish a syndrome repeatedly identified in Faulkner's endings that is also found at the ends of many Victorian novels—an obligation, almost a mania for affirmation, often of the very values that the text of the novel has dissected, probed, exposed as at least potentially problematic. In fact, Faulkner's prose echoes in many ways typical Victorian prose like that of George Eliot in her role as Victorian sage. Like Faulkner, Eliot believed that novelists have a responsibility to expose the dark side of life but finally to shed light. Eliot said (apropos of the conclusion then in progress to *Middlemarch*), "I need not tell you that my book will not present my own feeling about human life if it produces on readers whose minds

are really receptive the impression of blank melancholy and despair." She thus aimed, in her own words at "the good of those who read" by producing "mental sunshine" (*Letters* 5: 261).

My interest is, then, in the conceived duty to affirm wholesome, imitable values at the end of Victorian novels—family life, self-awareness, a warm-hearted feeling for others—despite the pitfalls of those values often revealed as the novel unrolled. What I'd like to do is to explore the Victorian novel's urge for affirmation at the end—how we have viewed it in the past and (somewhat different I think) how we view it in 1986—in terms of recent developments in literary criticism. I will be trying to show two things. First, that certain methodologies and trends of thought in twentieth-century criticism of the novel (especially up to the seventies and eighties) were erroneously prone to underestimate the sophistication of Victorian novelists' thinking about endings and closure, in part by relying too much on the surface meaning of the endings as written. Second, that despite the resistance of many in the profession to the critical schools of the last twenty years loosely grouped under the label post-structuralist, we are in a better position to understand the ending of novels like *Middlemarch* today than we were before those schools arrived on the critical scene.

Victorian novelists have a curious way of dismissing the endings to their novels even as they unroll. Again, Dickens comes to mind with his frequent leit-motif ending sometimes being so stylized as to distance the empathy with characters that seemingly motivates the after-history (what *did* Louisa see in the fire?). Scott (not a Victorian but so influential on the Victorian novel that including him is fair enough) sets the tone here: his endings frequently joke about the fact of ending and only grudgingly give—though they do give—the marriages his

reader expected. George Eliot can serve as a model in this regard, especially in her frequently quoted comment outside the novels, that "Conclusions are the weak point of most authors, but some of the fault lies in the very nature of a conclusion, which is at best a negation" (*Letters* 2: 324). At the time when criticism of novels first established itself solidly in this country (the early 1960's), most critics were too willing to follow the hint given by Eliot. If conclusions were indeed the weak spot, they could be ignored—and they often were, despite the fact that some of the endings of Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, Eliot, Trollope, and others have a duplicity that, if recognized and explored, might have made them more interesting. In other words, in phase one of critical attention to Victorian endings, we paid too little attention to disruptive, distancing, or parodic elements in endings, inadequately recognizing that such devices pointed to a discomfort with endings based on a host of possible reasons. These reasons included, perhaps, first, a Victorian reaction to Romantic interest in fragments, second, awareness that multiple endings were possible (Fowles' trick in his pseudo-Victorian *French Lieutenant's Woman*, was already present in some problematic Victorian endings, like that to *Great Expectations*), and, third, the need/desire to accommodate the reading public for popular novels whose interest in endings would be less complex than the authors', and so on.

Phase two with regard to endings came as a by-product of various formal approaches, including the New Criticism, rather late in being applied to novels. With their belief that all parts of a work of literature contributed to its organic whole and to its unity, formal analyses required that endings could not be ignored, were indeed keystones in the Aristotelian structure of beginning, middle, and end. And increasingly they were not ignored. Especially important in stimulating interest in endings and closure were works like Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*, which established a correlation between epistemologies and forms of endings and various studies (Kermode again, Smith's *Poetic Closure*, Friedman's *The Turn of the Novel*) which established the paradigm of the open ending versus the closed ending.<sup>1</sup> It is essential to note that some of our best insights about endings and closure came in studies not specifically devoted to novels but more generally involved with the history of ideas (Kermode) or with poetry (Smith); this overflow of useful ideas from various types of criticism into criticism of the novel (and vice versa) continues as a trend in recent criticism.

In criticism of the novel, the paradigm of the open versus the closed ending typically took twentieth-century open endings as in revolt against the typical Victorian ending. Ironically, while the idea of endings as epistemologically significant and the paradigm of the open versus the closed ending restored critical attention to closure, that attention was often to the discredit of Victorian novels. In this paradigm, the Victorian ending was often seen as affirming a stable epistemology which we Moderns/post-moderns know better than to accept. These ideas have been remarkably persistent despite being overly simple and failing to correspond to what is found in many

Victorian endings; as recently as the 1985 MLA, several papers at a session on "Beginnings and Endings in 19th Century Fiction" repeated the usual disparagement of Victorian endings, advancing Scott in one instance as a model of the writer of sure-footed closed ending, praising in another instance some Victorian endings for seeming modern, in a most curious yet remarkably persistent way. The doubts implicit in the weakness or parodic quality or stylization of many Victorian endings somehow got and get overlooked in the model of open and closed endings.

As the ideal of artistic unity and the (always implicit, though sometimes disavowed) idea of authorial intentions increasingly came under attack, the situation with regard to endings moved into phase three and—I would maintain, really became interesting. If endings were privileged moments linked to the affirmation of a positive epistemology, of a meaning and logos in the world which allows for "mental sunshine" and man's "endurance and prevailing," then endings were likely to be—and in fact proved to be—a primary target of the schools of criticism derived from Derridean philosophy, especially Yale Deconstruction. Two Millers from Yale led the Deconstructionist revision on closure in Victorian novels: J. H. Miller in "Ariadne's Thread" and in his book *Fiction and Repetition*; and D. A. Miller in a book, *Narrative and Its Discontents*, which took Eliot as its example of a novelist who "directs her text towards a state of all-encompassing transcendence from which it is continually drawn back by the dispersive and fragmentary character of the narrative itself" (x). Hillis Miller's work reveals most clearly the advantages and pitfalls of this approach. Its advantage was to question the authority granted to one textual moment over others and to recapture some of the not-so-sunny thoughts that preceded and were often veiled in the endings Victorian novelists typically wrote. Its pitfall was its aggressively avant-garde tone. When it appeared, "Ariadne's Thread" upset a lot of people by positing that the ending is a misplaced point of critical emphasis in interpretation, as indeed *any* point would be because all points of entry into the text provide not a stable point from which to interpret but rather collapse back into the textual labyrinth. What is perhaps most interesting in 1986 about Miller's essay (published in 1976) is that it now seems over-laboriously to assert a point that nobody gets upset about much any more (this has been my own experience in using the text with graduate students). Now let me be clear about what I think has happened here. It seems to me *not* that Miller's essay overproved its point in 1976, but that the point no longer needs extensive proof in 1986. As is so often the case in our voracious profession, what was once a disruptive, indeed subversive, insight has become part of the orthodox critical apparatus we bring to texts. There was thus a certain irony in the cover story which appeared about a year ago in the *Times Sunday Magazine*—what was news to the general public was not news to us, and came at a time when the Yale School was in a state of crisis and transition. By 1986, Deconstruction has largely been assimilated by other modes of close reading and by some forms of

1. Somewhat later studies not mentioned elsewhere in these pages are David Richter's *Fable's End* and a special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* devoted to narrative endings.



the new historicism. The question remains open—and interesting—of whether that assimilation has been too easily and facilely achieved.

Other remarkable developments in the last decade in critical theory have similarly given us additional, helpful models with which to regard closure in Victorian novels. Of these recent approaches, Bakhtin's dialogism has gotten considerable attention.<sup>2</sup>

At first, the Victorian novelist like Eliot in *Middlemarch*, and especially at its end, may seem like the quintessential monologist, pre-empting other voices. But notice the back and forth shuttle built-into passages like this typical one from the last chapter of *Middlemarch*:

Dorothea herself had no dreams of being praised above women, feeling that there was always something better she might have done, if she had only been better and known better. Still, she never repented that she had given up position and fortune to marry Will Ladislaw. . . . Many who knew her thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another and be known in a certain circle only as a wife and mother [and so on].

After Bakhtin, it is easy to see the jostling of cultural values and vocabularies in this passage—not just the obvious move from Dorothea's own views (a mix of personal ideals and received ideas) to those of an unnamed "Many," but also the standard clichéd views embodied in phrases like "position and fortune" and "wife and mother," versus the more idiosyncratic "substantive and rare." In fact, we might advance the idea that Eliot as monologist is in fact an adept ventriloquist. We might also see Eliot as dialogically affirming the values of family, self-realization, and feeling with others embodied in the after-histories of Dorothea and the Garths and as showing awareness that the same values (minus only the feeling for others) also motivated characters like Bulstrode.

Economic perspectives (chiefly, though loosely, Marxist) also have been helpful, especially in re-emphasizing *Middlemarch*'s status not just as a self-contained text, but also as a text produced by and for the middle-classes under prevailing market conditions. Like other Victorian novels, *Middlemarch* was written about families and capitalist societies for families and capitalist societies. It was written, indeed, to be read (sometimes in a family group) in the home, not so coincidentally the locus of many of the values affirmed in the ending. Its impulse to suppress doubts and criticisms about the ethos of family life and bourgeois values was thus culturally as well as temperamentally and generically conditioned. One example of this kind of cultural approach to the family theme is Catherine Gallagher's 1985 *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*.

Feminist criticism has also increasingly provided useful frameworks in which to raise questions about closure in the Victorian novel. Why, for example, do Victorian novels so obsessively focus on female protagonists—whose ends would,

so inevitably, lead to the submersion of large aspirations in domesticity? Why so often (think of Scott and Dickens) are male bonds central to the novel but muted or collapse into the family by the end? Eve Sedgwick's work in *Between Men* (also 1985) is one example of how such feminist or gender-based concerns can influence consideration of closure in Victorian novels.

Finally, and very important in my sense of things, is the recent interest in other, ostensibly non-fictional forms of Victorian narrative as ruled by their own various closural imperatives. The issues raised by closure in novels apply also to other forms of nineteenth-century discourse—Freud's case histories, travel narrations, early ethnographies. Many of us, including George Levine, are moving outside fiction in particular or literature in general—increasing understanding of how "science" and "social science" sometimes operate according to fictional models and (in turn) bringing what has been learned to the understanding of literature. To some in the profession, such excursions seem one more professional sin, "the commission of social science." To others such excursions seem not excursions at all, but a necessary part of the journey.<sup>3</sup>

The literary-cultural phase we are now in (with equal weight to both those terms, literary and cultural) seems to me to offer more satisfying and various perspectives on Victorian novels than were previously available to us.<sup>4</sup> Our perspectives on closure after post-structuralism seem, in fact, to enrich and enhance in every way the methods for the discussion of Victorian novels with which we entered recent critical history.

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2. Numerous studies of Bakhtin have already been published. The best place to make acquaintance with Bakhtin remains, however, *The Dialogic Imagination*.

3. Levine is writing on Darwin. My latest project involves anthropology,

psychology, and the visual arts.

4. My own previous try at the subject is the 1981 *Closure in the Novel*. I have asserted my author's privilege in refusing to classify it in one of my various "stages."



# Victorian Weaving: The Alienation of Work into Text in "The Lady of Shalott"

Gerhard Joseph

One must find the Weaver, the proto-worker of space, the prosopopeia of topology and nodes, the Weaver who works locally to join two worlds that are separated according to the autochthon's myth by a sudden stoppage, the metastrophic caesura massing deaths and shipwrecks: the catastrophe. . . . (Serres 52)

While our collective critical gaze must of necessity limit itself to the fixed canon of a dead poet's work, it constantly seeks out fresh views, rescuing this poem from a stale response, relegating that one to the category of the thoroughly investigated—until a shift of intellectual fashion generates a new hierarchy of emphasis. Thus, as Jerome Buckley has remarked in a survey of Tennyson criticism, "among Tennyson's shorter poems, 'Ulysses' has received the most extensive reinterpretation in our time" (3). Buckley is surely right about "our time" in the widest sense, but I would suggest that the short Tennyson work that has recently come in for the most interesting—and fashionable—re-valuation is "The Lady of Shalott." Indeed, if one is looking for a single manageable example, it may well be the *Victorian* poem that has most readily lent itself to the insinuation of theory—especially Derridean and Lacanian theory—into American commentary upon Victorian poetry. And I do stress "American," for the impact I wish to describe is thus limited. Perhaps because of the anti-structuralist militancy in England of so authoritative a Tennysonian as Christopher Ricks, as well as a variety of larger reasons, theory, especially French theory, has on the whole been met with greater reserve in English Tennyson studies than over here.

While it was from the first one of Tennyson's most popular poems, "The Lady of Shalott" generated a good deal of controversy after its initial publication and became a touchstone for an estimate of the youthful poet's qualities. J.W. Croker's notorious review of the 1832 *Poems* in the *Quarterly Review* lavished a heavy-handed irony upon what Croker felt to be a vaporousness of mood for the poem in general and of motivation for the Lady's behavior in particular (81-96). Conversely, Edgar Allan Poe saw the poem's "suggestive indefiniteness of meaning, with a view of bringing about a definiteness of vague and therefore spiritual effect" as the very source of the poem's—and Tennyson's—greatness (14:28). Subsequent nineteenth-century readers tended to divide themselves into ones who prized its amorphousness ("It was never intended to have any special meaning," averred Stopford Brooke in 1894 [127]) and those who tried to spell out apparent allegorical implications.

Tennyson's own desires in the matter were constantly being canvassed with respect to this poem among others, and he was clearly of two minds in responding. In general and to the extent that he was willing to speak at all, he would insist upon a hermeneutic openness, upon what he called the "parabolic drift" of narratives like "The Lady of Shalott" that only seemed to develop one-to-one allegorical correspondences. "I hate to be tied down to say 'This means that' because the thought within the image is more than any one interpretation," he told Boyd

Carpenter. "Poetry is like shot-silk with many glancing colours. Every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability, and according to his sympathy with the poet" (qtd in Tennyson 2:127). Norman Holland or the early Stanley Fish couldn't have been more insistent upon the reader's interpretive prerogatives. But in other moods Tennyson derogated even minimal indeterminacy in favor of univocal meanings spelled out by the author. As to the Lady's motivation, he told Canon Ainger, "The new-born love for something, for some one in the wide world from which she has been excluded, takes her out of the region of shadows into that of realities." When early twentieth-century readers were not content with impressionistic evocations of the poem's fairy-tale atmospherics, its "pure magic," they used that opposition recorded in Hallam Tennyson's *Memoirs* (1: 117) of his father, as a cue for ontological allegory of either a Platonic or Aristotelian persuasion—at least up to the time of the New Criticism.

While the rehabilitation of Tennyson's reputation has gone on apace during the past forty years, he did not benefit directly from the New Criticism's championing of a complexity that demanded close explication. A chapter in Cleanth Brooks' *The Well Wrought Urn* singles out "Tears, Idle Tears" as the exception to the rule that Tennyson's work does not display the subtleties of paradox and ambiguity (136-44), while F.R. Leavis excluded Tennyson from *Revaluation* on the ground that he offered little opportunity for local analysis (5). To the extent that Tennyson did draw positive attention, it was in the light of the New Criticism's tendency to see most poetry as more or less obliquely about aesthetics, about the poet's self-referential forging of well-wrought urns. Within that emphasis, the ontological oppositions of "The Lady of Shalott" generated by Tennyson's cue in the *Memoir* gave way to aesthetic ones for critics who, armed with Wimsatt-Beardsley strictures against the intentional fallacy, trusted Tennyson's tale rather than his *post-hoc* explanations. The poem thus came during the fifties to be read as a parable concerning the problematics of mimesis in Tennyson's early art, presumably as a reflection of his ambivalence about the artist's removal from the world. The earliest of such readings, which appeared in G. Robert Stange's unpublished Harvard dissertation of 1949, eventually found its way into Walter Houghton and Stange's highly successful anthology of 1956, *Victorian Poetry and Poetics*. "The poem suggests," their notes to "The Lady of Shalott" read, "that the artist must remain in aloof detachment, observing life only in the mirror of the imagination, not mixing in it directly. Once the artist attempts to lead the life of ordinary men his poetic gift, it would seem, dies" (16).

If there was indeed such a shift from what I have called ontological to aesthetic emphases, pre-and post-New Critical readings nevertheless tended to share an uncomplicated view of mimesis. That is, in the poem's parable the Lady, whether an artist figure or not, is trapped within a clear-cut dualism, wherein the mind confronts not the "real" world but rather its



imitation—a “shadow” or “mirror” of the real. What neither the ontological nor the aesthetic reading questions is that a primary “substance” exists as a base of the secondary “shadow,” a “reality” of which the Lady’s tapestry is a copy via the reflective mediation of the mirror.

But of course the essential thrust of current representation theory is to undermine such a Metaphysics of Presence, to fragment the High Mimetic mode implicit in the opposition of “shadow” or “mirror” and “substance.” What we have today instead is the infinite regress of post-structuralist thought where we are invited to follow, in Jacques Derrida’s words, “a book in the book, an origin in the origin, a center in the center” (296) beyond the inmost bound of human thought. It thus seems particularly timely that recent approaches to “The Lady of Shalott” have made a good deal of a perspectivist detail which, from what I can tell, was never even noticed by our interpretive community—much less stressed—before a two-page note by David Martin in a 1973 issue of *Victorian Poetry* called attention to it: namely, that Lancelot’s image flashes into the Lady’s crystal mirror “From the bank and from the river” (255-56). That is, in her reaction to the sight of Lancelot the Lady has to contend not only with a mirror image but also with a reflection of that same river’s reflection of him, not only with a second but also with a third-order reflection—what Herbert Tucker in an unpublished study of Tennyson has playfully called “at least a three bank cushion shot.” In the inner cosmic play of frames implied by her optical situation, the Lady is caught within a perceptual maze, a Derridean *mise en abyme*, in which the putative original image of Lancelot bounces endlessly and without grounding between river and glass, “multiplying variety in a wilderness of mirrors” (“Gerontion”), teasing the Lady (or at any rate some recent commentators upon her plight) out of thought.

“The Lady of Shalott” has thus taken on a paradigmatic force today that extends well beyond the poem’s exemplification of the early Tennyson’s aesthetics. This is especially the case for such talented younger Yale-trained Tennysonians as Tucker and Timothy Peltason—not to mention their teachers Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman: for giving the poem a Lacanian twist, Hartman has read the Lady’s passion for direct, unmediated contact with the world, her unwillingness to rest content with ungrounded representation, as *the* best poetic expression of a Western “desire for reality-mastery as aggressive and fatal as Freud’s death instinct”:

“I am half sick of shadows,” says the Lady of Shalott, and turns from her mirror to the reality of advent. She did not know that by her avertedness, by staying within representation, she had postponed death. The most art can do, as a mirror of language, is to burn through, in its cold way, the desire for self-definition, fullness of grace, presence; simply to expose the desire to own one’s own name, to inhabit it numinously in the form of “proper” noun, words, or the signatory act each poem aspires to be. (8)<sup>1</sup>

Thus, when the knights and burghers of Camelot gather around the barge which has floated her body down to Camelot, they can know her only as a signatory act, the words “The Lady of

Shalott” by which she inscribes herself upon the prow of her barge. The Lady thus becomes in death what she was, unbeknownst to herself in life: a poetic text in microcosm, a “floating signifier” in Hartman’s inspired punning application of Lévi-Strauss. Tennyson’s poem thus serves Hartman precisely as “The Purloined Letter” did Lacan in his now famous seminar on Poe’s story—as an allegory describing the signifier’s drift through the abyss, isolated from the signified, its audience, and the intention of its sender. For as Tennyson’s poem has drifted free (certainly in such a reading as the present one) of his stated “intention” in the *Memoir*, so the Lady’s proper name has in its Lacanian strangeness, drifted free of hers—and is therefore a parable of the “parabolic drift” itself, what Paul de Man called an “allegory of reading.”

A certain amount of the above has been said before—indeed, some of it by myself on another occasion (403-12)—but the radical depersonalization of the sign (implicit in Heidegger’s influential remark that we do not speak the language but it speaks itself through us) brings me to a different theoretical turn, in this case a Marxist one. Isobel Armstrong in an essay to appear in 1988 has examined the ideology of “The Lady of Shalott” in the context of two forms of exploitation in the 1830’s, the displacement of rural workers and the enforced passivity of women. She thus sees why the peasant reapers of the poem’s opening along with the Lady are set against the aristocracy and the entrepreneurial powers, the “knights and burghers” of Camelot, at the poem’s close. The dominant mythology which forces the agricultural laborer to become his own grim reaper, the cotton worker of the thirties to weave his own destruction (since their very success assures that they are being displaced by machines that will do their good work faster) converges with the ancient myth of the woman as weaver. For Armstrong the beauty of the poem is thus “the inconspicuous ease with which it defamiliarizes [the reapers] and cotton weavers and [their] exploitation by making the lady a proxy who carries the meaning of estranged labor.”<sup>2</sup>

While such a reading strikes me as most suggestive, my own emphasis concerns what the poem says about the estrangement of *literary* labor. It is certainly true that the interpretations generated by the New Criticism that I referred to earlier saw the work as a detachable artifact free from biographical encumbrance. But while such readings tended to deny a privileged relevancy to an author’s apparent intention except from internal evidence within the poem, New Critics did not go so far as to deny the existence of an author altogether. More recent readers, however, who emphasize “The Lady of Shalott” status as a “text,” a “sign system,” or a “signatory act” accept the notion popularized by Roland Barthes, Foucault, and others that we can get at nothing behind the semiotic system itself (certainly not a full-blown Tennysonian consciousness), nothing behind the drift of signifiers. The Lady (and by extension the poet “behind” her), that is, do not make a “work” that expresses the personality of a worker who produced it with reference to a palpable world. Rather, both Lady and poet are themselves the media through which, in the current parlance, a warp and woof weaving of a “text” happens—and the serendipitous fact

1. See also Peltason for a comparable treatment of the poem as a parable of advent, and Colley for an additional Lacanian reading.

2. I would like to thank Professor Armstrong for allowing me access to and permission to quote from her manuscript.

that the word "text" comes from the Latin "texere," "to weave," has been a conceptual/etymological pun which the likes of Barthes, Derrida, Michel Serres, and especially J. Hillis Miller, the master of our weaving guild for the year, have pursued down some fanciful avenues.

Such a theoretical movement from the poem as a "work," the output of a poet as craftsman, to an authorless "text" resulting from the impersonal play of signifiers along the intersection of *langue* and *parole*, exemplifies an increasing alienation or reification, in the Marxist sense of those linked concepts. The classical definition of reification appears in "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" (87-92), a long, densely argued, and difficult essay in Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, in which Lukács applies to the realm of idealist German philosophy the techniques Marx used to analyze class economics in *Capital* (see Marx 645). But we need not get bogged down in Lukács, Hegelian obscurities nor even take account of the romantic base of Marxist reification theory to extract from his work a brief sense of the term that will be useful for the present occasion. As a result of the commodification of labor in the modern world, a piece of work becomes "cursed" into a "mysterious thing," a mystification that is conveyed in a terminology of the numinous that is otherwise rigorously abstract and analytical. A worker's labor thus becomes something objective and independent of him, something that takes on a life of its own and whose function in his life he cannot fathom. But not only does he face an alien world of "cursed," reified objects, his own activity becomes a commodity which, subject to non-human detachment from the natural laws of society, must go its own way independent of his will. Reification for Marx and Lukács thus has a double aspect—an alienated world of objects *and* an alienated consciousness divorced from that world which it can only contemplate across a puzzling abyss. In the posture of the scientist for whom, in the words of Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach, "reality, what we apprehend through our senses, is understood only in the form of the object of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity," reification takes on a material form. The idealist's opposition to such empiricism, however, does not overcome reification but only reveals more pointedly what has been repressed by it—"sensuous human activity." Thus, both the neutral scientific observer and the transcendent philosophic seer of nineteenth-century thought occupy the same detached, contemplative stance, unable to enter into life. They are unable to "see" and "be" at the same time, as Carolyn Porter, following Emerson, has put it in her book on the plight of the participant-observer in American literature, to which my own formulation is crucially indebted (esp Chapter 2, "Reification and American Literature"). Further, the more intense the struggle of the modern mind to overcome the contemplative condition the tighter the hold it has upon the bureaucrat, technologist, and scientist. And, I would add, the literary critic.

For, applying Lukács' theory to the contemporary critic as worker, I would suggest that the New Critical insistence upon the "work" as a discrete object cut off from authorly intention, and subject to a detached critical analysis modelled upon sci-

entific "objectivity" is already an advanced stage of alienated consciousness. But the more recent theoretical posture whereby all we have is a "text" whose producer is a fiction of the theoretically naive and whose reference to anything besides other texts is highly questionable—such a cognitive endgame carries reification to a further extreme, to the "prison-house of language" within which many of us have now resigned ourselves to live. From my own cell within that dwelling, I would thus read "The Lady of Shalott," despite its feudal and fairy-tale trappings, as a figure of that change, a parable of recent literary history charting the movement from a New Critical analysis of authored "works" to a post-structuralist reading of unauthored "texts." For within her poem the Lady, a proto-worker of space transforming aesthetic categories, has moved from weaving a work to becoming a text. That the tapestry she weaves is quite specifically a "work" is accentuated by a detail that is easy to miss, the craft function of her mirror: since tapestry is woven from the reverse side, the Lady needs a mirror to see the design that she weaves. But that craft function is woven inextricably into its epistemological one: if the Lady needs the mirror to fashion her own design, the stimulus from the outside, a *mis en abyme* flash of textuality that intensifies the mirror's properties makes it difficult for her to see her own production aright. Indeed, that fracturing of image makes it impossible for her to work at all. As a result of that difficulty, the work, of which she is the indubitable creator, becomes cursed—as she does herself—into a disembodied text, the reified signifier of her name on the boat which Hartman and others have stressed and that is open to the misprisonings of knights and burghers in and out of Camelot, in and out of the poem. For it is the depersonalization of herself into a drifting signature, into her "proper" name in the Derridean sense, that makes for the poem's most relevant "parabolic drift" at this theoretical moment.

I can, in conclusion, imagine a strong counter-argument—a Barthesian or Derridean reading which would see the movement from the controlled pleasure generated by the work to the free *jouissance* generated by the text<sup>3</sup> as the *release* from New Critical reification. But, doubling back, that possibility—and the cognitive indeterminacy it privileges—strikes me as merely the latest triumph of the reified. For as Adorno has cheerfully defined our cultural dilemma,

The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the more extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. . . . (19-34)

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3. Barthes has celebrated the movement from "work" to "text." For a careful discussion of the work's survival, see Goodman and Elgin.



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## The Tenant of Wildfell Hall: Anne Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

Margaret Mary Berg

In her "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell," Charlotte Brontë writes that her sister Anne's choice of subject in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was "an entire mistake":

Nothing less congruous with the writer's nature could be conceived. The motives which dictated this choice were pure, but, I think, slightly morbid. She had, in the course of her life, been called on to contemplate, near at hand and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused; hers was naturally a sensitive, reserved, and dejected nature; what she saw sank very deeply into her mind; it did her harm. She brooded over it till she believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail. . . as a warning to others. She hated her work, but would pursue it. When reasoned with on the subject, she regarded such reasonings as a temptation to self-indulgence. She must be honest; she must not varnish, soften, or conceal. This well-meant resolution brought on her some misconstruction and some abuse, which she bore, as it was her custom to bear whatever was unpleasant, with mild, steady patience. (6-7)

This passage, in George Moore's opinion, "first started the critics in the depreciation of Anne" (246), and even to a reader less violently partisan than Moore (who believed *Agnes Grey* to be "the most perfect prose narrative in English literature" [243]), the comments seem calculated to lessen Anne Brontë's reputation: by insisting on her sister's "morbid" investment in reproducing "every detail" of situations which had caused her pain, Charlotte Brontë effectively reduces the novel from a

deliberately designed work of fiction to an obsessive reiteration of personal concerns. Though the passage stresses Anne Brontë's willful determination to use art as a vehicle of moral instruction, the impression that it ultimately conveys is that of a writer at the mercy of a compelling force which she cannot resist and which prevents her from choosing a saner alternative by submitting to the authority of her sister's "reasonings."

The discussion which follows will treat Charlotte Brontë's dismissal of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as an assertion in a tacit critical exchange between the two sisters concerning the proper function of art—one in which Charlotte, writing a year after Anne's death, had the last word. This exchange is, at best, difficult to reconstruct because of Charlotte's position as interpreter to the public of her sister's life and work. Working from signs of *Jane Eyre's* influence on *Wildfell Hall*, however, it is possible to begin to recover a sense of Anne Brontë's own voice and to discuss a more elaborate purpose at work in *Wildfell Hall* than Charlotte's comments allow for—one which implies a criticism of Charlotte Brontë herself as an artist.

\* \* \*

Recent critical discussions of Anne Brontë's novels, attempting to steer clear of the types of controversy and partisanship that Charlotte Brontë's and George Moore's comments invoke, have tended to consider Anne Brontë in isolation and to avoid

comparisons of any sort between the Brontë sisters' works.<sup>1</sup> Nineteenth-century reviewers who believed Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell to be one person, however, were quick to discern and comment on resemblances between their novels. In one review of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the writer observes in Acton Bell's story "a strong family likeness to the plot of *Jane Eyre*."<sup>2</sup> Another critic elaborates on this likeness, explaining that "in each our sympathies are unwittingly engaged for an attachment formed by a married person before death had dissolved the first contracted bond."<sup>3</sup> In *Jane Eyre*, a young governess and her employer fall in love, but their wedding is prevented at the last moment by the disclosure that Mr. Rochester is already married to a maniac imprisoned in his attic. In *Wildfell Hall* a woman deceives a man, and does so unintentionally, but the situation's general outlines are the same: in this novel a young farmer falls in love with a mysterious newcomer to the neighborhood, only to find that she has a husband whom she has abandoned. In each novel death eventually removes the obstacle in the lovers' path and they are able to marry.

This resemblance seems to indicate, as W.A. Craik notes, *Jane Eyre's* influence on *Wildfell Hall* (249). The dates of composition for the two works support this assumption: *Jane Eyre* was begun in August of 1846, completed a year later, and published by Smith and Elder in October, 1847. It appears that Anne Brontë began *Wildfell Hall* in the autumn of 1846 and completed it in the spring of 1848. It was published by Thomas Newby in June, 1848 (Winniffrith 77-78, Hanson 221). The writing of the two works overlapped, then, for a period of at least nine months, during which the sisters would have been reading their works in progress aloud to one another and soliciting comments. This criticism was not always heeded, though, as Charlotte's report of Anne's response to others' "reasonings" shows. Charlotte was similarly resistant to criticism; she told Mrs. Gaskell that "the remarks had seldom any effect in inducing her to alter her work, so possessed was she with the feeling that she had described reality" (Gaskell 215). The writing of *Wildfell Hall* then continued for at least nine months after the publication of *Jane Eyre*. This time scheme suggests a situation in which the two sisters, both committed to their own purposes, must nevertheless have been influenced by each other's stories, and in which Anne Brontë in particular would have had the opportunity to develop any material that her sister's work might have suggested.

This circumstantial evidence seems at first only to offer the basis for a discussion of Anne Brontë as a derivative artist—an idea consistent with Lawrence and E.M. Hanson's assertion

that *Wildfell Hall* is "Anne's poor shade of *Wuthering Heights*" (233). If we juxtapose a third scenario to the plots of *Jane Eyre* and *Wildfell Hall*, though, indications of a more interesting relationship between the two novels begin to come into focus. The "terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused" of which Charlotte Brontë speaks in her "Biographical Notice" and to which Anne Brontë had been witness were those evident in their brother's physical and moral decline. Branwell Brontë's deterioration and death were in part the consequences of his experience as tutor at Thorp Green, where he fell in love with his employer's wife and was dismissed upon discovery by his employer. There is no evidence that he and Lydia Robinson were actually lovers, but we do know that Branwell believed that she would marry him after her invalid husband's death (Gerin 199, 207). His final realization that she would not hastened his self-destruction from alcohol and drugs.

A few interesting resemblances and imprecise parallels between Branwell's story, the recognized "source" of *Wildfell Hall*, and the plots of both his sisters' novels suggest a possible explanation for the similarities between Anne's and Charlotte's work. All three "plots" in some way concern both a situation in which an inexperienced person is attracted to or tempted by a married person (as the other Brontës thought Branwell had been) and problems of drunkenness, dissipation, and/or madness. There is a significant difference, though: while in Branwell's story the issues of love and destructive self-indulgence center on a single figure, in each novel the vice of alcoholism is displaced onto the third figure of the wife or husband who obstructs the hero and heroine's desires. This division of issues in *Wildfell Hall* suggests that Anne Brontë found in her sister's handling of the triangular relationship between Jane, Rochester and Bertha Mason a structure that could be useful in reshaping her own observations into fictional form since it traced the pattern from her own experience with which she wished to deal, while at the same time allowing her to handle the protagonists' illicit love as an independent issue. Here I am following Derek Stanford's suggestion that though Anne must have regarded her brother's behavior at Thorp Green with disapproval, pity and shame, at the same time, though probably unconsciously, "she was moved and excited by witnessing his passion; even in the midst of her distress her imagination was stirred by the atmosphere of longing and the currents of desire" (223). The narrative pattern of *Jane Eyre*, then, might have offered a means of accommodating both these responses, allowing Anne Brontë to incorporate what Moore calls the quality of "heat" in the romance of Gilbert Markham and Helen Hun-

1. This desire to keep to a middle ground between the extremes of Charlotte Brontë's and Moore's criticisms is evident in Harrison and Stanford (230-236), in which Stanford acknowledges the negative effect that Charlotte's comments have had on Anne's reputation, but does not attempt, as Moore did, to make a case for Anne as the greatest of the Brontës. Stanford starts from the assumption that Anne "is not [her sisters'] weak reflection, their sedulous echo, but a writer of an almost completely different sort" and argues for her success as a realist, advancing a tentative claim for her as "our first realist woman author." Other critics have followed Stanford's lead, attempting to evaluate Anne without invoking comparisons between the sisters; even Ewbank (49-52), while beginning with the assertion that "No one would deny that of the Brontë sisters Anne was the one to whom least talent had been given," goes on to concentrate on the success of Anne's "pragmatic and moral approach to the art of writing

fiction." This approach is most clearly expressed in Craik (3, 252). In her Preface, Craik states that one of the primary purposes of her study is "to consider Anne Brontë as seriously and thoroughly as her sister, on her own terms as a writer, and to assess her place as an independent novelist, not merely as an interesting minor appendage." Craik does admit near the end of her book that Anne is "not as great" as either of her sisters, but makes an apparent attempt to compensate for this inadvertent comparison by stressing Anne's uniqueness, stating "she is not derivative. . . and has no literary successors."

2. An unsigned review, *Literary World*, 12 August 1848, in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* (260).

3. An unsigned review, "Mr Bell's New Novel," *Rambler*, September 1848, in *The Critical Heritage* (268).



tingdon, while still permitting a detailed illustration of "the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused" (239-41) in Arthur Huntingdon's physical and spiritual deterioration.

At this point, it seems that the action of these two influences in *Wildfell Hall* might be neatly summarized: where her brother's experience provided Anne Brontë with the "content" for her second novel, her sister's novel supplied her with a model framework or a pre-existing "form" within which to arrange that highly charged material. But such a schematization tends to encourage a view of Anne Brontë as a derivative and unskilled artist who, having borrowed the plot of her sister's novel, was unable even to handle it successfully. Furthermore, it makes too sharp a division between similar influences. If we press resemblances between the sisters' novels further, though, it is possible to trace a more complex scheme of interaction, and to discover in *Wildfell Hall* an implied yet coherent critique of Charlotte Brontë's handling of the moral issues that the story of Branwell's misfortunes raises.

\* \* \*

Jane Eyre's first uncertain impression of Bertha Mason is that of a creature resembling "the foul German spectre—the vampire" (*Jane Eyre* 311). After the interrupted marriage ceremony, though, Jane has a closer view of Rochester's wife:

In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (321)

These descriptions are suggestive of the way in which Bertha functions in Jane's autobiography as a whole: as a figure not wholly human, a force that obstructs Jane's desire and opposes her with a menacing power. The first Mrs. Rochester is, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar put it, "Jane's truest and darkest double. . . the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead" (360). Reduced to madness (and "reduced" in nearly a literal sense—without complexity of character or a language with which to communicate) Bertha expresses herself as a primitive principle of destructive energy.

Rochester explains that "excesses" on Bertha's part had "prematurely developed the germs of insanity" inherited from her mother. It is not because of her present condition but because of her earlier behavior that he loathes her:

. . . her character ripened and developed with frightful rapidity; her vices sprang up fast and rank. . . what a pigmy intellect she had and what giant propensities! How fearful were the curses those propensities entailed upon me! Bertha Mason, the true daughter of an infamous mother, dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste. (333-4)

Though Rochester succeeds in communicating the horror that Bertha inspires in him, this clearly physical disgust is not a feeling that the reader can share, since Rochester's language,

though powerfully suggestive, lacks particularity. His words can only strengthen the impression that Bertha's actions and appearance have already provoked by demonstrating that Bertha's moral nature is as distorted and abnormal as her physical appearance. This mediation of her story, stripping it of detail, contributes to the reader's sense of Bertha as something either more or less than human, and reinforces a tendency to read her as a type or symbol, whether for "the woman who gives herself to the Romantic Hero" (Chase 467) or for the "anxiety and rage" the female writer experiences in patriarchal society" (Gilbert and Gubar 78).

Arthur Huntingdon of *Wildfell Hall* is also a representative figure. His character, however, lacks the shadowy suggestiveness that gives Bertha's figure its almost mythic resonance, and the reader has no choice among possible interpretations: Huntingdon's story is a cautionary tale that carefully details the evils of drink, dissipation, and callous self-absorption. In one of the novel's most frequently quoted scenes Huntingdon's friend, Hattersley, tries to force Lord Lowborough to join in their revelry by using physical violence. Lowborough escapes Hattersley's grip by burning him with a candle that Helen provides and runs from the room. Hattersley then turns on Huntingdon, who has been watching the scene:

'I'll have the heart out of your body, man, if you irritate me with any more of that imbecile laughter!—What! are you at it yet?—There! see if that'll settle you!' cried Hattersley, snatching up a footstool and hurling it at the head of his host, but he missed his aim, and the latter still sat collapsed and quaking with feeble laughter, with the tears running down his face; a deplorable spectacle indeed. (*The Tenant* 290)

Shortly afterward, Helen hears her husband and his friends leave the drawing room:

At last he came, slowly and stumblingly, ascending the stairs, supported by Grimsby and Hattersley. . . [who] were both laughing and joking at him. . . He himself was no longer laughing now, but sick and stupid—I will write no more of *that*. (291)

Only at this point of utter revulsion does Helen refuse to continue her description. Elsewhere Huntingdon's vices and other "deplorable spectacles"—his adulterous relationships, his attempts to teach his infant son to drink and to curse at his mother—are set out in detail.

Anne Brontë achieves this kind of immediacy by shifting a third of the way through the novel from Gilbert Markham's epistolary narrative to Helen Huntingdon's diary, which contains the story of Helen's marriage. This structural feature, however, is also what a number of critics of *Wildfell Hall* have identified as the novel's central weakness. Even George Moore, Anne Brontë's champion, objected to this device—understandably, given his appreciation of the "heat" in Gilbert Markham's narrative. He felt that "an accident would have saved" Anne Brontë from this error of judgment:

. . . almost any man of letters would have laid his hand upon her arm and said: You must not let your heroine give her diary to the young farmer, saying, "Here is my story; go home and read it." Your heroine must tell the young farmer her story, and an entrancing

scene you will make of the telling. Moreover, the presence of your heroine, her voice, her gestures, the questions that would arise and the answers that would be given to them, would preserve the atmosphere of a passionate and original love story. (240)

Ironically, what Moore seems to be suggesting is that Anne Brontë should have written a work that would have resembled *Jane Eyre* (which he did not much admire) even more closely, following the earlier novel in more than its plot. What he describes here is essentially a reworking of the scene quoted earlier in which Rochester's past life with Bertha is so briefly and suggestively summarized, and in which the emphasis falls instead on the current dilemma in Jane and Rochester's "passionate and original love story." Anne Brontë, however, would undoubtedly have taken the same view of this suggested improvement that she did of her sister's attempts to "reason with" her, since her purpose in writing *Wildfell Hall*, stated in her Preface to the second edition, was "to reveal the snares and pitfalls of life to the young and thoughtless traveller" (30); the shift to Helen's diary is the technique that makes it possible for her to accomplish this purpose.

This decisive change of focus provides the starting point for a reading of Anne Brontë's novel as a reworking of the basic materials of *Jane Eyre* in which the thematic emphases of the earlier novel are redistributed. According to this reading, Arthur Huntingdon's story would be not only a version of Branwell Brontë's, but also a version of Bertha Mason's, in which all that *Jane Eyre* compresses into a few melodramatically resonant lines is expanded to occupy half of the narrative. Where Bertha is a nearly impersonal force or a figure important only in relation to Jane, Huntingdon is a carefully elaborated personality; where Bertha's "giant propensities" are alluded to only to establish her sub-humanity, Huntingdon's vices and his consequent deterioration are the principal concern of Anne Brontë's didactic story. This central instance of a radical reordering of priorities comes into focus in the contrast between the deaths of the two characters. Bertha dies in a dramatic plunge from the roof of Thornfield. This event, however, lacks immediacy for the reader since it is related to Jane much later by the landlord of a local inn. Moreover, its interest has little to do with Bertha herself: the reader is really interested in Rochester and Jane, and Bertha's fate is important only in so far as it affects their relationship. Huntingdon's death, though, is a long process which Helen describes in considerable detail. Her relationship with Gilbert Markham fades into the background as her husband declines. Despite their past relationship, she becomes concerned with the condition of Huntingdon's soul and with the question of his salvation—an issue which had been a point of controversy earlier in their marriage. When Huntingdon finally dies, Helen derives hope from her belief in universal salvation, "the blessed confidence that, through whatever purging fires the erring spirit may be doomed to pass—whatever fate awaits it, still, it is not lost, and God, who hateth nothing that He hath made, will bless it in the end!" (452).

There is a comparable variation of emphasis in the sisters' treatment of moral issues in their heroes' and heroines' love

stories. Whether or not *Jane Eyre* is a religious book is a question open to debate,<sup>4</sup> but it is clear that the novel places as great a value on individual integrity and personal notions of morality as on commonly held religious beliefs. This dual emphasis is evident in Jane's silent assertion of her independence during her interview with Rochester, the moment which marks her highest point of moral ascendancy. "Who in the world cares for you? or would be injured by what you do?" asks the side of her nature that wishes to stay with Rochester despite the fact that he is married. The other side is ready with a reply:

*I care for myself. The more solitary, friendless, the more unsustained I am the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God, sustained by man. . . . Laws and principles are not for times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour. . . . Preconceived opinions, foregone determinations are all I have this hour to stand by; there I plant my foot. (344)*

Jane stands by religious law and social convention because she believes them to be right, but also because they lend her the strength to make the choice that will preserve her self-respect, even her identity. "I care for myself" is the assertion that resounds throughout the passage and gives it its authority.

In *Wildfell Hall* matters are less complicated. Though Gilbert Markham tells us that he detects "a violent conflict between reason and passion" (404) in Helen Huntingdon during what they believe to be their last meeting, both characters believe in and conform to conventional moral strictures in a way that Jane and Rochester do not. Gilbert's model behavior is emphatically contrasted with that of Walter Hargrave, his sinister double, who not only pursues Helen knowing that she is married, but glibly distorts her religious beliefs to advance his suit, asking ". . . can you suppose it would offend that benevolent Being to make the happiness of one who would die for yours?—to raise a devoted heart from purgatorial torments to a state of heavenly bliss. . . ." (325). And Helen makes her beliefs and priorities clear when she appeals to purely religious considerations to convince Gilbert that they are right to separate:

*“. . . Gilbert, can you really derive no consolation from the thought that we may meet together where there's no more pain and sorrow, no more striving against sin, and struggling of the spirit against the flesh; where both will behold the same glorious truths, and drink exalted and supreme felicity from the same fountain of light and goodness—that Being whom both will worship with the same intensity of holy ardour, and where, pure and happy creatures, both will love with the same divine affection?"*

Such a passage provides ample support for Terry Eagleton's assertion that "Anne Brontë's novels find the world morally mixed, but they do not find morality in the least problematical" (123).

Taken together, these instances in which Anne Brontë appears at once to adopt and to modify the material of her sister's novel, shifting the focus from her characters' consciousnesses

invulnerability of the soul as much as earthly delights, become a microcosm of man's striving for Christian reward," both included in Norton Edition of *Jane Eyre* (449-53, 479).

4. See for instance Elizabeth Rigby's contemporary evaluation, "An Anti-Christian Composition," and Robert Bernard Martin's reading of the novel, in which he claims that "Jane and Rochester, learning to respect the



to a larger moral framework, or even from this life to life after death, constitute a pattern from which we might infer a coherent purpose at work in *Wildfell Hall*. This pattern suggests that to the degree to which her reading of *Jane Eyre* influenced her treatment of her subject, her painful experiences with Branwell at Thorp Green and later at the parsonage shaped a particular response to her sister's handling of controversial material. To as conscientiously didactic a writer as Anne Brontë, *Jane Eyre* might have appeared to evade, if not actually distort, moral and religious issues through its emphasis on the individual and the imaginative; in *Wildfell Hall* Anne Brontë attempts to correct this faulty emphasis by taking a more responsible approach to the representation of the same issues.

The grounds for such a divergence of opinion on the function of art are themselves thematized in *Wildfell Hall* through Anne Brontë's adaptation of still another feature of *Jane Eyre*—her decision to make her heroine a professional artist. Jane Eyre is an artist, though only an amateur; as most readers of the novel will recall, her relationship with Rochester is significantly advanced when he looks over the drawings and paintings in her portfolio and questions her closely about three in particular. Jane can be rigorously objective in her approach to her art (she makes contrasting studies of herself and her imagined image of Blanche Ingram in order to cure herself of her infatuation), but these particular paintings are imperfect representations or "pale portraits" of strange landscapes which had "risen vividly" (156-7) on Jane's mind. These pictures—direct though inexact translations into visual form of the ideas and sentiments that occupy Jane's unconscious—serve to provide both Rochester and the reader with indications of the strangeness and complexity of her inner life.

Before her marriage to Huntingdon, Helen's approach toward art, like Jane's, is divided, but here the conflicting interests in self-expression and objective representation of realities are opposed more sharply: Helen uses the reverse sides of her drawings to sketch the face of the man with whom she is infatuated, being careful to erase the likeness later. For Gilbert and Gubar, Helen's "functionally ambiguous aesthetic" makes her a useful paradigm for the female artist who must "deny or conceal her own art, or at least deny the self-assertion implicit in her art" and therefore uses it "both to express and to camouflage herself" (Gilbert and Gubar 81)—a pattern they see repeated in Helen's practice after running away from her husband of selling landscapes with false signatures and titles in order to escape detection. This reading, though, fails to take into account one further, strangely inconsistent feature: an apparent uneasiness on Anne Brontë's part with the notion of self-expression. In a scene similar to the one in *Jane Eyre* described above, Helen and Huntingdon become more intimate when he looks at her pictures and discovers the one image of himself that she has forgotten to rub out. Like Jane's strange pictures, Helen's sketch also provides a revelation of her inner state. Helen's hidden feelings, however, are more commonplace and their revelation brings predictable consequences: Huntingdon smirks, Helen blushes. Another such advance in intimacy takes place the following day, when Huntingdon sees and comments on the woodland

scene that Helen intends to be her masterpiece:

. . . in the foreground were part of the gnarled trunk and of the spreading boughs of a large forest tree, whose foliage was of a brilliant golden green. . . Upon this bough, that stood out in bold relief against the sombre firs, were seated an amorous pair of turtle doves, whose soft sad-coloured plumage afforded a contrast of another nature; and beneath it, a young girl was kneeling on the daisy-spangled turf, with head thrown back and masses of fair hair falling on her shoulders, her hands clasped, lips parted, and eyes intently gazing upward on those two feathered lovers—too deeply absorbed in each other to notice her. (175)

The artist's preoccupations are not difficult for Huntingdon to decipher: he pronounces it "a very fitting study for a young lady—Spring just opening into summer—morning just approaching noon—girlhood just ripening into womanhood—and hope just verging on fruition." Helen, surprisingly, is not embarrassed by these comments but responds naively when Huntingdon remarks of the girl in the picture,

"she's thinking there will come a time when she will be wooed and won like that pretty hen-dove. . . and she's thinking how pleasant it will be, and how tender and faithful he will find her."

"And perhaps," suggested I, "how tender and faithful she shall find him." (175-6)

In these scenes, "self-expression" as it is presented in *Jane Eyre* is trivialized, reduced to the embarrassingly naive representation of romantic fancies.

However, after leaving her husband, Helen herself comes to share this attitude toward such a use of art and to see her role as an artist differently. Now, though she does put false titles and signatures on her landscapes, they are otherwise faithful representations of external nature painted for the practical purpose of supporting herself and her son. No longer a vehicle for imaginative self-expression, art now confers obligations and restrictions on her: she tells Gilbert Markham that she "almost wishes she were not a painter" because she cannot enjoy "the various brilliant and delightful touches of nature" as others do—"I am always troubling my head about how I could produce the same effect upon canvas; and as that cannot be done, it is mere vanity and vexation of spirit" (104-5).

Jane Eyre's and Helen Huntingdon's attitudes toward art appear to owe much to Charlotte's and Anne's notions of truthful representation—it is clear enough that Jane's approach to her art is informed by Charlotte's idea of truth as, in Inga-Stina Ewbank's phrase, "reality recreated by the imagination" (165), while Helen, like Anne, is committed to a more literal and objective recording of external reality. This delineation of a contrasting position follows the pattern of the other imprecise parallels between *Jane Eyre* and *Wildfell Hall* which so strongly suggest a relationship of stimulus and response, and which provoked Charles Kingsley to remark in a review that *Wildfell Hall* had "exaggerated all the faults of that remarkable book [*Jane Eyre*] and retained very few of its good points. The superior religious tone in which alone it surpasses *Jane Eyre* is, in our eyes, quite neutralised by the low moral tone which reigns throughout."<sup>5</sup> Here again, Anne Brontë appears to adapt

5. Charles Kingsley in an unsigned review, *Fraser's Magazine*, April 1849, xxxix, in *The Critical Heritage* (272).

a feature of Charlotte Brontë's narrative and at the same time uses it to differentiate her own purposes from her sister's. In this instance, though, she registers an opposing attitude concerning the nature and function of art itself, expressing distrust if not actually scorn for the type of self-expressive art that Jane Eyre and Charlotte Brontë practice—a difference which is not simply an additional element in the larger pattern, but an indication of the pattern's source and significance.

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These arguments do not make a case for Anne Brontë's superior artistry at the expense of her sister's reputation, as George Moore's attempted to do. But a reading of *Wildfell Hall* that takes account of *Jane Eyre*'s influence does require some adjustment in the attitude toward Anne Brontë's art, the source of which Moore correctly attributed to Charlotte Brontë's comments: if we recognize that Anne Brontë was capable of dealing critically with a literary influence, even of developing and refining her own ideas about writing in response to it, we have to acknowledge *Wildfell Hall* to be more than the result of a compulsive effort to reproduce "every detail" of Branwell's experience in a cautionary tale.

More significantly, the presence of an implied critique of *Jane Eyre* in *Wildfell Hall* suggests aspects of Anne Brontë's character actually at odds with the only description of her that is available to us. According to Charlotte Brontë's "Biographical Notice," Anne was a person of "quiet virtues": "a constitutional reserve and taciturnity placed and kept her in the shade, and covered her mind, especially her feelings, with a sort of nun-like veil, which was rarely lifted" (8). What is missing from this description is any indication of the sense of self-assertion and awareness of power which must have informed Anne Brontë's rewriting of her sister's novel. This quality of self-assertion is not the self-expression associated with Jane Eyre and, by implication, with Charlotte Brontë; here in fact the term "self-assertion" appears inappropriate since the values *Wildfell Hall* communicates are those associated with traditional Christianity, not with an individual system of belief. But the connections between the two novels suggest that Anne was in control of her material and not, as Charlotte's description suggests, controlled by it; her use of *Jane Eyre*'s narrative structures and simultaneous insistence on conventional moral values reflect a choice on her part to establish a position quite different from her sister's, and to attempt to move past the limits of a single moral perspective that *Jane Eyre*'s autobiographical form (a form Anne had herself used in *Agnes Grey*)

implies.

But, to apply the terms that Gilbert and Gubar use to describe Helen Huntingdon, it seems that Anne feels compelled to "deny the self-assertion implicit in her own art"; even in the Preface to *Wildfell Hall*, in which she defends her practice of "telling the truth" to those who accuse her of "'a morbid love of the coarse, not to say the brutal'" (29), her tone is restrained and humble. It is perhaps important to recall at this point that, as Gilbert and Gubar also stress, her novel tells the story of a woman whose central act of self-assertion—her desertion of her husband—requires that she change her name and conceal herself from the person whom she has opposed. Anne's situation, however, differs in a crucial respect, in that her pseudonym does not disguise her from the figure against whom she is reacting; consequently, she conceals herself behind the "nun-like veil" of modesty and reticence on which Charlotte comments. Read in the light of this need "both to express and to camouflage herself," the self-effacing statement at the end of the Preface, "I would have it to be distinctly understood that Acton Bell is neither Currer nor Ellis Bell, and therefore, let not his faults be attributed to them" (31), requires interpretation as Anne's explicit attempt to differentiate her writing from her sisters'; like *Wildfell Hall* itself, this gesture is an act of assertion, even defiance, masked by a self-deprecating manner.

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## The Poor Fictionist's Conscience: Point of View in the Palliser Novels

Patricia A. Vernon

The narrator of Anthony Trollope's Palliser novels is a familiar figure to readers of the Barsestshire chronicles. His characteristic attitudes and concerns, his amiable and intimate manner, are easily recognized after an acquaintanceship extended through the Barsest series. He shares with his reader a common humanity; he readily acknowledges the faults, weaknesses, and limitations that individuality and humanity imply. The narrator's admission that he sometimes succumbs to the human inclination to slant the truth and that he often possesses something less than all the facts or certain knowledge is necessitated by his very desire to be a model of moral responsibility, to be himself "honest and true" (*The New Zealander* 109).<sup>1</sup> However, the tradition of the novel, its potential for exploration of the characters' inner lives and the complicated motivations which determine their behavior, gives the narrator legitimate precedent for assuming omniscience, which he frequently does, in order to penetrate the minds of the characters and present their inner discourse with themselves. Therefore Trollope's narrator seems to fill two alternate roles: the clairvoyant, controlling artist and the limited, human chronicler. These roles are not so much contradictory as mutually corrective.

The conviction that point of view is a crucial element in all experience, that, in fact, it determines the truth we see, guides Trollope's examination in his fictions of what it means to be honest and true. The narratives themselves are studies of conscience and, for this narrator, morally responsible behavior depends on an active conscience, on "knowing with" others. This depends in turn on the ability of the narrator and, subsequently, the reader to encompass imaginatively the moral consciousness of another. Trollope's narrator demonstrates this process in his own sympathetic engagement with the characters as well as in the relationship he postulates between himself and the reader. What Trollope's narrator communicates and shares with the reader is his sense of uncertainty and multiplicity. The world he describes is complex and chaotic, governed as much by chance as by choice, governed, in fact, by the *fainéant* Palliser ministry, hardly at all. On this conception of human experience the reader's sympathy must be based.

J. Hillis Miller's study of the form of Victorian fiction makes this basic assumption: "A novel is a structure of interpenetrating minds, the mind of the narrator as he beholds or enters into the characters, the minds of the characters as they behold or know one another. . . . Consciousness of the consciousness of others—this is the primary focus of fiction"(86). The interpenet-

ration of another's consciousness is a remarkable feat—an act of sympathetic imagination through which the other may be known in a way that goes beyond the observation of external facts, social interaction, or direct discourse. The narrator's method for realizing this feat in the Palliser novels goes beyond his technique in the earlier novels and merges narrator, character, and reader in a communion of sympathy that imaginatively links and thereby expands the real and the fictive worlds. The narrator's relationship with the fictional characters both demonstrates and analyzes the fictions whereby we know ourselves and one another. Trollope explains his creation of fictional characters as a "result of an effort of my moral consciousness."<sup>2</sup> The prerequisite for this effort is self-knowledge, the only direct experience we have of motivation, and from self-knowledge proceeds conscience, "knowing with" another.

The phrase "making up one's mind" is a particularly resonant one within the general context of Trollope's fictions. It most commonly describes two related but distinct processes. In the first sense, making up one's mind refers to choosing between two or more alternatives. But the phrase also occurs in the context of accepting the inevitable when it refers to the rearranging or reordering of ideas, beliefs, or aspirations to accept some unalterable condition. These two related activities of the moral consciousness generally provide the drama of Trollope's fictions. Additionally the phrase alludes to the fictional process itself: the imagining or "making up" of other minds. As Trollope's novels demonstrate, this imaginative act also constitutes sympathy. "Making up" one's own mind should ultimately be seen then as an even more complex task than the already challenging process of sympathizing with another, for it includes the evaluation and coordination of the intuited understanding of individual and collective others who affect or may be affected by the individual.

While Trollope earnestly works to create sympathetic readers, his most effective ploy is to assume their existence. He assumes particularly their capacity for sympathy, their close questioning of the story itself, and their interest in his problems as narrator. The intrusions remind the reader of previous or analogous situations; they point out that the narrator has chosen to order the narration in one way but that many are possible; and while some insist on the "chronicler's" limited knowledge, others imply that the happy endings are provided by the "fictionist" and might otherwise not occur. As the narrator adds chronicle to chronicle, the majority of his precepts for his readers convey the general message: pay attention, remember what you've read. And they suggest by their manner the narrator's increased confidence (since the earlier Barsest series in which a somewhat more aggressive narrator appears with even greater frequency) in the reader's ability to move from knowledge to understanding and sympathy with fewer explicit direc-

1. The phrase is from "Here's a Health to them that's awa'," an early Scotch lyric known to exist in several versions. Trollope refers to the one found in James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* 5 (1796): no. 412, according to Hall, editor, *The New Zealander*, xxxvii. The quatrain, "It is good to be merry and wise./It is good to be honest and true./It is good to be off with the old love/Before you are on with the new" appears in full in *Barchester Towers* (ch. 44) and *The Eustace Diamonds* (ch. 35). The second line can be found in *The New Zealander* and "Carlylism." Phrases from the quatrain occur throughout Trollope's Palliser series, particularly

references to being "honest and true."

2. *Autobiography* 178. Peckham explains in his discussion of Schopenhauer: "After justice comes morality, not the rational recognition of other individuals, but the 'intuitive knowledge that recognizes in another individuality the same inner nature as in one's own.' It is the love that penetrates behind the mask. . . . It is empathy. . . . The reason can only act from self-interest, that is, subject to the inexorable will. Only empathy can create morality. This is to become the leading moral idea of the nineteenth-century vision" (174-75).



tives and in the power of the narrative itself to engage the reader's sympathy. Each of the Palliser novels contains an average of over a dozen references to "the reader." Rhetorical questions are nearly as frequent, with a slight decrease in the latest works. Whether these take the form of requests for the reader's sympathy or assumptions, justified or not, about what he is thinking, they all engage our attention in just what we are currently thinking or feeling in response to the text. They place the reader within the temporal world of the fiction and prod him out of passive observation by asking that he consider the work partially and as a process rather than as a fixed and ordered whole.<sup>3</sup>

The largest number of direct references to the reader are requests to remember incidents or situations previously described. Generally these promptings for the absent-minded are simply random—they could easily occur with greater or less frequency and do not reveal patterns of particularly significant incidents or signal any overall assumptions about what the reader would be likely to forget.<sup>4</sup> They implicitly suggest that the present must be viewed in reference to the past, that any isolated observation is incomplete out of context. Examination of the passages referring directly to "the reader" in *The Duke's Children*, last of the Palliser novels, reveals in nearly every case a reference to the extent or limits of knowledge shared by reader, narrator, and the characters: "She knew—the reader may possibly know—that nothing had ever been purer, nothing more disinterested than her friendship" (16);<sup>5</sup> "With what effect on another member of the Palliser family the reader already knows" (20); "As the reader is aware, nothing could have been more unjust" (43); "This, however, as the reader knows, was a fib" (155); "The reader knows all the rest" (618). The others are similar. When the reader and writer share identical data and have common memories, though these may all originate in the text itself, perhaps because they originate in the text itself, they can make the same movements from experience to sympathy or judgment.

Trollope's narrator occasionally interrupts the forward progress of his tale to refer to or discuss those artistic concerns which he faces as a "fictionist." In general, the intrusions amplify Trollope's thematic concern with truth by addressing the question of what it means to be honest and true when the matter at hand is a fiction. For Trollope to shape his fictional world to fit a more orderly or consistent pattern would have been inconsistent with his theory of the novel. He maintained that an author trying to prove a point would no longer be open to varieties of experience or concerned with the individual exception. In a lecture, "On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement," Trollope expressed his opinion on the distinction between true and false novels: "Truth and Untruth. . . consist

in the desire of the speaker or actor to reveal or to deceive. . . . A novelist is false who, in dealing with this or that phase of life, bolsters up by a theory of his own pictures which are in themselves untrue" (113).

The narrator has indeed given considerable thought to his own desires and motives. Most of his digressions on art reject ease and personal convenience to serve some more worthy ideal.<sup>6</sup> He must be faithful to the narrative both as a work of art and as a representation of reality. Many of the intrusions reveal the narrator in the role of chronicler or historian—reporting on lives over which he has no control; the narrator also explicitly describes himself in the role of novelist. To assume these distinct and somewhat contradictory positions in relation to the narrative should not be considered dishonest for artists, fictionists, present the truth by making it up. The author makes up the minds of the narrator, the characters, and the reader by a projection of his own moral consciousness. This is not a dishonest disregard of his human limitations; instead, it acknowledges like natures in others with whom he can know and feel. "We know that Rembrandt's matrons existed" (*The Last Chronicle of Barset* 890).

Of all the varieties of narrative intrusions to be found in Trollope's novels the most ambiguous, and probably for that reason the most revealing, are those which imply some limitation on the narrator's ability to know with certainty all there is to know about the inner and outer lives of the characters who populate the fictional world. The work of art must of course have some bounds, and in many cases we are told or can infer the principles which determine the fictionist-chronicler's selection of his material. Generally the narrator serves an ideal of truth and justice in the telling of the tale. The implied imperatives are those which compel him to reveal the good points in bad characters, the faults and weaknesses of the good. These intrusions emphasize the narrator's interest in the moral values and mixed motives of the characters while simultaneously expressing his own sense of moral responsibility and his awareness of his own complicated motivations, his temptations to excuse those characters for whom he asks our sympathy, to incriminate those he would have condemned. He often admits to a personal fondness for or repugnance from the individual personalities he describes. His struggle with his own motives takes on increasing significance as the narratives progress, for as the stories speak to us themselves, we see that neither our judgment of the characters, nor the narrator's, nor their judgment of one another matters so much as their judgment of themselves, their inner consciousness of honesty and truth. The narrator's care is taken not to facilitate our assessment of the characters but to complicate or qualify it. As Arabin declared in *Barchester Towers*, "We should hardly judge by what

3. Here and throughout my reading of Trollope's narrative technique derives from Wolfgang Iser's thesis that the novel mirrors empirical reality in order to involve the reader ultimately with his own world through that of the fiction. Iser insists that the reader's "active participation is fundamental to the novel," in *The Implied Reader* xi-xii. Trollope strongly suggests that the attentive and sympathetic reading of the text embodies the most appropriate and satisfying response to reading one's own experience as well. Iser further explains in *The Act of Reading* that "by characterizing this fictitious reader it is possible to reconstruct the public which the author wished to address" (33).

4. McMaster describes and evaluates Trollope's "tone of careful explanation." She maintains that his "solicitude and accommodation cannot but win the attention and loyalty of his hearers" (208).

5. As my texts throughout I have used The Oxford Trollope editions of the Barset and Palliser novels, general editors Michael Sadleir and Frederick Page (London: Oxford UP). All references appear in the text by volume number (in cases where the original issue was two volumes) and page.

6. *The Duke's Children* 69: "This rushing 'in medias res' has doubtless the charm of ease." *Can You Forgive Her?*, 1: 44: "I. . . should find such a course of writing convenient. But I dismiss the temptation. . . ."



we see. . . we see so very very little" (2: 232).

All of the Palliser novels express the limits of the narrator as to facts, the problem of seeing "so very very little." Throughout the series the narrator uses persistent patterns of speech which ambiguously suggest both judgment and doubt. All too often for it to be considered inadvertent, Trollope's narrator phrases his remarks in such a way that they must be read as *his* beliefs, intuitions, or conclusions rather than absolute statements of fact. They draw our attention to the narrator as an individual offering his personal view. The phrase "I think" becomes increasingly frequent as an explicit qualification of expressions of judgment or generalization. Even when superficially asserting the narrator's personal certainty, his remarks must often be acknowledged to imply the possibility of other views. "It is astonishing how much difference the point of view makes in the aspect of all that we look at" (*Barchester Towers*, 1: 242). Our subtle narrator, persistently concerned with being honest and true, uses language apparently quite casually but expresses overall a remarkably ambiguous relationship with the particulars of the narrative. We as readers become aware that the lack of certain knowledge is not the determining factor in whether we accept the narrative as true. As the wise Madame Goesler suggests to Phineas Finn, the truth of a narrative resides somewhere between the lines, at no point equivalent to the text itself: "Take the spirit of the lines, Mr. Finn, which is true; and not the tale as it is told, which is probably false" (*Phineas Finn*, 1: 147).<sup>7</sup> The narrator's qualification of his remarks convinces us that he is being honest with us, not pretending to greater assurance than he has. Expressions of doubt and uncertainty, an integral part of the rhetorical stance, appear with regularity—"It must have been the case," "It may be doubted whether. . .," "We may perhaps say. . .," and "No doubt."<sup>8</sup> The last has, ironically, about the same effect as the others in that it allows for the possibility that there might have been doubt. The narrator, in all honesty, *must* frequently confess to doubt of his own judgment. This kind of expression is then closely linked to those passages which insist that some qualification of judgment must be admitted or that the reader must be made aware of particular information and need not be concerned with other details.

Another characteristic tendency of Trollope's narrative technique is to blur or obscure the distinction between the presentation of a character's indirect discourse and the commentary interjected by the narrator. Trollope often subtly shifts his focus from one character's mental process to that character's projection of another's thoughts and the limits or deficiencies of the projection.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, only by very careful reading can we keep a sense of the subjectivity or objectivity of any particular passage. In the Palliser series we can observe the increasingly close contact between the minds of the characters and the mind of the narrator by examining what is *not* the narrator's commentary—specifically, those passages expressing opinions or judgments which might be read as the comments of the narrator but are in fact or reasonable probability the ideas of the characters themselves. The uncertainty results from

a peculiar characteristic of this narrator's style. Internal discourse, narrated directly or indirectly, he often identifies as the thoughts of a character only after it has been presented. On first reading these passages, we all too easily assume they are the judgments of the narrator rather than reflections of the characters. Moreover, indirect discourse and the commentary of the narrator become especially difficult to distinguish where the two merge and separate within paragraphs and even within sentences. The majority of the following passage is Alice Vavasor's inner dialogue:

Alice felt the blood mount into her face, and regretted greatly that she had ever come among these people. Had she not long since made up her mind that she would avoid her great relations, and did not all this prove that it would have been well for her to have clung to that resolution? What was Lady Glencora to her that she should submit herself to be treated as though she were a poor companion,—a dependent, who received a salary for her attendance,—an indigent cousin, hanging on to the bounty of her rich connection? Alice was proud to a fault. She had nursed her pride till it was very faulty. All her troubles and sorrows in life had come from an overfed craving for independence. Why, then, should she submit to it from such a one as Mr. Palliser,—the heir of a ducal house, rolling in wealth, and magnificent with all the magnificence of British pomp and pride? No; she would make Lady Glencora understand that the close intimacies of daily life were not possible to them! (*Can You Forgive Her?* 2: 31-32)

Because the passage is not pure indirect discourse, because it is interrupted, though only briefly, for the narrator's conclusion ("Alice was proud to a fault" etc. . . .), we are left with an impression of the commentator's presence but not a sense of distance or detachment. His statements, though critical, are intimately twined with the specific fluctuations of the character's moral consciousness in action.

In the final novels of the Palliser series the shifts between the voice of the narrator and those of the highly self-conscious and self-critical characters are often almost impossible to discern. In the following passage from *The Duke's Children* not only does the narrator respond to and comment on the ideas of Plantagenet Palliser, but Palliser seems to respond to the judgments of the narrator within his own inner monologue:

The Duke could remember well how a certain old Lady Midlothian had first hinted to him that Lady Glencora's property was very large, and had then added that the young lady herself was very beautiful. And he could remember how his uncle, the late Duke, who had seldom taken much trouble in merely human affairs, had said a word or two—"I have heard a whisper about you and Lady Glencora McCloskie, nothing could be better." The result had been undoubtedly good. His Cora and all her money had been saved from a worthless spend-thrift. He had found a wife who he now thought had made him happy. And she had found at any rate a respectable husband. The idea when picked to pieces is not a nice idea. "Let us look out for a husband for this girl, so that we may get her married,—out of the way of her lover." It is not nice. But it had succeeded in one case, and why should it not succeed in another? (*The Duke's Children* 189)

7. "It mattered but little that he was wrong in all his details. Narrations always are" (*The Duke's Children* 497).

8. See, for example, *Phineas Finn* 1: 215; *The Prime Minister* 1: 215, 221

and 2: 188; and *The Duke's Children* 515.

9. Overton analyzes a passage which exemplifies this characteristic of Trollope's technique (491ff).



The phrase "he now thought" describing Palliser's current attitude toward his past relationship with Glencora could be considered either his own or the interjection of the narrator for it is consistent with the views of both as expressed elsewhere in the novel. The undoubted "good" which came of their marriage is not an insistence on the perfection of the marriage but simply the assertion that it was better than the other actual alternatives. But when the verbs shift to the present tense and a judgment is made, the reader can detect a different voice: "The idea when picked to pieces is not a nice idea. . . . It is not nice." This seems to be the narrator, though Palliser might well be capable of such self-criticism. The final sentence of the passage, introduced by "but," responds to or, at least, acknowledges the criticism. The interrogative mood links this last sentence to the subsequent paragraphs, which are clearly intended as the Duke's self-questioning. The segment of the passage which declares that "it is not a nice idea" seems to me to be the intrusion of the narrator, but he has positioned himself so deeply within the mind of the character that he speaks as if he were a conscience—not the conscience of the society or a communal voice, but a voice so closely identified with the specific character and his individual situation that he can function as part of the internal debate of Palliser's moral consciousness. A remarkable degree of sympathy is demonstrated here simultaneously with judgment.

One final passage should be considered by which it can be shown that the reader of the late novels who hopes to divide narrative commentary from the objective presentation of these characters' thoughts must be driven to despair. Plantagenet Palliser, now Prime Minister, protests against Glencora's lavish entertainments at Omnium to rally support for the coalition ministry:

" . . . it distresses me to think that what might have been good enough for our friends before should be thought to be insufficient because of the office I hold. There is a—a—I was almost going to say vulgarity about it which distresses me."

"Vulgarity!" she exclaimed, jumping up from her sofa.

"I retract the word. I would not for the world say anything that should annoy you;—but pray, pray do not go on with it." Then he left her.

Vulgarity! There was no other word in the language so hard to bear as that. He had, indeed, been careful to say that he did not accuse her of vulgarity,—but nevertheless the accusation had been made. Could you call your friend a liar more plainly than by saying to him that you would not say that he lied? They dined together, the two boys, also, dining with them, but very little was said at dinner. (*The Prime Minister*, 1: 177)

Several sentences of reflection follow the dialogue, but who is reflecting, Glencora or the narrator? The paragraph proceeds to reveal an interior view of Palliser's mind, and we could even infer that the final paragraph of the passage considered here might be equally well read as his thoughts. The rhetorical question suggests both the typical manner by which Trollope presents the characters' inner discourse and the characteristic style of the narrator's intrusions. Perhaps readers are not expected to attribute this passage to a specific source. Instead we might conclude that the narrator's sympathy with the characters is an enabling power which diminishes the isolation of the private mind and extends the limitations of point of view. The

narrator participates in their virtues and vices, their joys and their sorrows. The reader, drawn into the text as a companion of the narrator, finds himself engaged in the fictional world to the extent that there is no way out. The narrator, the link between the actual and the fictional worlds, has merged with the fiction. Rarely, of course, does this effect extend for more than a few paragraphs. The borders between life and art are soon clarified, but in the clarification I think the reader feels that much is lost. That sense of sympathetic communion which Trollope manages, though but for a moment, to establish between reader, narrator, and character breaks down the isolation of the individual consciousness.

The intertwining of the sensibilities and the intelligence of the narrator and the characters found in Trollope's later novels generally proceeds from his attention to characters who have themselves deeper awareness of moral complexities and his employment of a narrative technique which shifts elusively between narrative commentary and internal discourse. A striking demonstration of the merging of narrator and character can also be perceived when Mrs. Finn, the former Madame Max Goesler, explains to her husband, Phineas, the importance of being the careful, attentive, and sympathetic reader whom the narrator has persistently endeavored to create. Their dialogue occurs in chapter 62 of *The Prime Minister*: "Phineas Finn has a book to read." The book in question is the Prime Minister, Plantagenet Palliser, who now becomes simultaneously the text and a character within the text.

The first lesson that Mrs. Finn imparts to her husband is the inadequacy of general rules for the individual case. Phineas says, "It was a moment in which the man might, for the moment, have been cordial." She replies, "It was not a moment for *his* cordiality" (2: 210-11, italics mine). Next she demonstrates the way in which truth can be effectively expressed in figurative language: "The Duchess says that if you want to get a really genial smile from him you must talk to him about cork soles. I know exactly what she means. He loves to be simple, but he does not know how to show people that he likes it" (2: 211). Then Mrs. Finn points out the importance of evaluating the point of view from which the subject is seen. Mr. Finn insists: "Warburton clearly thinks he [the Duke] will be offended, and Warburton, I suppose, knows his mind" (2: 211). She responds, "I don't see why he should. I have been reading it longer, and I still find it very difficult. Lady Glen has been at the work for the last fifteen years, and sometimes owns that there are passages she has not mastered yet" (2: 211). The task of "reading" the minds of others, like "making up" the mind, is of necessity a life-long work. Mrs. and Mr. Finn next jointly demonstrate the possibilities of compressed and allusive communication for readers who have a familiar experience of many human (or literary—here the words seem interchangeable) texts by their allusions to Sir Bayard and Don Quixote (2: 211).

Phineas' subsequent experience with the Duke proves his wife's facility as a sympathetic and attentive reader and improves his own capacity for interpreting and appreciating the text: "Phineas. . . thought that he had succeeded in mastering one of the difficult passages in that book [the Prime Minister]" (2: 213). Phineas' recognition that he has mastered only a "passage" indicates his awareness that there remains still more



reading to do before reaching any conclusion. It should be clear that the purpose of this "reading" is not judgment but knowledge and understanding, whereby the reader can then regulate his own conduct conscientiously, by knowing *with* another.

J. Hillis Miller maintains that for the Victorian novelists the writing of a novel was "a way of escaping from isolation" (67). Trollope's narrative technique demonstrates how the painful isolation of the individual moral consciousness can be overcome by both writer and reader. The narrator provides a model whereby the examination of one's own motives enables the imaginative interpenetration of another consciousness and sympathetic identification with others, while reminding us that this "making up" of other minds, for an honest fictionist, must remain tentative, uncertain, and inconclusive.

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## A New Perspective: Naturalism in George Moore's *A Mummer's Wife*

Judith Mitchell

I invented adultery, which didn't exist in the English novel till I began writing. . . .

George Moore in a recorded conversation in the unpublished notes of Mr. Barrett H. Clark (qtd in Hone 373)

When *A Mummer's Wife* appeared in 1885, any critical acclaim it received was largely in the form of backhanded compliments. The *Athenaeum* somewhat acidly remarked that "It is on the whole remarkably free from the element of uncleanness" ("*A Mummer's Wife*" 767), the *Saturday Review* commented that "In *A Mummer's Wife* [Moore] attempts to be as offensive as the master [Zola] himself. . . . But . . . Mr. Moore is only curious and disgusting" ("*A Mummer's Wife*" 214) and Bernard Shaw, when told that Moore had written a wonderful new naturalistic novel, is reported to have said, "Nonsense! But I know George Moore. He couldn't possibly write a real book" (Morgan 16).

Moore's second novel remains largely unnoticed and unappreciated. Most readers who are familiar with it will probably have heard of it in connection with the demise of the Victorian three-volume novel, a literary event of some importance in the late nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

*A Mummer's Wife* was important for more than the part it played in this controversy, however. In his Foreword to the 1966 Liveright edition of the novel, Walter Miller asserts that "Just as 1492 connotes the opening of the New World, so 1885

signifies the beginning of modern English literature. One of the main reasons is that *A Mummer's Wife* was published in that year. With this experimental novel, George Moore introduced French naturalist techniques into English fiction, dealt a telling blow to Victorian aesthetics, got up momentum for other experiments that helped shape today's art, and secured for himself a permanent place among our leading novelists" (v). While these claims for the novel's importance may be slightly extravagant (it was *Esther Waters*, if any novel, which secured Moore his "place" among English novelists), other critics have agreed that in some sense *A Mummer's Wife* is the first, and possibly the only, naturalistic novel ever written in English.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly in 1885, despite his enthusiastic review of the symbolist *À Rebours* in 1884, Moore was still an avowed disciple of Zola, to whom he had been introduced by Manet at a *L'Assommoir* ball (to which Moore went dressed as Coupeau) in 1890. His laudatory preface to the English edition of *Pot-Bouille* appeared in the same year as *A Mummer's Wife*, and when he was writing his own novel, according to Hone, he wrote to Zola with high expectations: "If I succeed, as I expect, in digging a dagger into the heart of the sentimental school, I shall have hopes of bringing about a change in the literature of my country—of being in fact Zola's offshoot in England (*d'être enfin un ricocher de Zola en Angleterre*)" (qtd in Hone 101). Moore did not quite succeed in these ambitious aims, or at least not immediately—not even the considerably modified "English" version of naturalism became popular in

1. Moore's part in the debate over the censorship of the lending libraries is outlined by W.C. Frierson, Clarence Decker and Joseph Hone, among others. Briefly, after Smith's and Mudie's banned *A Modern Lover*, Moore persuaded Henry Vizetelly to publish *A Mummer's Wife* in a cheap one-volume edition and to make it available to the public at an affordable price (ten shillings). Other novelists and publishers followed suit, breaking

Smith's and Mudie's monopoly.

2. Milton Chaikin refers to *A Mummer's Wife* as "the first naturalistic novel in English fiction," and also as "the first and last naturalistic novel [Moore] wrote" (31, 39); Enid Starkie calls it "the first completely Naturalistic novel in English" (66); and Walter Allen calls Moore "the only English Naturalist in the French sense" (298).

England until the 1890's—but he certainly helped to lay the groundwork for new freedom of expression in the English novel.

The question of influence is particularly instructive in regard to *A Mummer's Wife*. Contemporary as well as modern critics have tended to see it as a "French" rather than an "English" novel; Henry James said that it seemed to be "thought in French and inadequately translated" (qtd in Moore, *Avowals* 185), and Stuart Sherman called it "a kind of English 'transposition' of *Madame Bovary*, flavored with a handful of something of Zola's" (134). Milton Chaikin (who reduces it to "very many bits culled from . . . Zola's novels") calls *A Mummer's Wife* "a book written according to a formula" (30), and Douglas Hughes likewise sees Moore "loosely following Zola's fictional formula" (xi) in his second novel. Perhaps most tellingly, Zola himself seems to provide indisputable evidence that Moore followed the naturalistic formula in the composition of *A Mummer's Wife*. In "Du roman" he outlines the following case:

Suppose that one of our naturalistic novelists wishes to write a novel on theatrical life. He sets out with this general idea, without having as yet a single fact or a single character. His first care is to gather together in his notes all that he knows of this world which he wishes to depict. He has known such and such an actor, he has witnessed such and such a play. Here are data already, the best, for they have ripened within himself. Then he will set about the business, he will get the men who are the best informed on the subject talking, he will collect their expressions, their stories, and their portraits. That is not all; he then turns to written documents, reading up all that he thinks will be of the slightest service to him. Finally he visits the places, lives a few days in the theatre. (211)

As Jean C. Noël points out, "Ne dirait-on pas que c'est lui [Moore] que Zola avait décrit" (101) in this passage.

This account parallels almost exactly Moore's description in *A Communication to My Friends* of his research for *A Mummer's Wife*. After Vizetelly advised him to document an ugly town, "the uglier the better," for the setting of his next novel, Moore set out to gather information. He chose Hanley (later adopted by Arnold Bennett as the setting for his novels of the Five Towns), in addition to a theatrical milieu. Notebook in hand, in true Zolaesque fashion, Moore went touring with the second company of *Les Cloches de Corneville*, visiting Hanley as well as other factory towns.

The naturalism of *A Mummer's Wife*—undoubtedly its most interesting and significant quality—will figure largely in my analysis of the novel in this paper. I shall argue that *A Mummer's Wife* is no mere French copy; that Moore modified the naturalistic formula in this novel in ways that are more subtle and complex than has generally been supposed; and that he wrote an amazingly strong novel in the process, a novel which even more than *A Drama in Muslin* and *Esther Waters* has been overlooked by literary historians. In fact, Moore's modifications of the naturalistic formula constituted improvements on it, resulting in a kind of enhanced realism. Miller speaks of Moore "surpass[ing] the requirements of naturalism, without in any way violating them" (vii), and William Newton asserts

that "it is quite possible to find in his novels up through *Esther Waters* almost every trait of naturalism, frequently in purer form than in the pages of the master [Zola] himself" (165). I shall attempt to show in what sense these assertions are true of *A Mummer's Wife*, and how in this supposed "copy" of French naturalistic novels Moore added something immensely vital to the English novel of the time.

The two novels generally acknowledged as the French sources for *A Mummer's Wife* provide a good starting point for my study. Douglas Hughes speaks confidently of "its obvious debt to Zola's *L'Assommoir* and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*" (xii), and I shall deal with the latter influence first, as it is the more significant. In an article entitled "Flaubert, Miss Braddon, and George Moore," C. Heywood in 1960 argued that Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* (1864) was not only "the earliest borrowing from Flaubert in English literature" but also "a major source of *A Mummer's Wife*" (151). "Though Moore was . . . familiar with Flaubert's novel by this date," says Heywood, "several aspects of his own novel which have till now been taken as borrowings from Flaubert derive in fact from Miss Braddon" (157). This article is extremely interesting, not because of the accuracy of Heywood's claims, but because it points to a novel which is in fact what Sherman accused *A Mummer's Wife* of being: an English "transposition" of *Madame Bovary*. As such, *The Doctor's Wife* provides an excellent point of reference for a study of the naturalism of *A Mummer's Wife*; if Isabel Sleaford (Miss Braddon's heroine) is an English Emma Bovary, what is Kate Ede? The distance between Flaubert's novel and Miss Braddon's is a convenient gauge for measuring the extent to which *A Mummer's Wife* achieves a complex transference of the principles of one conception of the novel into the traditions of another.

To begin with, it is certain that Moore read *The Doctor's Wife*, to which he refers in *Avowals* as "a derivative *Madame Bovary*" (128). In addition, as Heywood points out, Kate's favorite novel, the "one story that . . . caused her deeper emotions than perhaps even the others had done"<sup>3</sup> bears a much closer resemblance to *The Doctor's Wife* than to Flaubert's novel:

It concerned a beautiful young woman with a lovely oval face, who was married to a very tiresome country doctor. This lady was in the habit of reading Byron and Shelley in a rich, sweet-scented meadow, down by the river which flowed dreamily through smiling pasture-lands adorned by spreading trees. But this meadow belonged to a young squire, a superb man with grand, broad shoulders, who day after day used to watch these readings by the river, without, however, venturing to address a word to the fair trespasser. One day, however, he was startled by a shriek; in her poetical dreamings the lady had slipped into the water. A moment sufficed to tear off his coat, and as he swam like a water-dog, he had no difficulty in rescuing her. After this adventure he had, of course, to call and inquire, and from henceforth his visits grew more and more frequent, and by a strange coincidence, he used generally to come riding up to the hall-door when the husband was away curing the ills of the country folk. Hours never to be forgotten were passed under the trees by the river, he pleading his cause, and she refusing to leave poor Arthur—he was too good a fellow. Heart-broken, at last the

3. Moore, *A Mummer's Wife* (38). This edition is a reprint of the 1886 Vizetelly edition (Moore's first revision of the novel).



squire gave up the pursuit, and went to foreign parts, where he waited thirty years until he heard Arthur was dead. Then he came back with a light heart to his first and only love, who had never ceased to think of him, and lived with her happily forever afterwards. (38-39)

This—more or less—outlines the plot of *The Doctor's Wife*, with the exception of Moore's fanciful additions of the lady's fall into the water and the happily-ever-after ending.

The plot of the real *Doctor's Wife*, however, is just as melodramatic as Moore's version. It begins, like *Madame Bovary*, with a rather foolish young heroine who satisfies her vague romantic yearnings by reading novels. Like Emma, Isabel Sleaford marries a kind but dull young country doctor, with whom she is increasingly bored and dissatisfied. Also like Emma, Isabel is attracted to someone outside the marriage (the young neighboring squire returned from abroad, Roland Lansdell)—but there the similarity ends. As soon as Roland proposes to Isabel that they run away together, the novel turns into a conventional and predictable Victorian melodrama: Isabel renounces him and resolves to be "good"; he pines miserably for her; her blackguard father haunts the neighborhood asking for money and threatening to kill Roland, who once testified against him; Isabel's husband catches a fever from his country patients. Roland is fatally assaulted by Isabel's father, and both men die nobly within a few days of each other; and Isabel is left in the end sadder but wiser, and doing good works for the poor with Roland's fortune, which he bequeaths to her on his deathbed.

From Flaubert's initial situation, then, Miss Braddon deviates widely, in ways that are characteristically Victorian. Her heroine is "not a wicked woman; she was only very foolish" (2:226). More specifically, Isabel's romantic inclinations lead her away from, rather than towards, a sexual liaison; the biggest disappointment in her life is the shattering of her ideals when Roland asks her to elope. She says,

"I never thought that you would ask me to be more to you than I am now: I never thought that it was wicked to come here and meet you. I have read of people, who by some fatality could never marry, loving each other, and being true to others for years and years—till death, sometimes; and I fancied that you loved me like that; and the thought of your love made me so happy; and it was such happiness to see you sometimes, and to think of you afterwards, remembering every word you had said, and seeing your face as plainly as I see it now. I thought, till yesterday, that this might go on for ever, and never, never believed that you would think me like those wicked women who run away from their husbands." (2:98)

After this bitter lesson, "Isabel Gilbert was a woman all at once" (2:104) and develops in maturity and understanding from this point until the end of the novel.

In essence, *The Doctor's Wife* is a tract against the evils of excessive romanticism. The narrator, omniscient and very much in evidence, points out that Isabel in reading so many novels lived "as much alone as if she had resided in a balloon, for ever suspended in mid air, and never coming down in serious earnest to the common joys and sorrows of the vulgar life about her" (1:38). Such personal moral lessons, of course, derived from the experience of the main character and enun-

ciated by an omniscient narrator, were a salient characteristic of the Victorian novel.

In addition, the narrator in *A Doctor's Wife* has a wide moral sympathy for her characters. Isabel's conduct is excused because "She only wanted the vague poetry of life, the mystic beauty of romance infused somehow into her existence; and she was as yet too young to understand that latent element of poetry which underlies the commonest life" (2:227). Even Roland, who initially appears to be a villain, is categorized by the narrator as "a benevolently-disposed young man, desirous of doing as little mischief in the world as might be compatible with his being tolerably happy himself; and fully believing that no great or irreparable harm need result from his appropriation of another man's wife" (2:105).

Finally, *A Doctor's Wife* has none of the pessimism of *Madame Bovary*. Indeed, part of the novel's point about novel-reading is made through the narrator "poking fun" at Isabel in an exceedingly good-humored way. Early in the novel we are told that

She wanted her life to be like her books; she wanted to be a heroine,—unhappy perhaps, and dying early. She had an especial desire to die early, by consumption, with a hectic flush and unnatural lustre in her eyes. She fancied every time she had a little cough that the consumption was coming, and she began to pose herself, and was gently melancholy to her half-brothers, and told them one by one, in confidence, that she did not think she should be with them long. They were slow to understand the drift of her remarks, and would ask her if she was going out as a governess; and, if she took the trouble to explain her dismal meaning, were apt to destroy the sentiment of the situation by saying, "Oh, come now, Hookee Walker... Who eat a plum-dumpling yesterday for dinner, and asked for more? That's the only sort of consumption you've got, Izzie; two helps of pudding at dinner, and no end of bread-and-butter for breakfast." (1:36-37)

This sounds more like Dickens than Flaubert, and it is obvious that *The Doctor's Wife* has undergone so many Victorian transformations that it bears very little resemblance at all to its predecessor.

It is particularly fortunate for the purposes of my inquiry that the novel Miss Braddon chose to "Anglicize" in this way was the novel in which the very roots of naturalism had their being. In Flaubert's letters may be found all of the key principles of naturalism—the impersonality of the author, the adoption of the methods of the natural sciences, the absence of "morality," the depiction of unexceptional characters—and in *Madame Bovary* is the prototype for two other novels which are acknowledged to be the first naturalistic novels: the Goncourts' *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865) and Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867). Matthew Josephson says of *Germinie* that "The whole thesis of *Bovary* was here, dominant, as it was forever afterward in the realistic masterpieces: a given personality, conceived as a unit in a mass, pitted against its environment, the milieu into which it is born" (92). Zola reviewed this "clinic of Love" (Goncourt, "Preface" v) with enthusiasm, pointing out in particular its air of scientific experiment and its freedom from moral constraints in expressing "reality" so frankly. Zola was undoubtedly influenced by both *Madame Bovary* and *Germinie Lacerteux*; as Auerbach points out, he "is twenty years younger

than the generation of Flaubert and the Goncourts. There are connections between him and them; he is influenced by them; he stands on their shoulders. . . ." (447). Zola's own *Thérèse Raquin* is also a "clinic of Love" and the official beginning of naturalism. These three novels—*Madame Bovary*, *Germinie Lacerteux*, and *Thérèse Raquin*—will form the matrix of naturalist characteristics at the opposite end of the scale from *The Doctor's Wife*, and it is against this scale that I will set Moore's *A Mummer's Wife*.

The issue of sex, which marks the widest division between *The Doctor's Wife* and its French counterparts (and, indeed, between the naturalist and Victorian conceptions of the novel), constituted one of the main reasons for the banning of *A Mummer's Wife* by Smith's and Mudie's. Of Moore's boast that he had "invented adultery" in the English novel, Granville Hicks remarks that "He was not . . . far wrong. Gissing's women . . . are incapable of passion. Moore, whether or not he had the profound insight into feminine psychology of which he boasted, at least was courageous enough to record certain elementary observations. There is not only adultery in *A Modern Lover*; there is sufficient passion to make the adultery plausible" (205). I would like to qualify Hicks's (and Moore's) views slightly by adding that although Moore may have in some sense "invented adultery," it was only in the Victorian novel (the English novel in the eighteenth century contained plenty of adultery) and that this "invention" occurred in *A Mummer's Wife* rather than in *A Modern Lover*. There is passion in the latter novel, as Hicks suggests, but only on the part of the women, the minor characters; Lewis Seymour, the hero, remains cheerfully self-indulgent rather than passionate.

Kate Ede, the Hanley dressmaker who is the heroine of *A Mummer's Wife*, is at the beginning of Moore's novel in precisely the same situation as Isabel Sleaford, Emma Bovary, and Thérèse Raquin. She is married to an unattractive husband, the asthmatic Ralph, and dominated by her religious mother-in-law. She is romantically inclined, and becomes attracted to her boarder Dick Lennox, the manager of Morton and Cox's Theatrical Company. At this point, however, the turn of events in *A Mummer's Wife* differs widely—and significantly—from those in Braddon's novel as well as from those in the French naturalistic novels.

Isabel, as I have pointed out, renounces her "lover," having learned her lesson. It is noteworthy (and slightly implausible) that there is absolutely no sexuality at all in *The Doctor's Wife*. Although Isabel is excessively romantic, and deeply in love with Roland, her fantasies all have to do with goodness, in the form of heroic renunciations, noble deaths and unrequited love. In fact, she is a "pure" Victorian heroine who, when confronted with the option of leaving her husband for her lover, is properly aghast ("Not for one moment did the Doctor's Wife contemplate the possibility of taking the step which Roland Lansdell had proposed to her. . . . The possibility of deliberately leaving her husband to follow the footsteps of this other man, was as far beyond her power of comprehension as the possibility that she might steal a handful of arsenic out of one of the earthenware jars in the surgery and mix it with the sugar that sweetened

George Gilbert's matutinal coffee" (2:102-03). This, complete with the allusion to the handful of arsenic, is obviously what Miss Braddon feels to be a necessary corrective to *Madame Bovary*. In any case, there is no question of adultery in *The Doctor's Wife*; Isabel is simply too pure to sully her hands or even her mind with such notions.

All three French novels, on the other hand, contain an abundance of adultery. Emma takes two lovers, first Rodolphe and then Léon, and Thérèse takes Laurent. What is noteworthy is that in all three heroines sex is a passion amounting to an illness or obsession, an animal need unadorned by "love" except in an inflamed, unhealthy sense. All three degrade themselves sexually: Germinie has a secret life of excesses with strangers, Thérèse is talked into murdering her husband, and Emma, as Henry James points out, "remains absorbed in romantic intention and vision while fairly rolling in the dust" (347).

Between these extremes of the complete absence of sexual desire and sexual desire bordering on mania, is Moore's Kate Ede. Her romanticism, evident from the very first scene of the novel in which she sees Ralph's suffering as "noble," is described in the following way:

She accepted Ralph as unsuspectingly as she had before accepted the tawdry poetry of her favourite fiction. Her nature not being a passionate one, she was able to do this without any apparent transition of sentiment. . . . She accepted her husband's kisses as she did the toil he imposed on her—meekly, unaffectedly, as a matter of course. Apparently she had known all through that the romances which used so strongly to fascinate her were merely idle dreams, having no bearing upon the daily life of human beings—things fit to amuse a young girl's fancies, and to be thrown aside when the real cares of life were entered upon. (40)

Kate's nature is "not a passionate one," unlike either Isabel's or Emma's; Moore avoids both the extreme idealism of the former and the extreme sensualism of the latter. Also, Kate does not have either Isabel's condescension or Emma's active dislike for her husband. In fact, we are told that

Had he been a little kinder he would have satisfied her. Her dreams did not fly high, and now as she sat by him, holding his clammy hand, she thought she would have felt happy were she sure of even so much affection. A little love would have made her life so much pleasanter. It did not matter who gave it; she sighed for a little, ever so little. (20)

As Richard Cave remarks, "Unlike Emma Bovary, Kate seeks no Byronic tempests of the emotions but only tenderness, comfort and security"<sup>4</sup> It is mainly Dick's kindness and humanity, for instance, which draw Kate to him:

The man was coarse, large, sensual, even as is a mutton chop. But each movement of his fat hands was protective, every word he uttered was kind, the very intonation of his voice was comforting. He was in a word, human, and this attracted all that was human in you. The intelligence counted for nothing; his charm lay in his humanity. (67)

4. Cave (41). Peter Ure agrees that Kate is motivated not by passion, but by "slack-bodied" sentimentality (92).



This is not to say that there is no sexual attraction between Kate and Dick, however. When she takes his breakfast to him, we are told that "Kate could not choose but like him, and it made her wish all the more that he would cover up his big, bare neck. . . . There was something very human in this big man, and Kate did not know whether his animalism irritated or pleased her" (42-43). Dick's "big, bare neck" and his healthy "animalism" are obviously attractive to Kate, especially in contrast with Ralph, who, even when he is well, is seen "picking . . . a bad tooth with a hairpin taken from the drawers" (80).

The love-episode between Kate and Dick that was objected to most strongly by the libraries seems relatively innocuous by modern standards. Kate has gone downstairs to open the door for Dick, who is still her boarder at this point. After a short conversation, the following occurs:

They could not see each other. After a long silence she said, "We must not stop talking here. Mrs. Ede sleeps, you know, in the room at the back of the work-room, and she might hear us."

"Then come into the sitting-room," said Dick, taking her hands and drawing her towards him.

"Oh, I cannot!"

"I love you better than anyone in world."

"No, no; why should you love me?"

Although she could not see his face, she felt his breath on her neck. Strong arms were wound about her, she was carried forward, and the door was shut behind her.

Only the faintest gleam of starlight touched the wall next to the window; the darkness slept profoundly on the landing and staircase; and when the silence was again broken, a voice was heard saying, "Oh, you shouldn't have done this! What shall I tell my husband if he asks me where I've been?"

"Say you have been talking to me about my bill, dear. I'll see you in the morning."<sup>5</sup>

This is definitely adultery; however muted and suppressed, there is no doubt that a sexual encounter between a married woman and a man who is not her husband is going on behind the closed door. However tame and conventional it may seem in comparison to the lingering image of the coach crazily whirling with the insatiable Emma and Léon inside, the fact remains that the doctor's wife would never have considered any such thing, even for a moment.

Kate and Dick have passion, then, but not very much. Without this scene their lovemaking consists of a couple of stolen kisses and the following curious description, which occurs just after they have eloped:

The morning hours were especially delightful. Immediately on getting out of bed she went into the sitting-room to see after Dick's breakfast. It was laid out on a round table, the one white tint in the rose twilight of the half-drawn blinds. Masses of Virginia creeper, now weary of the summer and ready to fall with the first October winds, grew into the room, and the two armchairs drawn up by the quietly burning fire seemed, like all the rest, to inspire indolence. Kate lingered settling and dusting little rickety ornaments, tempted at once by the freshness of her dressing-gown and the soothing warmth of the room. It penetrated her with sensations of happiness too acute to be durable, and as they mounted to her

head in a sort of effervescent reverie, she would walk forwards to the folding doors to talk to Dick of—it did not matter what—it was for the mere sound of his voice that she came; and, in default of anything better to say, she would upbraid him for his laziness. The room, full of the intimacy of their life, enchanted her, and half in shame, half in delight, she would affect to arrange the pillows while he buttoned his collar. When this was accomplished she led him triumphantly to the breakfast table, and with one arm resting on his knees, watched the white shapes of the eggs seen through the bubbling water. (158)

The thing that is "curious" about this scene is that its atmosphere is domestic rather than erotic. The quietly burning fire, the freshness of Kate's dressing gown, the sweet delight of the lovers, the homeliness of the boiling eggs, all create the ambiance of a typical "young newlyweds" scene in a Victorian novel. In fact, even though Kate and Dick have only recently run away together, they seem "married." This is an important point for two reasons. First of all, the narrator through such scenes appears to condone the elopement, a highly unusual attitude in the Victorian novel at this time. The first of the "New Woman" novels which sanctioned love outside of marriage were not written until the eighteen-nineties, and *Jude the Obscure* was not published until ten years after the publication of *A Mummer's Wife*. In this respect, at least, Moore succeeded in "digging a dagger into the heart of the sentimental school," and it is in this tacit approval (or lack of disapproval) of Kate's elopement that he can really be said, I think, to have "invented adultery" in the English novel of the time.

The other reason that Kate's and Dick's instant domesticity is interesting is because, given the conventions of the Victorian novel, this was the only way in which Moore *could* indicate the narrator's approval of their liaison. Any other approach (such as the frank portrayal of their sexual enjoyment of each other) would have been regarded as outright pornography. Ian Watt's observation about the nature of courtly love in French and English fiction is extremely pertinent at this juncture:

Gradually, however, the code of romantic love began to accommodate itself to religious, social, and psychological reality, notably to marriage and the family. This process seems to have occurred particularly early in England, and the new ideology which eventually came into being there does much to explain both the rise of the novel and the distinctive difference between the English and French traditions in fiction. Denis de Rougemont, in his study of the development of romantic love, writes of the French novel that "to judge by its literature, adultery would seem to be one of the most characteristic occupations of Western man." Not so in England, where the break with the originally adulterous character of courtly love was so complete that George Moore was almost justified in claiming to have "invented adultery, which didn't exist in the English novel till I began writing." (154)

Moore was "almost" justified indeed; the fact that Kate and Dick are actually married shortly after the scene I have described further ensures that the amount of "adultery" in the novel is kept to a minimum.

In playing down Kate's passion and yet allowing her to run away with her lover, Moore creates a scenario that is consid-

5. Qtd in Moore, *Literature at Nurse* 6-7. (Omitted from the published text.)

erably less sensational (and more realistic) than either Miss Braddon's or Flaubert's. Kate herself is similarly pedestrian, as I have noted. Flaubert himself called Emma a "naturally corrupt woman,"<sup>6</sup> and Isabel is a sort of purified Emma—purified, however, beyond the point of credibility. Kate is neither excessively good nor excessively bad, but merely weak, as the narrator tells us:

She was not strong nor great, nor was she conscious of any deep feeling that if she acted otherwise than she did she would be living an unworthy life. She was merely good because she was a kind-hearted woman, without bad impulses, and admirably suited to the life she was leading. (38)

And, just as Kate's nature does not run to extremes, neither do the characters of the men she is involved with. Isabel's husband and lover are both finally portrayed as heroes, as I have noted, while the male characters in the French novels are an extraordinary group: Emma's husband is a clown, Thérèse's is a sickly, despicable weakling, and Germinie's fiancé will not even marry her; and the lovers of all three women are brutal cads. "Extraordinary" is not a word that could be applied either to Kate's husband or to her lover. Ralph is harmless, if he is not entirely likeable, and Dick is kind and jolly but certainly neither a hero nor a villain. Their ordinariness, in fact, makes Moore's characters seem closer to the everyday norm of "real life" than either the French or the English versions, and in this instance Moore's "slice of life" seems more authentic than that served up by Zola himself.

Apart from its alleged sexual explicitness, the other reason *A Mummer's Wife* was banned by the libraries was because of its "foulness": "It is, we know," said the critic for the *Saturday Review*, "a foolish thing to wash one's foul linen in public. How much more foolish it is to spread out and sort one's foul linen in public, not to wash it, but merely to demonstrate how foul it is" ("*A Mummer's Wife*" 215). The details surrounding Kate's alcoholism, in particular, are highly unpleasant. Moore's source for this part of the novel (the final third) is said to be Zola's *L'Assommoir*, but I think that the drunkenness in that novel is rather more incidental than in *A Mummer's Wife*. Gervaise and Coupeau are victims primarily of indolence, ignorance and poverty, whereas Kate is a true alcoholic, obsessed, finally, with her need for drink. As Lilian Furst points out, "Both [Kate and Gervaise] indeed die of alcoholism—but surely such thematic parallelism cannot be accepted as proof of influence" (140). (The same point, I would argue, could be made as to the influence of *Nana* on the theatrical milieu in *A Mummer's Wife*.)

After Kate runs away with Dick, she becomes a successful actress and a happily married woman. "As the days passed," we are told,

Kate grew happier, until she began to think she must be the happiest woman living. Her life had now an occupation, and no hour that went pressed upon her heavier than would a butterfly's wing. The mornings had always been delightful; Dick was with her then, and the afternoons had been taken up with her musical studies. It was the long evenings she used to dread; now they had become part

and parcel of her daily pleasures. They dined about four, and when dinner was over it was time to talk about what kind of house they were going to have, to fidget about in search of brushes and combs, the curling-tongs, and to consider what little necessaries she had better bring down to the theatre with her. (182)

At this point, no further comparison with either *The Doctor's Wife* or the naturalist "clinical studies of love" seems possible. A simple plot-reversal has seemingly occurred: the adultery between the ordinary seamstress and the jolly mummer, never very tempestuous to start with, settles into a comfortable enough routine. Neither the melodramatic renunciations of *The Doctor's Wife* nor the ruined lives of the three French novels have come to pass, and the remainder of the novel is devoted to the progress of Kate's alcoholism. Lloyd Fernando finds this development disconcerting, and Moore's novel disunified as a result:

A claim on behalf of Moore's originality does not . . . overcome successfully this use of a second major source for a single novel. Moore presents Kate's alcoholism with entire conviction, yet the book does not recover from the resulting shift of emphasis. The woman who has fled to freedom degenerates not really on account of her moral incapacity, but on account of a factor introduced mostly as an "experiment" in the Zola manner, and given patently separate thematic treatment late in the novel. (92)

I would disagree. Kate does degenerate "on account of her moral incapacity," in some sense, at least, and Moore's "'experiment' in the Zola manner" in the final third of the novel is a convincing and natural outcome of the situation he establishes in the first two-thirds. Osbert Burdett claims that "the cause of Kate's drinking is too vague" (419), but it is difficult to see how this is so. Quite simply, she begins to drink because she is ashamed of being a "loose woman" sexually ("loose," that is, according to the tenets of the religion in which she was raised), and she continues to drink because she becomes unreasonably jealous of Dick. Just as much as *Madame Bovary*, *Germinie Lacerteux* or *Thérèse Raquin*, *A Mummer's Wife* is "a clinical study of love"; but instead of the main character being destroyed directly as a result of her sexual desires, she is destroyed indirectly (but just as effectively) by them as they are replaced, distorted and transformed into a desire for alcohol. Although Kate does not have Isabel's passion for purity, neither does she have the amoral, animalistic attitude toward sex which characterizes Emma, Germinie and Thérèse (as well as Nana and Gervaise). Once again, this enhances the realism of Moore's tale; as Peter Ure points out, in choosing sexual mores as Kate's stumbling block, Moore "showed some insight into the pathology of conscience" (93). He also showed some insight into middle-class Victorian moral priorities, it might be added; it is unlikely that a woman of Kate's class in her position would be able to accept her own adultery without qualms. She does not "roll in the dust" like Emma, have a secret shameful life like Germinie or commit murder like Thérèse, but she feels guilty all the same, and unable to accept her success with equanimity. Kate's use of religion as a vehicle for her roman-

6. Flaubert in a letter to Louis Bonenfant, Dec. 12, 1856, *Oeuvres Complètes* 4:136, quoted in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism* 94.



ticism is likewise psychologically astute. This phenomenon, which Moore expands upon in the character of Cecilia in *A Drama in Muslin*, also occurs in *Germinie Lacerteux* ("Dans le prêtre qui l'écoute et dont la voix lui arrive doucement, la femme de travail et de peine voit moins le ministre de Dieu . . . que le confident de ses chagrins et l'ami de ses misères")<sup>7</sup> and in *The Doctor's Wife* ("[Isabel] wanted to find some shrine, some divinity, who would accept her worship. . . . If not Roland Lansdell, why then Christianity" [118-19]).

Moore's experiment in *A Mummer's Wife* is therefore more subtle and complex, both psychologically and artistically, than Flaubert's, the Goncourts' or Zola's. In my opinion, this third phase of Kate's existence springs convincingly from the first two, as I have said; and furthermore, it is dovetailed beautifully with the rest of the novel to create an aesthetically satisfying whole.

Predictably, Kate's final illness and death, with which the novel ends, is depicted as graphically as the deaths of either Emma Bovary or Nana. The description of Ralph's illness with which the novel opens is mild by comparison:

Facing the light, close up against the wall, her stomach enormously distended by dropsy, Kate lay delirious. From time to time her arms, wasted now to mere bones, were waved. . . . She was now a dreadful thing to look upon. Her thin hair hung like a wisp, and she had lost so much that the prominent temples were large with a partial baldness. The rich olive complexion was now changed to a dirty yellow, around the nose and mouth the skin was pinched and puckered. . . . Her eyes were dilated, and she tried to raise herself up in bed. Her withered arms were waved to and fro, and in the red gloom shed from the ill-smelling paraffin lamp the large, dimly-seen folds of the bed-clothes were tossed to and from by the convulsions that agitated the whole body. Another hour passed away, marked, not by the mechanical ticking of a clock, but by the cavernous breathing of the woman as she crept to the edge of death. At last there came a sigh, deeper and more prolonged, and with it she died. (350, 352)

Kate is now indeed "a dreadful thing to look upon." The atmosphere that surrounds her death, however, is subtly different from that which surrounds the deaths of Emma or Nana. Emma's death seems to be a fitting punishment for her foolishness, the culmination of Flaubert's disgust for her, and Nana's corpse becomes a fitting symbol of the corruption of a whole society. In either case, there is an implied judgment by the narrator, a statement about a certain kind of woman in one case and about a certain way of life in the other. This sense of a pitiless, almost vindictive satisfaction by the narrator increases the horror of the sordid physical details in each of these episodes. Kate's death-scene, while unpleasant, evokes no similar sense of horror or judgment but merely one of pitiable sadness.

The mood of melancholy rather than revulsion which attends this final scene of *A Mummer's Wife* is partly a result of attitudes or events which have occurred earlier in the novel. For one thing, no sense of punishment is involved, and Moore is able to report his character's death far more dispassionately and objectively than either Flaubert or Zola, partly because Kate

is a less corrupt and more likeable individual than either Emma or Nana. For another thing, Kate's story has not been one of unrelieved disgust from the beginning, so that her death is invested with a certain amount of meaning, unlike the deaths of Germinie, Gervaise or Thérèse, for example. Germinie and Gervaise have lived like dogs and they die like dogs, a fact which surprises no one, while Thérèse and Laurent's mutual suicide-murder is the logical climax to the grisly tale of their love. Moore's narrator makes no comment about Kate's death, nor does he need to; he merely reports it, and yet his report avoids both the implied anger and the extreme coldness of the naturalists. It is a nice (and fairly complex) tempering of the naturalistic formula of objectivity to suit the framework of English fiction.

In his second novel, then, Moore followed fairly closely Zola's formula for the creation of a naturalistic novel. He carefully researched and reported the milieu of his novel, including the unpleasant physical details, he adopted a straightforward attitude toward sex, he did not "individualize" his characters too much, and he recorded, as objectively as he could, the effects of a certain kind of environment on a certain kind of inherited temperament. Although some early reviewers saw the novel as a "warning" against the evils of alcohol, there is no obvious "moral" to the tale; as Nejdefors-Frisk remarks, "Kate's behaviour is neither praised nor blamed by the author, and there are no moral conclusions" (83). In his objectivity, in fact, Moore in some respects even outdoes Zola in this book. The straight-laced middle-class world and the carefree bohemian world are both seen to have desirable and undesirable qualities; neither one is right or wrong, they are simply different. Moore had every reason to be disappointed when Zola refused to write the preface for the French edition of *A Mummer's Wife*.

For all of that, the novel is an individual creation, and not merely a French "copy." Kate Ede is a "type" rather than an individual; but she is an English type, and *A Mummer's Wife* is a unique creation, an English novel written to French naturalistic specifications. Moore never wrote anything else like *A Mummer's Wife*—Douglas Hughes calls it "his only Zolaesque novel" (xi)—but it marked the beginning of a very important strain of realism that runs through all his best work. In the last analysis, naturalism itself was not important for Moore, as he believed that "The great literary battle of our day is not to be fought for either realism or romanticism, but for freedom of speech" (Moore, Preface to *Pot-Bouille*, qtd in Noël 117); but if the first infusion of naturalism into the English novel could be pinpointed, it could be said to occur here. This is by no means an insignificant event in the history and development of English fiction, and to students of Moore and students of transitional literature, *A Mummer's Wife* presents a fascinating study. And, even apart from its historical importance, as I have endeavored to show, *A Mummer's Wife* is on its own merits a very good novel.

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much the minister of God . . . as the confident of her sorrows and the friend of her miseries" (*Germinie Lacerteux*, trans., 50).



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## Browning's Testament of His Devisings in *The Ring and the Book*

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One pleasure of reading Robert Browning's dramatic monologues is knowing more than the speakers know, but readers are similarly prone to mistake fiction for fact, art for life, and ignorance for understanding. Browning's poetics allows the possibility of measuring readers' gullibility, naiveté, and ignorance. As a way of spurring their self-awareness, Browning pretends that his poetry is conventional, yet challenges them to recognize their misperceptions. The appearance of openly sharing truth about artistic and moral creativity is the bait to trap an unwary public that confidently accepts poetic messages at face value. Posing as a straightforward purveyor of information in Books I and XII of *The Ring and the Book*, he tries to make jaded readers remember the temporality and duplicity of language. Browning saw his "dramatic" work as restoring a measure of "objectivity" to the main currents of poetry after it had reached the rarefied atmosphere of Romantic "subjectivity." The "objective" poet deconstructs the thinking habits of his audience by returning truth ("assumed wholes") to experience and by waiving "the tradition of a fact, the convention of a moral" ("Essay" 1004). Dramatic monologues reduce the poet's hierophantic function, thus linking *personae* and readers in mutual efforts of discovery. If a reader, like a dramatic monologist, too willfully requires the whole truth, and nothing but Truth, language's successiveness and obliquity frustrate and tease. Poetic objectivity, based less on moral absolutes than on experiential confusion, fashions human

(mis)understanding with telling immediacy. Conceding that the poet has a license to perpetrate semantic tricks, a reader does not relinquish a right to know, but rather agrees that no meaning is final or closed; this grants that as interpretive slips begin to show, poor performers of the text must begin redressing themselves.

Poetry is susceptible to misinterpretation because readers mistake poetic objectives. In a letter to John Ruskin (December 10, 1855), Browning acknowledges poetry's didacticism and hinges misreading on interpretive preconceptions:

Do you think poetry was ever generally understood—or can be? Is the business of it to tell people what they know already, as they know it...? It is all teaching, on the contrary, and the people hate to be taught. They say otherwise,—make foolish fables about Orpheus enchanting stocks and stones, poets standing up and being worshipped,—all nonsense and impossible dreaming. (Collingwood 166)

Both the messages and methods of poetry are instructive, yet the business of poets and poetry is conceptually unmastered. By supposing that they "know already" what a poet or poem is "about" (especially if they seem to be told outright), readers cannot let meaning unfold problematically. By *not* "tell[ing] people what they know already, as they know it," Browning thwarts their inclination to stop pursuing partial truths because they have already conceitedly predetermined some end or re-



solution. Browning's apologetics derives from "bystanders[']...stupid thanklessness and mistaking" (Collingwood 165), i.e., their mishandling interpretive tools and ignoring poetry's temporality:

You ought, I think, to keep pace with the thought tripping from ledge to ledge of my "glaciers," as you call them; not stand poking your alpenstock into the holes, and demonstrating that no foot could have stood there;—suppose it sprang over there?...Why, you look at my little song ["Popularity"] as if it were Hobbs' or Nobbs' lease of his house, or testament of his devisings, wherein, I grant you, not a "then and there," "to him and his heirs," "to have and to hold," and so on, would be superfluous; and so you begin:—"Stand still,—why?" For the reason indicated in the verse, to be sure,—to let me draw him—and because he is at present going his way, and fancying nobody notices him,—and moreover, "going on" (as we say) against the injustice of that,—and lastly, inasmuch as one night he'll fail us, as a star is apt to drop out of heaven, in authentic astronomic records, and I want to make the most of my time. So much may be in "stand still." ...Is the jump too much there? The whole is all but a simultaneous feeling with me. (Collingwood 164-65)

Although Ruskin correctly thinks there is more to "glaciers" than meets the eye, he is mistaken in his interpretive approach and expectations, thus losing his way along Browning's poetic landscapes. Standing atop the floes, this Victorian sage fails to "keep pace with the thought tripping from ledge to ledge." Meaning's superfluity encourages a reader to participate more energetically in the process of (self-)discovery.

Browning is aware of the difficulty of accompanying poetry's movement because even the poet's creativity tends to lapse into static portraiture. The poet has to resist the spatializing tendency of his art and consciousness which threatens to "draw" or objectify a subject's temporal nature. The subject, however—"going on"...against the injustice" of such iconography—has its own will, forcing the poet "to make the most of [his] time." Critics, heeding these directions, will see again: the poetry is playfully instructive; the poet is not a god to be "worshipped" or an "enchanter" of objects (this is "all nonsense and impossible dreaming"); and a reader, likewise "mak[ing] the most of...time," is a companion of poetic "thought," not a laggardly explicator or occultist. Just as an auditor in a dramatic monologue must attend the speaker's "tripping" obfuscation and lucidity in order to glimpse shaded or shining truths, so a reader must "keep pace" hazardously with a poem's angled fictions, the poet's devious "testament of...devisings." Browning is not recommending rapid, inattentive reading but a more intuitive, aural sensibility that avoids overriding a text's sequentiality; the reader behaves as another silent *persona*. Therefore, meaning is not a boundary but a horizon, not an end but a "process so wonder-worth" ("Abt Vogler" 44).

Books I and XII of *The Ring and the Book* appear to be a forthright "testament" of Browning's creativity. Nevertheless,

a reader familiar with Browning's reluctance either to have his poetry reduced to "foolish fabl[ing]" or to have his identity idolified may recognize the "testament" as benign disinformation. The Victorian common reader tended either to respect Browning for his teachings or to denigrate him for barbaric obscurantism. His explanation of the famed ring metaphor in *The Ring and the Book* satirizes such gullibility and parodies glib didactics. Modern critics continue to "stand poking [their] alpenstock into the holes" of the metaphor, disguised as an explanation of symbolic and moral vision, without realizing that Browning is baiting habituated perceptions. His heavy-handed efforts to get an audience's attention are masterful feints.<sup>1</sup> Pretending to be able to explain simply what creative perception and perceptive creativity involve, he mocks the simplistic "British Public...who like [him] not" (1:410), without being able to see at all:

Do you see this Ring?

...the artificer melts up wax  
With honey, so to speak....

What of it? 'T is a figure, a symbol, say;  
A thing's sign: now for the thing signified.

Now, as the ingot, ere the ring was forged,  
Lay gold (beseech you, hold that figure fast!)  
So, in this book lay absolutely truth,  
Fanciless fact....(1:1, 18-19, 31-32, 141-44)

From the very outset Browning has the first laugh on credulous readers who seek the origins of creativity. This apparently simple, patronizing scheme to explain the artistic preservation or renewal of truth only confuses matters further. What "Ring" is there to "see"? Is the honeycomb image less riddling ("so to speak") than, say, the ring figure/symbol? As readers vainly try to "hold that figure fast," this creative-writing teacher (or is he something else?) goes about his objective legerdemain and subjective *trompe l'oeil*. Aware that his popularity depends so much on their ability to figure out what he is doing by using customary responses or perspectives, he obligingly tells them what they want to hear and shows them what they expect to see. This coddling, which feigns "subjective" superiority, actually reduces interpretive certainty and authority instead of exposing poetic process. The story is the bait of falsehood to catch the carp of truth, i.e., limited reading. Pretending to spell out everything by playing the part of a subjective poet who provides answers, Browning further disguises what he does with poetry and what it does to us.

The poet's reputation with the "British Public" concerns him less than he affects: "...I look on my own shortcomings too sorrowfully, try to remedy them too earnestly: but I shall never change my point of sight, or feel other than disconcerted and apprehensive when the public, critics and all, begin to under-

1. Alan Sinfield similarly suggests that the dramatic monologue uses "the feint...to express dissatisfaction with common-sense assumptions about the nature of consciousness and of the world" (141). The poet feigns not only "because the poem is in the first person and the speaker, we feel, should be the poet" (29), but also because he wants the "speaker" to have a credible voice separable from the poet's. Moreover, beyond "feigning,"

Browning is "feinting," that is, disguising his designs on a reader's perceptions. His dramatic monologues are always feigned expressions of the views of his *personae*, who also may be pretending; however, the "feints" of Browning and his speakers give the dramatic monologues their tragicomic duplicity with which the poet's rapier-like thoughts may touch us, even teach us, no matter how quick we are.

stand and approve me" (Collingwood 166). Browning nurtures readers' delusions that they know what a poet should be, or be doing. They think they want some (in)credible poet who can "make foolish fables about Orpheus enchanting stocks and stones," that is, presumably a predominantly "objective" poet; or they want their "poets standing up and being worshipped," that is, "subjective" seers of higher truths. Browning gives them both kinds in *The Ring and the Book*. He creates a network of mythic and archetypal conflicts for "poetry, make-believe, / And the white lies it sounds like" (1:455-56). However, such "foolish fables" of an objective caliber are scarcely the limits of his creativity because the ensuing dramatic monologues, instead of being an anticipated enchantment, are the poet's way of disenchanting his potentially adoring readers and revising their moral perceptions:

Once set such orbs,—white styled, black stigmatized,—  
A-rolling, see them once on the other side  
Your good men and your bad men every one,  
From Guido Franceschini to Guy Faux,  
Oft would you rub your eyes and change your names.

Such, British Public, ye who like me not,  
(God love you!)-whom I yet have laboured for,  
Perchance more careful whoso runs may read  
Than erst when all, it seemed, could read who ran—  
Perchance more careless whoso reads may praise  
Than late when he who praised and read and wrote  
Was apt to find himself the self-same me. . . . (1:1374-85)

The poet is unlikable because his objective "make-believe" and "white lies" disorient people from "what they know already, as they know it." A running reader, able to keep up with Browning's thoughts, may be the best reader, but the poet is still unwilling to succumb to flattery or fame from reductive, formulaic thinkers. Hence, public "understanding" and encomia may result from reading on the run, but they do not power Browning's poetry. Formulas merely slow the poetic and interpretive pace before the energetic trickster-poet evades and frustrates readers' vain expectations about conclusive meaning; his having to use "make-believe" and "white lies" at all is the problem, not the resolution, of poetic credibility as people know it.

Browning leads predilective readers to believe in his orphic voice to get their attention, and carefully makes them read on the run to forestall their use of prying alpenstocks. Pretending that his subjective faculties are paramount, he emphasizes his spiritual intuition as revitalizing, that is, the agency for "fus[ing] [his] live soul and that inert stuff [the "facts" of the Old Yellow Book]" (1:469 ff.). Since the gullible British Public believes such "nonsense and impossible dreaming" contain some final facile truth, Browning has to continue his angling and disillusioning strategies:

This was it from, my fancy with those facts,  
I used to tell the tale, turned gay to grave,  
But lacked a listener seldom; such alloy,  
Such substance of me interfused the gold  
Which, wrought into a shapely ring therewith,  
Hammered and filed, fingered and favoured, last  
Lay ready for the renovating wash  
O' the water. 'How much of the tale was true?'  
I disappeared; the book grew all in all. . . . (1:679-87)

If eager, predisposed listeners of Browning's "tale" want truth, he conveniently obliges, but not entirely with the truth they know or as they know it. His crafty business, once again, is to hide his art by appearing to disclose it. "Lovers of dead truth" and "Lovers of live truth" (1:696-97) get what they want—either the Old Yellow Book's "inert stuff" or the poet's "tale"—except plain sight of Browning himself. As he had done earlier with respect to ringmaking, Browning is practicing another ruse of objective magic—making himself disappear, affirming nothing—when a questioner wants quantitative answers about truth. This vanishing act is another way for the respective truths of the narrated "tale" or the source "book" to speak for themselves and for the auditor to decide whether pure historical truth or alloyed poetic truth is more telling. Of course the answer to the question, "How much of the tale was true?" is impertinent because, as Browning has already mentioned, "Fancy with fact is just one fact the more" (1:464). The question itself and the reason it is asked are significant, nonetheless. The issue of verisimilitude is an extension of the Roman citizens' earlier battery of questions relating to the existence of any truth at all, if a poet has a finger in it (1:447-56). Their question, rather than signifying a commitment to pursuing truth, implies a naive attitude: meanings and conclusions always conform to expectations, without ever endangering an inquirer's preconceptions.<sup>2</sup>

As a corrective measure to foreheld notions about the creative act and the poetic artifact, the poet has to seem to be doing something other than what he really is doing. In *The Ring and the Book* Browning fakes acceding to his audience's strictures, while he undermines its cherished notions about art, hoping to shake perceptual stolidity and lethargy. Making believe that he and his art are understandable in traditional ways, he simultaneously challenges the careless and complacent notion that truths are static and finished. Therefore, instead of providing satisfying answers to slow readers' questions about signifiers or significance, he responds either cryptically or questioningly. Just when one begins to understand that a ring symbolizes a book (the Old Yellow Book), he makes the ring symbolize his telling a "tale" to some Roman citizens. Only askance do we come to "see" that not even *The Ring and the Book* itself is "the thing signified" by the ring, but rather some ideal "Lyric Love" (12:868), even slightly different from "lyric Love"

2. Discussing heuristic fiction as the essence of poetry, Paul Ricoeur writes:

...metaphor not only shatters the previous structures of our language, but also the previous structures of what we call reality. When we ask whether metaphorical language reaches reality, we presuppose that we already know what reality is. But if we assume that metaphor redescribes reality, we must then assume that this reality as redescribed is itself novel reality. My conclusion is

that the strategy of discourse implied in metaphorical language is...to shatter and to increase our sense of reality by shattering and increasing our language. The strategy of metaphor is heuristic fiction for the sake of redescribing reality. With metaphor we experience the metamorphosis of both language and reality. (111, emphases added)



(1:1391).

Browning's representation of his poetic nature, though credible, is no more comprehensive and no less frustrating. He uses the analogy between jeweler and poet as long as it suits him, which is as long as "a listener" follows along; however, once the journeyman-critic becomes too willful or independent, that is, interpretively vain, Browning momentarily "disappears" but immediately reappears in other guises to raise six more questions:

Lovers of dead truth, did ye fare the worse?  
Lovers of live truth, found ye false my tale?

Well, now; there's nothing in or out o' the world  
Good except truth: yet this, the something else,  
What's this then, which proves good yet seems untrue?  
This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine  
That quickened, made the inertness malleolable  
O' the gold was not mine,—what's your name for this?  
Are means to the end, themselves in part the end?  
Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too?  
The somehow may be thishow. (1:696-706)

Browning may have finished "finger[ing]" (1:684) the ring symbol temporarily, but he is not done feigning.<sup>3</sup> Apparently ingratiating and accommodating ("The somehow may be thishow"), he proceeds to explain the character of the poet (1:707-73), not, as might be expected, the composition of the ring-tale. Here he poses as a subjective poet whom people are inclined to worship: a "mage" (1:742), Faust, or Elisha (1:760). The protean poet possesses "a special gift, an art of arts, / More insight and more oversight and much more / Will to use both of these than boast [his] mates" (1:746-48). Masquerading as a seer, Browning perpetrates another ruse by pretending that the subjective poet is more astute than the objective fashioner.

In *The Ring and the Book* we have to avoid taking sides in the creative tensions between didacticism, which a subjective poet uses to tell us how to perceive, and fabulation, which an objective poet uses to illustrate ranges of perception. When we begin to think we understand conclusively a lesson being imparted by Browning's subjective "insights," his objective "out-sights" force us to reconsider it. From the subjective poet's work we may derive "the very radiance and aroma of his personality" ("Essay" 1002), such sweetness and light being exactly what we want. But Browning might have said about readers' relationships with subjective poets what he said only about their conditions with objective poets: "We are ignorant, and would fain be otherwise" ("Essay" 1001). Although he wishes to lead us astray by means of our preconceptions, Browning is concurrently pacing us toward more impartial truth

about the arts and artists. The ruses are for our benefit, trying to open our perceptions of synthesized creative strategies.<sup>4</sup> Making believe that if the subjective poet tells us "live truth" we will hear it, and that if the objective poet shows it to us we will see, Browning aims to relax our hardened perceptions, which prevent us from apprehending what Thomas Carlyle calls life's "open Secret." His feigning pure objectivity or subjectivity is his way to finger the artless, slow reader: *de te fabula*.

Just as the analogy between ringmaking and poetics has some objective credibility, so the analogy between theurges and the poet himself has a modicum of subjective credibility. But again Browning uses a reader's misapprehensions about poetry and poets in order to disillusion. Consequently, he next casts himself as an illusionist stage manager (1:824 ff.), that is, one who enacts what he can imagine and what a reader can intellectually digest. In this role Browning envisions the dramatic monologists in Books II-XI who will approximate the truth according to their respective "worth of word" (1:837). Especially emphasizing the verbal and perceptual matrices of each "voice," Browning stages his actors in a phenomenology of hearing, rather than seeing, to adduce the aporia arising from what "we call evidence, / Uproar in the echo, live fact deadened down" (1:833-34). The preview of the action in later monologues is merely another poetic device for keeping us on our toes as we race with the poet's thoughts.

A stage manager is not Browning's final impersonation, as he continues to wean readers from their credulous "prepossession" (1:853) of art and artist; at the conclusion of Book I he transforms himself into a fairy tour guide:

Finally, even as thus by step and step  
I led you from the level of to-day  
Up to the summit of so long ago,  
Here, whence I point you the wide prospect round—  
Let me, by like steps, slope you back to smooth,  
Land you on mother-earth, no whit the worse,  
To feed o' the fat o' the furrow: free to dwell,  
Taste our time's better things profusely spread  
For all who love the level, corn and wine,  
Much cattle and the many-folded fleece. (1:1330-39)

Those who have followed the subjective poet's ascent to the past and the objective poet's descent to the present will have improved their digestion of meaning if they are "friends" (1:1340). Nevertheless, Browning continues to burlesque his vatic authority and the public's accolades. His bellwether activities fleece this flock of "friends." More aware now of "country in the clouds" (1:1341), they possess better vision of Cloud Cuckooland than a poet does, only because his "wistful eagle's

that the Victorian poets were not good enough to know what they were doing or were still too preoccupied with their Romantic legacy to differentiate objectivity and subjectivity properly. Browning, for one, managed to resolve "the subjective-objective dichotomy" by dovetailing the epistemic resources of poetic making and seeing. Rather than failing to live up to the dichotomy, as Sinfield implies, the poet masters the dichotomy theoretically in order to use it more effectively as a feint. If one is unsure at what point in a poem objectivity becomes subjectivity, or vice versa, the dichotomy itself is not being questioned, but rather the reader's preconceptions about which is which.

3. Käte Hamburger notes that "fiction," "feint," and "feign" all derive "from the Latin  *fingere* , which has the most radically differing meanings extending from that of shaping or inventing to that of deceitful fabrication" (55). Browning's description of his "tale" to the Roman citizens in terms of a "fingered" ring is a punning suggestion that any communication distorts facts somewhat—with the dual potential for creative invention and deception.

4. Sinfield's belief that the Victorian dramatic monologue is an "unstable product" because "it plays across the subjective-objective dichotomy, calling it into question" (64), is considerably misguided. He seems to assume

horny eye" (1:1342) never opened for such "nonsense and impossible dreaming." The eagle and Browning instinctively know better than to exceed the limits of their being, although the "heart" (1:1345) may promise more.

When the Roman citizens asked the poet whether he deals in "make-believe" and "white lies," he responded, "Yes and no!" (1:457). Throughout Book I he enacts this dialectic of asserting and denying complicity with the public's eagerness to get truth effortlessly. His poetry must contain fantasy because this is all his "friends" can understand now; in this sense he is a fabulous adventurer like Jack climbing the beanstalk, with whom he compares himself (1:1347). Browning purposely allows both his identity as a poet and his poetics to be accomplices in such misprision-turned-"bunko" game without much fear of being immediately apprehended. He confidently returns to complete the ring metaphor, "A ring without a posy, and that ring mine?" (1:1390), since his bovine or sheepish readers—not realizing his sophistry and poetic closure have duped them—still demand the completed symbol of Browning's artistry. They receive "what they know already, [but not] as they know it," namely, a parody of invoking a muse: "O lyric Love, half-angel and half-bird" (1:1391). His text reads us as we read it: a hybrid, prankish "lyric Love," which both protects and enacts poetic truth by standardizing creativity and criticism, inspires his words' worth. Browning's purpose in becoming a poetic "bunko" artist is to debunk his friends' tendency to miss the truth he imparts because they think they already know the aims and limits of that truth. Seeing the end of Book I as exclusively autobiographical (i.e., Browning's belated literary dedication to his dead wife) confuses fiction with fact, poesy with posy, and assumes that Browning's invocation is absolutely undeviating and unamusing.<sup>5</sup>

Even in Book XII, after ten intervening dramatic monologues, Browning refrains from granting his readers a facile ending: "Here were the end, had anything an end" (12:1). He prolongs the dialectical tensions of subjective and objective poetics by disclosing four more "reports" (12:24) that claim to be "an end of all i' the story" (12:775); however, they only further "baffle so / [The] sentence absolute for shine or shade" (1:1372-73), so that one has to measure the merits of history against credible make-believe: "There, would disbelieve stern History, / Trust rather to the babble of a bard?" (12:804-05). The moment a reader anticipates again "the final state o' the story" (12:823) after Browning's playful and veracious feints, the bard's latest instructional surprise occurs: not even his own art is perfectly true to the Truth but is also, again, merely an approximation. The reader, almost understanding the poet and his "babble," and consequently tempted to pay homage, is jerked back abruptly into an objective world: poetic creativity challenges and mocks rather than tolerates understanding and complacency. Browning turns the tables on the "British Public, who may like [him] yet, / (Marry and amen!)" (12:831-32), by berating them not for their lack of sympathy or their blindness but for their misguided love and perception. Unable to insult the intelligence of a "brother" directly, without having

that truth misinterpreted (12:841-53), the poet encourages and displays such misprision by dramatic indirection which suits misconceptions; the hope is that ingenuous readers will be surprised reflexively into moral and artistic reappraisal. Therefore, Browning's deconstruction of his artistry and his public's oversight does not necessarily make all "human speech...human testimony...human estimation" utterly relative and valueless (12:832-40). Realizing that truth cannot be known or communicated absolutely, and freed from "the superficiality of non-perception" (Ezra Pound's 1964 Preface to *A Lume Spento*), one perhaps achieves greater self-recognition.

Browning's "testament" in *The Ring and the Book* is a counterfeit poetics, a way to "tell a truth / Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought" (12:854-55, emphasis added) of our obtuseness and intellectual pride. Consequently, every (mis)reading becomes an opportunity to see our conceited selves reflected in the looking-glass, make-believe worlds of the poem and its interpretation:

So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,  
Beyond mere imagery on the wall,—  
So, note by note, bring music from your mind,  
Deeper than ever the Andante dived,—  
So write a book shall mean, beyond the facts,  
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside. (12:858-63, emphases added)

The framing books of *The Ring and the Book* deceive and disillusion the "British Public" with what it expects to discover in poetry. Browning knows that a reader's preconceptions about the poet's craft cause critical blindness and interpretive missteps. His cunning indirections mark the directions of delusive interpretive grandeur and hermeneutic retardation. Browning warns us about the dangers—when we write our own books—of not keeping a heuristic pace with the poetic fictions, of not reading on the run. His poems seem to ask: "When was the last time you misread us? When was the last time you misread yourselves? If you weren't so lame, would you even need alpenstocks?"

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5. Stephen Crites remarks: "The muses, after all, are dangerous counselors. They are said to have warned Hesiod, 'we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but,' they added, 'we know, when we

will, to utter true things.' The muses prompt us in falsehood as well as in truth, and...both these possibilities are inherent in the dynamics of experience" (108).



## Books Received

- Albright, Daniel. *Tennyson: The Muses' Tug of War*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1986. Pp. vii + 256. \$24.95. "I shall try to show that the most productive tension in Tennyson's imagination was between two forces, either one of which, indulged to an extreme, would make poetry impossible: the urge to the sublime, or the nameless, and the urge to the commonplace; and I shall try to show that Tennyson's poetry is happiest when he can dress up the one in the vestments of the other, make the ineffable seem part of our usual furniture—and invest the ordinary with a tinge of eeriness" (11).
- "The Charles Dickens Special Issue." *The Chesterton Review* 11 (Nov. 1985): 411-552. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Thomas More College, 1985. Subs. \$16.00/year. "This special issue on Dickens and Chesterton is devoted to a theme and a relationship which were dear to Chesterton's great heart. I refer, of course, to the theme of appreciating Dickens and to the close affinities which the two men shared" (411).
- Crump, R. W. *Charlotte and Emily Brontë 1955-1983: A Reference Guide*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986. Pp. xvii + 319. \$35.00. "[T]he third part of a three-volume bibliography of secondary writings" on the two sisters, which includes "biographies (both articles and books), centenary tributes, introductions to editions of the Brontës' works, and reviews of their writings" (vii).
- Dentith, Simon. *George Eliot*. Harvester New Readings. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1986. Pp. x + 150. \$22.50. A general introduction which "is, in its the broadest terms, a defence of George Eliot as a realist writer" (4).
- Flint, Kate. *Dickens*. Harvester New Readings. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1986. Pp. xi + 159. \$19.95. A general introduction which offers "strategies of reading. Such strategies are not intended to explain Dickens' work, to answer and to tie up neatly the problems which it poses, but are to help recognise some of the premises on which it is based, to point to some of its affinities with the time at which it was written—from the point of view of organisation as well as of content—and to describe some of the effects which it has on us as readers" (1-2).
- Frederic, Harold. *Gloria Mundi*. Ed. Larry Bromley. The Harold Frederic Edition 4. Lincoln & London: U of Nebraska P, 1986. Pp. 481. \$30.00. A critical text "critical in that it is not an exact reproduction of any existing text but is, rather, a synthesis of authorial readings from all relevant texts. . . . according to the guidelines of the Modern Language Association's Center for Scholarly Editions. . ." (371). Contains an Editorial Appendix of 136 pp.
- Gagnier, Regenia. *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986. Pp. 255. \$29.50. "In this book I argue, first, that the contradictions in [Wilde's] works can be understood only by reference to his audiences, and, second, that a consideration of his audiences can lead to a serious reconsideration of the aestheticism of the 1890's. This aestheticism was an engaged protest against Victorian utility, rationality, scientific factuality, and technological progress—in fact, against the whole middle-class drive to conform—but the emphasis is on engaged" (3).
- Margaret Oliphant (1828-1897): A Bibliography*. Comp. John Stock Clarke. Victorian Fiction Research Guides 11. St. Lucia, Australia: U of Queensland, 1986. Pp. 102. \$7 Australian, (Paper). A bibliography of works by her, with some 733 entries, an introduction, and 6 appendices.
- McGowan, John P. *Representation and Revelation: Victorian Realism from Carlyle to Yeats*. Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1986. Pp. vi + 206. \$26.00. Includes chapters on D. G. Rossetti, Carlyle, Ruskin, Dickens, Eliot, Browning, and Yeats.
- Miller, Robert Keith. *Carlyle's "Life of John Sterling": A Study in Victorian Biography*. Nineteenth-Century Studies. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987. Pp. [xi] + 103. \$34.95. "The purpose of this study is. . . twofold. A careful reading of Carlyle's *Life of Sterling* should both help establish the value of an important, neglected text and add to our understanding of Carlyle" (4).
- Orel, Harold. *The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986. Pp. [x] + 213. \$29.95. Contains chapters on William Carleton, Le Fanu, Dickens, Anthony Trollope, Hardy, Stevenson, Kipling, and Conrad and H. G. Wells, as well as an introduction defining the genre.
- Platz, Norbert H. *Die Beeinflussung Des Lesers: Untersuchungen zum pragmatischen Wirkungspotential viktorianischer Romane zwischen 1844 und 1872*. Buchreihe der Anglia, Zeitschrift Für Englische Philologie 25. Band. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1986. Pp. xi + 358. 26DM. Explores the frequently-stated desire of Victorian fiction to influence the behavior of readers. Beginning with Disraeli's view from the preface to *Coningsby* that fiction offers "the best chance of influencing opinion," Platz traces this intention in novels of Disraeli, Kingsley, Dickens, Gaskell, and Eliot.
- The Waterloo Directory of Irish Newspapers and Periodicals, 1800-1900: Phase II*. Ed. John S. North. Waterloo, Ontario: North Waterloo Academic Press, 1986. Pp. 838. \$300. A listing "in all fields, published from daily to annual frequency, including the arts, sciences, professions, trades, labour, agriculture, industry, church, home, theatre. Over 3900 titles and cross references, with subtitles, changes of title, dates, series, editors, printers, proprietors, issuing bodies, size, price, subjects, departments, illustrations, indexing, mergers, and locations of copies. Three indexes—Subject, Place and Personal Name."
- Worth, George J. *"Great Expectations": An Annotated Bibliography*. The Garland Dickens Bibliographies 5. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 555. New York & London: Garland, 1986. Pp. xxii + 346. \$49.00. "I have attempted to list and comment on everything pertaining to the novel published in English from its first appearance in 1860-61 to the end of 1983" (vii).

# Victorian Group News

## Announcements

TENNYSON: AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE to be held at Bishop Grosseteste College, Lincoln, July 24-26 1987. Speakers will include Jerome Buckley, Gillian Beer, Isobel Armstrong. Conference Chairman will be Philip Collins, the guest of honor Lord Tennyson. For information write Peter Preston, MA, Staff Tutor in Literature, Department of Adult Education, University of Nottingham, Cherry Tree Buildings, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD, England.

TENTH INTERNATIONAL BRONTË SCHOLARS' CONFERENCE will be held 5-10 July 1987 on the theme of "Haworth Parsonage, *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, the interaction of the landscape and the literature. For further information write the Director of Continuing Education, Department of Adult and Continuing Education, The University, Leeds LS2 9JT, United Kingdom.

THE ROBERT B. PARTLOW, JR. PRIZE, presented by the Dickens Society in honor of its founder, is an annual award of \$250 for the year's best, first article-length publication on Dickens (that is, more than five printed pages in length). At its meeting in December, 1987, the Society will make an award for the period June, 1986, to June, 1987.

Entries (three copies or offprints) should be sent as soon as possible but no later than 31 August 1987 to Susan R. Horton, Secretary-Treasurer, The Dickens Society, Department of English, The University of Massachusetts at Boston, Boston, Massachusetts, 02125.

VICTORIAN GENDER ISSUES is the subject of the 1987 conference of the Victorians Institute, 16-17 October, at the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill. The principal speaker will be Elaine Showalter. Address 10-page papers (by 10 July) and inquiries to: Beverly Taylor, Dept. of English, Greenlaw 066A, Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

Back issues of VN, at a cost of \$4.00 per copy, are available in limited quantities for the following numbers: 8, 20, 23, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70.