

### Special relationships: Anglo-American affinities and antagonisms 1854-1936

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# Special relationships

Anglo-American  
antagonisms  
and affinities  
1854–1936

edited by

**JANET BEER** and **BRIDGET BENNETT**

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Anglo-American affinities  
and antagonisms 1854–1936

*edited by*

Janet Beer and Bridget Bennett

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# Introduction

*Janet Beer and Bridget Bennett*

The celebrated description of Britain and America as two nations divided by a common language suggests the limits, at both ends, of the relationship between the two countries. It is a relationship that has received a good deal of critical attention, yet the collaborations, collisions, friendships, mutual admiration or hostilities between individual British and American writers and their cultural preoccupations has not been an area of much study. The idea of a special relationship between the United States and Great Britain is one that falls in and out of favour; for instance, the notion that there was a particular affinity between nations had currency during the 1980s when their respective political leaders had similar ideologies and, it was frequently claimed, a close personal rapport. Since the ending of Ronald Reagan's and Margaret Thatcher's terms of office, the question of whether the Anglo-American special relationship still flourishes or, indeed, ever had much valence, is frequently raised, never more so than with the election of President George W. Bush, a president who started his term of office with rather less interest in the global than in the local. In the first flush of the new presidency the Spanish-speaking Bush suggested a renewed interest in the southern and northern borders of the United States. Britain meanwhile, repeatedly debated the thorny issue of its relationship to continental Europe, and within Europe, a new generation of political leaders has brought with it fresh ideas of where and whether alliances should be forged and maintained. The geo-political map has registered substantial changes in the last two decades of the twentieth century and the United States, seemingly, has been out of kilter with the international mood. For a period it seemed as if the special relationship had foundered. The events of 11 September 2001 have changed all that. At the time of writing, the revived and newly strengthened Anglo-American relationship is being redrawn as the Blair government continues to play an active

role in support of President Bush's call for an international response to terrorism. The special relationship appears to have re-emerged with a new agenda founded on and generating both accord and contention.

The connection between the former colony and colonial power is one that has always been complex and it is not our intention here to track its history. The aim of this collection of essays is, rather, to consider a series of cultural and literary relationships that took place across the Atlantic (and often despite it). These suggest that, in cultural terms at least, the relationship between Britain and the United States has been a particularly productive one, whether in antagonism or amity. The eleven essays in this volume reveal a set of borrowings, shared considerations and preoccupations, rivalries and friendships that took place between creative writers and cultural commentators on both sides of the Atlantic from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. This was a period in which transatlantic communications and transport were transformed, allowing for an increasing internationalisation of intellectual activity. What the essays reveal is the extent to which national boundaries were not an inhibiting factor for the exchange of ideas or the currency of issues. What they demonstrate, individually and together, is a series of dynamic cultural exchanges that challenge models of nationhood and reveal a significant internationalism that was at work within the field of literary culture. In effect, the essays allow us to re-consider definitions of what constituted nationhood over the period covered by the collection.

These essays have grown out of both pedagogical concerns and recent trends within scholarship that have made transatlantic, Atlanticist, and circum-Atlantic approaches to cultural and literary studies some of the most productive and exciting of recent years. They are engaged with a variety of Anglo-American conjunctions. These extend from actual and intellectual encounters, readings or re-readings, professional and national rivalries and parallel activities. Some individuals only met each other on the printed page, some met face to face. Figures who should have met in person, like Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Sarah Grand, working with the same people and ideas but on different sides of the Atlantic, meet only in these pages. Similarly, Edith Wharton and Virginia Woolf expressed their attitudes of mutual suspicion in letters to many of their friends but never to each other. In contrast, the remarkable intellectual affinity between Gertrude Stein and Alfred North Whitehead, at a crucial moment in the development of their literary and philosophical careers, provides a model of a productive Anglo-American 'special relationship', a description that can also be applied to the extraordinary sympathy which developed



between the members of the Bolton Whitman Fellowship and those who were in close association with the poet in the United States.

The nature of the relationships examined in these essays range between the metaphorical and the actual, but they also reveal the intricate nexus of correspondences or connections which existed outside the main pairings investigated by contributors and which will bear further investigation. Take the case of George Eliot, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Charlotte Brontë, who were brought together through communications both earthly and other-worldly. Stowe wrote to Eliot describing a long 'conversation' she had held (via the planchette) with the spirit of Charlotte Brontë at a seance she had attended in America. This might, for obvious reasons, be said to constitute a relationship that was certainly special yet it is only one (though a sensational one) of many that existed in spiritual if not material form. Needless to say, Eliot found it highly implausible and wrote to Stowe to tell her so.

The essays here are presented chronologically, but there are strong thematic links throughout. Some essays are concerned with the influence of one writer upon another, on the resulting anxieties and pleasures of intellectual indebtedness. Some are concerned with parallelisms: two writers working on similar ideas, divided by a nation and an ocean. A key question that runs through the collection is what a focus on transatlantic relations can bring to our understanding of literary production and ideas of authorship and of national characteristics. Many of the contributors to the volume have opted to investigate these issues by examining specific relationships between two writers, one American, one British. The result of this is to produce a model of literary influence that operates at a close and personal level, involving specific and intimate knowledge of one writer by another.

Two contributors are particularly concerned with Scottish–American literary relations. Susan Manning's interest is in the power of a profoundly antagonistic relationship, that between Mark Twain and Walter Scott. She asks questions which extend what is usually conceived of as Twain's limited, parodic engagement between Scott's *Waverley* novels and his own work, in particular, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. In so doing she also, in her words, aims 'to complicate our current, perhaps too sanguine, view of Scottish–American literary relations'. Scott, like the American Harriet Beecher Stowe, was enormously influential in nineteenth-century literary culture and Manning tries to unravel what Twain claims to have been the misreading of Scott, just as Judie Newman demonstrates Stowe's mis-reading and mis-representation of the

Highland Clearances. In her essay on Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands*, Newman discusses Donald MacLeod's 'furious riposte' to that which he read as a poorly informed American intervention in Scottish politics, all the more shocking coming from the world-famous author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

R.J. Ellis's essay considers the inventive use that Harriet Wilson makes of the slave narrative in *Our Nig*. Wilson, an African-American woman, was unfamiliar with the conventions of the pastoral so that her revelation of 'pastoralism's underlying rural class structure' foregrounds issues that have been traditionally under-represented or ignored in that genre – most strikingly, questions of gender and race. Ellis invokes Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* to show that, on the other side of the Atlantic, there was a concomitant frustration with the restraints of the pastoral mode. His essay provides a new and challenging context for *Our Nig*: an investigation into genre, moving beyond the slave narrative to what it means to see the text as – in his term – 'apastoral'. Class and nationhood are at the forefront of Alison Easton's interpretation of Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Tory Lover*. Jewett was a lifelong admirer of Walter Scott, particularly the Waverley novels, and Easton argues that she used Scott in order to situate the American Revolution in the national imagination. His work acted as a prompt, helping her to 'negotiate the complexities of this civil conflict in the creating of nations'. Lindsey Traub also invokes a monumental British precursor in her discussion of Henry James, examining his half-admiring, half-anxious relationship with George Eliot. As the youthful reviewer of her novels, James tried to contain her in a patronising critical commonplace as 'delightfully feminine' in her writing. No less free of personal bias when he met her a few years later, he described her as 'a great horse-faced blue-stocking', whose intellectual influence he still sought to underplay. Nevertheless, as Traub shows, his debt to her was substantial in terms of her professionalism as well as her aesthetic practice.

Anne-Marie Ford's essay is one of two in the collection that engages with manifestations of the Gothic imagination. Ford's reading of Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* in relation to its borrowings from *Jane Eyre* is a salutary reminder of the genuinely transatlantic nature of the culture of letters in the mid-nineteenth century. Where, for Twain, Scott is an inappropriate though inescapable model, the example provided by Brontë for Stoddard, alongside figures such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Sand, is one that she acknowledged and welcomed. Influences which are common to both Stoddard and Brontë are also scrutinised in Ford's essay: both writers adapted existing conventions of

Gothic to their own particular cultural circumstances; Cassandra Morgeson might be read as a Jane Eyre translocated into New England culture. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik are also concerned with influence and translocation, in this case, that of the paradigmatic ex-patriate, T.S. Eliot. For Evelyn Waugh in *A Handful of Dust*, Eliot was a powerful Modernist precursor, and Eliot's support for Djuna Barnes's extraordinary novel *Nightwood* was made manifest by the Introduction he wrote for its second edition in 1937. Eliot as the quintessential Anglo-American cultural mediator is, for Horner and Zlosnik, a figure through whom we can consider the variety of transatlantic manifestations of Modernism, with attention paid to his apparent under-valuation of the Gothic mode. Their essay, however, concludes by arguing that 'Eliot's determinedly Eurocentric critical paradigm' which has been enormously influential in the conception of High Modernism, is exclusive rather than inclusive and has actually militated against full understanding of works by writers such as Barnes, despite his championing of her work.

In an essay on Walt Whitman and the Bolton Whitman Fellowship Carolyn Masel gives a fascinating account of the ultimately widespread effects of a relationship established between the poet and his most devoted British readers; she details the powerful influence which Whitman had upon a group of working men in a small Lancashire town, both aesthetically and ideologically. In correspondence and in personal visits to the poet by two of their number, a relationship was established that brought benefit of 'comfort and hope' to the dying Whitman as well as a sense of purpose to his Bolton readers who felt his influence in all areas of their lives and most notably in their thinking on democracy. A rather more intimate relationship is the starting point for Kate Fullbrook in her account of the strong personal dynamic of the friendship between Alfred North Whitehead and Gertrude Stein. For Stein, writing as Alice B. Toklas and with characteristic modesty, named Whitehead – along with herself and Pablo Picasso – as one of the three geniuses she knew. Despite the disparities in the writing styles and intellectual backgrounds of Stein and Whitehead, their mutual admiration and respect was augmented by their 'shared conception of process of movement, as the universal feature of all that exists'. Edith Wharton and Virginia Woolf as 'the two most articulate and influential literary women of the modern period' – as Katherine Joslin calls them – existed in a relationship of mutual enmity, positioned at opposite poles of the profession of authorship. They read each other's work but praise and censure came in equal measure: Woolf's admiration of Wharton's autobiography had a bitter aftertaste. Writing to Ethel

Smyth, she noted: 'I like the way she places colour in her sentences . . . There's the shell of a distinguished mind'. Joslin, like Horner and Zlosnik, interrogates the canon of High Modernism through the reception of the work of these two women writers whose professional lives were concurrent but not contiguous.

This collection has been produced at a time when theories of the Atlantic, circum-Atlantic and transatlantic are having a major impact on literary, cultural and historical studies. Bridget Bennett's polemical essay on nineteenth-century spiritualism engages with the implications of such approaches. She addresses the question of what an Atlanticist reading can bring to the understanding of the history of nineteenth-century spiritualism and through doing this raises questions of what such new scholarship can bring to more traditional conceptions of national literatures and traditions. Janet Beer and Ann Heilmann are concerned with two writers who blurred boundaries between polemic and aesthetic: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Sarah Grand. These social reformers, working from within the feminist sexual purity movements on separate sides of the Atlantic, both believed 'that national and "racial" regeneration was women's special mission' and 'that women should spearhead the moral management of society'.

In bringing these essays together we are not attempting a cartography of Anglo-American relations from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries but exploring some of the more intriguing convergences and diversions in the paths taken by a number of celebrated writers and cultural commentators. With the exception of Masel's essay on Whitman, the essays in the collection are substantially concerned with prose; notwithstanding, many different styles and types of writing are examined. It should also not be seen as surprising that that the genre which is most susceptible of access on both sides of the Atlantic should have been the novel, and that the question of national identity, so vigorously pursued as an integral part of the enterprise of fiction by such as Mark Twain, could be both summative and formative of the idea of the other culture. Donald MacLeod could count on his audience's knowledge of Harriet Beecher Stowe's reputation as a novelist as well as humanitarian reformer to make his claims even more sensational, whilst Henry James could re-orient understanding of the realist novel by refracting it through the international light. The essays are offered as a contribution to the ongoing examination of the field of transatlantic cultural relations, applying paradigms opened up by new theorisations of the Atlantic to writers in the mainstream of American and British literature. To this extent, they represent

an intervention in the field that must be seen as partial but instructive; one which recognises the need, as well as the demand, for further investigations into and elucidations of the possibilities available to scholars in the growing field of transatlanticism.

## Did Mark Twain bring down the temple on Scott's shoulders?

*Susan Manning*

In Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820), the Grand Master of the Order of the Templars, determined to purify their Preceptory of Templestowe, figures the besotted knight Brian de Bois Guilbert as a Samson entrapped by the sorceries of the Jewess Rebecca-Delilah:

with [the] aid [of the saints and angels] will we counteract the spells and charms with which our brother is entwined as in a net. He shall burst the bands of this Dalilah, as Samson burst the two new cords with which the Philistines had bound him, and shall slaughter the infidels, even heaps upon heaps. But concerning this foul witch, who hath flung her enchantments over a brother of the Holy Temple, assuredly she shall die the death.<sup>1</sup>

Samson does indeed burst his bonds, but it's an odd image of victory for the Templar to choose: as everyone knows, this is not the end of the story. In one of the Old Testament's most powerful accounts of revenge and of vindication, the man of miraculous powers is out-tricked by Delilah and blinded by the Philistines, and takes his revenge by bringing down the temple on his own shoulders:

And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.<sup>2</sup>

This final desperate gesture of strength is also an admission of helplessness. As Mieke Bal has recently put it, Samson's most dramatic act of power is his own *coup de grâce*: his death 'is his greatest performance.'<sup>3</sup> The biblical story had already served Scott as a powerful image for the seductions of literature: in the 'Autobiographical Fragment', which he composed in 1808 and revised in 1826, he described his continuing delight in

the ballads of chivalry, the ‘Delilahs of [his] imagination’ guiltily enjoyed in secret beyond boyhood.<sup>4</sup>

In *Life on the Mississippi*, published a little over sixty years after *Ivanhoe* in 1883, Mark Twain delivered an indictment of sorcery on Scott himself, via the literary seduction his novels had wrought on the imagination of the American South:

Then comes Sir Walter Scott with his enchantments, and by his single might checks this wave of progress, and even turns it back; sets the world in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and swinish forms of religion; with decayed and degraded systems of government; with the sillinesses and emptinesses, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society.<sup>5</sup>

Scott has entwined the South with ‘spells and charms’; Twain sets himself up as the champion who shall challenge and expose the sorcery. Unable to get round or past Scott’s enchantments (so I’ll argue), Twain attempted a Samsonite annihilation of everything his writing stood for.

This essay considers a catastrophic act of revenge which is also one of self-immolation. It is an attempt to complicate our current, perhaps too sanguine, view of Scottish–American literary relations: instead of emphasising (as those of us who work in the field normally do) influences, affinities, and mutually enriching aspects of the transatlantic exchange, I want to ask about some of the problems Scottish literature may have cast in the way of nineteenth-century American writing, some of the anxieties of influence, the blocks in transmission, the failures to read, assimilate and move on. And what better exemplary comparison than Scott – arguably the single most influential writer in the shaping of nineteenth-century American literature – and Mark Twain, who notoriously acknowledged the power of that influence to the extent of blaming ‘the Great Enchanter’ for the American Civil War? More precisely, because the novel stands square at the heart of Twain’s antipathy and his indictment, I want to look at the relationship between *Ivanhoe* (arguably the single most influential *novel* in nineteenth-century America) and Twain’s belated, bloated satiric fantasy of chivalry, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889). Two questions present themselves insistently: why did Twain’s antipathy to Scott last well beyond the point in his own career where his literary reputation stood clear of the shadow of ‘The Author of *Waverley*? And why was it so virulent? Both aspects of the issue register an element of excess which itself chimes with the characteristics of the biblical story through which my analysis will be focused.

Twain was not of course the first to profess that Scott was not merely a burden but a peril to American writers and readers. For James Fenimore Cooper,

These very works of Sir Walter Scott are replete with one species of danger to American readers; and the greater the talents of the writer, as a matter of course, the greater is the evil. . . . Th[e] idea [of deference to hereditary rank] pervades his writings, not in professions, but in the deep insinuating current of feeling, and in a way, silently and stealthily, to carry with it the sympathies of the reader. . . . Now what would be the situation of a writer who should attempt, before the American public, to compete with even a diminished Scott, on American principles? He would be almost certain to fail, supposing a perfect equality of talent, from the very circumstance that he would find the minds of his readers already possessed by the hostile notions, and he would be compelled to expel them, in the first place, before he could even commence the contest on equal terms.<sup>6</sup>

I want to note two things here: firstly, Cooper's sense of the heroic act of purification demanded of American writers, who, like Christ casting the money-changers out of the temple, must expel false notions instilled in the minds of American readers by Scott's enchantments before pure American principles may be sown.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, that final image: the very existence of Scott's writing is figured as a challenge; the rivalry has, that is, a representative as well as a personal aspect, couched in the language of chivalry. In 1820, the year of *Ivanhoe's* appearance, *The Port Folio* described Scott as 'the first genius of our age'; a few years later *The Southern Review* declared that 'he stands upon an eminence, to which approaches have been made, but no one has placed himself by his side'.<sup>8</sup> Whatever else is at stake, this clearly expresses the enormous cultural anxiety of nineteenth-century American writers: if Scott, the colossus, cannot be got round, he must be encountered on his own territory – taken on, we might say, 'at *outrance*' in single combat.<sup>9</sup>

The assignment of responsibility for the Civil War is by no means an isolated attack in Twain's work: running skirmishes with Scott persist in his writing through markedly changing cultural conditions for the production and sale of *American* literature. We can only conclude that, at some level, Twain himself remained in thrall to the enchanter, as he alternately reviled and adopted the romance mode.<sup>10</sup> In 1876, Tom Sawyer nearly comes to grief through destructive romantic adventures unmistakably the result of a too-great fondness for the works of Scott; nearly twenty years later, in *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894), the protagonist seeks fame in a 'crusade', like the one in which



Richard Cur de Loon, and . . . lots more of the most noble-hearted and pious people in the world, hacked and hammered at the paynims for more than two hundred years trying to take their land away from them, and swum neck-deep in blood the whole time.<sup>11</sup>

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), the antipathy is rehearsed in the symbolic episode of the wrecked steamboat *Walter Scott* on the Mississippi, with the books of romance salvaged from the hulk from which Huck

read considerable to Jim about kings, and dukes, and earls, and such, and how gaudy they dressed, and how much style they put on, and called each other your majesty, and your grace, and your lordship, and so on, 'stead of mister; and Jim's eyes bugged out, and he was interested.<sup>12</sup>

All leading, of course, to the impersonated aristocracy of the Dauphin and the Duke of Bridgewater, and the murderous, meaningless feud of the Grangerfords and the Sheppersons, which critics have read as an image of the Civil War.

*Huckleberry Finn* came as close as anything in Twain's writing to making terms with Scott's legacy; but the confidence of its apparent assimilation of outmoded heroics into a new comic vision and voice of America did not signal a resolution of the anxiety of influence in Twain's writing. The 'wreck' surfaces as outright indictment in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883):

He did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote. Most of the world has now outlived good part of these harms, though by no means all of them; but in our South they flourish pretty forcefully still. . . .

Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war. It seems a little harsh toward a dead man to say that we never should have had any war but for Sir Walter; and yet something of a plausible argument might, perhaps, be made in support of that wild proposition.<sup>13</sup>

It's a celebrated passage, but I don't believe anyone has ever inquired about its degree of virulence. Twenty years previously, the relatively unknown Henry James had securely consigned Scott to the pantheon of the Great (safely) Dead: 'He has submitted to the somewhat attenuating ordeal of classification; he has become a standard author. He has been provided with a seat in our literature; and . . . his visible stature has been by just so much curtailed'.<sup>14</sup> No publisher, he went on,

would venture to offer *Ivanhoe* in the year 1864 as a novelty. The secrets of the novelist's craft have been laid bare; new contrivances have been invented; and as fast as the old machinery wears out, it is repaired by the clever artisans of the day. Our modern ingenuity works prodigies of which the great Wizard never dreamed.<sup>15</sup>

The Scott who survives in James's version of American literary culture is benign, 'a strong and kindly elder brother'.<sup>16</sup> His Scott is a comfortable teller of fireside tales, absolutely without power to intervene in the *real-politik* of contemporary life. A possible clue to Twain's excess may lie in the explosive momentum of his prose. The 'stretcher' was, after all, the hallmark of his comic style and this may have fuelled Twain's flying beyond rational decorum: self-sustaining invective employs language as a symbolic murder-implement. It's worth noting, too, that James had very little investment in 'Southern' culture, in comparison with Twain.

Something more still seems required to account for it, however. Lacking James's (at least apparent) assurance, Twain's letters to literary correspondents continued to seek confirmation that Scott's magic was no longer potent. To Brander Mathews as late as 1903, he exclaimed melodramatically,

Brander, I lie here dying, slowly dying, under the blight of Sir Walter. I have read the first volume of *Rob Roy*; and as far as Chapter XIX of *Guy Mannering*, and I can no longer hold my head up nor take my nourishment. Lord, it's all so juvenile! So artificial, so shoddy. And such wax figures and skeletons and spectres. Interest? Why, it's impossible to feel an interest in these bloodless shams, these milk-and-water humbugs!<sup>17</sup>

The weight of the parricidal displacement is greater than the ensuing freedom.<sup>18</sup> What is interesting here is the question why, given the apparently unvarying antipathy, he was still reading – or failing to read – Scott at all, in 1903. There is in fact no obvious cultural reason why Twain should still have been beating his fists against the 'Great Enchanter' at the very end of the century, after Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Dickinson, James – and himself, as it were – just to mention the most obvious names.<sup>19</sup> The uncritical craze for Scott's work in America – if it had ever existed – had long since subsided into the containable respectability of leatherbound 'Magnum editions' on library shelves.<sup>20</sup> Why, then, did Twain continue to tussle with his influence at such length and with such rancour? What writerly purpose might it have served him to go on reiterating it?

The Civil War accusation does seem to have stuck in some form of

communal imagination: it is probably the single thing that everybody knows about Scott and Mark Twain.<sup>21</sup> Scholars of Scott have, however, energetically refuted the idea that the novels were in any sense precipitating factors in the Civil War. The Southern aristocracy have been demonstrated to have had a progressive not reactionary image of themselves; we know that 'medieval' jousting matches as a popular form of entertainment predated *Ivanhoe* in both North and South (in Philadelphia in 1778, British troops neglected their opportunity to finish off Washington's famished army at Valley Forge, in favour of giving General Howe a grand send-off with a lavish tournament).<sup>22</sup> Scott's romances have been shown to be far from uniquely influential on Southern taste; and of course it is easy to demonstrate that he did not advocate chivalry anyway.<sup>23</sup>

Against this (in its own terms entirely convincing) accumulation of evidence of the factitiousness of Twain's accusation, I'm going to argue that there *is* a real connection for an American writer between Scott and the Civil War, though the manner of its expression in Mark Twain's writing has misled scholars of both writers since, as to its nature. It will be important, too, in rescuing the real issue from the obscuring veil cast over it by Twain's rhetoric, to address the question of how *literally* to read the denunciations of a humorist whose comic effects are so largely based on exaggeration. I'll return to this issue, which is central to the literary relationship between Twain and Scott, but it will be helpful to look first at Twain's use of a strategy of subversion that is reliant on burlesque and parody.

This is a characteristic defensive strategy of early nineteenth-century American writing in its relation to British literature. There is an issue of Twain's belatedness here, which needs further attention, but one of the most powerful characteristics of the burlesque voice, as we find it in American literature from Washington Irving's *Salmagundi* papers (1808) and *A History of New York* (1809), through Poe's 'Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall' (1835), and *Moby-Dick* (1851), to *A Connecticut Yankee*, is its instability. As a mode, burlesque tends to veer towards satire and parody without resting in either, and yet to lie uncomfortably close to imitation and the more respectful forms of emulation. Mixed messages give burlesque a kind of skittering elusiveness that is deeply subversive of the claim of the classical and exemplary. It is one of the main 'weapons' deployed by nineteenth-century American writing against the overweening importance of British 'models': but while we might wish to read a work such as *Moby-Dick* as triumphantly launching out from imitation into uncertainty, there is I think an inherent tendency for burlesque to get

caught up in a running argument with its original, to keep coming back to strike a final blow.

*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* notoriously plays across the whole gamut of burlesque from satire to submission. A Jamesian *donnée* apparently came to Twain in a dream after several days reading Malory:

Dream of being a knight errant in armor in the middle ages. Have the notions & habits of thought of the present day mixed with the necessities of that. No pockets in the armor. No way to manage certain requirements of nature. Can't scratch. Cold in the head – can't blow – can't get at handkerchief, can't use iron sleeve. Iron gets red hot in the sun – leaks in the rain, gets white with frost & freezes me solid in winter. Suffer from lice & fleas. Make disagreeable clatter when I enter church. Can't dress or undress myself. Always getting struck by lightning. Fall down, can't get up. See Morte Darthur.<sup>24</sup>

The novel begins, that is, with armour, which exemplifies (as Bruce Michelson has usefully put it) 'all the other hobbling habits, the habits of thought, the moral systems, the social institutions, the popular literature that Mark Twain had to live with'.<sup>25</sup> It is the *embodiment* of chivalry. And real bodies find it deeply uncomfortable to live in. The comedy is circumstantial, disengaged, and quite without animosity. It's a classically Bergsonian example of laughter deriving from the clash of rigidity and the humanly flexible.<sup>26</sup> Twain as humorist is able here, quite literally, to get inside a clichéd image and explode it.

The story that evolves from this image tells how Hank Morgan, employee of the Colt firearms factory in Hartford, Connecticut, wakes up after a blow to the head in the 'lost land' of sixth-century Camelot. Determined to bring order and progress to this hopelessly beknighted world, he manoeuvres himself into a position of power at King Arthur's right hand, introduces nineteenth-century inventions to chivalry and incites the peasants to rebel.<sup>27</sup> The comedy derives from the juxtaposition of ways of life thirteen centuries apart: at a crucial moment, for example, Sir Lancelot comes riding fully armed to Hank's rescue on a bicycle. This aspect of the book is also freewheeling burlesque; if the whole has a satirical *purpose*, it's probably best described by Twain's own retrospective account:

I think I was purposing to contrast that English life, not just the English life of Arthur's day but the English life of the whole of the Middle Ages, with the life of modern Christendom and modern civilization – to the advantage of the latter, of course.<sup>28</sup>

But the great final books of Malory's epic are structured by revenge, whose primitive impulses rapidly come to dominate any ideas of normality. From very early on, the wreck of the 'Walter Scott' muddies the waters of the Arthurian fantasy with traces of animus foreign to the burlesque mood. The narrative is framed by 'A Word of Explanation': during a guided tour of Warwick Castle (familiar to Scott's readers of course as Kenilworth), the 'editor' encounters a 'curious stranger', who, with his knowledge of heraldry, his easy tale-spinning and romantic weaving of spells from the past, seems set up as a figure of the 'Great Enchanter' of the nineteenth century. Here already are intimations of the self-immolating preoccupation that later brings Twain's story toppling down upon itself. The vituperative attack on Scott which will sabotage Hank's success is beginning to distract the narrative in some oddly serendipitous allusions to Sir Kay 'fir[ing] up on his history-mill', and how 'talk from Rebecca and Ivanhoe and the soft lady Rowena' would 'embarrass a tramp in our day'.<sup>29</sup>

The novel's burlesque freedom in tilting indiscriminately at satiric objects derived from sixth-, twelfth-, fifteenth- and nineteenth-century sources soon starts to rigidify as the competition between Hank and Merlin for supremacy as magicians takes over. The 'mighty liar and magician, perdition singe him for the weariness he worketh with his one tale!', whose prestige at Arthur's court stands in the way of Hank's advancement, focuses the pervasive oppositional presence of Scott in the narrative.<sup>30</sup> (We remember that the denunciation in *Life on the Mississippi* occurs in a chapter entitled 'Enchanters and Enchantments'.) The confrontation of the rival 'magicians' accounts for the increasingly unstable positioning of the character of Hank, who becomes dangerously, though intermittently, identified with the narrative voice of the novel. His first act of pyrotechnic destruction in the Court of Camelot is to blow up Merlin's tower; but the wily sorcerer is not so easily defeated. Mutual outmanoeuvrings structure the action, Hank playing Samson to Merlin-Scott's Delilah. After his trick of the eclipse appears to have outdone his rival, Hank is jubilant.<sup>31</sup> Their final conflict is cast into the terms of chivalry: a mighty 'duel not of muscle but of mind, not of human skill but of superhuman art and craft; a final struggle for supremacy between the two master enchanters of the age'.<sup>32</sup> Like Samson, power goes to his head as he over-reaches himself in omnipotent boasting:

And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.<sup>33</sup>

And so, like Samson, he does. But the exultation, in both cases, is premature and misplaced. Noting its excessiveness over any *cultural* 'need' for an American writer to topple Scott from the American literary pantheon by 1889, we must, I think, look to a more personal explanation in Twain's own response to this omnipresent literary forebear. A psychoanalytic reading is strongly suggested by the very extremity of response over occasion: the chivalric quest that Hank takes is unavoidably an image of omnipotence, a form of magical thinking.<sup>34</sup> He becomes increasingly the hero of his own aggrandising story; the exaggerating idiom which previously anchored the reader to common sense takes on a sinister edge. As Bruce Michelson writes, '*A Connecticut Yankee* never stops being a wish-dream of glory, no matter what other themes offer themselves, or undercut that dream in the novel.'<sup>35</sup> With an indeterminate degree of ironic objectivity on Twain's part, Hank falls for what Hanna Segal (speaking of twentieth-century moments of apocalyptic devastation) has called 'the lure of destructive and self-destructive omnipotence, and the terror they induce.'<sup>36</sup> Revenge, as John Kerrigan points out, brings down rigidity of purpose on the avenger; it is a kind of armour that constricts his mental freedom to see that every story has more than one side.<sup>37</sup> Triumphantly vanquishing the entire chivalry of England, Hank finds that total victory empties experience of meaning; taken to its literal conclusion, it wipes out the other in relation to whom identity is always negotiated.

Twain's working notes for the novel had suggested peaceful resolution; in fact, it ends, as Henry Nash Smith puts it, in 'one of the most distressing passages in American literature', when Hank Morgan 'literalises the carnage of romance victories', in a scene that alludes directly to the general tourney at Ashby in *Ivanhoe*:<sup>38</sup>

Down swept that vast horseshoe wave – it approached the sand-belt – my breath stood still; nearer, nearer – the strip of green turf beyond the yellow belt grew narrow – narrower still – became a mere ribbon in front of the horses – then disappeared under their hoofs. Great Scott! Why, the whole front of that host shot into the sky with a thunder-crash, and became a whirling tempest of rags and fragments; and along the ground lay a thick wall of smoke that hid what was left of the multitude from our sight. . . . Of course we could not count the dead, because they did not exist as individuals, but merely as homogeneous protoplasm, with alloys of iron and buttons.<sup>39</sup>

There is something drastically overdetermined about the extent of destructiveness revealed in these final chapters. If Hank Morgan, for most of the novel, is the enchanter-as-showman, a kind of cross between

Prospero and P.T. Barnum, he becomes at this climax an equivocal figure of authorial vengeance. Outlining an ‘antagonistic model of Anglo-American literary relations’, Robert Weisbuch intimates that ‘something better than blockage and subterfuge might be brought forth by an acceptance of enmity. Insult could catalyze the imagination.’<sup>40</sup> One way to read *A Connecticut Yankee* would be as the product of an imaginative enmity which had in some sense been excessively catalysed beyond its own metaphorical capacities into a revelation of very primitive destructive instincts. The ‘insult’ may (indeed must, given Scott’s priority) have been an imagined one, but the extraordinary, unstable, comic energies released in response suggest that the Anglo-American exchange – at least in this particular case – cannot be understood on any simple model either of ‘influence’ or ‘antagonism’.

If, as Jacqueline Rose has suggested, ‘metaphor is the recognition and suspension of aggression’, that horrific literalising of the destructive potential of human imagination to which Henry Nash Smith points may represent the unleashing of uncontrolled revenge against a hated rival who cannot be subdued in direct confrontation.<sup>41</sup> However, Rose also notes that:

loss of metaphor is in itself a form of defence which threatens memory and identification alike . . . [those who] los[e] metaphor, have lost that function without which the origins of language are unthinkable. Take metaphor out of language and there is no memory, no history, left.<sup>42</sup>

To literalise, that is, is to cut language loose from its *representative* function in relation to the past, to deprive it of elucidatory power which might hold revenge in suspension. This chivalric Armageddon manifests what – given its excess over the cultural demands of American conditions of literary production by the late 1880s – one can only call Twain’s traumatic relation to Scott, displaced into catastrophic re-enactment of a civil war embodied in terms of the South’s seduction into sham ideals. It’s an act of revenge-through-repetition, an exercise of the *lex talionis* so complete that it brings down the house divided upon itself.<sup>43</sup> Hank’s energy, sated with destruction, ebbs to the point that he cannot resist the final spell of Merlin, the prodromal enchanter, who makes him sleep for thirteen centuries, to awaken, alienated from both memory and history, in the nineteenth:

I seemed to be a creature out of a remote unborn age, centuries hence, and even that was as real as the rest! . . . Ah . . . stay by me every moment – *don’t* let me go out of my mind again<sup>44</sup>

This temporal dislocation in which the past floods and overwhelms the present characterises all experience so dominant that it must be repeated because (in Rose's terms) it cannot be metaphorised. This is the point, I suggest, at which the power of Scott and the horror of recent American history coalesced in Twain's literary representation.

The connection between the end of *A Connecticut Yankee* and the American Civil War has been noted before and is explicit in the text, where Arthurian 'freemen' are compared with poor Whites of the South, and the knights clearly resemble the planter aristocracy.<sup>45</sup> What to my knowledge has not been observed, is that *A Connecticut Yankee* in several respects other than those already mentioned repeats Scott's example when it intends to dispel it: because this juxtaposition of an antiquated, doomed but gallant way of life with the irresistible (but not altogether lovable) progressive forces which come to supplant it is, structurally speaking, precisely that of the *Waverley* model. Scott's narratives of civil war (*Old Mortality* (1816), *Quentin Durward* (1823), *Peveril of the Peak* (1823), *Woodstock* (1826) all explicitly take this form) make it clear, too, that civil war must annihilate the chivalric spirit, that 'secret Delilah' of its author's imagination. In his 'Essay on Chivalry' for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Scott had located its final decay in Britain in the internecine Wars of the Roses, whose slaughter so depleted the English nobility that the system could not survive:

And, thus, Providence, whose ways bring good out of evil, laid the foundation of the future freedom of England in the destruction of what had long been its most consitutional ground of defence, and, in the subjugation of that system of Chivalry, which, having softened the ferocity of a barbarous age, was now to fall into disuse, as too extravagant for an enlightened one.<sup>46</sup>

Scott's providential historiography structurally allowed for the co-existence of comic and tragic implications; Twain's apocalyptic vision offers no compensating redemption through its displaced 'fratricidal carnage'.<sup>47</sup> And it may help to explain why *Ivanhoe* – for all the 'ingredients' which made its *matter* eminently appropriable by the developing nation: nation-building, race, the conflict of old and new cultures – proved such a difficult novel for American writers to incorporate imaginatively. Because it is as much about civil war as it is about chivalry. Civil war is the ultimate destruction of enchantment, as the metaphor of the 'house divided' takes on horrifyingly literal embodiment; it is, classically, the narrative that American literature has not found itself able to tell directly.

*A Connecticut Yankee* is the great American Civil War novel that didn't



quite happen, because its capacity to represent metaphorically the full memory-range of this nationally and personally devastating conflict was suborned into a confrontation with Scott which caused it to self-destruct in a curiously hopeless repetition. Characteristically, Twain's writing seeks to purify itself of the 'sham' of Scott's sorcery by revealing the literal absurdity of the romance mode. This, of course, is to deny the self-knowingness of metaphor – in itself an absurd position. Encountering the phenomenon of shell-shock in soldiers during the First World War, Freud's associate Janet began to formulate a distinction between 'traumatic memory', which repeats the past, and 'narrative memory', which narrates the past as past.<sup>48</sup> *A Connecticut Yankee* seems to be an attempt to convert trauma into narrative, a kind of 'working through' of both Scott's influence and the trauma of the Civil War into a comic fiction which is, however, overtaken and destroyed, at the end, by a reprise of the original injury. Dominick LaCapra's observation that 'trauma limits history and historical understanding, notably in its disruption of contextualization and dialogic exchange', gives us, I think, a useful formulation for Twain's misprision of Scott.<sup>49</sup> The American's forceful entry into Scott's 'field' itself enacts a violent aggression, taking revenge by repeating his own outraged sense that the life of the South had been suborned by Scott's enchantments. As Melville dramatises in *Moby-Dick* the traumatic relationship of American writers to Shakespeare, so, I suggest, *A Connecticut Yankee* embodies as a failed dialogue the traumatic literary relationship between Scott and Mark Twain.

I want now to speculate about some reasons for this, and to ask why Twain's misprision of Scott was not in the Bloomian sense productive, but finally self-defeating. Firstly, the Civil War was territory of 'unclaimed experience' for Twain himself, and his tone never stabilises in relation to it. 'The Secret History of a Campaign that Failed' and other evasive redactions of his two weeks' inglorious sojourn as a Southern soldier (followed by a leave-taking that in military terms would be described as desertion), reveal a kind of survivor-guilt. This may begin to explain why, in 1888–89, Twain was still re-writing and fighting his own war with Scott, in a symptomatically excessive burlesque that explodes beyond comedy when it cannot find ground which is not pre-occupied by its antagonist. Repeatedly, revenge is thwarted by being anticipated.

For one thing, Scott had already pointed out that excess was somehow constitutive of chivalry, whose manifestations from the beginning always verged on self-parody. His analysis of how it came to be that the exploits recounted by the mediaeval *romanciers* were taken seriously as historical

accounts of the chivalric age, in fact maps exactly onto Twain's indictment of the enchantments cast by the *Waverley* novels onto Southern society: 'All those extravagant feelings, which really existed in the society of the middle ages, were magnified and exaggerated by the writers and reciters of Romance; and these, given as resemblances of actual manners, became, in their turn, the glass by which the youth of the age dressed themselves.'<sup>50</sup> The paired essays on 'Chivalry' and on 'Romance' for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* linked their subjects, as James Chandler has recently brilliantly summarised them, by a mutually enhancing and self-perpetuating 'principle of extravagance', itself analogous to the self-knowing excessiveness of metaphor:<sup>51</sup> there can be no doubt that Scott's reading of chivalry, like his understanding of 'romance', was every bit as disillusioned as Twain's. The grimmer moments of humour in *Ivanhoe* anticipate *A Connecticut Yankee* with indicative exactness; the reader is never allowed to turn aside from the reality that chivalric violence, though harnessed, is real, and costs. Here is the assessment of loss at the Ashby tournament:

Thus ended the memorable field of Ashby-de-la-Zouche, one of the most gallantly contested tournaments of that age; for although only four knights, including one who was smothered by the heat of his armour, had died upon the field, yet upwards of thirty were desperately wounded, four or five of whom never recovered. Several more were disabled for life; and those who escaped best carried the marks of the conflict to the grave with them. Hence it is always mentioned in the old records, as the Gentle and Free Passage of Arms of Ashby.<sup>52</sup>

A modern reader has no difficulty in detecting the irony in this description; we are forced back to the question of why it should have escaped Twain, master of annihilation-by-understatement. It is a passage that – including the detail of the knight smothered by the heat of his armour – he might well have written himself. 'These are not', asserts the scheming statesman Waldemar Fitzurse, 'the days of King Arthur, when a champion could encounter an army.'<sup>53</sup> In its own way, *Ivanhoe* deconstructs the chivalric pattern quite as thoroughly as *A Connecticut Yankee*: for much of the novel, its ostensible hero is bedridden, an enfeebled, infantilised knight borne around on a litter and tended by an outcast. At the end of *Ivanhoe*, the Templar de Bois Guilbert dies, as Hank does, not a victor or even the glorious loser in the field of chivalry, but 'victim to his own contending passions.'<sup>54</sup> The climactic contest between hero and anti-hero for the virtue of Rebecca in the lists of Templestowe in fact dissolves into grisly comedy as a debilitated *Ivanhoe* and an apoplectic de Bois Guilbert fall simultaneously from their horses at the first knock.

The problem for Twain, as for all Scott's parodists, is that Scott's writing did not take itself seriously enough to be susceptible to the kind of burlesquing demolition which is so devastating in the case, for example, of Twain's 'Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses'. This is to say that the novel already contains not only the arguments that would undermine any of its apparent 'positions' or messages, but also the comic space in which they quite simply do not matter all that much. It's not a question of the 'seriousness' of chivalry, or vengeance, as subjects. Like pastoral, what Nassau Senior called the 'splendid masque' of *Ivanhoe* subsumes the materials of its own undoing in the Saxon slaves Wamba and Gurth, tricksters whose antics form a kind of anti-masque or 'internal commentary', as the narrator puts it.<sup>55</sup> Both thematically and formally, then, *Ivanhoe* is proleptic of its own parodies, from *Crotchet Castle* and *Rebecca and Rowena* to *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*: Coeur de Lion fights under the banner of 'The Black Sluggard'; Athelstane the Saxon Pretender is a lazy, good-natured glutton. This inconvenient strain of levity was noted by the novel's earliest reviewers: 'Instead of the grave and somewhat dignified style in which it behooved the celebrator of ancient deeds of chivalry to describe such high achievements', admonished the *Eclectic Review* in June 1820,

a vein of facetiousness runs through the composition, which is not always in unison with good taste; and the Author throughout the narrative, takes especial care to keep himself distinct from the subjects of the fiction.<sup>56</sup>

Bad taste or not, this quality was well represented by Don Quixote's appearance at the Fauquier Springs tournament, but disappeared from the necessarily simpler formulae of both idolators and iconoclasts once the novel had been tamed to exemplariness.

Enchantment remains, however, at the heart of both Scott's and Mark Twain's imaginative universes. The question, finally, is about how to deal with the *end* of enchantment, and of what kind of space it can still occupy in a dis-illusioned world. Scott is a wilier, murkier, and more ambivalent writer than Twain could afford to allow him to be. The literary dialogue that could not happen was replaced by a series of revenges that are constrained to repeat. In the end, Twain's apocalyptic indictment both literalises the purity of 'the temple' and brings it down. Though it travesties readers' experience of the novels, his version of chivalric romance embodies a very real relationship between Scott and the Civil War as elements unassimilable in the redaction of an American post-Romantic ideology of nationhood – an embodiment that itself exemplifies a wider problem of the failure of idealism, the loss of 'purity', for nineteenth-century American writers.<sup>57</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* [1820], ed. Graham Tulloch, The Edinburgh Edition of the *Waverley* novels, Vol. 8, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p. 314.
- 2 Judges 16:30.
- 3 Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 63.
- 4 Walter Scott, *Scott on Himself*, ed. David Hewitt, Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1981, p. 28.
- 5 Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, ed. James M. Cox, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, p. 327.
- 6 James Fenimore Cooper, *Gleanings in Europe* [1838]; New York, Oxford University Press, 1928, Vol. 1: *France*, p. 348; Vol. 2: *England*, pp. 153–4.
- 7 Mark 11:15.
- 8 Quoted by Andrew Hook, *Scotland and America: A Study of Cultural Relations, 1750–1835*, Glasgow and London, Blackie, 1975, p. 147. On the contemporary reception of Scott in America, see Andrew Hook, 'Scott and America', *From Goosecreek to Gandercleugh*, East Linton, Tuckwell Press, 1999, pp. 94–115; G. Harrison Orians, 'The Romance Ferment after *Waverley*', *American Literature*, 3:4 (January 1932), 408–31; Rollin C. Osterweis, *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1949, etc.
- 9 Scott, *Ivanhoe*, p. 77.
- 10 Amidst all the self-righteous indignation, Clemens was not above a bit of chivalric display himself: 'To celebrate the visit of [Ulysses S. Grant, the Civil War hero] and his family to Hartford in October 1880, the Clemens house, like others in the city, was decorated from top to bottom with flags of all nations, shields and coats of arms, glittering arches, mottoes and heraldic devices on gold and silver paper. Near the gate stood two figures in complete armor.' Justin Kaplan, *Mr Clemens & Mark Twain*, [1967], Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970, p. 281.
- 11 Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, in *The Writings of Mark Twain*, 37 vols, New York, Gabriel Wells, 1922–25, Vol. 19, p. 10. Peter Messent has recently analysed the cultural anxieties displayed in *Tom Sawyer*, in *Mark Twain*, London, Macmillan, 1997, pp. 65ff.
- 12 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ed. Emory Elliott, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 71.
- 13 Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, pp. 327–8.
- 14 Unsigned Review of Nassau Senior's *Essays on Fiction*, *North American Review*, 1864, reprinted in John O. Hayden (ed.), *Walter Scott: The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, p. 427.
- 15 Unsigned review of Nassau Senior's *Essays on Fiction*, p. 428.

- 16 Unsigned review of Nassau Senior's *Essays on Fiction*, p. 431.
- 17 Mark Twain, *The Selected Letters of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider, New York, Harper and Row, 1982, p. 276. See also to his letter to William Dean Howells, 22 August 1887 (p. 180).
- 18 See Cathy Caruth, 'Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History', *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991), 181–92, for a reading of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* that links the possibility of history for the Jews to the displaced trauma of parricide.
- 19 Robert Weisbuch notes that 'Twain seems almost anachronistic in his struggle with the British. His attacks on Scott in *Huckleberry Finn* and elsewhere broaden into an Emersonian worry with an America that refuses its fresh self for Old World pretensions', *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 32.
- 20 James T. Hillhouse makes it clear that right from the outset strongly dissenting voices were heard in the chorus of praise for the *Waverley* novels, notably in the radical and liberal press; see *The Waverley Novels and Their Critics*, Minneapolis, The University of Minnesota Press, 1936, Chapter 5.
- 21 James Fenton, for example, reviewing a recent scholarly study of armoury in *The New York Review of Books*, cites it without qualifying comment: 'An Ardor for Armor', *The New York Review of Books*, 46:7 (22 April 1999), p. 60. I am grateful to Ian Duncan for drawing this review to my attention.
- 22 See Fenton, *Ibid.*
- 23 See, for example, Grace Warren Landrum, 'Sir Walter Scott and His Literary Rivals in the Old South', *American Literature*, 2:3 (1930), 256–76; G. Harrison Orians, 'Walter Scott, Mark Twain and the Civil War', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 40:4 (1941), 342–59; Michael O'Brien, *Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988; and the works already cited by Hook, Fenton and Osterweis.
- 24 Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Notebooks & Journals*, Vol. 3 (1883–91), eds Robert Pack Browning, Michael B. Frank, and Lin Salamo, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, pp. 78–9. Revenge structures the final books of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*; Mark Girouard notes that 'most of the popular editions of Malory in circulation in late Victorian and Edwardian England were written by Americans' (*The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1981, Preface). He describes how as early as 1792 Scott was making notes on the *Morte d'Arthur*; both *Marmion* and *The Bridal of Triermain* show Arthurian influences (*Return to Camelot*, p. 178). Scott quotes from Robert Southey's 1817 edition of Malory in his 'Essay on Romance', 1818.
- 25 Bruce Michelson, *Mark Twain on the Loose: A Comic Writer and the American Self*, Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, p. 155.

- 26 See Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell, London, Macmillan, 1935, pp. 3–22.
- 27 See Paul J. de Gategno, *Ivanhoe: The Mask of Chivalry*, New York, Twayne Publishers, 1994, p. 68; In *Return to Camelot*, Girouard notes how enthusiasm for chivalry was kept alive in the nineteenth century as it became the vehicle of opposition to utilitarianism. Hank Morgan, of course, is a veritable embodiment of utilitarianism.
- 28 Mark Twain, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1959, p. 271.
- 29 Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, ed. M. Thomas Inge, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 30–1.
- 30 Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee*, p. 25.
- 31 Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee*, p. 47.
- 32 Twain *A Connecticut Yankee*, p. 306 and Chapter 39.
- 33 Judges 15:16.
- 34 See Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery*, London, Faber & Faber, 1998, pp. 2ff.
- 35 Michelson, *Mark Twain on the Loose*, p. 155.
- 36 'From Hiroshima to the Gulf War and after: socio-political expressions of ambivalence', in *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War: Papers 1972–1995*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 163. The lecture from which this comes makes, appropriately enough, a plea for tolerance of ambivalence in the face of difference.
- 37 John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 3.
- 38 Henry Nash Smith, *Mark Twain's Fable of Progress: Political and Economic Ideas in 'A Connecticut Yankee'*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1964, p. 65, and Scott, *Ivanhoe*, pp. 111–12. See Twain, *Notebooks & Journals*, Vol. 3, p. 415.
- 39 Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee*, Chapter 43.
- 40 Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross*, p. 12.
- 41 Jacqueline Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, London, Virago Press, 1991, p. 213.
- 42 Rose, *Haunting*, p. 213.
- 43 Repetition has always, as Kerrigan puts it, 'the potential to register, in crypto-Freudian terms, the rhythm of psychic trauma'. *Revenge Tragedy*, p. 269; see also James M. Cox, 'A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court: The Machinery of Self-Preservation', *Yale Review*, 50:1 (1960), 89–102.
- 44 Twain, 'Final Postscript', *A Connecticut Yankee*, p. 356.
- 45 Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1971, pp. 140–5.
- 46 Walter Scott, *The Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 28 vols, Edinburgh, Robert Cadell, 1834–36, Vol. 6, p. 113.

- 47 The phrase is Henry James's, in *Hawthorne*, London, Macmillan, [1879] 1967, p. 135.
- 48 Ruth Leys, 'Traumatic Cures: Shell Shock, Janet, and the Question of Memory', *Critical Inquiry*, 20:4 (Summer 1994), 623–62; quoted passage from p. 647.
- 49 Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 14.
- 50 Walter Scott, 'Essay on Romance', in *Prose Works*, Vol. 6, p. 171.
- 51 James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 145. See also Scott, 'Essay on Chivalry', in *Prose Works*, Vol. 9, pp. 10–11; 39–40.
- 52 Scott, *Ivanhoe*, p. 115.
- 53 Scott, *Ivanhoe*, p. 134.
- 54 Scott, *Ivanhoe*, p. 392.
- 55 Nassau Senior, *The Quarterly Review*, 1821, in Hayden, *Critical Heritage*, p. 235, and Scott, *Ivanhoe*, p. 27. See also Kenneth Sroka's description of Wamba and Gurth as 'eiron figures' according to Northrop Frye's model of romance, 'The Function of Form: *Ivanhoe* as Romance', in *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 19:4, (Autumn 1979), p. 650.
- 56 Hayden, *Critical Heritage*, p. 193.
- 57 Scott's model for the clash of cultures in the making of modern nations continued actively to shape Southern writers' analyses of their historical divisions and dilemmas well beyond the Civil War and Reconstruction. Outside the scope of this essay is Twain's later adaptation of *Waverley* structures and motifs in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, which transposed the North/South conflict into an encounter with the issues of race. Other writers – like Charles Chesnutt whose *House Behind the Cedars* (1900) mimics *Ivanhoe*'s chivalric scenes, substituting an African-American woman who passes as white for Scott's Rebecca – and film-makers, notably D.W. Griffiths's celebrated epic *Birth of a Nation* (1914), developed the *Waverley* model to portray – and suggest structures of resolution for – racial tensions in the American South well into the twentieth century.

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## Stowe's sunny memories of Highland slavery

*Judie Newman*

[They], counting the natives as their slaves and their prey, disposed without scruple of them and all that they had, just as it suited their own interest or convenience, reckless of the wrongs and misery they inflicted on these simple, unresisting people . . . removed from their comfortable houses and farms in the interior.<sup>1</sup>

An almost sublime instance of the benevolent employment of superior wealth and power in shortening the struggles of advancing civilisation.<sup>2</sup>

Two descriptions of the same system: one from Harriet Beecher Stowe, staunch abolitionist and unwavering champion of the oppressed African American, the other from one of her most relentless opponents. But which is which? In this case the system is not slavery but the Highland Clearances, and it is the second quotation which comes from Stowe, whereas the first is taken from Donald MacLeod's furious riposte to her. MacLeod's account of the forced eviction of the tenants of the Duchess of Sutherland, their homes burnt over their heads, their surviving families removed to the barren coastal lands, the 'fortunate' ones becoming unwilling emigrants to Canada, spares no punches in its descriptions, which draw upon eye-witness accounts, and his own bitter experience during the clearance of the entire Naver valley. It stands in strong contrast to Stowe's glowing depiction of the happy condition of the Sutherland tenantry in their model cottages under the benevolent control of the Duchess. The latter had sponsored an address against slavery, 'An Affectionate and Christian Address of Many Thousands of Women of Great Britain and Ireland to Their Sisters the Women of the United States of America' signed by some 576,000 British women in 1852, and presented to Stowe at the Duchess's palatial residence, Stafford House, on 7 May 1853. The Duchess had entertained Stowe lavishly on her visit to

Britain, presenting her with a gold bangle in the shape of a slave's shackle. But Stowe had relied for her account of the Sutherland estates (Letter XVII of *Sunny Memories*) on secondhand information, derived from James Loch, the Duchess's agent. As a result she offered ammunition on a plate to pro-slavery activists. How could *Uncle Tom's Cabin* be believed if its author were so careless with her evidence? As MacLeod put it,

If you took your information and evidence upon which you founded your *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from such discreditable sources . . . who can believe the one-tenth of your novel? I cannot. (*Gloomy*, p. 122)

The pro-slavery strategy of comparing the lot of the European labourer unfavourably with that of the slave was readily invoked, with exhortations to the Duchess to attend to philanthropy at home before venturing to intervene in American affairs, as Horace Perry Jones has observed.<sup>3</sup> As late as 1963, John Prebble<sup>4</sup> described Stowe as ignorant of the facts of both the Clearances and slavery, and dismissed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as wholly inaccurate.

Why did Stowe make this mistake? And why did she repeat it? *Sunny Memories* was written after Stowe had been made aware of the charges against the Sutherlands. Indeed, in her preface she is squarely on the defensive, defying her critics:

If the criticism is made that everything is given *couleur de rose*, the answer is Why not? They are the impressions, as they arose, of a most agreeable visit. How could they be otherwise? (*Sunny*, p. ix)

Contradictorily, at the same time she states that she is publishing her travel letters only to correct 'the persevering and deliberate attempts, in certain quarters, to misrepresent the circumstances which are here given'. (*Sunny*, p. ix). Letter XVII is entirely devoted to a defence of the Duchess, with Stowe extolling the 'improvements' in the estate (on which she had yet to set foot), detailing the mileage of new roads, the number of banks, schools, post offices, and even describing the complete conversion of the inhabitants to temperance. ('There is not, I believe, an illegal still in the county' (*Sunny*, p. 221), she declares, a statement which convicts her on the spot of extreme credulity, to anyone who knows Sutherland, then or now.) MacLeod took her to pieces in *Gloomy Memories*, contesting and disproving every single point. Despite the potential libel on the Sutherlands, facts are, as MacLeod puts it, 'stubborn chiefls' (*Gloomy*, p. 120); he was never challenged or refuted, and his account was fully substantiated as a result of the Royal Commission of 1883, assisted by the discovery of an eye-witness

diary account by a Caithness churchman, Donald Sage. On her second European tour Stowe did visit the Sutherland estate, and comments in a letter to her husband on 15 September 1856, from Dunrobin Castle, the Duchess's seat, that 'I am showered with letters, private and printed' imploring her to see for herself the evidence of abuse and misery.<sup>5</sup> In response she extolled the virtues of the Sutherlands, describing the Duke as unselfishly spending the entire income of the estate on its improvements, and the estate itself as akin to a garden. In short 'Everything here is like a fairy story'. (*Life and Letters*, p. 218). Indeed, the Duke offered to have the castle (architecturally rather akin to Disney's trademark Ruritanian fantasy) illuminated in celebration if Fremont won the American election (*Life and Letters*, p. 222). Even thirteen years later, when the evidence was surely incontestible, Stowe repeated the material, in her memorial of the Duchess, once more exonerating the Sutherlands.

What reason could Stowe have for whitewashing a Highland landlord? Various arguments have been advanced. Later commentators have tended to follow Stowe's own account. Forrest Wilson, for example, simply dismisses all charges, repeating Stowe's own point that there was confusion between the first Duchess of Sutherland (died 1839) who was responsible for the Strathnaver Clearances, and Stowe's own friend, who became Duchess of Sutherland only on her marriage in 1823.<sup>6</sup> Whether or not there were abuses, Stowe argued, it was well before her time. MacLeod, of course, pointed out that there had been no change in the landlords' policy throughout the period. Clearances continued, including, in 1853 when Stowe was in Britain, a particularly brutal clearance in Knoydart. Frank Klingberg and Howard Temperley ascribe the success of Stowe's tour to her achievement in preserving the unity of a severely factionalised movement – which any sign of criticism of the Sutherlands would have threatened.<sup>7</sup> Joan Hedrick, while not pronouncing one way or the other on the question of the Clearances, similarly understands Stowe's defence of the Duchess as part and parcel of her conciliatory position, carefully maintaining her own neutrality between different abolitionist factions.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Chris Mulvey notes that Stowe's ideal model of society as an extended family made her vulnerable to the attractions of the aristocracy, especially where the nobleman could also be seen as a force for progress and commercial improvement.<sup>9</sup> Stowe's interest in improvements readily disposed her towards the clearances, as a 'progressive' modern movement (she spent some time visiting model lodging houses and schools, while in Britain).

George Shepperson (in much the most extensive discussion of the

topic) apparently makes one point in Stowe's favour in underlining the fact that Stowe had not actually visited Sutherland when she penned *Sunny Memories*, implicitly correcting the error made by Prebble, who dates *Sunny Memories* after the second visit (i.e. when Stowe should have known better). Shepperson argues that she had access only to second-hand information, in other words that it may have been a relatively innocent mistake, at least initially. In addition, he notes the importance of Stowe's visit in stimulating the 'Free Cotton' argument, and in lending respectability to the abolitionist cause. While not letting Stowe off the hook completely, Shepperson also notes the problems facing anyone in gaining access to the truth. The evidence of illiterate Gaelic speakers on the north coast of Scotland was unlikely to outweigh the 'facts' as presented by James Loch and the Sutherland estate to a London audience.<sup>10</sup> Geography was also a factor. Even when in Sutherland, Stowe was on the east coast, and in the close vicinity of Dunrobin, the Duchess's seat. Without going as far as MacLeod who accused the Duchess of staging a 'Prince Potemkin'-style display of temporarily done-up cottages and happy peasants expressly for Stowe's benefit (*Gloomy*, p. 140), there is all the difference in the world between the circumstances of farmers and estate workers in the shadow of the castle, and the inhabitants of the far north-west (most of which is reached, even now, at the expense of some time and difficulty by single-track road). In addition, as Shepperson also notes, there may have been a personal factor. Stowe's son, Henry, who much enjoyed his visit to Dunrobin, died in an accident in 1857 shortly after their return. In a letter to the Duchess on 3 August 1857 communicating the news of Henry's death, Stowe writes that 'Dunrobin will always be dearer to me now'. (*Life and Letters*, p. 240). The Duchess lost her own son in the Crimea and the two women were clearly brought closer together by mutual grief.

Be that as it may, it is none the less arguable that Stowe did know what she was doing and did it expressly. My argument has two main points: first, despite its date (and *pace* Shepperson), *Sunny Memories* was designed from the outset to combat MacLeod, who had published his accusations originally in a series of letters to the *Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle* in 1840–41, republishing them in expanded form in 1841 as *History of the Destitution in Sutherlandshire*. Stowe did not act in ignorance of the charges, even on her first visit. Second, Stowe's strategy was not focused upon the *contrast* between the slave and the wage labourer, but upon the strikingly close *parallels* between the slave and the Highlander. It was relatively easy to highlight the differences between a

plantation slave and an urban labourer in a European city. It was not so easy to contest the parallels between the slave and the inhabitant of a semi-feudal rural estate under aristocratic 'guardianship'.

To take up the first point: *Sunny Memories* (particularly in the British letters) is not so much a travel book as a work of polemic. Despite her professed enthusiasm for Scottish ballads, Burns and Scott, Stowe seeds her text with strategic images of a modern, 'improved' Scotland, to pave the way for her defence of the Sutherlands in Letter XVII. Approaching Glasgow by night she is alarmed that the country appears to be on fire 'like a raid from the Highlands' (*Sunny*, p. 37) and relieved when the fires turn out to be iron foundries. These may be 'less picturesque than the old beacons' (*Sunny*, p. 37), but their hammers are decidedly better than the clash of claymores. In short the Highlands represent a savage past. Walter Scott may be wonderful but he 'belonged to a past, and not the coming age' (*Sunny*, p. 51). He is only picturesque to American eyes because safely removed by time. She continues:

One might naturally get a very different idea of a feudal castle by starving to death in the dungeon of it, than by writing sonnets on it at a picturesque distance. (*Sunny*, p. 51)

As for popular Scottish champions, she comments on Jane Porter's *The Highland Chiefs* that:

Many a young woman who has cried herself sick over Wallace in the novel, would have been in perfect horror if she could have seen the real man. (*Sunny*, p. 52)

Unsurprisingly, the clan system comes in for no wistful nostalgia. Commenting on the speaking skills of the Duke of Argyll, Stowe declares that 'it is much better to deliver a lyceum lecture than to lead a clan in battle' (*Sunny*, p. 53). MacLeod had made much of the loss to the British army occasioned by the clearances. Stowe had defended them as the inevitable civilised turning of swords into ploughshares. At the Duchess's London residence she admires two retainers in full Highland costume, but when two bagpipers perform her tune changes:

Their dress reminds me in its effect, of that of our American Indians, and their playing is wild and barbaric. (*Sunny*, p. 309)

Having written off the Highlanders as barbaric remnants of a past age (rather like Vanishing Americans) she sketches the future in an account of a visit to cottages at Dryburgh. The suggestion of a parallel between slaves and labourers is briskly rebutted by her host ('we are no slaves')

*Sunny*, p. 109) who goes on to argue that the affairs of the working classes have greatly improved since 'this emigration to America' (*Sunny*, 109). The cottage is eulogised in terms of its neatness, evidence of industry, proximity to schools, and excellent tea table, together with the Christian grace said over it. Slyly Stowe points out that her host is a mason with a son in America. MacLeod was, like his father, also a mason, now exiled in North America. Clearly masons had nothing at all to complain about! It is a small touch which betrays Stowe's polemical intention.

Why was Stowe so exercised on this matter? The answer has a special resonance for contemporary historians. Following the 'historians' controversy' in Germany in 1986 over the use of history for political purposes, scholars have become familiar with the dangers of making historical arguments that tend either to 'relativise' or to 'normalise' the Nazi state's killings of Jews. Discussing Ronald Reagan's respectful tribute at the graves of SS soldiers at Bitburg in 1985, Geoffrey Hartman warned of

a more subtle revisionism . . . all around us that mitigates the horrors of the camps, not by denying it but by using equalizing comparisons.<sup>11</sup>

In this way Vietnam becomes a Holocaust – or (a more vexed issue following Elkins) slavery a psychological equivalent of the camps. It is a problem that besets any comparative study, offering a fatal temptation to writers to indulge the rhetoric of blame with rival calculators totting up the mortality rates. Stowe was there before us, and saw the pitfalls at her feet. As my opening quotations suggest, the parallels between African slaves and Highlanders were all too suggestive, and were immediately noted as such. When one ship, the *James*, reached Canada from Scotland in 1826 the Governor General commented that 'there are not many instances of slave-traders from Africa to America exhibiting so disgusting a picture'. (*Gloomy*, p. 206). When the *Sarah* and the *Dove* sailed from Scotland to Pictou in Nova Scotia in 1801, 700 Sutherlanders were on board: Prebble notes that if they had been slave ships they would have been allowed to carry only 489 passengers (*Highland Clearances*). Without explicitly invoking the Middle Passage, MacLeod made much of the horrors of the voyage: 'six weeks' dreary passage, rolling upon the mountainous billows of the Atlantic, ill-fed, ill-clad, among sickness, disease and excrements' (*Gloomy*, p. 155). Physical violence and restraint were an experience common to both slaves and Scots. In August 1851, in the clearance of Barra and South Uist (just before Stowe's first visit) those who fled the emigrant ship were pursued, beaten, dragged on board and handcuffed. Macleod comments:

the duplicity and art which was used by them in order to entrap the unwary natives is worthy of the craft and cunning of an old slave trader . . . One stout Highlander . . . resisted with such pith that they had to handcuff him before he could be mastered. One morning, during the transporting season, we were suddenly awakened by the screams of a young female who had been recaptured in an adjoining house after her first apprehension. We all rushed to the door and saw the broken-hearted creature with disshevelled hair and swollen face, dragged away by two constables and a ground officer. Were you to see the racing and chasing of policemen, constables and ground officers, pursuing the outlawed natives you would think, only for their colour, that you had been by some miracle transported to the banks of the Gambia on the slave coast of Africa. (*Gloomy*, p. 164)

Those who did get away (hiding in the hills) never saw their families again, of course. Macleod again foregrounds the parallel with slavery:

The expulsion . . . the manhunt . . . the violent separation of families, the parents torn from the child, the mother from her daughter . . . For cruelty less savage the dealers of the South have been held up to the execration of the world. (*Gloomy*, p. 166)

The ‘Affectionate Address’ had emphasised the fact that the slave was denied the sanctity of marriage and education in the truths of the Gospel, and had appealed to sisters, wives and mothers on those grounds. The Address was a very carefully couched, middle-of-the-road, ostensibly apolitical document. It is a fair assumption that these two issues were the safest and most unchallengeable grounds on which the abolitionists could found their case – the nineteenth-century equivalent of ‘Mom and apple pie’. Under the new ‘improved’ Sutherland regime, the inhabitants suffered from the same prohibitions. Nine out of ten of them were members of the Free Church. They were not permitted to build churches or manses for their pastors. The punishments for assisting or sheltering a *persona non grata* were also severe: anyone giving overnight shelter to a Protestant minister was evicted. As a result, Free Church Ministers were at least as exposed to the elements as fugitive slaves. One minister had to make a round trip of 88 miles without any shelter at all in order to preach – no light thing in the north of Scotland.<sup>12</sup> Since the Sutherlands were not themselves Presbyterian, MacLeod drew the astute conclusion that this had little to do with religion and much to do with suppression of the truth.

The Free Church threatens to translate [their] wrongs into English –the Gaelic language removes a district more effectually from the influence of



English public opinion than an ocean of 3000 miles – the British public know better what is doing in New York than what is doing in Lewis or Skye. (*Gloomy*, pp. 198–200)

Church land was also often the only place from which a Highlander could not be violently evicted. Angus Campbell, evicted at Rogart, took up residence in a temporary booth which he erected over his father's grave in the churchyard. Unwilling to use force, the minister and factors conceded the case. Once Campbell was back home, they simply evicted him again, taking care to bar all entry to the churchyard first (*Gloomy*, p. 98). In 1828, MacLeod found that the Strathnaver church had actually been demolished and its timbers used to build an inn at Altnaharra. Just as in the American South, the established church supported the landowners, either physically (the Reverend Beatson is described as pursuing escaping emigrants 'like a gamekeeper': *Gloomy*, p. 64) or by inculcating habits of Christian submission, arguing that their sufferings were all the result of their sins. In the clearance at Culrain in 1820, where the militia fled before a large crowd of women, the Reverend Macbean spent forty-eight hours describing the torments and fires of Hell, until he broke the people's will. Since the churchmen were often the only literate people in the area, and since the Sutherland estate received tenants' petitions only if written in English and supported by a character reference from the minister, the Highlanders had almost as little protection from the law as the slave. In her memoir of the Duchess, Stowe somewhat ingenuously ascribes the practice of getting all cases in writing to the Duke's deafness (*Sunny*, p. 247).

The new tenants of the cleared lands were appointed JPs. If a case did come to court it had to be 'interpreted' from Gaelic to a jury of English speakers; when one sheriff (Robert McKid) visited the north-west and took evidence which established the truth, he was immediately dismissed from office. Ostensibly to discourage overpopulation, the Sutherlands also issued edicts forbidding marriage on their land. If a crofter's son married, he had to leave the croft – effectively marriage by permission. Donald Ross notes that after the recruiting officers had failed to raise one single recruit in Sutherland in the aftermath of the clearances, the young men of the county forwarded a statement to the newspapers explaining themselves as follows:

We have no country to fight for, as our glens and straths are laid desolate, and we have no wives nor children to defend, as we are forbidden to have them. We are not allowed to marry without the consent of the factor.<sup>13</sup>

MacLeod states that this led to ‘a great amount of prostitution’ and an increase in ‘illegitimate connections and issues’ (*Gloomy*, p. 137). Sutherland may not offer a precise parallel with the whorehouses of New Orleans, but any threat to the sanctity of marriage was highly damaging evidence, in abolitionist and evangelical circles.

Just as Stowe (and the ‘Affectionate Address’) had appealed to motherhood as the transcendent value, so commentators on the clearances drew attention to the plight of the Highland Mother – flung out in the heather with sick children, giving birth in public in the midst of a clearance as her home flamed, dragged from a burning house with her clothes on fire – all well-attested incidents. ‘Mothers in Christian Britain, look, I say, at these Highland mothers who conceived and gave birth, and who are equally as fond of their offspring as you can be’, declaimed MacLeod (*Gloomy*, p. 155). The *Morning Chronicle* (7 October 1856) addressed Stowe in her own sentimental rhetoric:

You are a mother, Mrs Stowe . . . Will you therefore kindly ask the wife of Angus Sutherland how she felt when, less than three months ago, she and her little ones – then ill of measles – were thrown out of their humble home? Will you get the wife of Angus McKay to narrate to you how, only last year, a few days after suffering the pangs and going through the perils of maternity, she with her new-born white babe and other little ones, was mercilessly carried out in a sheet, and left to bivouac on a bare hill without home or shelter[?]

In short, the parallels in forced transportation, physical abuse, denial of marriage, denial of the Christian religion, conniving clergymen, lack of legal protection, enforced immorality, and docility under oppression were compelling. Stowe was committed to the argument (expressed, ironically, by Augustine St Clair in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*<sup>14</sup>) that ‘the thing itself is the essence of all abuse’ – that slavery was morally wrong in itself, regardless of parallels with any other system. To admit one parallel case would have been to set in motion a process of ‘equalizing comparisons’, which would have played straight into the hands of the other side.

The proof perhaps is evident in the rhetoric of Stowe’s opponents. In making his parallels between Highlanders and slaves MacLeod ran the risk of perpetuating racism, and broadening its sphere by unleashing a third term – the imperialised – uncritically employed. One of MacLeod’s less palatable suggestions was that, were the Duke to offer the slaves the place of the Highlanders, they would beg to be returned to slavery:

But if it was possible or practicable to try the experiment, that is, to bring 190000 of the American slaves to Sutherlandshire, and give them all the

indulgence, all the privileges, and comforts the aborigines of that county do enjoy, I would risk all that is sacred and dear to me, that they would rend the heavens, praying to be restored to their old American slave owners. (*Gloomy*, p. 104)

Contrasting the slaves' lot with the Highlanders' MacLeod portrayed the former as less unhappy in their slavery, on the grounds that they had never known what it was to be free, unlike the Highlanders who had only recently lost their former rights.

The child who has been born blind is not so helpless, nor so much to be pitied when he comes to manhood, as the poor fellow who has been deprived of his sight after arriving at manhood; the former never knew what light or the use of it was, and will not pine and lament over the loss of it. (*Gloomy*, p. 104)

Fired as he was by the wrongs of the Highlanders, it is difficult to make any allowances for MacLeod's argument here which manages to equate racist oppression with biological essentialism, physical handicap and a quite unconscious equation of African slavery with the forces of darkness. Even worse, MacLeod invokes Voltaire's example of the Cannibal Queen, whose response to being reproached for her cannibalism was to point out that, whereas Voltaire's people killed men and left them to rot, her people at least benefitted from consuming them. Similarly, he argued, the Southerners could tell the abolitionists that at least when they bought slaves 'we feed, clothe and house them' (*Gloomy*, p. 33) as opposed to the British who first pauperise and then abandon their 'white slaves'. Arguments of this nature have a nasty habit of reversing themselves. As added ammunition, MacLeod invoked the example of cannibalism among the starving Irish, citing the case of a boiled baby (*Gloomy*, p. 33). From this, it was a short step from the comparative to the globalising, and to justifications of Empire, with the Duke characterised as Nana Sahib (*Gloomy*, p. 223), the Highlanders as the heroes of the Indian Mutiny (*Gloomy*, p. 224), and of South Africa (*Gloomy*, p. 150), and the unconquered Celtic race the only 'pure', unmixed blood in Britain (*Gloomy*, p. 104), now being massacred in North America by cruel half-breeds and savage Indians (*Gloomy*, p. 41). In the latter example MacLeod was unaware that the leaders of the so-called savages were the Gaelic MacGillivray brothers (as Ian Grimble notes in his introduction: *Gloomy*, p. 29). MacLeod was, of course, in good company in exploiting an orientalisising rhetoric. In *Capital* Karl Marx, taking the Duchess of Sutherland as an example of the worst excesses of the Clearances, compared the

landlords to fierce Indians and Moguls.<sup>15</sup> In MacLeod's original article for the *New York Daily Tribune* (9 February 1853, p. 6) the Duchess of Sutherland was described as a 'female Mehemet Ali'. Perhaps Stowe was right to prefer stonewalling to equalising comparisons.

Or did she? The story has a twist in its tail. On 9 and 16 October 1856, as Stowe headed south after her visit to Dunrobin, readers of the *Northern Ensign* (a Caithness paper) were treated to a long letter of repentance. Apparently realising that she had no chance of visiting the north coast on a fact-finding tour, Stowe describes how she stole into the Duke's library in search of some hard facts, only to discover to her horror that the population of Sutherland had hardly increased in fifty years, that land values were low, that there was almost no shipping or commerce, no post offices, no banks, not a newspaper or a press or a bookshop, that in short 'the material prosperity of Mr Loch's chapter in my *Sunny Memories* was a myth'. Stowe promptly recanted.

The bubble has burst! Chapter seventeen of my 'Sunny Memories' is a mere delusion. Oh that with one dash of my pen I could blot it out of existence, and forever wipe away the remembrance of the connection I had with it . . . The facts I got from the books in the library leave me no alternative but to declare my former statements . . . as baseless and unfounded, and to pronounce [the] system, not 'a sublime instance of the benevolent employment of a superior wealth and power in shortening the struggles of advancing civilization', but a barbarous and cruel application of superior power.

In a full description of the various abuses, she concludes that 'I fear I did wrong in coming forward to vindicate these horrid clearances'. She has, she argues, made a rather subtle hint at the true state of the case in *Dred*, but cannot afford to anger the Duchess 'whose friendship is essential to the sale of my books'. As readers will gather, the letter is a transparent (and acknowledged) forgery by the editor. Stowe maintained her public silence and made no response. The editor's suggestion of a covert hint in *Dred*, however, may offer readers of Stowe a shred of comfort. In that novel, the Clayton family estate is a paradigm for the benevolent trusteeship of the enlightened slave-owner, with its model cottages, lyceum, and improvements of the most progressive nature. The Utopia fails when Clayton finds a party of whites at the door, torches in hand, intent on burning the house over his head, a threat which effectively *clears* the whole plantation, black and white, sending them to a new life in Canada.

## Notes

I am grateful for the assistance of Jim A. Johnston, and Irene Ross of the Strathnaver Museum, Clachan, Bettyhill, Sutherland.

- 1 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands*, London, Sampson, Low, 1854, p. 228. Hereafter, *Sunny*.
- 2 Donald MacLeod, *Gloomy Memories in the Highlands of Scotland versus Mrs Harriet Beecher Stowe's Sunny Memories In (England) A Foreign Land: Or A Faithful Picture of the Extirpation of the Celtic Race From the Highlands of Scotland*, Strathnaver Museum, Farr, Sutherland, [1856] 1996, p. 85. Hereafter, *Gloomy*.
- 3 Horace Perry Jones, 'The Southern Press Follows Harriet Beecher Stowe Abroad', *McNeese Review*, 27 (1980–81), 36–44.
- 4 John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1963, pp. 306–15. Hereafter, *Highland Clearances*.
- 5 Annie Fields (ed.), *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1897, pp. 218–19. Hereafter, *Life and Letters*.
- 6 Forrest Wilson, *Crusader in Crinoline: The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, London, Hutchinson, 1942.
- 7 Frank J. Klingberg, 'Harriet Beecher Stowe and Social Reform in England', *American Historical Review*, 43 (1937–38), 542–52; Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery 1833–1870*, London, Longman, 1972.
- 8 Joan Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe. A Life*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994.
- 9 Christopher Mulvey, *Transatlantic Manners*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- 10 George Shepperson, 'Harriet Beecher Stowe and Scotland, 1852–3', *Scottish Historical Review*, 32 (1953), 40–6.
- 11 Geoffrey Hartmann (ed.), *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 6.
- 12 Alexander Mackenzie, *The History of the Highland Clearances*, Glasgow, P.J. O'Callaghan, [1883] 1914, p. 63. Contains excerpts from Loch, MacLeod, Miller, Sage, Stowe.
- 13 Donald Ross, *Letters on the Depopulation of the Highlands*, Glasgow, 1956, p. 4.
- 14 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, London, Penguin, [1851] 1981, p. 332.
- 15 Karl Marx, *Capital*, ed. Frederick Engels, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1974, p. 682.

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## Gothic legacies: *Jane Eyre* in Elizabeth Stoddard's New England

*Anne-Marie Ford*

'What do you think of those scenes in *Jane Eyre* where she watches with a professional eye the rising of [Rochester's] passionate emotions, and skillfully prevents any culmination of feeling by changing her manner? – Did anybody ever notice it?'<sup>1</sup> These questions come from a letter, dated 5 May 1860, to the American writer and critic James Russell Lowell, from an aspiring New England writer, Elizabeth Drew Barstow Stoddard. Lowell had recently accepted one of Stoddard's short stories for publication in the American journal the *Atlantic Monthly*, and had sent her a letter advising her on ways in which he felt she could improve her writing style. Her response, commenting on the love games between Charlotte Brontë's heroine and hero, reflects the interest in sexuality evident in her own writing, as well as her admiration for Brontë, whose work seems to have influenced Stoddard rather more than Lowell's advice. He detected in her writing, he said, a tendency to move 'towards the *edge of things*,'<sup>2</sup> and warned her against it. But Stoddard was captivated by the love games in *Jane Eyre*, and, especially, the daring representation of a sensual heroine who challenged patriarchal power and claimed the right of self-possession. Brontë's exploration of these themes fused elements of Gothic literature with the domestic, so that, as Elaine Showalter argues in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980*, her writing 'shows an evolution from Romantic stereotypes of female insanity to a brilliant interrogation of the meaning of madness in women's daily lives'.<sup>3</sup> The images Brontë conjured up of female entrapment and frustrated desire powerfully engaged and inspired Stoddard. At a time when many other American women writers were producing sentimental or moralistic novels, which tended to reinforce the social and cultural values of the time, Stoddard wrote about the passionate self and lamented that America had no 'Elizabeth Browning, Brontë, [or] George Sand'.<sup>4</sup>



Each of these European writers was an important model for women writers in America, and it is hardly surprising that Stoddard's first novel, *The Morgesons* (1862), displays the influence that Brontë had upon her writing. Both Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Stoddard's *The Morgesons* are written in the first person, and both begin with the heroine as a child, before bringing her, at the age of eighteen, to her first sexual encounter. The heroine's progress from beginning to end is given a psycho-social context by employing what has come to be known as female Gothic, a mode which expresses women's sexual fantasies and fears, as well as their rage at male oppression, and is itself derived from the Gothic writings of late eighteenth-century Europe. Both authors, too, use binary images of fire and ice, in order to reflect the cold outer world of custom and control, at odds with the fervent passions of the sexual self. Brontë's heroine first meets the hero/villain Rochester when out walking on a frosty night, and returns home only to be ushered into a firelit room to encounter him once more. Stoddard's heroine is placed against a snowy, frozen backdrop, contrasted with the firelit warmth of an inn, as she experiences the sexual advances of her would-be seducer, Charles Morgeson. In both novels such symbolic oppositions convey to the reader the inner life and emotional responses of a passionate and unconventional heroine.

Brontë and Stoddard both borrow from, and adapt, the romantic Gothic tradition of, for example, the British writer Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). In addition, Stoddard anatomises the pathology of a repressive regional culture in a style known as provincial Gothic, used by American writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne in his *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). Such borrowings and negotiations between British and American traditions of the Gothic are also explored by Sue Zlosnik and Avril Horner in their essay on the work of Djuna Barnes and Evelyn Waugh (Chapter 11). In adapting the Gothic mode, Brontë not only focuses on the sexual nature of women and male oppression, but also on class categories, reflecting a deeply embedded nineteenth-century preoccupation, one that was a focus for Gothic writers, not least Hawthorne. Stoddard employs elements of the Gothic to render the sexually powerful and dominant male, resonant of the slave owners of the American South, as well as current debates regarding women's socio-economic oppression. Brontë and Stoddard both consider contemporary issues through images of embattled females, seeking victory over cultural and social oppression, although they present this victory in very different ways.

Overall, however, in their representations of male oppression, and the

issues they confront, Brontë and Stoddard are broadly similar. The critical introduction to the 1984 reprint of *The Morgesons*, by Lawrence Buell and Sandra Zagarell, notes Stoddard's close intellectual affinity with both Charlotte and Emily Brontë, 'The work of all three displays an interfusion of Victorian social realism with the romance tradition', and continues that Stoddard, like the Brontës, 'depicts . . . social reality with a keen awareness of how kinship, marriage, property ownership, and inheritance inter-mesh'.<sup>5</sup> In exploring the way in which Brontë and Stoddard deploy Gothic conventions, I want to consider their common and varied representations of woman's psycho-social oppression, and erotic nature. Furthermore, I will investigate the emancipation of each of their heroines from socio-economic restrictions, and their modes of dealing with the fulfilment of their erotic nature. I will also show the ways in which the transatlantic borrowings of Elizabeth Stoddard create a rich and unnerving novel that refuses to embrace conventional models of femininity. Stoddard's use of British and American Gothic traditions and her engagement with *Jane Eyre* result in an extraordinarily candid and surprising novel, which still resonates with readers today.

The trope of the castle in romantic Gothic, and of the house in provincial Gothic, is used to symbolise the confinement and maltreatment of women socially, psychologically and physically: in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for example, Emily St Aubert, a beautiful young woman, is confined by her uncle in a remote castle and threatened with the loss of her wealth and her life; and, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hepzibah Pyncheon, an elderly spinster, is confined by gender, class, and a series of historical crimes in her family, in a decaying old mansion, living a life of loneliness and poverty. In an age when middle-class culture idealised the home, and the role of the woman as its moral centre, the Gothic was used to reveal the fears and horrors within everyday domestic life. As Kate Ferguson Ellis argues, in *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, nineteenth-century Gothic undermined the prevailing belief that the domestic space was a safe one, especially for women. Ellis perceives the Gothic heroine's attempts to escape her prison as a desire to subvert a domestic ideology which was beginning to tyrannise the lives of middle-class women within a capitalist society. Yet she acknowledges, too, 'that popular literature can be a site of resistance to ideological positions as well as a means of propagating them'.<sup>6</sup> Brontë, through her transgressive heroine, interrogates both gender boundaries and class categories, yet finally surrenders to many of the values of contemporary ideology. Nevertheless, she also creates what Ellis describes as

a space in her text for the appearance of the forbidden, and in this space she places the libidinous, monstrous female, Bertha Rochester. Texts such as Brontë's and the later sensation<sup>7</sup> novels of, for example, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, present female madness/insanity in its social context, as a reaction to the limitations of the feminine role. Stoddard's novel also investigates such limitations, through images of nervous sensibility and agoraphobia to which her women fall victim. Stoddard also goes further than Brontë in insisting on the heroine's transgressions as a permanently liberating force. Yet the central preoccupations of both writers remain the same: a passionate heroine, threatened by social and cultural codes that seek to deny her the possibility of achieving self-possession. In their use of the home as a place of internment, both offer a template for what Ellis, in *The Contested Castle*, identifies as a space of apparent safety which actually imprisons its female inhabitants.

Thornfield Hall, the building to which Jane goes on leaving Lowood, is a gentleman's manor-house, and although it has battlements round the top, like a Gothic castle, these, Brontë's heroine concludes, 'gave it a picturesque look'.<sup>8</sup> She is not discomfited either when a tour of the house reminds her of the tale of Bluebeard, a Gothic villain before his time, who brutally murders a number of young wives: 'I lingered in the long passage . . . separating the front and back rooms of the third story – narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle' (*JE*, p. 138). As Jane draws closer to discovering Thornfield's secret, however, she finds that it contains genuinely Gothic horrors: a creature who, at dead of night, attacks a visitor to the Hall, like a vampire, sucking his blood and saying she would drain his heart; a creature who is Mrs Rochester. The wife of Thornfield Hall's master is restrained in a house which is, after all, 'a mere dungeon' (*JE*, p. 244). Thornfield Hall, like Bluebeard's castle, contains within it a dreadful secret, but here it is the secret malevolence and rage not of a brutal husband, but of an imprisoned wife.

Jane's deeper knowledge of Thornfield Hall is echoed in Cassandra's progressive understanding of the house she visits in Belem, the home of the Somers family, into which she eventually marries. Cassandra, like Jane, makes a light-hearted reference to Bluebeard (she and Ben Somers agree it is their favourite fairy story), and she too finds that the house she visits is not without its horrors. Again there is an imprisoned wife, a woman buried alive in the family home. Bellevue Pickersgill Somers, from whose aristocratic father the Somers derive their wealth, is trapped in

time: she is a 'terrible aristocrat', who never changes anything in the house, for she is 'fixed in the ideas imbedded in the Belem institutions, which only move backward' (*TM*, p. 167). She is also trapped within her own body: having been married at fifteen, she is still producing children more than thirty years later. Significantly, in the Belem scenes she never leaves the house. Here is another entrapped female, a covertly malevolent wife, discharging her rage at her confinement(s) by insidious attacks on others. Bellevue Somers – at the centre of the family, spinning her threads of malice like a spider in the middle of its web – is fixed in this emblem, an image that brilliantly combines the mundane with the horrific: 'Mrs Somers gave me some tea from a spider-shaped silver teapot, which was related to a spider-shaped cream-jug and a spider-shaped sugar-dish' (*TM*, p.168). But Bellevue Somers, like Bertha Rochester, is a prisoner, trapped in time and within her own body, she produces (male) heirs to the Pickersgill line, and rarely goes beyond her own front door. Claire Kahane, in 'The Gothic Mirror', has written persuasively that such an image in Gothic literature represents 'the spectral presence of a dead-undead mother, archaic and all-encompassing, a ghost signifying the problematics of femininity which the heroine must confront.'<sup>9</sup> In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë problematises femininity through images of the deadly Bertha Rochester, vessel of sexual abandon, mad and savage, while Stoddard's buried mother-figure is Bellevue Somers, the female trapped, and made monstrous, by her own fertility.

Brontë and Stoddard also engage, through their texts, in a debate on the ways in which economic power is denied to the female within a capitalist patriarchal society, during their own historical moment. In their novels they show the female as economically marginalised, oppressed by customs and institutions which deny her power or control. In Brontë's *Thornfield* and Stoddard's Belem household, emphasis is placed on the corrupting power wealth wields in relation to gender. Both Bertha Rochester and Bellevue Somers represent woman as monstrous being, a being created by socio-economic boundaries of patriarchy and capitalism; an awful warning of what Brontë's and Stoddard's heroines might become, if they fail to achieve personal autonomy. In fact, they embody the horrors of a nightmare world, which reflects the corruption of the daytime existence that imperils gender relations. Brontë uses darkness, wild laughter, fire and terror to express the warped relationship between husband and wife at *Thornfield*. Stoddard depicts a world of decay, cobwebs, inertia and dissipation to illustrate the twisted lives of the Belem household. Having learnt the horrors of what may befall them, both her-

oines work towards achieving self-possession, and ultimately come into possession of economic power.

The deployment of the Gothic castle or house is echoed in both Brontë's and Stoddard's use of other standard Gothic character conventions, in particular those relating to the villain, the heroine and the hero, the latter usually rescuing the heroine from the villain. *Bluebeard*, Charles Perrault's French tale of 1697, offered a template for Gothic treatment of the husband as villain, in the same way that Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* (1797), offered a template for Gothic treatment of the father-figure as villain. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for example, the villainous Montoni is the husband of Emily St Aubert's aunt, and the heroine's legal guardian. Re-enacting the role of the legendary Bluebeard, Montoni torments his wife, imprisoning her when she is ill, refusing her access to either appropriate care or medicines, and eventually taking pleasure in her early demise. Both Brontë and Stoddard were to modernise this classic Radcliffean plot, encoding contemporary concerns about women, subject to unjust internment and denied their identity by their socio-economic position, as well as, in Brontë's case, questioning definitions of insanity. Brontë challenges the social and psychological constructs which limit the female, and explores the images of the divided self that can result. In *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History and the Politics of Gender*, Linda M. Shires comments, 'symbolic associations of women with disease were strengthened by the received wisdom that not only were women more prone to insanity than men, they were also more responsible for hereditary transmission'.<sup>10</sup> Although Brontë rejects the notion that the passionate female is diseased in body (and mind), owing to her 'unfeminine' sexual desires, she also confirms the taint of madness and moral decadence as a disease inherited through the female. The savage, sexual Bertha Rochester is, after all, defined as 'the true daughter of an infamous mother' (*JE*, p. 334).

Showalter, in *The Female Malady*, discusses the connections made over time between madness and gender. She argues that women struggling with mental illness are, in part, struggling with the dissatisfactions, anxieties and frustrations they experience in coming to terms with being female in a culture that privileges male experience. Bertha Rochester is depicted as a woman whose lustful nature, apparently inherited from her wanton (and foreign) mother, is the cause of her lunacy. Jean Rhys, of course, in her novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), offered a reworking of these themes in a powerful vindication of Brontë's fictional character.

Stoddard's trapped females also suffer mentally, though perhaps less dramatically than Brontë's, reflecting more prosaically the anxieties, frustrations and limitations of being female. Her heroine's sister, Veronica, is a frail, nervous creature whose fear of her own sexuality limits her ability to engage with life. She reflects the nineteenth-century society Showalter discusses in her critical work, one which 'perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable'.<sup>11</sup> Veronica's nervous instability is translated, in Bellevue Somers, into agoraphobia. Mrs Somers is a woman for whom reproduction has become a primary purpose, so that she is imprisoned within her own body and also, like Mrs Rochester, entombed within the house of the husband/father.

In *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic*, Eugenia DeLamotte argues that Brontë's Jane Eyre is susceptible to confinement in the same realm as Rochester's wife, Bertha, inhabits. 'A point has been made in Jane's tour of the house that there is more than one little door in the upper storey, as if Thornfield were a sort of Bluebeard's Castle and Bertha's echoing laugh sounded from these rooms, too'.<sup>12</sup> When the existence of his first wife is disclosed, and the marriage to Jane aborted, Rochester attempts to persuade her to live with him, 'happy, and guarded' (*JE*, p. 331), his wife in all but name. This does, indeed, mirror Bertha Rochester's imprisoned existence, his wife in name only. Further, Brontë's second hero/villain, St John Rivers, offers Jane a marriage which (like Bluebeard's) brings death in its wake, as she recognises: 'If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now' (*JE*, p. 438). Yet, just as Brontë's hero/villains reinforce Radcliffe's covert questioning of gender roles, Brontë, also like Radcliffe, confirms her belief in the conventions of marriage.

By the conclusion of the novel, Brontë's heroine is celebrating ten years of happy marriage to the hero/villain, Rochester. Brontë makes it clear to her readers that the reason behind Rochester's early and disastrous marriage is the law of primogeniture. As the second son, he inherits no wealth from his father, and is virtually forced by his family into a marriage which will bring him financial gain. Thus, Brontë seeks partly to exonerate Rochester, by showing him as not only repentant but also, like the woman, a victim of social and cultural codes of behaviour. Penny Boumelha, in *Thomas Hardy and Women*, points out that the commodification of the woman was a central concern in nineteenth-century fiction. She reflects that, in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), Michael Henchard, 'in selling his wife and daughter to the sailor Newson, repeats in a startlingly blatant form the definitive act of exchange'.<sup>13</sup> Although Rochester's early

marriage contract also places Bertha Mason in the position of bartered goods, Brontë does not explore this idea. Instead, she works towards exonerating Rochester, and draws her heroine and hero/villain into a more or less conventional Victorian marriage, in which Jane is both helpmate to her husband, and mother to his children, and Bertha is seen as the sinful other. Stoddard is less willing to compromise her vision, for although her iconoclastic heroine, Cassandra Morgeson, does conform sufficiently to marry, she becomes neither helpmate nor mother, nor is the sexual woman condemned. Radcliffe's novels, therefore, find a greater resonance with Brontë's in concluding with a conventional marriage between heroine and hero, and in this Radcliffe's novels are ultimately less subversive than they seem.

However, Radcliffe can also be unconventional. She complicates the appeal to her readers' fear and guilt about gender relations by making two of her villains both fascinating and attractive; they are mysterious, charismatic, powerful and melancholy. Brontë and Stoddard adopt, but also significantly adapt, the Radcliffe template. Edward Rochester and Charles Morgeson owe much to the Radcliffe villain: they are father-figures; they are harsh, controlling, intimidating men, with distinct glamour; they are also both married, and, as in a Gothic novel, represent a sexual threat to the heroine, which forces her to flee in the case of Brontë's heroine, and to drive her almost to destruction in the case of Stoddard's. In Brontë's novel Rochester is, in a sense, Jane's father-substitute: he asks, 'do you agree with me that I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt, perhaps exacting, sometimes, on the grounds I stated, namely, that I am old enough to be your father [?]' (*JE*, p. 165), and his housekeeper, astonished by his plan to marry Jane, exclaims, 'He might almost be your father' (*JE*, p. 293). Rochester is clearly a sexual threat to Jane. It is true the threat of bedroom invasion, typical of the Gothic mode, is realised only in the proxy form of his wife, but Rochester remains a sexual threat because of the erotic charm Brontë gives him, charm much greater than that given to conventional Gothic villains. He tries to conquer Jane not by force, but by play, by the love games he indulges in with her, 'look wicked, Jane . . . coin one of your wild, shy, provoking smiles: tell me that you hate me – tease me, vex me' (*JE*, p. 310). These love games are, in effect, power games, and Jane uses her power, as Stoddard notes, to both arouse and control his passion; 'Yet after all my task was not an easy one', Jane admits, 'often I would rather have pleased him than teased him' (*JE*, p. 302). Brontë also focuses on themes of class division and slavery in her image of Rochester as Jane's master. For Brontë, her heroine's resentment of the

insidious intrusion of economic/male power is indicated in images of 'exotic' slavery, and significant orientalist tropes. Jane remarks: 'I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched: I crushed his hand, which was ever hunting mine, vigorously, and thrust it back to him red with the passionate pressure' (*JE*, p. 297). However, the language Brontë uses ('crushed', 'hunting', 'thrust', 'passionate') has a powerful physicality which underlines the greater importance of the sexual component in these power games.

Charles Morgeson, like Rochester, is a father-substitute, who, as a distant cousin, has offered Cassandra a home with his family in Rosville for a year, while she attends the local academy. Charles is, also like Rochester, a sexual threat to the heroine, a young girl already excited by the sensual atmosphere of Rosville, the scent of flowers, the glow of jewels, candlelight and fire. Rochester's sexual potency is suggested somewhat faintly by his first appearance, when he rides his horse out of the mists towards Jane. But Charles's sexual potency is underlined forcefully by numerous references to his keeping of wild and spirited horses, notably his most savage horse, Aspen, a fine, black, 'diabolical' creature. And while Rochester's sexual threat is marked by the proxy invasion of Jane's bedroom, Charles's sexual threat is marked by a personal invasion of Cassandra's bedroom. Rochester's actual threat to Jane comes in the form of a bigamous marriage, but also comes to nothing when she adopts the role of the fleeing Gothic maiden; Charles's actual physical threat to Cassandra, however, comes in the form of a possible adulterous liaison and reaches its climax in a nightmare carriage ride, in which the horse, mad and savage, drags the vehicle off the road. Charles is killed, but only after he thrusts Cassandra to safety. In this final act of heroism Charles proves himself to be, like Rochester, rather different from the usual Gothic villain.

The Gothic heroine is generally portrayed as a victim of her own innocence and ignorance, but in their versions there is little doubt that both Brontë and Stoddard again adapt, as well as adopt. Radcliffe, in her novels, had dared to expand the horizons of the heroine, and to suggest that too much innocence was a dangerous thing; indeed, her heroine's achievement of forbidden knowledge was often the key to her survival, unlocking the door of patriarchal imprisonment. Similarly, Bluebeard's secret, which his new wife sets out to discover, is hidden behind a forbidden door. Here lies what Anne Williams, in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, asserts is the secret of a patriarchal culture, the expendability of the



female.<sup>14</sup> If *Bluebeard* is a narrative which demonstrates the need to punish the inquisitive female, in order to maintain male power, *Jane Eyre* and *The Morgesons*, like Radcliffe's novels, are fictional challenges to this order. Both Brontë and Stoddard were able to discover, within the Gothic mode, opportunities to interrogate and subvert social constructs. Their heroines are independent by nature, feisty, sexually responsive, and highly intelligent. Moreover, their determination to interrogate cultural codes, and to claim personal autonomy, work towards images of unrestrained womanhood. These clever and interesting heroines achieve financial independence, and so gain access to a power which is conventionally almost exclusively the possession of men. The heroines are unconventional in other ways, too. Jane is plain, small and quick-witted, while Cassandra's own willing involvement in her impending seduction is a remarkable twist on Gothic conventions. In her depiction of the young and inexperienced heroine, whom she places in the traditional position of the female at the mercy of the powerful male, Stoddard emphasises that female's power. She achieves this by drawing attention to Cassandra's strength of will; as Charles exclaims, 'Cassandra is never tempted. What she does, she does because she will' (*TM*, p. 98). In scenes which reflect the economic/male power of the slave-owning South, and the sexual abuse of the female slave, Stoddard challenges controlling male power with female power. Cassandra glories in her own free will, defying the threatening sexuality of the male by countering with her own sexual desires. Stoddard invokes the traditional frame of seduction, merely to subvert it and to twist her narrative into a different, and startling, form. The heroes, too, run counter to Gothic convention, where they are usually handsome and virtuous young men, who rescue the heroine from the villain. The fair, handsome and virtuous St John Rivers, who shelters and proposes marriage to Jane, after her flight from Thornfield, is really more villain than romantic hero. In fact, he is much more the oppressor, seeking to destroy the female, than the dark, devilish and far from handsome Rochester. St John is cold and sexless, as well as saintly, in his renunciation of the flesh, while Rochester's passionate nature marks him as Brontë's true hero. Hence, Jane's struggle against St John's proposal is given the aesthetic appearance of a regrettable yielding to a seducer. Stoddard's hero, Desmond Somers, conforms to the Gothic pattern even less than Brontë's. Desmond, like Charles Morgeson, is something of a villain, passionate, forbidding, decadent, and self-indulgent (indeed an alcoholic); although, unlike Charles, he has no wish to control Cassandra, is no sexual tyrant, and desires, rather, a woman he can meet on equal

terms. Moreover, Desmond, while marrying Cassandra, does not rescue her any more than St John does Jane. In a way, both authors give their heroines power by allowing them to rescue the hero/villain. Jane rescues Rochester from a life of sin and loneliness. Cassandra rescues Desmond, somewhat unconventionally, by refusing to rescue him; his battle, against the hereditary vice of alcoholism, is one he must fight for himself.

Although the novels are broadly similar, in that their heroines achieve passionate fulfilment and a sense of self-possession, Brontë and Stoddard differ, especially, in the conclusion of their novels. Brontë's work is a more conventional, even pietistic, book. Her maiming of her hero reflects an ambivalence with regard to male power, and a desire to appropriate it for her heroine, who receives an inheritance from her uncle that makes her her own mistress. No comment in the book more emphatically describes the heroine's appropriation of power than: 'Reader, I married him' (*JE*, p. 474). Yet Brontë also conforms to the conventional model of marriage in the narrative. Her heroine gives birth to a boy in the early years of her marriage, a son who continues and replicates the Rochesters: 'When his first-born was put into his arms, he could see that the boy had inherited his own eyes as they once were, large, brilliant, and black' (*JE*, p. 476). The words, 'first-born', suggest that other children followed (Jane is recounting the end of the story, looking back over ten years of married life), and indicates Brontë's adherence to the Victorian ideal of woman as wife and mother, a producer of (male) heirs. As DeLamotte, in *Perils of the Night*, has recognised, 'the final and deep contradiction of *Jane Eyre* remains: while portraying, in a shockingly specific and overt way, the perils of ordinary domesticity and equating them with the worst Gothic nightmare of confinement, Charlotte Brontë nonetheless ultimately defines woman's transcendence as domestic enclosure'.<sup>15</sup>

Stoddard, to a greater extent, resists a conventional view of marriage. She also goes a step further than Brontë in marking her heroine's financial independence, for Cassandra becomes the owner of her own house, the old Morgeson family home in Surrey. She has proved, by the end of the story, to be a worthy successor to her great-grandfather, Locke Morgeson, who possessed 'the rudiments of a Founder' (*TM*, p. 9), and bequeathed his property and significant first name to Cassandra's father. The philosopher, John Locke, in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), stressed the importance of private property as a central factor in self-determination (although he conceived this ownership of property as a male one), but Stoddard twists the value system into one which empowers the female. Cassandra and Desmond marry, but their marriage is blessed by

neither family nor religion, nor with children. They travel to Europe, staying two years, before returning to Surrey, where they spend the summer at the old family house. Cassandra, connected with the sea throughout the novel, writes the end of the story in her old chamber: 'Before its windows rolls the blue summer sea. Its beauty wears a relentless aspect to me now; its eternal monotone expresses no pity, no compassion' (*TM*, p. 252). Nature is the only God Cassandra recognises, a nature which, at the last, remains indifferent to the joys and pain of her existence. In this respect, Stoddard imitates the natural imagery employed by Radcliffe in her Gothic novels. Radcliffe's heroines in, for example, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* are placed in landscapes that suggest imminent danger, such as gloomy and barren mountains, precipices and wild and plunging rivers. In *Romanticism and Gender*, Anne Mellor argues that the landscapes of the sublime function in a double way in Radcliffe's novels, so that environments not only reflect danger, but offer a backdrop in which human cruelty and physical violence can flourish. As she points out, Radcliffe demonstrates that 'sublime horror originates not from nature but rather from man', adding that 'In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *banditti* not only rove among the savage Alps but actually inhabit the homes of the female characters'.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Mellor proposes that, for Radcliffe, the experience of the sublime in nature also 'elevates the perceiving self to a sense of his or her own integrity and worth as a unique product of divine creation'.<sup>17</sup> This is reflected in Stoddard's novel, where her heroine is marked, and empowered, by the divine power of Nature as a superior being, and the wild and passionate sea reflects her inner nature. Cassandra's self-belief mirrors what Mellor sees as 'the positive Radcliffian sublime [which] both inspires and sustains love by giving each individual a conviction of personal value and significance. It thus enables the women who experience it to effect a mental escape from the oppressions of a tyrannical social order'.<sup>18</sup> The reflection of the heroine in the natural is a less dominant theme in Brontë's novel, for whom nature is but one instrument of God's power. But, in their heroines' emancipation from psycho-social and economic oppression, there are many similarities and both writers use notions of the double or mirror image to frame aspects of the rebellion of their heroines.

Brontë's most obvious use of the Gothic double or mirror image involves the two Mrs Rochesters, used to project the female as libidinous and insane or sexually corrupt. As Jane tells her story, she reveals her inner self, her fears, her longings, and her horror of the 'woman as monster', which culminates in her dreaming/waking vision of a vampire-like creature, who

places Jane's wedding veil on her own head, to gaze into the mirror. The compulsion to visualise the self, and to give visual form to the fear of self, is one which Ellen Moers suggests, in *Literary Women*, is an essentially female experience, extending the parameters of female Gothic to include self-hatred and self-disgust, directed toward the female body, sexuality and reproduction. Certainly, both Brontë and Stoddard, in their texts, employ mirror images when their heroine is in a state of great anxiety, fear or excitement, and while Cassandra's horror is the nightmare of female procreation, Jane Eyre is alarmed by female sexuality. As Jane begins to feel a passionate response to Rochester, expressed in thoughts of love and adoration, she experiences alarming events, occurring at night, between sleeping and waking. 'I hardly know whether I slept or not' (*JE*, p. 178), Jane recalls when, upon hearing vague noises followed by a demonic laugh, she ventures into the corridor at Thornfield, and sees smoke coming from Mr Rochester's room. The flames are extinguished, danger averted, but Jane continues to be haunted by dreams which become even more intense as her relationship with Rochester deepens, and she agrees to marry him.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the manner in which Brontë manipulates mirror imagery to describe the heroine's schizophrenic experience in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Jane's sense of a splintering self, 'Jane Eyre splitting off from Jane Rochester, the child Jane splitting off from the adult Jane, and the image of Jane weirdly separating from the body of Jane',<sup>19</sup> is confirmed in the mirror image of the spectral other. Gilbert and Gubar figure Bertha as 'Jane's truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead'.<sup>20</sup> It is this dark double who stands between Jane and Rochester, the savage female, trapped and maddened by her imprisonment within the confines of a patriarchal house/culture. In *Jane Eyre*, the reflection of the monstrous woman wearing her veil reveals Jane's unconscious fears of her own sexual longings. Rochester's lunatic wife is reduced, we are told, to savagery by her own insane and wanton nature, though recent, especially postcolonial, readings of the novel give a very different account of Bertha Rochester's condition and its cause. This, society would seem to declare, as Rochester does, is what becomes of the woman who is over-sexed. Rochester tells Jane that his wife 'dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste' (*JE*, p. 334). Jane is thus confronted by the image which has haunted her, the horror of the libidinous female as madwoman, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, who must be imprisoned and

denied. Jane refuses to become Rochester's mistress, a replacement for Celine Varens, nor will she risk becoming another Bertha Rochester, insane and imprisoned. She declares she will 'hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad – as I am now' (*JE*, p. 344). Therefore, in this scene in which Jane is sexually tempted to become Rochester's mistress, Brontë's depiction of her as 'mad' deliberately connects sexual abandonment with an abandoning of reason. But, although the horrifying image of Bertha Rochester is presented as one which might also overtake Jane, that is not to say that Brontë is declaring marriage to be terrifying in itself. Margaret Homans, in *Bearing the Word* does suggest that Jane's fear before the wedding that Mrs Rochester will not 'come into the world alive'<sup>21</sup> shows that she is fearful of marriage. Gilbert and Gubar also contend that, figuratively and psychologically, Bertha represents that part of Jane's self that secretly wants to tear the veil asunder, and that 'her fears of her own alien . . . bridal image, [are] objectified by the image of Bertha.'<sup>22</sup> What Brontë makes clear, however, is that Jane feels it is all too good to be true. When Rochester uses the name Jane Rochester she feels, 'almost fear', but explains that this is because 'human beings never enjoy complete happiness in this world . . . to imagine such a lot befalling me is a fairy-tale – a daydream' (*JE*, p. 287). The day before the wedding she tells him, 'I am not . . . troubled by any haunting fears . . . I think it a glorious thing to have the hope of living with you, because I love you' (*JE*, p. 308), which would seem assurance enough. Her fear is not of marriage, but of her horrific double, Bertha Rochester, whose ungovernable passions mirror her own repressed nature. Brontë dramatises her heroine's sexual conflict by using images of other possible selves, Celine Varens and Bertha Rochester, in order to demonstrate, finally, her difference from, and superiority to, them. Jane's passionate desires are, ultimately, rather less important than her conscience. As Showalter points out, 'what is most notable about Brontë's first representation of female insanity, . . . is that Jane, unlike the contemporary feminist critics who have interpreted the novel, never sees her kinship with the confined and monstrous double, and that Brontë has no sympathy for her mad creature. Before Jane Eyre can reach her happy ending, the madwoman must be purged from the plot, and the passion must be purged from Jane herself'.<sup>23</sup> In this final denial of the sensual passions of her heroine, Brontë is very different to Stoddard, who celebrates the sexual, and even the adulterous, impulse.

Yet Stoddard also makes use of mirror images to examine the divided self of her passionate heroine, literally as well as metaphorically. She depicts Cassandra as an explorer of her own sexual identity, seeing powerful,

dramatic images reflected in the mirrors into which she gazes, and questioning the mirror of her own conscience as she grows towards a knowledge of herself. At a party Cassandra is left alone with Charles, the scene between them is typical of so much of Stoddard, the dialogue both jagged and intense:

‘Cassandra,’ he said at last, growing ashy pale, ‘is there any other world than this we are in now?’

I raised my eyes, and saw my own pale face in the glass over the mantel above his head.

‘What do you see?’ he asked, starting up.

I pointed to the glass.

‘I begin to think,’ I said, ‘there is another world, one peopled with creatures like those we see there. What are they – base, false, cowardly?’

‘Cowardly,’ he muttered, ‘will you make me crush you? Can we lie to each other? Look!’

He turned me from the glass. (*TM*, p. 92)

The mirror images stresses the visual, placing the reader in the position of voyeur. The eroticism in the scene is focused on the heroine’s awakening passion and the male’s desire violently to possess and overpower her. But if the world Cassandra has seen reflected in the glass is a world of cowards who deny their passions, are we to assume that Cassandra, having seen and recognised her impassioned self, intends to indulge her illicit desire? At the close of this scene the reader is given no account of her thoughts or decisions, no clear indication of her intentions.

But Stoddard does offer a view of the inner self struggling to achieve self-knowledge, as Cassandra turns to her conscience. The mirror image of Cassandra as self and Cassandra as conscience is remarkable in insisting that the heroine’s experience of adulterous sexuality is a positive one. Unlike Jane, her passionate desires are of supreme importance and are not subordinated to restrictive religious codes. She relies neither on church nor society to guide her, unconventionally seeking knowledge and understanding from her own conscience:

‘Do you feel remorse and repentance?’

‘Neither!’

‘Why suffer then?’

‘I do not know why.’

‘You confess ignorance. Can you confess that you are selfish, self-seeking – devilish?’

‘Are you my devil?’

No answer.

'Am I cowardly, or a liar?'

It laughed, a faint, sarcastic laugh.

'At all events,' I continued, 'are not my actions better than my thoughts?'

'Which makes the sinner, and which the saint?'

'Can I decide?'

'Why not?' (*TM*, p. 131–2)

The conclusion Cassandra reaches emphasises a sensual nature superior to social and religious laws. In this Stoddard is not only significantly different to Brontë, she is remarkable, as a nineteenth-century writer, in her positive representation of illicit female sexuality, and in describing awakening sexual desire, 'He raised his strange, intense eyes to mine; a blinding, intelligent light flowed from them which I could not defy, nor resist, a light which filled my veins with a torrent of fire' (*TM*, p. 86).

In examining her heroine as sexual being Stoddard, like Brontë, uses the Gothic double, most obviously in the instance of the three Mrs Somers: Bellevue, Veronica and Cassandra herself. Cassandra and her sister, Veronica, are a mirror image of each other, but a reverse mirror image. Cassandra embraces life, accepting her own passionate nature, while Veronica internalises her wildness and strangeness, so that she is finally trapped in a deathly pose of ethereal beauty. As her name suggests, Veronica is an 'image' of idealised woman, frail, child-like, innocent, delicate and dreamy. She is used to refute the cultural and social values of Stoddard's period, in which many writers of fiction depicted such women as the ideal. Cassandra and Veronica are doubled again when they marry the brothers Desmond and Ben Somers. In this way, another mirror image for Cassandra is provided in her mother-in-law, Mrs Somers. The dark secret of this other self is not untrammelled female sexuality, as in Brontë's Bertha Rochester, but her fertility. Bellevue Somers, for Cassandra, is woman as monster, as Bertha Rochester is for Jane. They are, however, different kinds of monster, and this reflects differences between Brontë's and Stoddard's attitudes to female eroticism that in themselves reflect differences between their attitudes to religion and the supernatural.

Supernatural activity in Gothic fiction – notably that involving prophetic dreams, ghostly apparitions, and miraculous events and characters – was used partly to generate mystery, suspense and dread, and partly to thrill, and yet reassure the reader, by challenging, whilst paying lip service to, orthodox Christian piety. Brontë's novel conforms to a pattern in which any deployment of the supernatural in the text is found to support notions of Christianity and God's providence. It assumes, for example,

that adultery is wrong, a damnable sin. It also assumes that there are supernatural, providential agencies at work to help Jane resist committing adultery and to reward her for resisting. Jane has no doubt Providence helped her to resist becoming Rochester's mistress: 'God directed me to a correct choice: I thank His Providence for the guidance!' (*JE*, p. 386). Her prayers during her wanderings, 'Oh, Providence! Sustain me a little longer! Aid! – direct me!' (*JE*, p. 356), lead her, extraordinarily, to the home of her cousins, the Rivers. And it is Providence that explains the quasi-miraculous telepathic communication between Jane and Rochester, after the death of his first wife, that leads her to seek him out once more, a communication Jane clearly reads as reflecting God's forgiveness of their adulterous impulses and His blessing on their union. Although Jane's pilgrimage may be read as a metaphorical expression of actual social ills, Brontë's use of the supernatural essentially confirms an adherence to orthodox Christian moral values. It is no accident that the book ends, not with the happiness of Jane and Rochester in a passionate married relationship, but with the religious austerity of the sexually unimpassioned, unmarried St John, an austerity Jane celebrates as guaranteed to win its heavenly reward.

Stoddard, unlike Brontë, refuses to confirm the conventional, and therefore religious, view of adultery, but acknowledges only the power of nature over humanity. Her principal point of reference throughout the novel is not reliance on God or providence, but self-reliance. In a twist on this aspect of self-determination, in which Cassandra relies on her inner sense of right, rather than the external laws of society, Stoddard shows her heroine bearing an outer mark to signify inner change. In this Stoddard demonstrates enormous difference from Brontë, who marks her villain/hero with 'the scar of life on [his] forehead' (*JE*, p. 461), as a sign of his sins and his purification by fire. Cassandra is left with threadlike scars on her cheek, following the accident in which Charles was killed, but they are a positive mark of sexual experience, as Desmond and Cassandra indicate when discussing how she got them:

'It was in battle?'

'Yes.'

'And women like you, pure, with no vice of blood, sometimes are tempted, struggle, and suffer.'

'Even drawn battles bring their scars.' (*TM*, pp. 183–4)

Cassandra's only regret about her unconsummated affair is that she did not go far enough: 'I was strangely bound to him', she tells Charles's widow, 'And I must tell you that I hunger now for the kiss he never gave



me' (*TM*, p. 123). Stoddard herself seems to have felt that Cassandra should have gone further than a kiss, and would have done so but for a failure of nerve on her own part on behalf of her heroine. In October 1889, when *The Morgesons* was being reprinted, Stoddard wrote to the publisher John Bowen of Charles's and Cassandra's love affair: 'With the capacity between them of a magnetic and profound passion, the pressure of generations of Puritan teachings and examples, prevented it from being in result nothing [*sic*] more than nebulous particles striving in the universe to come together and make a new world'.<sup>24</sup> Stoddard did see religion, like Brontë, as the controlling factor which denies the superiority of human passions, but she did not see this as necessarily right. Indeed she uses Desmond's past to demonstrate that a 'fallen woman', a transgressive woman who makes the opposite choice to that of Jane Eyre, need not be reduced, let alone damned, by her experience. Desmond has a talisman of a past love, another mark. At an evening party in Belem, Cassandra notices, 'a ring on his watch-ribbon smaller than I could wear; a woman's ruby ring'. Desmond admits, 'I loved her shamefully, and she loved me shamefully . . . you may not conjure up any tragic ideas on the subject. She is no outcast. She is here to-night; if there was ruin, it was mutual'. (*TM*, p. 199) Cassandra, scanning the women at the party, sees not one sad or guilty face.

Stoddard makes little use of supernatural events in her text, apart from Veronica's prophetic dream, on the eve of her own wedding to Ben Somers, of Cassandra's eventual marriage to Desmond Somers. Stoddard employs the Gothic motif of dream/nightmare, with its shifting boundaries, to describe the sexual longing and anguish of the heroine, parted from her lover. Veronica, as Cassandra's sister/double, experiences the vision, but she brings back into the real world proof of her dream, a red mark on her arm, made by the point of Desmond's knife. The natural rather than the supernatural dominates Stoddard's text. A natural perspective is emphasised in Veronica's keeping of pagan rituals, in which she inaugurates the seasons, and it is also nature that arbitrarily decides who is to survive and become one of nature's elite. The heroine, whose name deliberately rejects the biblical, is her own prophetess, acknowledging her own nature as the wellspring of her existence; nature glories in the power of female agency and, because unconventional, is in tune with the universe. It is true *The Morgesons* does conclude with what seems like religious sentiment, a cry to God, which echoes the Puritanism the novel goes some way to reject: but this is one of Stoddard's characteristic ironies. After Ben's death, in *delirium tremens*, Desmond and Cassandra

question each other mutely (their understanding of the other is so great, words are unnecessary), and, therefore, although it is Desmond who speaks, he says what they both feel. 'God is the Ruler . . . Otherwise let this mad world crush us now' (*TM*, p. 235). A bitter cry against fate is expressed as an ironic belief in God and a challenge to an insane world, where survival is randomly dependent upon nature. Stoddard refuses to uphold religious orthodoxy; to the end *The Morgesons* remains a secular book.

The most singular similarities and differences, then, between Brontë and Stoddard, lie in their image of the passionate female self. Brontë fears the passionate self quite as much as she is thrilled by it, Stoddard, on the other hand, simply wishes to celebrate it. Summed up in the records both writers left of their impressions of the sensual and passionate French actress Rachel, is their bond of sympathy and difference. Brontë records, after seeing her in Brussels, 'Rachel's acting thrilled me with horror. That tremendous force with which she expresses the very worst passions in their strongest essence forms an exhibition as exciting as the bullfights of Spain and the gladiatorial combats of Rome, and (it seems to me) not one whit more moral'.<sup>25</sup> Immortalising her as Vashti in her last novel, *Villette*, Brontë describes the Rachel character as a devil, whose passionate power has an evil source, a tigress, madness incarnate, yet also a fallen angel whose 'hair, flying loose in revel or war, is still an angel's hair, and glorious under a halo'.<sup>26</sup> In sharp contrast is the article Stoddard wrote for the *Daily Alta California*, dated 5 September 1855, which says,

[Rachel] is so slender that every emotion seemed to sway her to and fro . . . This white clothed figure, frail and lithe, with intense, fiery eyes, and slender trembling hands, fills the scene, the mind, and the imagination. Her fury, her sneers, her pathos and grief, made me excited, wretched and tearful. She is in fact the most wonderful creature I ever saw . . . Were I the lover of this Jewish woman, I would kill myself, because I could not be her master, and she would taunt me if I were not . . . Her voice, too, is beautiful; deep, soft, and sonorous, like the tolling of a far off, deeply mouthed bell. It was not necessary that her part should be rendered into English; her grief and rage she wrote with eyes, and lip, and gesture.<sup>27</sup>

Both Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Stoddard, in *Jane Eyre* and *The Morgesons*, wrote original, powerful texts which trace the journey of the passionate female self. However, their use of the Gothic mode, garnered from both sides of the Atlantic, allowed them to express views that were ultimately quite distinct. Brontë's fear of the erotic desires of the woman

is greater than her longing, and Gothic convention allowed her, and her readers, to enjoy the excitement and thrill of female passion safely. Stoddard, clearly exhilarated by Rachel's performance, as Brontë was thrilled and horrified, was able, in her use of the Gothic, to explore the erotic nature of the woman and to identify with, not deny, the sensual self. Of Rachel's performance, Stoddard notes, 'This no doubt was art; but her person is so in harmony with what she expresses, that you cannot divide art from nature'.<sup>28</sup> This simple truth made Rachel a threatening, alarming and heretical image of the woman for Brontë, at the same time as she exemplified, for Stoddard, sensual woman as icon. For, in Rachel's performance, if art was holding up the mirror to nature, it was a nature which, undeniably, celebrated the eroticised woman.

The central contradiction of Brontë's novel, is her determination, at the last, to figure her heroine's transcendence from within the domestic in her role as wife and mother. Although she helps to liberate her heroine through the actions of Bertha Rochester, especially in her violent tearing of her wedding veil, it is clear that the heroine desires to escape into, not out of, marriage. Therefore, her escape from Thornfield, one which Alison Milbank, in *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction*, describes as 'a real Gothic escape, for the courtship of Jane Eyre by Rochester had taken the form of cruel power-games',<sup>29</sup> can only be temporary. These games, a combination of both love and power, and, as Stoddard had noted, principally erotic in their charge, do show that Jane is a match for Rochester, but they also show the harsh nature of the male. As she escapes back to Thornfield, and then to Ferndean, Brontë's heroine is implicated in an acceptance of female servitude, for, although the male has been punished by fire, he remains her master. Jane Eyre may be her own mistress, but she desires a conventional union. Stoddard, writing fifteen years later, out of a New England world in some ways less socially restrictive than that of Brontë's native Yorkshire, was to celebrate the sensual nature of her heroine with a marked independence. Cassandra, although married, is neither 'wifely' nor 'motherly', the two conventional roles for married women which Brontë's heroine joyfully accepts. Instead, Stoddard has moved closer 'towards the *edge of things*',<sup>30</sup> and has crafted her literary inheritance into a celebration of the woman who is independent, unconventional and self-possessed: a transgressive heroine who finally emerges as possessor of the contested castle of Gothic literature.

## Notes

- 1 Manuscript, Library Archives, Harvard University.
- 2 James H. Matlack, 'The Literary Career of Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard,' PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1967, p. 185.
- 3 Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980*, London, Virago Press, 1987, p. 66.
- 4 The *Daily Alta California*, October 1854, Library Archives, Harvard University.
- 5 Elizabeth Stoddard, *The Morgesons and Other Writings, Published and Unpublished*, eds Lawrence Buell and Sandra Zagarell, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984, pp. xviii–xix. Hereafter, *TM*.
- 6 Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. xii.
- 7 See Lyn Pykett, *The Sensation Novel: from The Woman in White to The Moonstone*, Plymouth, Northcote House/British Council, 1994.
- 8 Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, London, Penguin Books, 1985, p. 130. Hereafter, *JE*.
- 9 Claire Kahane, 'The Gothic Mirror,' in Shirley Nelson Cooper *et al.* (eds) *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 334–51.
- 10 Linda M. Shires, *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History and the Politics of Gender*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 36.
- 11 Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 73.
- 12 Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 206.
- 13 Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, New Jersey, Barnes and Noble, 1982, p. 3.
- 14 Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 43.
- 15 DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night*, pp. 226–7.
- 16 Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 93.
- 17 Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 95.
- 18 Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 95.
- 19 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1979, p. 359.
- 20 Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 360.
- 21 Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 303.
- 22 Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 360.

- 23 Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 68.
- 24 Manuscript, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester MA.
- 25 Henry Knepler, *The Gilded Stage*, London, Constable, 1968, p. 49.
- 26 Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, London, Dent and Sons, 1966, p. 235.
- 27 *DAC*, September 1855, Library Archives, Harvard University.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Alison Milbank, *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction*, London, Macmillan, 1992, p. 144.
- 30 Matlack, 'The Literary Career of Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard', p. 185.

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*Our Nig:*  
fettters of an American farmgirl

R.J. Ellis

From her who ever was and still's a slave (Mary Collier, 1739)<sup>1</sup>

Following its rediscovery by Henry Louis Gates Jr in 1982, Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) was quickly identified as a double first – the first African-American novel published by a woman and the first African-American novel published in the USA. It was also rapidly located within its ante-bellum abolitionist literary contexts. Plainly *Our Nig* draws upon Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and slave narrative writing of this period.<sup>2</sup> My purpose is not to gainsay these perspectives, but to identify, complementarily, how *Our Nig*, the work of a Northern free black, also provides a working-class portrait of New England farm life, removed from the frontier that dominates accounts of American agrarian life.<sup>3</sup> The novel articulates a young female farm servant's class position and lack of agency.<sup>4</sup> Consequently its engagement with the pastoral is highly original – an originality promoted by Wilson's African-American identity: the pastoral tradition to hand was a white Western one, from which she was largely alienated.<sup>5</sup> She was therefore compelled to bring to her experiences the resources of the only literary tradition coherently available, the slave narrative. As a consequence, that tradition's stress on labour emerges in her writing in the very face of Western pastoral conventions.<sup>6</sup>

This transposition to a rural setting in the 'free' North of frankness about toil and its consequences means that *Our Nig* stands as not simply some type of slave narrative variant, but also what I will call an 'apastoral'. Just as, in Toni Morrison's words, Chinua Achebe 'insist[s] on writing outside the white gaze, not against it', so Harriet Wilson does not write against pastoral conventions in the way an anti-pastoral does,<sup>7</sup> but stands outside the pastoral's 'gaze' – *without* it (in both senses of the word). Her

novel offers a close engagement with power and economics in the New England countryside, illuminating from without the way the pastoral preserves a near-silence on both sides of the Atlantic concerning farm labour's exhausting physical demands (though this illumination stayed unrecognised for over 120 years, whilst the novel remained unreviewed and largely unread until Gates's facsimile was released).

We now know, thanks to the work of Gates and Barbara H. White, that *Our Nig's* story-line is autobiographical, and that its probable setting is New Hampshire.<sup>8</sup> Frado, the book's central character, as a child becomes a type of indentured servant to the Bellmonts, working on their family farm in the fictionally named town of 'Singleton', where she is treated with abominable cruelty. This farmhouse is a 'Two-Story White House', the novel stresses, in an irony reflecting on the two-story concerning race and slavery peddled both by America's political establishment and by the town of *Singleton*. But also, equally plainly, Frado labours as a farm servant,<sup>9</sup> so providing a bottom-up view of her society's rural way of life. As such, her portrait is not unrepresentative. Indenturing of children was common in the ante-bellum North, and when she flees from her mistreatment upon coming of age to try to make her own way, she joins a transient group of 'tenants . . . and the landless . . . an important part of the population, . . . moving from farm to farm and township to township, never settling permanently because they owned no land'.<sup>10</sup>

Frado's story, then, offers a grim version of New England country life, laying bare pastoralism's underlying rural class structure. It thereby counters what Joan M. Jensen describes as the 'muffling' of class differences and conflicts in the rural North, where members of communities tended to be highly interdependent and so appear unified.<sup>11</sup> Considered from this perspective, *Our Nig* emerges as both one of the first fictional portraits of farm life produced by a working-class writer and one of the earliest prose accounts of any kind written from the point of view of the rural working class in either the United States or Britain. Furthermore, it offers a female viewpoint on this condition.<sup>12</sup> This is quite another way of identifying the novel as a 'first', one opening up a large new area in which to locate the text – stretching back down what Raymond Williams has described as the 'backward moving escalator' of the pastoral tradition, transmitted originally from classical Rome, taken up during the Renaissance and, subsequently, in neo-classical Enlightenment forms.<sup>13</sup> I will begin, then, by identifying how this pastoral 'escalator', moving away from emerging issues of class on both sides of the Atlantic, is one upon which *Our Nig's* dislocations of fictional representations of farm life conspicuously do not stand.



One starting point in this respect, if not an obvious one, is Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis*, a near-contemporaneous novella published in 1864.<sup>14</sup> This offers a rare fictional account of a female working in the fields. Cousin Phillis is not working class, but she is the daughter of a far-from affluent minister who also works a small farm (which he apparently owns) in order to make ends meet. The family lead frugal but comfortable lives, though relying on all members of the family pulling their weight, in line with a Protestant work ethic that Gaskell knew well from her Unitarian involvements in Manchester and its environs. Phillis always works steadily, for the most part at light domestic tasks such as mending clothes and knitting (*CP*, pp. 17, 38). But, significantly, she also helps out on the farm. We see her feeding chickens, carrying hens' eggs and picking peas (*CP*, pp. 18, 35, 65). The climax to this farmwork comes during two hay harvests (*CP*, pp. 80ff.). Initially the book does not portray her engaging in the harvest but instead standing beside her father in the hayfield admiring the theodolite of an engineer staying at the farm. However, extraordinarily, she *is* finally depicted at work in the fields, 'leading the row of farm-servants, turning the swathes of fragrant hay with measured movement' until 'the red sun was gone down' (*CP*, p. 118).

This type of fieldwork is precisely the sort that women above the servant class are never portrayed as undertaking in fiction up to this time. As such it is worth focusing upon, for the moment is carefully circumscribed. Phillis's work is unavoidable, since harvest time requires all possible hands – so much so that the book's narrator (a visitor to the farm) joins in. Secondly, her labours are carefully framed. No specific mention is made of her using an implement as she 'lead[s] the row' (though earlier we have been told she 'throw[s] . . . her rake down' to welcome her cousin, *CP*, p. 118) and stress is placed on how 'some sort of primitive distinction of rank' is preserved. The intimation is that Phillis risks losing 'rank' as a consequence of her farm work. Significantly, other farm work is predominantly done by labourers or the house servant, Betty, busy churning, 'washing out her milk-pans in . . . cold bubbling spring water', or hard at harvest work whilst Phillis inspects her engineer's apparatus (*CP*, pp. 15, 64, 60). By portraying a woman of Phillis's standing working in the fields Gaskell's story tests the limits of propriety. Yet Gaskell also must – and does – recognise the omnipresence of rural labour.

What I am suggesting is that the discourse that became established in the nineteenth century – that 'Man [is] for the field and women for the hearth' (in Tennyson's 1847 phrase)<sup>15</sup> – is in practice undermined by a whole series of inevitable exemptions. Women can work as dairymaids

and shepherdesses, and even fieldworkers – but only if they are working class (unless chicken or baby animal feeding or gentle garden work is involved).<sup>16</sup> Phillis trespasses across this line, despite the narrative circumscriptions designed to excuse her in what is, otherwise, a largely conventional text in terms of its preservation of pastoral boundaries (though one is also made aware how theodolites impact on the rural idyll – Gaskell’s engagement with the pastoral is far from naive).

The book’s adherence to the pastoral idyll is clear. The farmhouse interior is one where ‘such things as were to be white and clean, were just spotless in their purity (*CP*, p. 27), whilst ‘The court was so full of flowers that they . . . were even to be found self-sown upon the turf that bordered the path’ (*CP*, p. 18). In the kitchen-garden, ‘profuse in vegetables and fruits . . . raspberry-bushes and rose-bushes grew wherever there was a space’ whilst ‘the warm golden air was filled with the murmur of insects . . . the . . . sound of voices out in the fields, the clear far-away rumble of carts’ (*CP*, pp. 64–5, 117). As the escalator moves backwards to this utopia, the beasts gain human feeling: ‘all the dumb beasts seemed to know and love Phillis’ (*CP*, p. 147). The way that nature produces its bounty free from human labour (abundantly self-seeding), and the beasts possess human sensibilities, even intelligence (‘know and love’), generate a ‘dream world’ – if one with disturbing implications for those who perform the actual, largely concealed, labour.

Female work poses a problem in this country utopia, needing to be massaged into conformity with the mid-nineteenth-century discourse of feminine fragility, as it is in *Mary Barton* (1848), in which Alice, gathering heather (‘such pleasant work . . . for . . . it was so light to carry’), ‘sit[s] down under the old hawthorn tree (where we used to make our house among the great roots . . .) to pick and tie the heather up’.<sup>17</sup> The ‘pleasant . . . light’ labour is finally domesticated: the explicit claim is that, nestled in the hawthorn’s roots, she somehow sits ‘indoors’. A problem with pastoral discourse such as this, particularly in nineteenth-century writing by the ‘solid middle classes’ (as Gaskell might be characterised),<sup>18</sup> is the precariousness of this balancing act, which always threatens to summon up the discourse of working-class labouring life as ‘slavery’. This comparison, fuelled, of course, by transatlantic abolitionist accounts of slavery’s hardship, which often focused upon enforced female labourers’ sufferings, occurs in *Mary Barton*’s opening chapter: ‘We are their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows’.<sup>19</sup> We shall see how the tropes used to minimise this problem in *Cousin Phillis* are characteristic. Perhaps the way they result in distortions of country

life is symbolised by the fact that 'Claude glasses' were popularly used by the bourgeoisie to frame and tint the landscape so that it resembled the Claudian paintings hanging on their walls.<sup>20</sup>

The pastoral's careful framing of its landscapes to excise most farm labour and almost all female farmwork signals both how labour compromises the pastoral idyll and how behind such framing lies some recognition that rural work was harsh and hard. In *North and South* (1854–55), in particular, Margaret Hale talks at some length about the distresses experienced by rural labourers: 'They labour on, from day to day, in the great solitude of steaming fields – never speaking or lifting up their . . . downcast heads. The hard spadework robs their brain of life . . . they go home brutishly tired.'<sup>21</sup> To some extent this is part of a pattern of encouraging urban workers to contrast their lot favorably with that of rural workers, as when a pair of Dorset farm labourer's trousers, much distressed by hard toil, was part of an exhibition held in Manchester in 1853.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, this sort of emphasis made it all the more imperative that female farm labour go largely unrepresented, except within circumscribed, 'fecund' bucolic roles (such as (idle) shepherdesses or milking/churning dairymaids).<sup>23</sup> However, generally speaking, what E.P. Thompson describes as 'polite culture' established a barrier to the portrait of all 'habitual . . . daily labour', which meant that 'little precedent' existed for such portraits.<sup>24</sup> There is an acute shortage of accounts of farm labour, and a particular hedge around portraits of women's fieldwork until later in the nineteenth century. *Our Nig* diverged astonishingly from this polite convention.

Gaskell, by contrast, drew back – a recoil also prompted by a contemporary controversy. Middle-class distaste for women labouring in the fields gathered momentum in the UK at this time, part of an increasingly hostile attitude towards working women and in response to a rising emphasis on the harshness of rural work. Arguments focused upon the use of mixed-sex agricultural work gangs, which, it was claimed, gave rise not only to 'hardship' but also 'immorality.'<sup>25</sup> The commissions set up as a result to investigate the state of rural labour heard testimonies allowing a glimpse of what lay beyond the pastoral's limits. For example, a woman testified in 1843: 'My eldest girl has a thorough dislike to [fieldwork]. She almost always goes crying to her work. She would do almost anything than it.'<sup>26</sup> Relatedly, W.S. Gilly, in *Peasantry North of the Border* (1842), endorsed the idea that 'The greatest evil in our rural districts, is the degradation of the female sex, by their employment in labours adapted for men.'<sup>27</sup> Consequently a rare working-class prose account of farm life,

Alexander Somerville's *The Whistler at the Plough* (1852), despite its ironic title and its concerted anti-pastoral perspective on rural working-class life and poverty, offers a portrait of women farmworkers as not just degraded, but depraved.<sup>28</sup> The pastoral idyll was becoming more tightly contested in the mid-nineteenth century, and the female was the first to be squeezed out.

It was these debates, following the caustic poetry of 'peasant poets' such as John Clare and Robert Bloomfield, that account for the change of perspective found in Charles Kingsley's *Yeast* (1848), 'tear[ing] down . . . the vision of a rural idyll' as it confronts the unhappy condition of the rural poor, summed up by the maxim 'day-labourer, born, day labourer live, from hand to mouth' and its characterisation of field women: 'It's the field work . . . makes them brutes in soul and manners . . . It wears them out in body, sir . . . They must go afield, or go hungered'.<sup>29</sup>

Unease with pastoralism, swelling under such assaults – albeit assaults recurrently marred by patronage and usually devoid of specificity<sup>30</sup> – is captured in an essay by George Eliot. Ruminating in 1856 upon 'How little' was 'known' of 'the real characteristics of the working-classes', she visualises them at work:

Observe a company of haymakers. When you see them at a distance, tossing up forkfuls of hay in the golden light . . . and the bright green space which tells of work done gets larger and larger, you pronounce the scene 'smiling'. . . Approach nearer and you will certainly find that haymaking time is a time for joking, especially if there are women among the labourers; but the coarse laughter that bursts out . . . is as far as possible from your conception of idyllic merriment.<sup>31</sup>

Within Eliot's assumption that she can discriminate accurately between types of merriment (with all its patronising implications) lurks a discomfort about the role of labour in the rural idyll, which in turn can be related to the rise of mechanised modes of capitalist practice in farming and their relationship to industrialisation and factory labour.<sup>32</sup> Such a revision of the pastoral discourse in the context of changing agricultural practices, representing female labours as degrading (de-grade-ing), makes it apparent why it is so awkward for Phillis to participate in the hay-harvest, and helps account for the novel's insistence on her superior rank and the other careful qualifications hedging her labours. Such defensive deployment of the pastoral idyll are repeatedly encountered.

By contrast, almost no accounts exist by rural working-class women of definitively unidyllic experiences during this period.<sup>33</sup> Sayer has

unearthed an account by a Mrs Burrows of her work in an agricultural gang in the 1860s (a retrospective one, only published in 1931): 'In the evening we did not leave the fields until the clock had struck six, and then of course we must walk home, and this walk was no easy task for us children who had worked hard all day'.<sup>34</sup>

The sheer shortage of such working-class perspectives means that middle- or upper-class views dominate. In this respect, Harriet Martineau's *Brooke and Brooke Farm*, published in 1832, can be regarded as a kind of apotheosis. Written as a defence of enclosure, Martineau's novella tells the story of the enclosing of common land in the village of Brooke.<sup>35</sup> This account is reassuringly framed by pastoral conventions. The opening describes how Brooke Farm, 'a solid English mansion' surrounded by 'blooming peachtree[s]' and 'flourishing plantations' nestles in the 'loved' village of Brooke (*BB*, pp. 1–3). The ending, predictably, portrays 'harvest home', with reapers 'stooping to the cheerful toil', in a scene of fullness and benevolence: 'How goodly looked the last waggon, laden with golden grain . . . leaving a few ears dangling from the sprays for gleaners' (*BB*, pp. 134, 135). The bulk of the text is taken up by propagandising explanations of why it is for the best that, post-enclosure, only large farms can flourish. Small farms cannot afford the initial capital outlays to enclose their holdings, stock them, fertilise them adequately or properly fund their upkeep. The Brooke inhabitant, Norton, is therefore misguided when he purchases a few extra fields, failing to recognise 'the improvidence of beginning to farm without a sufficient capital of land or money' (*BB*, p. 126). Norton inevitably fails.

The baldness of the language is striking: 'It cannot be, you see, that any very small capitalist can compete with a large one' (*BB*, p. 97). The issue of class is summoned up by such formulations, in which the destiny of those who must surrender their land is to work for others. So Norton ends up a bailiff thanks to the paternalistic intervention of the owner of Brooke Farm. It is just possible to hold on to an 'allotment', but this will need to make a 'good profit' (*BB*, p. 38). And even then it will be necessary to sell part of one's labour to nearby large landowners: thus the allotment owner, George Gray, must also work for Sir Harry Withers. To sustain the message that this arrangement is propitious for all, labour must be presented as near-effortless. So a larchwood's fertility increases 'without any assistance from human labour beyond that of putting larch plants into the ground . . . What wonder that Sir Harry planted many larches!' (*BB*, p. 60). Labour is elided, right alongside the book's contention that the title of labourer is wholly 'honourable' (*BB*, p. 102).

The best that usually happens is that, like *Middlemarch's* Dorothea, we are left looking sympathetically out of (upper) middle-class windows, scopically distanced: 'in the field she could see figures moving . . . she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance'.<sup>36</sup> It is hard to find literary texts crossing this pastoral remove in either Britain or America. Exceptions to such aloofness and to the contrived omission of representations of labour cannot be found in British fiction prior to 1859; instead, the only resort must be to two peasant poets of the eighteenth century, Mary Collier and Stephen Duck, and to two of their poems: Collier's 'The Woman's Labour', written in response to Duck's 'The Thresher's Labour'.<sup>37</sup> *Our Nig's* bald frankness about labour is almost matched by these, yet finally Wilson's novel remains much more of a scopic reversal: its unmediated 'two-story' of middle-class abuse of farmworkers lacks the buffering (however subliminal) necessitated by the sponsorship of wealthy patrons that Duck (especially) and Collier enjoyed.<sup>38</sup>

Frado, the New England 'free' farm servant, subject to appalling beatings at the hands of her mistress, Mrs Bellmont, experiences fully this other story of farmhouse life. Consisting of vicious mistreatment legitimated by a racism that the novel intimates infects all in the 'free' North, it causes her to end up a chronic semi-invalid. This is the farm economy that underpins Mrs Bellmont's resolve to 'beat the money out of her if I can't get her worth any other way' (*ON*, p. 48). Mrs Bellmont measures Frado monetarily repeatedly: 'Just think how much profit she was to us last summer. We had no work hired out; she did the work of two girls' (*ON*, p. 48).<sup>39</sup> Her life is a matter of the extraction of all her potential 'profit' to the Bellmonts. She is particularly fully commodified, not just because she is African-American, but also because – though a 'Free Black' (*ON*, p. xxxix) – she is indentured and so, like farm family labour, readily exploited.<sup>40</sup> The ironic way she is a *cost-free* 'free black' means a two-story of labour and exploitation is intercalated with the two-story of racism, in disturbing and sophisticated textual economics. Frado's story offers a piquant perspective on the relationship of labour to economics and 'free' enterprise. The result is an extraordinary 'apastoral' departure from the pastoral in a text about rural life.

To understand this more fully, it is necessary to explore briefly some further tensions within American pastoralism.<sup>41</sup> The writings of Jefferson constitute an appropriate departure-point, since *Our Nig's* opening promise to portray a 'two-story white house' calls up not just an image of a New England farmhouse, but also an image of the White House itself,

the symbolic centre of the American republic, its president sworn to guarantee the freedom of its citizens as 'an inalienable right'.<sup>42</sup> Jefferson was in 1859 still its most renowned inhabitant and he had famously celebrated farmwork: 'Those who labor on the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people . . . It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire'.<sup>43</sup> Yet Jefferson himself conspicuously does not labour upon his land but rather rides or rambles over it, recurrently in a supervisory capacity (SW, pp. 389, 552, 556). This is, of course, a matter of political economy; Jefferson both celebrates self-sufficiency yet also acknowledges that he is able to enjoy his civilised life through entering the field of commerce. As Charles A. Miller comments: 'Jefferson wanted it both ways' in that 'If American farmers took seriously the doctrines of independence and self-sufficiency, they would not produce for commerce at all'.<sup>44</sup> In the same way the dignity of self-sufficient labour celebrated by Hector St John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* does not extend to its narrator, James, or the character Mr Bertram, who tells a Russian visitor that 'I direct and advise more than I work' since 'Being now easy in my circumstances, I have ceased to labour'<sup>45</sup> (AF, pp. 183, 192). Bertram instead employs 'hired' farmworkers (AF, p. 189).

*Our Nig* offers up a similar arrangement: the Belmont family, particularly Mrs Belmont and Mary, 'direct' Frado's farm labours. Wilson's text, like Jefferson's or Crèvecoeur's, represents farmers as 'free' to supervise, aligning all their writings with Harriet Martineau's portrait of Brooke's Sir Harry, 'going [his] rounds amongst the labourers' (BB, p. 61).

Crèvecoeur's *Letters*, then, unsurprisingly lose coherence when considering labour and its relationship to his beloved 'free' farmers. This matters because, as Alexander O. Boulton observes, both Jefferson and Crèvecoeur 'invented a "New American," a free and independent farmer . . . opposed to hierarchy, dependency and slavery . . . [an] ideological citizen [seen as a] . . . prerequisite for the creation of a national self-identity'.<sup>46</sup> Yet this invention was riven by contradictions, not least because, as Timothy Sweet notes, 'farming often required a good deal of wage labour, supplied by landless men and women', once Northern slavery was abolished.<sup>47</sup>

Consequently, drawing on a trope characteristic of much ante-bellum writing, Crèvecoeur is driven further, representing labour not only as operating in a command-free vacuum but also as almost magically issuing from nature's bounty. In the process his political economy draws on a pervasive American version of the backward-moving pastoral escalator, which, like its British cousin, again subsists in simply allowing

nature's bounty to issue forth.<sup>48</sup> So 'nature's kind luxuriance' causes her to 'open her broad lap to receive the perpetual accession of new comers, and to supply them with food' (*AF*, pp. 186, 11) whilst farm animals look after themselves, bequeathed self-nurturing wisdom by an ever-fecund mother nature: 'some of them seem to surpass even men in memory and sagacity' (*AF*, p. 186). Such moments chime with equivalent moments of wonder in Jefferson's writing: 'I am never satiated with rambling through the fields and farms', he observes, since 'our own dear Monticello' is where 'nature spreads so rich a mantle under the eye'. The accent shifts to contemplation: 'We had not peas nor strawberries here till the 8th day of this month. On the same day I heard the first whip-poor-will whistle . . . Take notice hereafter whether the whip-poor-wills always come with the strawberries and peas' (*SW*, p. 460). As the cultivation of strawberries and peas is seamlessly united with the natural cycle of the whip-poor-wills' migration, the facts of labour and class are elided; farmwork disappears and all men appear (labour[er]-)free, legitimating the enjoyment of leisure.

This is unsurprising, given the contradictions in a formulation by which Jefferson and Crèvecoeur represent labour as both a dignified link to the soil and also, paradoxically, as merely an *effortless* gathering of bounty. The links with Gaskell's carefully hedged representation of Cousin Phillis's farm life are clear, but these American elisions are noticeably more extreme. One way of accounting for this is to suggest a closer link with a common source for this pastoral discourse, Classical representations of a Golden Age, in which visions of Arcadian perfection have millenarian overtones sitting well with America's cultural aspirations and self-representations.<sup>49</sup>

Even more pertinent, though, is the premium put upon success by the discourses of emigration, given the heavy personal and financial investment required from immigrants. This stokes up a more Manichean tone in the American pastoral. Compared to its English equivalent, it is pervaded by sharper binary divisions that prove inherently unstable.<sup>50</sup> So, for example, Jefferson's famous paean to 'freedom', which he opposes to 'dependence', which 'begets servility and . . . suffocates the germ of virtue' (*SW*, p. 259), is destabilised by his actual employment of leasees, servants and slaves. The binary divide is ultimately rooted in a division of labour.

The final, desperate resort is to emphasise that America's democratic ideal is modest in scale. So Jefferson simplifies his ideal of the farmer by eulogising the smallholder: 'The smallholders are the most precious part of a state' (*SW*, p. 362). Similarly, Crèvecoeur's James claims 'I am a simple farmer' (*AF*, p. 200). However, such Rousseauvian sentiments prove hard



to sustain. James may finally revert to being a simple farmer, but only by the extraordinary device of deserting his life as an 'opulent farmer . . . surrounded with every conveniency which our external labor, and internal industry could give' in order to procure 'a simple subsistence with hardly any superfluity, [which] cannot have the same restrictive effect on our minds' (AF, p. 225). In this formulation the phrase, 'external labor, and internal industry', seeking to distinguish between outdoor and indoor work, proves ambiguous. It can also be regarded as recognition of how labour has become 'external' to these 'opulent farmers'. '[S]urrounded with every conveniency', they operate an 'internal industry' – the running of a farm business. Crèvecoeur's James feels that the way these farmers have realised 'surplus . . . into solid wealth' will lead to 'fatal consequences' (AF, pp. 225–6). So 'simple farm[ing]' must be preferred.

The instability of this final, desperate resort is made clear by the logic of capitalism Harriet Martineau spells out in her 'Illustration of Political Economy', in *Brooke and Brooke Farm*. Untroubled by the type of democratic egalitarianism recurrently fuelling a desire within both Britain and America to establish utopian egalitarian communities (such as Brook Farm, 1841–47), and consequently able to air openly issues raised by 'the division of labour' (BB, p. 94), Martineau urges that it is 'Better [to] call one-self a labourer . . . and have plenty to eat, and a whole roof over one's head than pinch and starve for the sake of owning a couple of fields' (BB, p. 93). Her advice starkly illuminates how Crèvecoeur's and Jefferson's praise of simple farmers sets up an impractical backward-moving escalator eliding not only the issue of labour (and who labours) but also, concomitantly, the issue of class. This is why, in one further recognition of these discursive instabilities, Jefferson ushers paternalism on the scene: 'Take every possible occasion for entering into the houses of labourers . . . see what they eat, how they are clothed, whether they are obliged to work too hard' (SW, p. 139).

Let us then observe Jefferson's injunction, and seek to discover how Frado is fed and clothed, and whether she is 'obliged to work too hard'. And for once, this is easily done – almost uniquely in ante-bellum fiction. (Melville's 'The Tartarus of Maids', 1855, and the writings of George Lippard redress this imbalance somewhat, in an industrial setting.) *Our Nig* indeed depicts a farm labourer's life. The near-total absence of alternative accounts marks out Wilson's novel as a significant first in a new way, not least because, *pace* most versions of American farm life, farming often required wage labour.<sup>51</sup> As in Britain, there are very few prose accounts of American farm labours, especially female farm labours, until

later in the century. As Joan M. Jensen laments, 'historians have relatively few written records from which to derive the rural woman's past.'<sup>52</sup> Women involved with utopian experimental communities do consider farm labour. Louisa M. Alcott penned a brief, retrospective account in 1876 of her mother's work in an experimental transcendental community in 1843, and Marcia Bullard describes a female's fieldwork in a Shaker community.<sup>53</sup> On the frontier, too, accounts crop up, like Mollie Sanford describing her anxiety-ridden donning of male clothes in an attempt to make her Nebraskan farmwork easier, and Stephen Fender quotes one Janet Johnson, writing to her sister from Beverly, Upper Canada in 1846: '*Dear Jane, I never was in a place under the sun I liked worse I helped James with the turnips hoying. I was to fall down with the heat and when taking them and the potatoes up I was al shaivering of cold*'<sup>54</sup>

Such prose accounts – almost always, as in these four cases, published later than *Our Nig* – are scarce, which is why I have been forced as far afield as Canada. Accounts by farm labourers are even thinner on the ground. Mostly we are limited to the sort of perspective encountered in *Walden*, in which Thoreau gives an aloof account of his encounter with an Irish farm-labourer, John Field, 'an honest, hard-working, but shiftless man', squatting in an abandoned farmhouse with a leaking roof and contracted to dig a farmer's field 'with a spade or bog hoe': 'I trust he does not read this, unless he will improve by it', Thoreau opines,<sup>55</sup> in a scopic arrangement bearing comparison with George Eliot's.

Such near-universal neglect of the precise details of farm work add to *Our Nig*'s importance. Its portrait of Frado, as Jefferson requests, focuses on her inadequate diet, her poor clothing and the way she is worked too hard. It is not just slavery that possesses a politics of the body. Indeed, the account of her life with the Bellmonts opens with her being led to inadequate accommodation, 'an unfinished chamber . . . [with] the roof slanting nearly to the floor' (*ON*, p. 13) and a list of her tasks:

Her first work was to feed the hens . . . She was then . . . to drive the cows to pasture . . . Upon her return she was allowed to eat . . . a bowl of skimmed milk, with brown bread crusts, which she was told to eat standing . . . she was placed on a cricket to wash the common dishes. . . she was to be in waiting to bring wood and chips, to run hither and thither . . .

A large amount of dish-washing for small hands followed dinner. Then the same after tea and going after the cows finished her day's work. The same routine followed day after day, with slight variations; adding a little more work and spicing the toil with 'words that burn', and frequent blows on her head. . . . Her labours were multiplied . . . (*ON*, pp. 13–14)

Details of Frado's demanding tasks constitute a refrain in *Our Nig's* account of her life at the Bellmonts'; stress is placed on the way these increase as she grows up: 'There had been additional burdens laid on her . . . She must now *milk* the cows . . . Flocks of sheep had been added to the farm . . . In the absence of the men, she must harness the horse . . . go to the mill' (ON, p. 27). Jefferson's paternalistic insistence on discovering details can be readily observed:

From early dawn until all were retired, was she toiling, overworked . . .

Exposure from heat to cold, or the reverse, often destroyed her health for short intervals. She wore no shoes until after the frost, and snow even, appeared . . .

. . . manual labor was not in reality her only burden; but such an incessant torrent of scolding and boxing and threatening. . . (ON, p. 35)

Ironically, when one of the Belmont males seeks to help Frado, by performing one of her tasks, driving home the cows, he 'unintentionally prolonged her pain', since she could therefore be left bound and gagged as punishment all the longer. By the end of these accounts of Frado's labours it is easy to understand both the irony of Mrs Belmont's reflection that 'she could not well spare one who could adapt herself to all departments – man, boy, housekeeper, domestic, etc.' and the comment of 'Margaretta Thorn', concerning how the Bellmonts 'ruined [Frado's] health by hard work, both in the field and the house' (ON, pp. 63, 77).

These details of labour and its debilitating effects run exactly counter to the Jeffersonian discourse's representation of labour as an effortless engagement with the bounty of nature. So Frado's laborious daily cow-herding contrasts with *Letters'* portrait of the same activity, which, obliterating the labour, represents the cows apparently marshalling themselves, with brute sagacity: 'His cows were then returning home, deep-bellied, short legged, having udders ready to burst'. Indeed, when labour must be acknowledged – the cows cannot milk themselves – the work is still effortless'. The cows actively 'seek . . . with seeming toil, to be delivered from the great exuberance they contained' (AF, p. 186). Again, the trope silently erases the labourer in the phrase – a deeply ambiguous one in this context – '*seeming toil*'. *Our Nig*, by contrast, excludes any such beneficent representation of farm life. Indeed, the land and its qualities are almost totally absent from Wilson's account, in sharp contrast to the repeated careful measuring by Jefferson and Crèvecoeur of fertility and productivity, extending to details of soil variations (SW, pp. 127ff.; AF, p. 23). Land for Frado simply represents

labour. All we are otherwise told, curtly, is that ‘the Bellmonts [lived] in a large, old fashioned, two-story white house, environed by fruitful acres, and embellished by shrubbery and shade trees’ (*ON*, p. 9). The words ‘fruitful’ and ‘embellished’ are the only ones in the whole of Wilson’s apastoral novel that might be held to acknowledge the pastoral tradition. And it is significant that in this very sentence the Bellmont’s farm is given the description ‘two-story white house’ (the phrase contained in the novel’s subtitle).

I want to weigh this moment carefully. It is a highly transatlantic literary moment. Wilson has, I believe, chosen the name Bellmont with precision. Firstly, it can summon up Jefferson’s shade, for ‘*bel mont*’ in French carries a meaning related to the Italian ‘*monticello*’ (‘hillock’). Thus not only the White House but also Monticello, where Jefferson kept his slaves, is invoked. Palladian houses like Monticello were customarily mounted on a small hill, so as to command prospects but not dominate them and preserve a harmonious unity with nature (making these hills, indeed, ‘*bel monts*’). Belmont, Portia’s ‘park’-set home in *The Merchant of Venice*, would have sought such harmony in the sixteenth-century Veneto (where Palladio built his villas) and, just as Shakespeare’s play exposes the underlay of money and legal trickery supporting Belmont, so Frado exposes what supports her Bellmonts’ white house.<sup>56</sup> The effect of these dense allusions is to summon up a transnational pastoral web ensnaring Frado in a fruitfully embellished sheen of beauty she cannot escape even when she comes of age, because beyond it lies only beggary.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, once Frado risks all and leaves the Bellmonts, her life becomes a constant and unequal battle with poverty. At one point she becomes a species of straw hat outworker (*ON*, p. 67). As such, incontestably a ‘free wage labourer’, she draws attention to her previous, closely comparable class-location.<sup>58</sup> Though she claims that being a free wage labourer is easy for her compared with her farm labours (in a further undermining of pastoralism), her constant lot is always to labour as hard as her destroyed health will allow her.

Consequently, I read her confrontation with a ram in the Bellmont’s sheep-flock allegorically:

Among the sheep was a willful leader, who always persisted in being first served, and many times in his fury he had thrown down Nig, till . . . she resolved to punish him. The pasture in which the sheep grazed was bounded . . . by a wide stream, which flowed on one side at the base of precipitous banks. The first spare moment at her command, she ran to the pasture with a dish in her hand, and mounting the highest point of land nearest the

stream, called the flock to their mock repast. . . . The willful sheep came furiously leaping . . . far in advance of the flock. Just as he leaped for the dish, she suddenly jumped one side, when down he rolled into the river . . . (ON, p. 28)

It is easily possible to join in with the watching men, 'convulsed with laughter at the trick'. But perhaps the text cautions us not to be readily drawn to their merriment, since it points out how, only moments before, her audience was watching in 'breathless' anxiety as Frado stood precariously at the edge of a cliff, down which she could well have been bowled to her death. In some ways this figures both her relationship to her work and the way that hard labour customarily leads to an early death or disablement and poverty once strength or dexterity fails. Frado at this early point is young enough still to have her health, and hence nimble enough to skip aside from the dangers to which her constant hard work exposes her. But these dangers gathered in frequency in an American agricultural environment, which, by 1850, was becoming heavily capitalised, with three-fifths of the rural population 'labourers, domestic servants or artisans'.<sup>59</sup> By the end of the book, her health chronically compromised by the attrition of rural labour, lamed by a fall at work, Frado bodily testifies to these processes of change.

I must finally note that Frado's labours on the farm are literally doubled by her domestic chores as a female farm servant, and how, eventually, farmwork gives way, after the labour of childbirth, to labours devoted to keeping her son out of the County Farm orphanage. Such doubling and redoubling of labour runs directly counter to the ruminations of Jefferson on the impropriety of allowing women to work.<sup>60</sup> It is precisely because Frado is always yoked to the bottom of her particular socio-economic pile by the tripartite oppression of class, race and gender, that she can expose the pyramidal structures looming over her.

*Our Nig* establishes how the 'inalienable rights . . . of liberty and the pursuit of happiness' (SW, p. 234) are demonstrably partial and relative for 'free' blacks almost as much as slaves, particularly since the indenturing of African-Americans was quite common in the ante-bellum North.<sup>61</sup> But it also does more than this. *Our Nig* recasts the available literary resources for portraying farm life in anglophone writing by standing not only *without* that version of the American pastoral casting the American rural landscape as feminine,<sup>62</sup> but also *without* the pastoral tradition generally. The resulting apastoral creates a topography of labour providing – uniquely, in fiction up to that time – an explanation of how it was that the

pair of Dorset labourer's trousers exhibited in Manchester in 1853 could stand up unsupported, they were 'so patched and stiffened with sweat and animal grease'.<sup>63</sup> *Our Nig's* grim economics, whilst rooted in the particular racist constructions of American life, forcefully exposes this labour-intensive side to farm life, otherwise so perfidiously omitted from pastoral discourse on both sides of the Atlantic.

#### Notes

My thanks to Julia Swindell's assistance, and John Lucas's invaluable advice, leading me to *Cousin Phillis*, the Dorset farmworker's trousers and Portia's Belmont. My thanks are also due to the British Academy for their support for my work.

- 1 Mary Collier, 'The Woman's Labour', in *'The Thresher's Labour' by Stephen Duck and 'The Woman's Labour' by Mary Collier: Two Eighteenth Century Poems* (1989 [1739]): 15. Hereafter *TL* and *WL*.
- 2 See Gates 1983: xi–lv; also Foreman 1900; Gates 1987; Smith 1987.
- 3 Accounts of women's farm labours on the frontier are commoner than for other American locations, because of the high ideological loading placed on frontier life as the archetypal American experience, stimulating both consensual and oppositional accounts. See Fairbanks and Sundberg (1993), who show that most accounts of pioneer life post-date *Our Nig*; also Jensen 1981; Peavy 1996; Jeffrey 1998.
- 4 I use the word 'class' in the sense offered by E.P. Thompson: 'class . . . [is] something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships' (Thompson 1966: 9).
- 5 Little is known of Wilson's reading (and, consequently, of her awareness of the pastoral tradition), but she did read the poems of Henry Kirke White, since she quotes from three in *Our Nig*. See R.J. Ellis, 'Notes', in Wilson 1998: 87–9. Hereafter *ON*. Pastoral flourishes abound in White. See, for example, his 'Childhood: A Poem' (White 1830: 244 and *passim*). White's attractiveness for Wilson is clear, given the melancholic bent of his poems and their recurrent recognition of the presence of poverty and toil.
- 6 See, for example, Frederick Douglass's many portraits of slave labour (Douglass 1982 [1845]: *passim*).
- 7 Toni Morrison, quoted in Jaggi 2000: 6. The anti-pastoral is defined by Pearl Brown (1992). It is primarily marked by its inversions of pastoral conventions – necessarily setting it in a dialogue with the pastoral. However, few pastoral works unremittingly endorse the virtues and innocence of country ways, as set against city vices and corruption. From William Empson onwards, things have always been identified as more complex. See Empson 1935.

- 8 See Barbara White 1993; also Curtis and Gates 1990.
- 9 Karen Sayer defines farm servants as ones who 'did domestic work on the farm, and were available to do field and harvest and dairy work when required' (Sayer 1995: 6). This definition largely fits Frado (though a requirement to carry out farmwork is more systematically factored into her workload).
- 10 Jensen 1986: 41–2. The age that Frado becomes indentured, six, is typical; the average age for white children being five, of black children, seven. See Jensen 1986: 72.
- 11 Jensen 1986: 45.
- 12 Accounts of pioneer life, whether memoirs like Rebecca Burlend's, or novels – and only one predates *Our Nig*, Carolyn Kirkland's *Western Border Life*, describing a female's travels on the frontier – do not exactly stand as working-class accounts. See Burlend 1968 [1848]; Kirkland 1856.
- 13 Williams 1973: 18ff. See also Squires 1971; Tolliver 1971.
- 14 Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cousin Phillis* (1995 [1864]). Hereafter *CP*.
- 15 Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'The Princess: A Medley' (1847), in Tennyson 1909: 202.
- 16 See Sayer 1995: 25ff. Arthur Hugh Clough's *Bothie of Toper-na-Fuosich* (1848) portrays a farmer's daughter digging up potatoes, but she labours in a farmhouse garden, not the fields.
- 17 Gaskell 1970 [1848]: 70.
- 18 Uglow 1993: 203, 8.
- 19 Gaskell 1970 [1848]: 20. Charles Kingsley in *Yeast* describes a country 'wretch' as 'a man and a brother' (1994 [1851]: 76).
- 20 E.P. Thompson, 'Introduction', *TL*, p. i. Sayer (1995) unearths a brief portrait of a woman weeding, written in the eighteenth century by James Hurdis. See Hurdis 1800.
- 21 Gaskell 1854–55: 382.
- 22 Lucas 1966: 193.
- 23 Mary Wollstonecraft, when proposing that women serve as carpenters and sailors (whilst conceding that the key role was motherhood), fails to draw attention to a main indicator of women's hardiness – their established role as female fieldworkers and farm servants. See Sayer 1995: 17.
- 24 Quoted in Uglow 1993: 32.
- 25 Sayer (1995: 37) quotes Assistant Commissioner Stephen Denison, 1843. See also Sharpe 1992.
- 26 Sayer 1995: 37.
- 27 Quoted in Sayer 1995: 60.
- 28 Somerville 1852–53.
- 29 Sayer 1995: 41; Kingsley 1994 [1851]: 120, 125.
- 30 Kingsley 1994 [1851]: 125: 'the promise of the [lofty] brow [was] . . . almost always belied by the loose and sensual lower features'.

- 31 Eliot 1856: 52–53.
- 32 Sayer notes that James Caird calls this transition period (1846–73) that of ‘High Farming’, when ‘more farmers than ever before were practising the new methods and using the new science of capitalist agriculture’ (1995: 85). This emerges in *Cousin Phillis*, when Phillis’s farmer father and the narrator’s engineer father design a ‘new model of a turnip-cutting machine’ (*CP*, p. 50).
- 33 Sayer 1995: 87, 174.
- 34 Quoted in Sayer 1995: 88–9.
- 35 Martineau, *Brooke and Brooke Farm* (1832). Hereafter *BB*.
- 36 Eliot 1965 [1871–72]: 846.
- 37 ‘The Thresher’s Labour’ was an aberration within Stephen Duck’s oeuvre, since, though he was a former agricultural labourer, he had been taken up by Royal patronage, and his verse mostly reflects his patrons’ ideas of propriety. In ‘The Thresher’s Labour’, Duck portrays a remorseless pattern of hard labour leading to exhaustion (*TL*, pp. 3, 6). Mary Collier reserves her main fusillade for a female who oversees her work when she returns from the harvest fields to carry out domestic labours. She is harshly overworked (*WL*, pp. 21–2). The narrator is harshly over-worked: ‘Not only Sweat but Blood runs trickling down / Our wrists and fingers; still our Work demands / The constant action of our lab’ring Hands’ (*WL*, p. 22). This pattern (a frank portrait of a female farm servant’s labours laced with resentment towards an oppressive female supervisor) re-emerges in *Our Nig* over one century later, even more forcibly.
- 38 In Duck’s case, subscribers included Queen Caroline, the Prince of Wales and a long list of others; in Collier’s case, the list is substantial, though shorter and less august. *TL*, pp. vi–ix.
- 39 Barbara White 1993: 33ff.
- 40 See Atack and Bateman 1987: 186ff.: ‘the large farm family . . . created a pool of captive labour’.
- 41 Even on the frontier, shortage of labour of all kinds provided a justification for women to work. See Jeffrey 1998: 78.
- 42 *ON*, p. xxxix. For discussions of the nuances of Wilson’s subtitle, see Jackson 1989: 351; Doriani 1991: 212; Ellis 2000. Nine of the first twelve Presidents owned slaves. African-American authors repeatedly explore the ramifications of this hypocrisy, most famously William Wells Brown, in *Clotel*. *Clotel*’s central character results from an affair between Jefferson and one of his female slaves (Brown 1989 [1853]). See also Ellis 1999. For discussions of this ‘two-story’ aspect to Jefferson, see Miller 1988: 43; Regis 1992: 95; Semonin 1992: 17; Onuf 1993; Temperley 1997.
- 43 Thomas Jefferson, *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (1998): 259. Hereafter *SW*.
- 44 Miller 1988: 208.



- 45 J. Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1971 [1782]): 183, 192. Hereafter *AF*.
- 46 Boulton 1995: 486.
- 47 Sweet 1994: 59. See also Atack and Bateman 1987: 37, who note that in 1860 in the north-east only 37 per cent of the population were farmers, whilst 28 per cent were labourers and that some 'farmers without farms' and 'part-time farmers' would also have been labourers.
- 48 See, for example, Enos Hitchcock's *The Farmer's Friend*, whose main protagonist notes, 'Here in a calm retreat . . . resides felicity . . . industry without servility . . . order without an over-rigid discipline – everything good and amiable' (1793: 104–5). See also Dunne 1991.
- 49 See Fender 1992: 28, 63, 93. For such Arcadian visions of a 'Golden Age' see Hesiod 1973: 66; Virgil 1983: 18–19, 22.
- 50 Except when this, too, is deeply influenced by Classical examples – as was Ben Jonson's 'To Penshurst': 'The painted partrich lyes in every field, / And for thy messe, is willing to be kill'd / . . . / The blushing apricot, and woolly peach/ Hang on thy walls, that every child may reach' (Johnson 1954: 77). Even then the American mode is usually more hyperbolic, since 'so urgent was their need to turn their cultural loss to advantage that they fell upon, as if inventing anew, a whole, traditional rhetorical complex' (Fender 1992: 60). Given the exaggerated scale of statements of pastoral ease in American writing, when contradictions emerge, these are often stark. See Miller 1988: 64–5.
- 51 See Jensen 1986: 45ff.; Atack and Bateman 1987: 194; Sweet 1994, 59ff. Accounts of frontier farm labours are still sparse, since many pioneers were not literate and it was difficult for pioneers, especially pioneer women, to find time to write of their labours. See Jeffrey 1998: 8, 77.
- 52 Jensen 1981: xvii.
- 53 Alcott 1981 [1876]. For Marcia Bullard's story, see Jensen 1981: 55–7. Writing in 1906, Bullard describes work from around 1866.
- 54 Sanford 1959 [1857–1866]: 53; Fender 1992: 210.
- 55 Thoreau 1957 [1854]: 451, 452, 456.
- 56 Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, III.iv.84. Again the problem that little is known about Wilson's reading arises, though each chapter of *Our Nig* opens with a well-chosen quotation – one of these by Shelley and three by Kirke White. See also note 5.
- 57 Jefferson rules beggary out of court: 'Vagabonds without visible property or vocation, are placed in workhouses, where they are well clothed, fed, lodged and made to labor . . . you will seldom meet a beggar. . . I never yet saw a native American begging in the streets or highways. A subsistence is easily gained here' (*SW*, p. 253). Cobbett reproduced this discourse in 1818, maintaining that there is 'no *begging*, properly so called' in America (quoted in Fender 1992: 136). See also Cobbett's *Cottage Economy*, which claimed that the 'Yankee' was 'Never servile, always civil. This must necessarily be the

- character of freemen living in a state of competence' (Cobbett 1979 [1822]: 108).
- 58 Note the ironies nestled in the phrase 'free wage labourer', which I take from Kulikoff (1992: 6).
- 59 'Rapid price convergence of products after the war [of Independence] suggests that farmers participated with increasing regularity in regional commodity markets . . . [in an] enthusiastic reception of capitalist economics and class relations'. Indeed, 'by the 1850s, if not earlier, competitive small capitalist farms had replaced those of the yeomanry in much of the [North] . . . Less than two-fifths of the household heads in 1860 owned or leased farms; most of the rest were labourers, domestic servants or artisans' (Kulikoff 1992: 23, 36, 43, 47).
- 60 *SW*, pp. 127, 198. Yet, as Jensen points out, 'Thomas Jefferson had both male and female sicklers at work on his plantation . . . in 1795' (1986: 48). Similar work to Wilson's was imminently to be performed by Rebecca Harding Davis in an industrial context in *Life in the Iron Mills* (1998 [1861]).
- 61 Jensen 1986: 41–2.
- 62 See Kolodny 1975.
- 63 John Lucas, Personal correspondence with R.J. Ellis, 9 November 2000. See also Lucas 1966: 193.

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## Crossing over: spiritualism and the Atlantic divide

*Bridget Bennett*

A joke has it that spiritualists first crossed the water in order to get to the other side. Despite its obvious shortcomings, it does suggest a more serious imperative: the investigation of how reading nineteenth-century spiritualism within a transatlantic context might be a highly revelatory activity, might indeed reveal something more interesting than we have hitherto considered about what crossing the Atlantic meant to spiritualists. Nineteenth-century spiritualism is routinely described as a phenomenon that originated in the United States and spread first across the Atlantic and then world-wide. In this essay I will argue that a transatlantic focus challenges existing orthodoxies and suggests new areas of investigation. Yet in describing this agenda for reading spiritualism I am conscious that this chapter asks more questions than it answers (and may, at times, seem to raise issues and give examples only to move elsewhere).

Though many American and British spiritualists were more interested in the site of the seance, and the revelations it might contain, rather than its cultural origins, the same cannot be said for many historians of spiritualism. A number of historians have argued that spiritualism emerged in America as a discrete cultural phenomenon which needs to be read within its American context in order to make sense of its myth of origin – the ‘Rochester rappings’ of 1848. In such interpretations, American spiritualism is read as a culturally specific form that arises from a number of local geographical, cultural and political factors.<sup>1</sup> Such an approach, however, does not sufficiently account for the complexities of spiritualism’s inheritance; it does not consider the heterogeneity of a movement that draws from both sides of the Atlantic, and from European Christian traditions as well as Native American religious practices and, crucially, from the religious beliefs of slaves. Readings of spiritualism that concentrate upon its indigenous form provide a significant and compelling advance on the

serious scholarship that has been done on spiritualism to date. Yet they still fall short of explaining some of the phenomena associated with it such as the regular appearance of black and Native American spirits to white mediums.

I believe that we need to question why spiritualism crossed the water and established itself as a popular and successful form in Britain as quickly as it did. Much existing work on nineteenth-century British spiritualism has also resisted that question, though these are still early days in that particular area of investigation.<sup>2</sup> If we ask this, then we also need to look again at how spiritualism 'started' in the first place, and to ally our findings to theoretical models of how aspects of culture can be said to originate and spread. Further, I would add that investigations of this order are able to enrich our understanding of the spread of cultural phenomena in the modern period. Such investigations would reveal, of course, that the notion of spread or diffusion is highly complex, though the notion that cultural drift and spread resists specific and delineating chronologies is hardly revelatory.

With specific regard to spiritualism, Logie Barrow questioned the established wisdom of the accepted account of origins in England that has been propounded by some cultural historians. In his insistence on some of the characteristics shared between England and America – a profound interest in self-education, and some shared religious groups or sects with belief systems that anticipated spiritualism (such as the Shakers) – he argues that the chronology and geography of early spiritualism and its spread has been misrepresented. He insists, rightly I think, on the complexity of the relation between a series of sometimes loosely related phenomena that seemed to focus, for a moment, upon spiritualism. As he writes:

very broadly, we should talk less in terms of lines of descent than of points of blur and tension between, say, Owenism, herbalism, Swedenborgianism, mesmerism, Methodism, Chartism and other isms.<sup>3</sup>

If we follow Barrow's injunction to consider conjunctions, blurs and tensions then we open up a hugely rich vein of investigation for future work on the area. There's much exciting work to be done to add to the scholarship that already exists, most particularly, in the area of the black Atlantic, and in the representations and interventions of race within spiritualism.<sup>4</sup> What this argument implies is that it is crucial to pay even closer attention to the origins and forms of spiritualism than has been done to date. This is to take issue, for a while in any case, with Daniel



Cottom's argument that the meaning of spiritualism is more significant than its origins, or, as he puts it:

we must acknowledge that the issue of empirical verification has no necessary precedence over the issue of meaning, which may actually constitute a telling critique of the tendency to identify empiricism with truth. I am not so concerned with the origins of spiritualism, then – the Fox sisters in upstate New York, Mrs. W.R. Hayden's first visit to England, Daniel Dunglas Home's incursions into France and Russia – as I am in the cultural appeal and power, the evident meaning, that this movement proved to have.

Instead I'm suggesting instead that the origins of spiritualism themselves help to elucidate its meaning, as well as the 'experiences, discourses and practices' that primarily interest Cottom in his work on spiritualism and surrealism.<sup>5</sup> Accounts of origins may well be highly significant in defining and suggesting the range of experiences that go into producing the discourses and practices of spiritualism. They may, to put it another way, be indistinguishable from each other in key areas. If this is true then we ignore them at our peril. Yet here it is appropriate to echo Cottom's cautionary note about the difficulty of writing about such a large and diverse movement under a single term. A wide range of persons and activities are subsumed within the word 'spiritualism'. As I have already suggested, it is important to recognise that not enough work has as yet been done on the activities, for example, of black mediums working in the Southern states, which might alter existing histories of the subject. Many white mediums acknowledge their presence, often in passing, in their writings.<sup>6</sup> New readings on the relations between such black mediums and Africanist religious belief systems might allow us to follow up possibilities of interaction between the activities of north-eastern white spiritualists and African-American southern spiritualists who came from quite different religious, political and ethnic backgrounds. (This is just one small example of the exciting possibilities of work in this area.)

These different types of spiritualism, or spiritualisms, might better be understood both within a context of origins and through more Atlanticist or circumatlantic readings, if we are to accept Joseph Roach's claim that it is in performance itself that origins can best be revealed. What this suggests is that (to come full circle) even if we concentrate on performance we find ourselves necessarily paying attention to origins. Yet if we start with origins we find ourselves shifting focus to performance in order to prove our hypotheses. As we pursue our investigations we must think through the significance and centrality of cultural memory, which may

help us to think through issues of performance and of origins in the same moment.

Central to such connections and arguments I have articulated so far is, of course, the possibility of travel. To think transatlantically involves investigating the possibilities of travel in the nineteenth century (and earlier too) and the relationships between slave trafficking on the one hand and movement of free peoples on the other alongside the development of religious and cultural practices in America. The phenomenal growth of nineteenth-century spiritualism was made possible by the emergence of new, modern modes of transportation, book and periodical publishing and communications. New technologies allowed mediums to travel within and between Britain and North America – even as far as Australia – to demonstrate their skills and publicise and market their writings. New technologies also, famously, provided metaphors by which supernatural occurrences could be described and understood. Telegraphy – which transformed transatlantic relations in the middle of the century helping to narrow and circumvent the space between America, Britain, and therefore its European neighbours – was used by spiritualists as a metaphor for the ways in which communications from the other world could be understood. The medium John Murray Spear explained the significance of electricity and telegraphy within his spiritual cosmos in the following way:

Between the Grand Central Mind and all inferior minds there subsists a connection, a telegraphic communication, by means of what may be called an Electric chain, composed of a greater or less number of intermediate links. The greater mind, being always positive to the lesser, can affect, impress, or *inspire* it.

The spiritual telegraph, much like its earthly counterpart, transferred messages from one place to another, invisibly and seemingly against reason, yet somehow it worked, demonstrably so. The wide comprehension of the relevance of such a metaphor is suggested by the fact that the most significant American spiritualist periodical of the 1850s, edited by Samuel Britten, was called *The Spiritual Telegraph*.<sup>7</sup>

Given the concurrence of the emergence of spiritualism and the growth of such new technologies it is useful to ask to what extent the Atlantic was a divide to the growth of and the aesthetic and cultural practices of spiritualism. That is to say, firstly, did the formal practices of spiritualism on each side of the Atlantic vary from each other to any significant degree, and to what extent is any variance determined by geographical specificity?

Secondly (to be more prosaic) to what extent did the Atlantic function as a divide to spiritualists on either side of it? Finally, did the Atlantic have particular and specific meanings for spiritualists? Might the Atlantic itself, and the possibility of spirit travel across and beyond it, even be invoked as a source of proof of the truth of spiritualism's claims? In the two cases I will outline below it seems that the divide formed by the Atlantic was certainly not insuperable, and in one case (that of the British novelist and spiritualist Florence Marryat) it became proof of the truth of spiritualism. Both Florence Marryat and my other subject, Emma Hardinge Britten, were able to cross the ocean and experience spiritualism on both sides of it. Though it is true that spiritualism emerged in the United States before it emerged in the form we associate with it in Britain, to say that without all sorts of provisos and hesitations is unwise. Marryat noted that she found the numbers of materialisations she experienced in the United States surprising. But she did not find the fact of materialisation novel, since they had started to be seen in England shortly after the first full body materialisation was experienced in the United States. There were contiguities between spiritualist experiences on both sides of the Atlantic, therefore, that deserve investigation. One of these is Florence Marryat's experience of materialised spirits in New York.

In her seminal work on spiritualism *There is no Death* (1891) Florence Marryat describes an incognito visit she paid to a New York seance in 1884 that left her a firm believer in spiritualism. The visit took place while she was in transit to a professional engagement in Boston, having travelled from England. She was already well known in her capacity as a novelist and a spiritualist, but also as the daughter of Captain Frederick Marryat whose novels, largely about the sea, had sold in huge numbers earlier in the century. Marryat writes that having arrived in New York with some time to spare before she left for Boston she decided to attend a seance. Looking in the local newspaper, she found an advert for a seance at which full body materialisations of spirits were to take place. Such materialisations were very popular among spiritualists: they seemed to bring the realities of the existence of spirits closer to them. Seeing the spirits of their dead ones before them in body form was of far greater comfort to many spiritualists than just hearing raps or receiving written messages could be. Marryat had attended many such seances in Britain already (a detail that is significant here) and had encountered the spirit of her dead daughter Florence a number of times. Florence had died shortly after her birth, but was readily recognisable to her mother by her cleft palate even when she appeared as a much older figure. Some spirits,

especially the spirits of very young children, grew older in the spirit world. In a previous manifestation she had appeared in the form of a girl of about seventeen years.<sup>8</sup> Marryat arrived at the New York seance keen to use the experience as a test of the facts of spiritualism and also, perhaps, to have an experience of what seances were like on the other side of the Atlantic. Spiritualism had, historians agree, originally come to Britain from the United States. Might American spiritualism, as experienced over there, differ in some ways from British spiritualism? Marryat was keen to find out. In the New York seance she witnessed a series of materialisations that impressed her so profoundly by their sheer quantity that she sought a physical explanation for them. She found it in the climate, suggesting that ‘the dry atmosphere of the United States’ assisted whatever the process was that allowed for such transformations to take place.<sup>9</sup> Yet it was not just the numbers of materialisations that impressed and convinced her. What struck her most was the appearance of a figure she had longed to see. The male conductor of the seance made an announcement that particularly interested her:

‘Here is a spirit who says she has come for a lady named “Florence” who has just crossed the sea. Do you answer to the description?’ I was just about to say ‘Yes’ when the curtains parted again and my daughter ‘Florence’ ran across the room and fell into my arms. ‘Mother!’ she exclaimed, ‘I said I would come with you and look after you – didn’t I?’

I looked at her. She was exactly the same in appearance as when she had come to me in England – the same luxuriant brown hair and features and figure, as I had seen under the different mediumships of Florence Cook, Arthur Cölman, Charles Williams, and William Eglington; the same form which in England had been declared to be half-a-dozen media dressed up to represent my daughter stood before me there in New York, thousands of miles across the sea, and by the power of a person who did not even know who I was. If I had not been convinced before, how could I have helped being convinced then?<sup>10</sup>

The appearance of ‘Florence’ convinces her mother through her resemblance to the figure she had seen in numerous seances in England, despite all that sceptics had told her about how she was being duped. Further, as the extract above shows, it is the fact that Marryat believed herself unknown in New York that convinced her. How could what she had seen possibly be fraudulent? As the seance continued, and the spirit of a friend appeared, providing her with additional proof (though by this time she was already persuaded) she found her conviction strengthened by the conductor of the seance. She continues:

I was more deeply affected than I had ever been under such circumstances before, and more deeply thankful. 'Florence' made great friends with our American cousins even on her first appearance. Mrs William's conductor told me he thought he had never heard anything more beautiful than the idea of the spirit-child crossing the ocean to guard its mother in a strange country, and particularly, as he could feel by her influence, what a pure and beautiful spirit she was. When I told him she had left this world at ten days old, he said that accounted for it, but he could see there was nothing earthly about her.<sup>11</sup>

This experience of a seance on the other side of the Atlantic was clearly seminal for Marryat, particularly given the path that had taken her to it. When she was younger she had thought of contact with a world of the supernatural as something unmediated by others – in other words as something individuals experienced for themselves through seeing spirits or ghosts as they might call them, or having heightened spiritual awareness. This form of belief was one she claimed for her father; she gave an example of it in *There is no Death* when she described his own account of seeing the spirit of his brother while he was anchored off the coast of Burma.<sup>12</sup> The spirit told Frederick Marryat that he had died, and Marryat then recorded the exact moment this happened in his log. Later he claimed that this was indeed the time at which his brother had died. Florence Marryat gave an account of seeing spirits of her own in the years before she became a convert to spiritualism. While living in India with her first husband she saw spirits draped in white (so that she initially mistook them for Indians). While such experiences of the supernatural were geographically varied, as these examples show, her experience of visiting seances and consulting mediums had always been associated with America. It was, for example, when she visited an American medium in London in 1873 that her investigations into the spirit world became systematised and began to involve professional mediums. Though she consulted a number of British mediums while in London, she also went to the seances of American mediums based there, and entered into a transatlantic correspondence with an American medium in the late 1880s.<sup>13</sup> Such transatlantic links were a characteristic of spiritualism from its very earliest days as accounts by Marryat and others show. Spiritualism was often characterised not just by social mobility but also by geographical mobility. By examining the experiences of two figures whose involvement in spiritualism took place on both sides of the Atlantic I will explore what transatlantic connections meant to spiritualists, and what they have meant, to date, to histories and historians of spiritualism. To do this is also

to suggest how such questions might enable us to think about and read spiritualism and international cultural exchanges in new ways and help us to come towards an answer to some key, though very simple, questions. Reading through a transatlantic focus leads to new understandings of its relation to modernity (in its widest sense) and to complex meanings, as well as helping us to think through issues of cultural contact and spread. If spiritualism is read in such a context it will, I believe, reveal itself as a fascinating case of American cultural imperialism, the spread of which is partly dependent on elaborate systems of marketing – such as the advertisement Marryat found, newspaper publications, public lectures and so on – that allowed spiritualists to treat their contact with the other world as a form of commodified entertainment, with specific markets and intended audiences. But it will also reveal its contingency on an amalgam of influences that were produced through the unique combination of cultural and ethnic encounters and engagements that characterise the history of America.

In their pioneering works on spiritualism in nineteenth-century England, Logie Barrow, Janet Oppenheim and Alex Owen all make passing, albeit differing, comment on the relation between the emergence of spiritualism there and the transatlantic visits of key American women mediums.<sup>14</sup> In her seminal work *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (1989), for example, Owen attributes the spread of spiritualism from America to England to the visits and proselytising of American mediums such as Mrs Hayden and Mrs Roberts. This argument follows the claims made four years earlier by Oppenheim in her book *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (1985), though in her account of transatlantic spread, Oppenheim had also included the figure of Daniel Dunglas Home, a Scottish-born migrant to the United States who had spent enough time there to be regarded by some as an American when he returned to England in 1855. Both Hayden and Roberts crossed the Atlantic in the early 1850s and were, as Owen puts it, ‘the forerunners of a steady stream of transatlantic visitors who helped establish a pattern of close ties between spiritualists in both countries’. ‘Transatlantic’ in this context appears to mean American. Owen supplements her argument by noting that when Harriet Beecher Stowe visited Britain, in 1853, abolition and spiritualism were ‘among the foremost topics of the day’.<sup>15</sup> One observer wrote to her husband that ‘The great talk now is Mrs Stowe and spirit-rapping, both of which have arrived in England’.<sup>16</sup> The notion of arrival is more fraught and problematic than this contemporary

commentator suggests, but for the moment I will use it without challenging it.<sup>17</sup> The implied substitution (by Owen) of 'American' for 'transatlantic' is also problematic, as we will see. Indeed contemporary confusion about Home's national identity (was he really British or American?) is very telling as it feeds into an area of debate about distinctive national characteristics and cultures that is at the heart of a significant portion of what has been written about nineteenth-century spiritualism. What is undisputed is that the story of nineteenth-century spiritualism is one that involves a crossing over from one nation to another, via the Atlantic. Though it spread beyond Britain and the United States, I will only be considering the transatlantic spread of spiritualism in its narrowest sense here.<sup>18</sup> Though that crossing over has usually been read as being one way – from the United States to Britain – as the example of Florence Marryat shows (and others might back it up), it took place in both directions, from Britain to the United States too. The case of Emma Hardinge Britten will provide another way of reading such movements and, like that of Marryat, it will show the ways in which reading transatlantically can be a fruitful and elucidatory exercise

Emma Hardinge Britten was a hugely celebrated British medium and historian of spiritualism who spent many years of her life in the United States and married the spiritualist William Britten. Her most celebrated piece of work, *Modern American Spiritualism* (1870), is a seminal account of the emergence and spread of spiritualism within the United States. From any perspective, she is an important figure; from a transatlantic one she is crucial. Her autobiography attests to a life of significant mobility and activity, and an involvement in substantial development of spiritualism on both sides of the ocean. She is a figure who can be cast as a notable Atlanticist in terms of her own crossings of the Atlantic and her Anglo-American perspective. Like Marryat she had a strong feeling for the sea. Some of her most dramatic narratives, clearly intended as being proofs of her mediumship, tell of shipping disasters predicted and narrowly avoided by her. Like Marryat, who found considerable comfort (as well as evidence of spiritualism) in spirit messages from her sailor stepson and sailor brother, sailors played a part in Britten's spiritual life. Her belief was underpinned by the superstitions traditionally associated with sailors and the sea. She wrote that her dead sailor brother (later a spirit guide for her) sent her the first message from the spirit world that convinced her of spiritualism.<sup>19</sup> Her brother's message, rapped out to her as she pointed a pencil at the letters of the alphabet, provided a proof to her that only she could have recognised. She laboriously spelled out a message that represented

both her brother's last words to her while still alive, and his first to her from the spirit world: '*Darling Emma, find a great sea snake for Tom*' [emphasis hers]. The message is a cryptic reference to two sea songs that he had particularly liked, and a reminder of the liminal or journeying life he had led.<sup>20</sup> Through making reference to that sort of a travelling life, it can also be read as a refutation of boundaries and fixities, including that of national identity itself. This confusion of national identity is also a key element of the story she tells about her own life.

Paul Gilroy has argued, famously, that the trope of the ship is especially important to the theorisation of the Black Atlantic.<sup>21</sup> He writes, 'Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs.' Here I am suggesting that, in the cases of Marryat and Britten, the invocation of dead sailor brothers – and their own connection with sea travel, mercantilism and colonial endeavour – allows us to start investigating the role of the Atlantic in the spread of spiritualism from America to Britain. Yet in parallel to this it is essential to look at the significance of the black Atlantic in the origins of spiritualism itself and then of its subsequent practices and performances. Marryat herself cites her father's experience of the supernatural (in an imperialist context) as being significant to her own development of an interest in spiritualism. His connection to the United States, to the West Indies sugar trade and to slavery should be noted. His grandfather, Thomas Marryat, a medic, had spent several years in the 1760s travelling and picking up work in America. His father, Joseph Marryat, was a Member of Parliament for Sandwich and a colonial agent for Grenada. He owned a significant amount of property in the West Indies that was dependent on slave labour. He married an American woman, Charlotte Von Geyer whose loyalist family had lost a great deal of money after the Revolution. Joseph Marryat was actively involved in the bill for the abolition of the trade in slave-grown sugar. His son's comments on the relative merits of free African-Americans in Philadelphia and the Afro-Caribbeans of 'our West India Islands' in his *A Diary in America* (1839) caused outrage in Grenada. A strong refutation of his remarks, in pamphlet form, was published in London, substantially comprised of a series of letters published in Grenada in the *Saint George's Chronicle*.<sup>22</sup> One writer makes the claim that Marryat should be more circumspect in his comments since 'it is generally reported and believed, that Capt. Marryat is descended from a coloured ancestor of no very remote date, or exalted



rank. Whether this is correct or not, it is certainly true that questions about his ancestry were raised periodically by others too, even after his death.<sup>23</sup> Marryat served on the *Impérieuse*, which was involved in the defence of the castle of Trinidad against the French in 1808, and spent several years in ships in the West Indies, along the coast of the United States, and around Burma. The family's history was, then, profoundly enmeshed within the history of the black Atlantic, the politics and practices of slavery and also British imperialism. As we have seen, Florence Marryat herself lived in India for some period as the wife of an officer in the British army. The legacy of that period often broke out within seances: she claimed on a number of occasions to see Indian spirits, dressed in traditional clothes, materialise in front of her.

As well as a consideration of the black Atlantic when researching and understanding the politics and performances of spiritualism, it is also essential to examine the borrowings and influences that take place between spiritualism and indigenous religious practices in America. From the earliest moments of spiritualist historiography as written by spiritualists, the presence of Native American spirits and religious beliefs has been acknowledged as being significant to the formation and practices of spiritualism. Britten raises the centrality of Native Americans on a number of occasions in her autobiography, most strikingly, in a bizarre, apocalyptic vision she has on her final journey across the Atlantic to retirement in England, when the ship she is travelling on is just outside Liverpool. The encounter she 'sees' between Native American spirits (especially her own spirit guide 'Arrowhead') and the inhabitants of her birthplace in 'every town, city, village and street of England' suggests the radical juxtaposition of the American life she chose and the English life she eventually returned to.<sup>24</sup> Yet the vision also has its roots in a European tradition of religious mysticism and iconoclasm that marks it out as borrowing from both sides of the Atlantic. The association between spiritualism and Native American beliefs and spirits is long-standing on both sides of the Atlantic. The appearance of Native American spirits in the seances of British mediums needs to be read within the context of the politics of the representation and reception of key Native Americans who visited Britain from the early sixteenth century onwards. The most famous of these figures was Pocahontas who converted to Christianity, married an Englishman and died and was buried in England.<sup>25</sup>

Pocahontas's 'conversion' from Indian into the Europeanised wife of an Englishman was more dramatic than Emma Hardinge Britten's transformation into the wife of an American man. None the less, Britten struggled

with the implications of her choice. A significant narrative running through her autobiography is about the relation between her 'Englishness' and the American life she finds herself leading. In certain key scenes within her autobiography moments of crisis about propriety and behaviour are linked to national identity and national characteristics. Citing her transition from actress to spiritualist lecturer (a fairly standard trajectory for many women spiritualists from Britain and America) she uses the language of propriety to describe an instance of crisis. She writes that she was 'absolutely assured' that she had to give up the stage through a series of spiritual sources even though she had one more week of a contract of employment to run. Yet despite being aware of the necessity to find new work she found it difficult to make a decision about what to look for. As she argues,

Thus whilst I seemed to be irresistibly impelled to refuse all the offers of theatrical engagements that were pressed upon me, I was no less averse to the thoroughly *un-English* idea of becoming a female preacher, as I designated the Spiritual rostrum speakers of my own sex. What, 'I! a young *English lady*, to go out like a bold, strong-minded woman to preach! Oh, shocking!' I cried, and so it appeared to the *weak-minded girl*, still under the influence of tyrant prejudices, and what were at that time old-world opinions.<sup>26</sup>

There is no doubt that the notion of a 'bold, strong-minded woman' here means, literally, an American woman. In the British popular imagination of the period, as reinforced by fictional characterisations, American women were represented as having a number of freedoms (many associated with republicanism and the rights purportedly afforded to women) denied to British women. It is also clear that, given the career she would go on to have – one in which she became a celebrated trance lecturer – there's an affectionate self-denigrating joke going on here about beneficial acculturation. 'Old-world' here functions not just as a literal suggestion of a European mindset, but also of an oppressive anti-republican sensibility that fosters and demands obedience in women rather than independence and intellectual maturity. The slippage from '*lady*' to 'woman' and finally '*girl*' suggests the range of gendered categories available. Britten's crisis is accounted for as being not just about the difficulty of being an Englishwoman continuing within such a dubious public sphere, it is also a crisis about emotional commitment of a more personal kind. Her anguished deliberations culminated in her decision to return to a quiet life in England. A contributory factor was that she had a 'certain and somewhat solemn engagement'<sup>27</sup> in England, and a letter waiting from

her fiancé asking her to return home (presumably to lead a retired married life). She decided to write and confirm that she would be crossing the Atlantic and coming home. In her account of writing that confirmatory letter she invokes destiny and the intervention of the spirit world – two common devices of spiritualists – for a reply that seemed to be written without her volition. She intended to write that she would be back in England in a month's time, yet instead she finds herself writing something that would change her life forever. She describes what happens in the following vivid terms:

In place of making this announcement, however, I deliberately wrote, and that whilst in the full possession of my senses, a description of a very rich lady who had herself made my correspondent an offer of marriage. I told him of some heavy financial difficulties he was then in, and bid him at once marry the lady who had offered herself to him, and think no more of me, for *I should never return to England for many long years to come.*<sup>28</sup>

Here, in her letter to her fiancé, she confirms her chosen status as an Englishwoman abroad, and one who has reversed the narrative of spiritualism's movement from West to East. She employs many tropes and rhetorical devices familiar from spiritualist writings, and she refuses to cross the Atlantic and return to England, at this point, instead opting for a life of uncertainty, itinerancy and independence in a new country.

In many ways the stories of Florence Marryat and Emma Hardinge Britten remind us that transatlantic travel was easier and more readily undertaken than is sometimes acknowledged. Spiritualism can be read as an enabling principle. Work on spiritualism has not drawn significant attention to this aspect of such narratives since it has concentrated on ideas of spiritualism within specific national contexts while also acknowledging (albeit tacitly) the shortcomings of such an approach by alluding to contacts and mobilities that characterise spiritualism. This is not to undermine some of the very good work that has been done on the subject, especially on issues of class and gender; rather, it is to suggest another focus. Historians have often concentrated upon crossing between various spheres of activity, but not of crossing from one culture to another. So, the spread of spiritualism is usually considered as an example of a form of reverse movement that challenged the predominant westward movement of people across the Atlantic by setting up a counter-movement of ideas and of culture crossing back over the ocean. Its huge popularity and spread was unprecedented, though around the same period other American cultural products were also having a massive influence on British society: the

gigantic success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) with both the British and American reading public (which Chapter 2 touches upon) is the most obvious example. Central to such arguments is the idea of crossing.

What particularly concerns me here are the many ways in which notions of crossing have been imagined: both by critics and historians of spiritualism, and by nineteenth-century spiritualists. The words 'crossing' or 'crossing over' may be read as peculiarly apt suggestions of the many modes of impersonations and performances, gender, racial and class transgressions that took place within the boundaries of the spiritualist seance. 'Crossing over' in one sense suggests at once not just a movement from (one?) place to another, but also a mode of transformation, assumed or simply possible, that might and often did take place within the arena of actions with which spiritualism is associated. 'Crossing over' suggests itself as a useful metaphor, as well as an actual description of a series of activities or acts. It signifies a challenge to divides of geography, class, race and gender, but it also suggests ways in which the self-descriptions and justifications spiritualists gave of themselves and their practices utilised discourses from religion, science and material culture. Spiritualists themselves literally crossed over between the language of these areas, just as science, spiritualists claimed, borrowed from the idioms of spiritualism. Writing in 1872, a spiritualist claimed that in private scientists 'adopt the idioms of Spiritualists, and unwittingly give expression to the fact that they entertain the same convictions as to the existence of spirits, their agency as mediums, and their communion with those in the flesh.'<sup>29</sup> Spiritualists created for themselves a complex discourse to account for the new realities they believed themselves to be experiencing. In this context, then, crossing over implies an ability to adapt and utilise, to make a new narrative from a series of disparate – often, I would argue, transatlantic – sources. In this way, spiritualism allowed for the crossing of boundaries in ways that were genuinely radical and enabling as several scholars, notably Ann Braude, have shown.<sup>30</sup> Yet, in addition to the suggestion of linguistic inventiveness, there are many other ways in which the terms might be read or considered. For the moment I want to think of 'crossing over' in a number of broad senses rather than in a narrow sense. I will conceive of it as a form of movement from one world to another and as from one side of the Atlantic to the other and back again – as criss-crossing, to put it another way. But I will also consider it as a mode of transformation of subjectivity that could and did take place through the complex nexus of suggestions and willed imaginings within the seance. If, in a seance, a young working-class white woman could 'become' a series of figures from

entirely different class or social backgrounds, even from another race or the opposite gender, or if she could be the centre of the enthralled attention of powerful people who otherwise would not consider her at all, this was a remarkable achievement. This was one of the ways in which it was highly attractive to practitioners. Given the possibility of the transformative acts, the literally world-changing or world-challenging performances of the sort that could and did take place, it can be imagined that the primary interest of many ordinary spiritualists was with the seance itself, the site of such activity. This, though, is not to say that they all had identical motives.

Once spiritualism crossed the ocean and 'arrived' in England, its extraordinary spread on this side of the Atlantic rivalled that even of its remarkable explosion in America, as the work of Owen, Oppenheim, Barrow and others have shown indisputably.<sup>31</sup> Its spread within England sparked a good deal of anxiety amongst many observers who cast their anxiety not just as a fear about the unknown nature of the new religion, but specifically as one about a form of American cultural imperialism, and indeed contamination, which needed to be resisted. This strange new fad that had crossed the water might be acceptable over there, but what place did it have within religious, political and cultural traditions over here? Contemporary British commentators on American life such as Charles Dickens, Fanny Trollope and Captain Marryat had shown to the British public that in many respects the New World and the Old were indeed very different.<sup>32</sup> Dickens argued, though, that with respect to religious practices there was less division between the two countries than might seem to be the case:

I do not find in America any one form of religion with which we in Europe, or even in England, are unacquainted. Dissenters resort thither in great numbers, as other people do, simply because it is a land of resort; and great settlements of them are founded, because ground can be purchased, and towns and villages reared, where there were none of the human creation before. But even the Shakers emigrated from England; our country is not unknown to Mr Joseph Smith, the apostle of Mormonism, or to his benighted disciples; I have beheld religious scenes myself in some of our populous towns which can hardly be surpassed by an American camp-meeting; and I am not aware that any instance of superstitious imposture on the one hand and superstitious credulity on the other, has had its origins in the United States, which we cannot more than parallel by the precedents of Mrs Southcote, Mary Tofts the rabbit-breeder, or even Mr Thom of Canterbury: which latter case arose some time after the dark ages had passed away.<sup>33</sup>

This uneven catalogue of figures scarcely veils a contempt that had already been exposed explicitly in *American Notes* (1842) in his account of his visit to a Shaker community. This suggests that Dickens was not sufficiently interested in such a comparison to argue his case more thoroughly. Yet his claims have a use in explaining, if he is correct, a reason why spiritualism captured the imagination in nineteenth-century England and resisted co-option into nationalist discourses, instead appealing to readings that suggested it was beyond or outside of or even not in need of such categorisation. As Owen puts it, ‘Unconcerned by dire warnings that spiritualism was “an especially American plot” concocted by those who sought to “propagate their own religious and political views”, many were keen to give the spirits the benefit of the doubt.’<sup>34</sup> More pointedly, perhaps, many converts simply weren’t interested in such readings of the new phenomenon, finding in spiritualism rather a set of practices that they found congenial, comforting, exciting, unconventional, spectacular and ultimately available to them. In other words, British spiritualists themselves seem to have cared very little about whether modern spiritualism had come over from America, or what it implied even if had. For the whole point, to them, was surely that by its very nature spiritualism, predicated on notions of boundary crossing, rendered the notion of boundaries and of crossing more complex than such attacks implied. Faced with the ‘evidence’, as it was usually seen, that dead loved ones could communicate with the living even after crossing over, it therefore made no sense that only dead Americans could perform this feat. Though a great deal in the world of spirits closely resembled the world as the living knew it, national boundaries were certainly absent from descriptions of the spirit world.

That is not to say, however, that many American attempts to describe the world of spirits did not borrow heavily from Republican sentiment, political theory or rhetoric, as Bret Carroll has recently shown.<sup>35</sup> Andrew Jackson Davis published a new version of the Declaration of Independence in *The Spirit Messenger* in 1851, emphasising religious rather than political concerns and echoing the rethinking of America’s political project that was the concern of many American spiritualists.<sup>36</sup> Yet the dazzling array of historical figures from a number of different cultures that regularly appeared in seances on both sides of the Atlantic seemed to offer pluralist possibilities that overcame merely human and national boundaries. What this suggests, then, is that British spiritualists were embracing a cultural movement without expressing great anxiety about its origins or source. They were less interested in a defensive, conservative

reading of culture and more in embracing exciting newness. This account of cultural migration has significant implications, I believe, for the great wave of American cultural exportation that is characteristic of global culture today. The newness they embraced was, I think, a cultural form that was an amalgam of a set of collisions which took place within a new republic that had broken with Europe but still maintained close relations with it. In 1848, when the Fox sisters and their 'Rochester rappings' launched spiritualism on the world, this republic was still reliant on a system of slavery that allowed it to prosper economically; but alongside this had experienced encounters with indigenous peoples whose effect on American culture was more profound than Anglo-Americans were prepared to admit. Spiritualism, as a product of a unique set of historical and geographical conditions, needs to be read with the widest and most critical attention to these circumstances.

So, I return to the question I raised at the start of this chapter: does a transatlanticist reading bring something new to established readings of spiritualism?<sup>37</sup> Thinking about how spiritualism evolved, what its sources were and how it spread from one nation to another, and then further still, involves a reflection on how culture itself evolves and reproduce itself and what role capitalism has in such work. Reading transatlantically in its broadest sense may be a fruitful and rewarding exercise, as the rise in transatlantic and circumatlantic studies is proving. Such readings challenge previous paradigms and in this way have political implications not just about the ways in which we read and interpret culture, but also about how we organise ourselves institutionally and ideologically. This is something I welcome enthusiastically. More specifically, to turn back to the subject of this chapter, reading transatlantically allows for an examination of the phenomenon of spiritualism that promises to reveal exciting sets of transactions, interventions, collisions and meetings. In short, I think it does.

#### Notes

- 1 See, for example, Howard Kerr, *Mediums, Spirit-Rappers, and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850–1900*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972; R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977; Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1997. I am greatly indebted to each of these works.
- 2 In the work of Alex Owen, Logie Barrow and others it is the culturally specific that forms the primary focus. See Logie Barrow *Independent Spirits:*

- Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850–1910*, London and New York, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986; Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*, London, Virago, 1989.
- 3 Barrow, *Independent Spirits*, p. 10.
  - 4 This is work in progress.
  - 5 Daniel Cottom, *Abyss of Reason: Cultural Movements, Revelations, and Betrayals*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 13.
  - 6 For example, in her autobiography Emma Hardinge Britten mentions meeting ‘many excellent [black] mediums’ on a visit to the southern states in 1859–60 (Margaret Wilkinson (ed.), *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten*, Manchester and London, John Heywood, 1900, pp. 146–6).
  - 7 Spear’s comment is cited in Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, p. 69. For further arguments about the significance of the telegraph see, for example, Emma Hardinge [Britten], *Modern American Spiritualism*, New York, 1872.
  - 8 She had told her mother that she had outgrown her disability while in spirit life and would never again appear with such a distinctive characteristic. Florence Marryat, *There is no Death*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1891, p. 115.
  - 9 Marryat, *There is no Death*, p. 192.
  - 10 Marryat, *There is no Death*, pp. 291–2.
  - 11 Marryat, *There is no Death*, p. 293.
  - 12 Marryat, *There is no Death*, pp. 5–6.
  - 13 See, for instance, Marryat, *There is no Death*, pp. 18–19; pp. 224–49.
  - 14 Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.
  - 15 Her profound interest in spiritualism has been amply documented.
  - 16 Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p. 19, letter from Mary Howitt to her husband.
  - 17 Oppenheim writes that ‘As spiritualism steadily moved westwards across the United States, expansion to the east, across the ocean, was only a matter of time. There was a virgin audience in Britain, primed by news of the American phenomena, and ready to be impressed’ (*The Other World*, p. 11).
  - 18 For example, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote to her husband of having had meetings with a Mrs E. of Boston while in Florence in 1860 that were of great comfort to her. Though Mrs E. was anxious about calling herself a spiritualist, Beecher Stowe was sure that she was a ‘very powerful medium’ and encouraged her to ‘try the spirits whether they were of God – to keep close to the Bible and prayer, and then accept whatever came’. Annie Fields (ed.) *The Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, Cambridge, Boston, The Riverside Press, and New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, p. 253. Letter to Calvin Stowe, 16 January 1860. A fair amount of work has been done on groups of spiritualists (especially expatriate groups of spiritualists) outside Britain and the United States.



- 19 Wilkinson (ed.), *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten*, pp. 22–3. For accounts of predictions of Atlantic shipping disasters see pp. 31–4.
- 20 Wilkinson (ed.), *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten*, pp. 22–3.
- 21 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London, New York, Verso, 1995, p. 4, and see indexed references.
- 22 Anonymous, *A Reply to Captain Marryat's Illiberal and Incorrect Statements Relative to the Coloured West Indies, as Published in his Work, Entitled, 'A Diary in America'*, London, E. Justins & Sons, 1840.
- 23 See Anonymous, *A Reply to Captain Marryat*, p. 3. The claim is made by a figure signed 'A Coloured West Indian'. For details of Frederick Marryat's life see David Hannay, *Life of Frederick Marryat*, London, Walter Scott, New York and Toronto, W.G. Gage and Co., 1889, and Florence Marryat, *Life and Letters of Captain Marryat* (2 volumes), London, Richard Bentley and Son, 1872. The question of his ancestry is raised in highly coded ways, chiefly through the notion that biographers of Marryat would do well to avoid making unproven assumptions. See, for example, *The Athenaeum*, 3212 (18 May 1889), p. 633. Four notes in *Notes and Queries* deal with the issue of which street in Westminster Marryat was born. The attention to this detail and deference to family authority on the subject is not particularly unusual. Yet given the claims made in Grenada it does suggest that there was still a question hanging over Marryat's ancestry. See *Notes and Queries*, 7th series, 7 (1889), pp. 9, 74, 177, 294.
- 24 This vision (which I am writing about elsewhere – work in progress) is peopled by Native American spirits who roam England destroying buildings, especially churches, and calling themselves 'the soldiers of the new Reformation'. Wilkinson (ed.), *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten*, pp. 210–12.
- 25 See Robert S. Tilton, *Pocahontas: The Evolution of an American Narrative*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994; Alden T. Vaughan, 'Trinculo's Indian: American Natives in Shakespeare's England', in Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (eds), *'The Tempest' and its Travels*, London, Reaktion Books, 2000, pp. 49–59; Karen Robertson, 'Pocahontas at the Masque', *Signs* (Spring 1996), 551–83. A number of mediums had American Indian spirit guides, as Alex Owen and others have noted.
- 26 Wilkinson (ed.), *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten*, pp. 37–8.
- 27 Wilkinson (ed.), *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten*, p. 38.
- 28 Wilkinson (ed.), *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten*, p. 38.
- 29 Cited in Cottom, *Abyss of Reason*, p. 35.
- 30 See Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1989.
- 31 See, for example, Owen, *The Darkened Room*; Oppenheim, *The Other World*; Barrow, *Independent Spirits*.
- 32 Dickens's *American Notes for General Circulation* was published in 1842,

- Fanny Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* in 1832, and Captain Marryat's *A Diary in America* in 1842.
- 33 Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, eds Arnold Goldman and John Whitley, London, Penguin Books, 1985, p. 290.
- 34 Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p. 19.
- 35 Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*.
- 36 See, especially, Chapter Three: 'Spiritualist Republicanism'.
- 37 One work that has been especially important to me while thinking about this subject is Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.

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## Poet of comrades: Walt Whitman and the Bolton Whitman Fellowship

*Carolyn Masel*

These I singing in spring collect for lovers,  
(For who but I should understand lovers and all their sorrow and joy?  
And who but I should be the poet of comrades?)  
(from 'These I Singing in Spring')

I see not America only, not only Liberty's nation but other nations  
preparing  
(from 'Years of the Modern')

Old age poses special risks for poets. The fear must always be that the diminution of physical capacity will correspond with a diminution of poetic capacity, a fear augmented for male poets by the deeply embedded trope equating virility with poetic power. For Walt Whitman, old age came early. In 1873, at fifty-three, he suffered a debilitating stroke and although he made a partial recovery and lived on – indeed, for nearly twenty years – the most productive period of his poetic career was over. Nevertheless, the impulse to write never left him, nor did he relinquish the metaphor linking creative and sexual power. He chose instead to write a poetry of diminution, of physical frailty, in full consciousness of his previous triumphant proclamations of virile poetic power:

Last droplets of and after spontaneous rain,  
From many limpid distillations and past showers;  
(Will they germinate anything? mere exhalations as they all  
are – the land's and sea's – America's;  
Will they filter to any deep emotions? any heart and  
brain?)<sup>1</sup>

The usual harsh verdict passed on Whitman's later poetry tends to dismiss the bravery involved in the decision, reiterated many times, to go

on writing in the face of ever-diminishing returns. His reputation today rests on the poetry he wrote between 1855, the date of the first appearance of *Leaves of Grass*, and 1871, the date of the fifth edition. Despite his ceaseless efforts to promote his book (which went, in the end, to seven editions), Whitman's poetry took a very long time to find a substantial readership; a milieu for the appropriate reception of his poetry had, in a sense, to be constituted. That constituency did not form until the 1920s, long after his death. Yet Whitman's last droplets of spontaneous rain did germinate something: something wholly unexpected but, once he became aware of it, treasured and wondered at: the love of a devoted band of British readers across the Atlantic in the prosperous mill-town of Bolton, Lancashire.

The story of the Bolton Whitman Fellowship begins in the 1880s and therefore concerns some of Whitman's earliest avid readers. Their letters to the poet in the last years of his life brought him comfort and hope, and the transatlantic visits of two of them in particular gave him a sense of community that, with its exhilarating international reach and promise of further extension, was immensely precious to him. The papers of the Bolton Whitman Fellowship are held on two sites: the smaller collection is held at the John Rylands University Library of Manchester at Deansgate, the larger at the Bolton Central Library. The foundation of the Rylands collection is the bequest of Charles F. Sixsmith, who refused to leave his substantial collection to the Bolton Library following a dispute with the Librarian there.<sup>2</sup> The archive as a whole, however, is remarkably unified, configured as it is around a central figure. It is the record of the group of men gathered around James William Wallace, known simply as 'Wallace' to his friends, at whose home they met to discuss the poetry and philosophy of Walt Whitman.

The criss-cross trace of thousands of items – letters, articles, journals and photographs – to and fro across the Atlantic between Wallace and his friends in Bolton and Whitman and his friends in Camden is simply too dense to be understood in terms of literary 'influence'. Indeed, although their correspondence contributes much to our knowledge of the early reception of Whitman's poetry, it is doubtful that any merely literary model could adequately characterise their exchange. Wallace and his friends sought not only to understand those poems which were unlike any poetry they had encountered before, but also to make contact with the man who wrote the poems, the man who had vowed to make his own personality the very centre of his poetry. He seemed to them the source not just of a distinctive and radically new kind of poetry, but a source of

vision, of wisdom, of courage and of overarching love, and love was the both the means and the end of the manifold social transformations they envisaged. It seemed wonderful to them that, for the first five years of their correspondence, that man was still available to them, and responded to their professions of gratitude and devotion with characteristic generosity – making gifts of autographed copies of his books to particular correspondents, and sending cards and good wishes in which individuals were named. The Bolton Whitmanites were not the first working people to heed the poet's celebratory message of unity – a unity powerfully connecting individuals without sacrificing any of their uniqueness – but they do seem to have been the first group of working people to receive Whitman's poetry collectively, the first community of non-university readers. In the bustling town of Bolton, on the opposite side of the Atlantic, the frail poet found the readership of which he had dreamed.

Wallace's focus on Whitman dates from 1885, when Wallace was thirty-one. The group that would become the Bolton Whitman Fellowship was by that time already well established as a reading group, but not one dedicated to a particular author. Its initial members were drawn from the parish church and soon became a core group of eight young men. That core group itself quickly expanded to include a dozen or so more members, some of whom were occasional rather than regular attenders. By the time that Wallace first came in contact with Whitman's poetry, they had worked their way through a wide range of authors, including Burns, Carlyle, Emerson, Tennyson, Ruskin, Mrs Humphrey Ward and George Macdonald, as well as Shakespeare, Milton and Goethe.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to pinpoint the first meeting of the group, but one of its members, Fred Wild, who was more or less the same age as Wallace, supposed they were 'about seventeen' when they started the readings, which would give a starting date of about 1870.

For most of its members, the attraction of the group was undoubtedly Wallace himself, his extraordinary sweetness of personality being much remarked upon. Wentworth Dixon, who joined the Fellowship in 1885, noted that his kindness extended even to earthworms, which he went to considerable pains to avoid treading on, prompting a comparison of Wallace with St Francis.<sup>4</sup> But the more usual comparison was with Whitman himself. Dixon, indeed, claimed Wallace as Whitman's spiritual superior, since Whitman was, one could hardly help noticing, self-promoting, whereas Wallace was utterly selfless.<sup>5</sup> Hearing Wallace read from Whitman was said to be 'a pentecostal experience',<sup>6</sup> although it was also agreed that his voice was truly awful: 'rough and husky' and

‘sound[ing] as though he had a “throat affection”’.<sup>7</sup> The readings took place in the evening at Wallace’s home at 14 Eagle Street, which was ‘one of the worst streets in The Haulgh, Bolton’. The room in which they gathered was nine or ten foot square and soon thick with tobacco smoke.<sup>8</sup> In the early years, group readings took place three or four evenings a week, after which the men went for a walk, but within two years Monday evenings had become the regular meeting time.<sup>9</sup>

Dixon describes Wallace’s parents as belonging to the ‘artisan class’.<sup>10</sup> Wallace himself was more educated than his parents and is better described as educated working class or lower middle class. The same thing is true of the group as a whole: a brief glance at the various occupations of its members reveals a constituency drawn from both sides of the managerial line. This would seem to be an index of not only the social mobility that characterised Bolton’s and other Victorian mill towns’ working classes, but, more significantly, an index of a new sense of possibility in negotiating employment and social relations – a sense of possibility that this group felt derived directly from Walt Whitman, and which individual members sought to apply both collectively and in their own individual lives. To give but one example: Charles Sixsmith, who worked in Bentinck Mill in Farnworth and in time became its managing director, sought to evolve a new aesthetic of block printing that would be integral to a humanely conceived relationship of the mill-workers to the fabric they produced.<sup>11</sup> Sixsmith became a member of the Fellowship in the early 1890s, but in 1885, the time of the Fellowship’s first introduction to Whitman, it boasted a general practitioner, a hosiery manufacturer, a cotton waste merchant, an engineering employer’s federation secretary, an architect’s assistant, a bank clerk, a magistrate’s clerk, a lawyer’s clerk, and one other clerk, as well as two church ministers.<sup>12</sup> In time, these core members of the group would be joined by a very diverse range of people with connections to schools and universities, the Independent Labour Party, the media, and professional collectors of Americana. The list of prominent reformers connected with the Bolton Whitman Fellowship, whether through occasional visits or solely through correspondence, includes Edward Carpenter, Robert Blatchford, Keir Hardie, James Sims, Katherine St John Conway, John Bruce Glasier, Caroline Martyn, Alice Collinge, Caroline Eccles and Ramsay Macdonald. Among other correspondents was the Unitarian minister Reverend Will Hayes (also known as Brother John), who founded in Kent a society devoted to comparative religion that included Whitman among its prophets. The name of that society, ‘The Order of the Great Companions’, came from a line of

Whitman's 'Song of the Open Road'. Among the overseas correspondents were the poet AE (George Russell) in Ireland; Albert Aylward, George and Mildred Bains, and Henry and Helen Saunders in Toronto; Willie Ormiston Roy in Montreal; Shigetaka Naganuma in Tokyo; and the poet Bernard O'Dowd in Melbourne. Thus, superimposed on the primary, deeply etched pattern of transatlantic to-ing and fro-ing was a web that centred on Bolton. One strand extended through Millthorpe near Sheffield (home of Edward Carpenter), London (Tennyson's home) and Chatham, Kent (where Will Hayes lived), to France (home of the poet Murger, whom Whitman translated, and the critic Léon Bazalgette). Another strand diverted the line from Bolton to Camden through Ireland, and then extended the transatlantic arc through Montreal, Toronto, London (Ontario), leapt across the Pacific to Japan, and leapt again to Melbourne.

What bound the Bolton Fellowship together was not only their sense of social purpose, which they had in common with many other local reformist and socialist groups, but the sense of that purpose as being embodied and confirmed by Whitman. For them Whitman was the Poet of Democracy, the man who in his life and work best articulated their striving for political representation based on a conception of spiritual equality, a process that would crystallise in the creation of the Independent Labour Party and in other organs of reform. They sought the betterment of society through education, the improvement of the urban environment and the preservation of the countryside, the humane treatment of animals, a holistic approach to manufacture, equal rights for women and a more widespread acknowledgement of the bond of love between male friends and comrades of both sexes. The story of the Bolton Whitman Fellowship is, above all, a story of persistent idealism in the face of adversity: the story of a shared aspiration that endured through the individual privations and suffering of its members and the daunting circumstances of two world wars.

Since what characterised the group itself was an abiding millenarianism, one of Whitman's chief attractions for them was the millenarian spirit intrinsic to his conception of the nation that he famously claimed was a poem in itself. While it was an accident of history that brought the Bolton group first to Emerson and then to Whitman, rather than, say, to William Blake, once the correspondence with Whitman and his friends had begun, the insight of each group with regard to its own social and political situation was brought to bear on its transatlantic opposite, with mutually illuminating results.



Although he was not, in conventional terms, the best-educated member of the group, Wallace remained its undisputed leader from the time of its inception until his death in 1926. There is a sense in which the very ordinariness of his circumstances points up the extraordinary qualities of his temperament that made him such a pivotal figure. Yet it is the particulars of that ordinary life that brought him, at a specific juncture, to a crisis, a terrible neediness that only Whitman could answer. Wallace was born in August 1853. His father was a millwright from Northumberland, his mother grew up in Bolton. His father's work necessitated many absences, including a trip to Russia to equip new mills there,<sup>13</sup> and it is certain that Wallace was much closer to his mother, a 'kind and gentle woman', who was severely afflicted with rheumatism and lived as an invalid.<sup>14</sup> At fourteen Wallace left school to work as an architect's assistant at Bradshaw's (later Bradshaw and Gass), where he remained until his 'early' retirement in 1912.<sup>15</sup> For most of this time he lived with his mother at the Eagle Street house, caring for her through her daily suffering and, eventually, her gruelling, long last illness. His sorrow at her death in 1885 was profound. In the months that followed, his friends observed a change in him, a new peacefulness and calm. This they would later characterise as resembling the change experienced by both Whitman and the Buddha, clearly demonstrating Wallace's credentials as a prophet.<sup>16</sup> It is Wallace himself who associates Whitman with his mother's last illness and death. He recalls having 'long had a slight knowledge of and much curiosity about Whitman', but it was only 'twelve months before [his] mother died that [he] read for the first time complete copies of "Leaves of Grass" and "Specimen Days", and felt . . . that he, of all men, taught the doctrine of immortality with quite new emphasis and authority'.<sup>17</sup> His response to reading Whitman and '[feeling] the deep thrill of contact with a mighty spirit' was to bring him to the group. Dixon records him 'recit[ing] with great feeling numerous passages from [*Leaves of Grass*]' to the assembled men, who, while they were excited by this poetry that did not resemble any they had encountered before, also found it 'somewhat obscure' and were therefore grateful for the 'lucid explanations [that] were always forthcoming from Wallace'.<sup>18</sup> What Whitman meant to Wallace in his state of spiritual ferment was difficult to articulate even five years later: 'How near & dear you are to me I cannot tell you', he wrote to the poet, 'but I am sure that no author before ever appealed to such depths of a man's nature or aroused such tender personal love'.<sup>19</sup>

Carmine Sarracino has noted that several of Whitman's disciples came

to the poet through an experience akin to religious conversion, precipitated by a particular crisis.<sup>20</sup> In the Bolton group, both Wallace and his friend Dr John Johnston attest to having separately undergone an experience of this nature and so conform to the pattern articulated by Sarracino in relation to Whitman's more famous followers: R.M. Bucke, Anne Gilchrist and John Burroughs. Wallace referred to the profound change in his consciousness following his mother's death simply as an 'illumination'; much later, in 1915, he would speak feelingly of the advent of religious experience that 'when it happens to a man, so completely revolutionizes his whole outlook on life and all his desires and aims as to amount to a new birth.'<sup>21</sup> Four years after that he would argue that a kind of crisis had occurred in Whitman's life when he was about thirty-five that had precipitated the *Leaves of Grass*.<sup>22</sup> Taken together, these various writings suggest that Wallace himself recognised a parallel between Whitman's experience and his own.

Dr Johnston, who was effectively Wallace's second in command, was something of a polymath. He worked in Bolton as a general practitioner, but he also campaigned passionately for better working conditions in the Bolton mills, and especially for the abolition of child labour. He instructed the St John's Ambulance Brigade and sought in a variety of other ways to improve public health.<sup>23</sup> He kept himself fit by cycling, and recorded in a pamphlet a cycling tour undertaken by 'Fritz and Ian' ('Fritz' was Fred Wild; Johnston, hailing originally from Dumfriesshire, was 'Ian'). Another article contains an account of a journey to attend the passion play at Oberammergau. While he lost none of his affection for Scotland, he cherished none the less the particulars of Lancashire life, and composed several humorous songs in local dialect for the Eagle Street meetings. One of these, written for Wallace's birthday, referred to his friend as the 'Masther' of 'The Aigle Shtrate Collidge'. This good-natured irony was much appreciated: thereafter, the Bolton group referred to itself, half-deprecatingly, as The Eagle Street College.

It was in 1887, two years after Wallace discovered Whitman, that Wallace and Johnston first wrote to the poet, informing him of their personal gratitude for his work and of the Bolton weekly meetings. Johnston spoke of his encounter with Whitman's work as 'his deliverance from *soul-benumbing* scepticism into which, not without pain, he had gradually fallen'. Whitman's books were 'his constant companions, his spiritual nourishment, his continual study and delight'. Whitman had 'ennobled and beautified' his daily life and his work, returning him to a sense of his vocation. Wallace wrote of his 'heavy bereavement' and of his reading of

Carlyle, Ruskin and Emerson, but he claimed for Whitman alone the capacity to answer him in his neediness, asserting that his work was 'a veritable "Gospel" bringing tidings of great joy'. Accompanying this letter, phrased with infinite grace and humility, was a birthday gift of money: '10.00'.<sup>24</sup> Whitman, elderly, poor and increasingly ill, his poetry either denigrated or ignored by all but a handful of friends, was delighted to receive the congratulations and the gift, writing that 'the response from those staunch and tender Lancashire chaps cheers and nourishes my very heart'.<sup>25</sup> There began a correspondence that endured for the remainder of the poet's life and a link between the Bolton Whitmanites and the North American Whitmanites that would endure unbroken for sixty years.<sup>26</sup>

One salient characteristic of this transatlantic connection was that individual correspondents remained faithful throughout their lives. Upon their deaths, other correspondents from either side of the Atlantic stepped in to represent them. To take the most obvious example, the correspondence between Wallace and Horace Traubel would eventually be taken over by Minnie Whiteside, Wallace's 'adopted daughter', and Horace Traubel's widow, Anne. The image that comes to mind is that of a flock of migrating birds, where, when the leader tires and falls behind, another bird assumes the position at the head of the flock. Thus, while the individual correspondents varied, the transatlantic connection was faithfully maintained, neither side ever doubting the importance of the other.

It is worth remarking that the appeal of the poet to the Eagle Street College rather than to those with a conventionally educated literary background is entirely consistent with the rest of the story of his dissemination in England. William Michael Rossetti, the foremost and at times the single champion of Whitman's poetry among the literati, had been made aware of Whitman's poetry by Thomas Dixon, a cork cutter in Sunderland, who had bought at (illegal) auction some copies of the *Leaves* from one James Grindrod, a veteran of the American Civil War who peddled books, for a time, in Sunderland. Dixon, who himself corresponded with Whitman, sent the book to his friend William Bell Scott, a poet and sculptor, who made a Christmas gift of it to his friend Rossetti.<sup>27</sup> But Rossetti's 'discreetly pruned *Selection*' in which Whitman appears, according to Harold Blodgett, 'as if he had rigged himself in formal morning dress to be admitted at the door of an exclusive English club',<sup>28</sup> would not appear until 1868, more than ten years after he had first received his copy.<sup>29</sup> Just as the dissemination of Whitman was effected by largely self-educated working men long before he was taken up by literary sponsors in his own country, so much of the discussion of Whitman's

virtues as a poet and a man by The Eagle Street College constitutes some of the earliest Whitman criticism, even though much of it has never been published, and most of it is still not recorded in the standard scholarly bibliographical works. Recent scholars have only begun to mine the Bolton Whitman archive for these early appraisals of the poet.

In addition to the commentary of the various members of the group, which mainly takes the form of letters, lectures and articles, the archive contains a good deal of contextual evidence of the debate surrounding Whitman in literary circles. Some of this is available elsewhere, but Geraldine Hodgson's evaluation of Whitman in *The Co-operative News and Journal of Associated Industry* in 1899, for instance, represents a valuable contribution to early Whitman scholarship – one which contrasts directly with G.K. Chesterton's more typical qualified praise (with reservations on Whitman's abandonment of metre and modesty) five years later.<sup>30</sup> A clipping from the *Sunday Times* of 1931 mentions the English as liking Whitman better during his lifetime than did Americans, but the writer does not mention the Bolton group. In his address to fellow Bolton Whitmanites delivered in 1930 in the Swan Hotel in Bolton, William Broadhurst complained of the omission of the Bolton group from John Bailey's *English Men of Letters* series published by Macmillan.<sup>31</sup> By the 1950s, the Bolton Whitman Fellowship had been elided completely from official literary history. A review of *Whitman and Rolleston: A Correspondence* in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1952 draws the public's attention to Dubliner T.W. Rolleston's translation of Whitman into German, remarking acerbically, 'It is an ironic fact that the worth of the American poet, banned and neglected in his own country, was first recognized by a few courageous poets and university men in England and Ireland' – a summary that might have caused the surviving members of the Bolton group to deliver a few ironic remarks of their own.<sup>32</sup> However, the single most telling item in Sixsmith's hoard in the John Rylands Library must be the newspaper cutting (unfortunately unidentified) concerning one of the first copies of *Leaves of Grass* in London, which was sent to the editor of the *Morning Star*, F.W. Chesson, who used it as a scrap-book.

The high point of the discipleship of the two foremost Whitmanites in the Bolton group was undoubtedly their pilgrimage to see the good grey poet in Camden, Johnston travelling there in 1890 and Wallace in 1891. In doing so, they joined the line of transatlantic visitors who, over the years, had made their way to the poet's door. Among the most distinguished were Edward Carpenter (whom they would shortly come to know) and Oscar Wilde (whom they would not). They kept an informal

diary in notebooks, which were transcribed and eventually published in 1917 as *Visits to Walt Whitman in 1890–91 by Two Lancashire Friends*.<sup>33</sup> The notebooks, now held in the Bolton Library, testify to the special significance of the visit, the preciousness of the time spent with the bard and his associates. They are extremely detailed, recording every item of conversation – even the pointed silence of Walt’s canary (‘The canary said nothing’).<sup>34</sup> For Wallace, who was only persuaded to travel at the last minute, the visit to America must have been among the most significant events of his life. Just as he recorded Whitman’s words with meticulous detail, so, too, he carefully preserved his ticket from Liverpool to Philadelphia, together with the official notification of sailing, a table of foreign moneys and an insurance card against personal injury (possibly paid by Johnston).

Wallace and Johnston could hardly have met with the poet without also meeting with his carers and disciples in Camden. The carers were Mrs Mary Davis, Whitman’s housekeeper, and Warren (‘Warry’) Fritzing, his nurse; the disciples were Horace Logo Traubel – bank clerk by day, editor of *The Conservator* by every other conceivable hour of the twenty-four and Whitman’s amanuensis on demand – and Dr Richard Maurice Bucke, Medical Superintendent at the Insane Asylum in London (Ontario), Whitman’s first biographer and his close friend. While Dr Johnston stayed with Dr Bucke, Wallace stayed with Traubel and his family, the ties then forged between them enduring beyond Wallace’s death.

Traubel was a prolific and loyal correspondent. He wrote to Wallace almost every day – sometimes more frequently – from the time of his return to Bolton until 1897, and more sporadically afterward. He was to send a detailed account of Walt’s last days to the anxious Boltonians (the poet died on 26 March 1892: six months to the day after Wallace’s embarkation at Liverpool) and much news about the realisation of what he understood to be Whitman’s purpose in the world, the promotion of the individual human spirit as the measure of all social organisation, a cause to which he would devote the rest of his life.

Literary historians have been quick to point out that Whitman, a Jacksonian Democrat, did not share the fundamental belief in socialist principles that bound Wallace and Traubel together and which they discussed in their correspondence. That difference between Whitman and two of his most important disciples on either side of the Atlantic has, however, been variously interpreted. Jerome Loving and Michael Robertson, for example, would appear to see the difference as incontrovertible, a bald fact, whereas Paul Salvesson points to Whitman’s hesitant

statement about socialism made at the end of his life and prompted by Traubel: 'Of course I'm a good deal more of a socialist than I thought I was, maybe not technically, politically so, but intrinsically, in my meanings.'<sup>35</sup> Wallace, certainly, had no hesitation about including Whitman in his *Calendar of Socialist Saints* (now held in the John Rylands archive). Whether the disciples' differences with Whitman amount to no more than a matter of emphasis or whether they constitute a significant misprision, it is certain that the disciples' views themselves differed greatly. Wallace was interested in a politically instituted socialism that would be informed by the profoundest spirituality, whereas Traubel was primarily concerned with individual freedoms.

In addition to providing him with an opportunity to discuss and clarify his principles, Traubel's correspondence with the Bolton group, and with Wallace in particular, undoubtedly provided him with an arena – perhaps the only arena – in which he could safely air his views about his contemporaries. One of the most difficult views to vent to anyone on his own side of the Atlantic other than his wife must have been his conviction that Dr Bucke (who, like Traubel, was Walt's literary executor) was a person of distinctly limited imagination. Traubel's wife Anne, whose intuitions he respected, did not like Bucke; moreover, she thought his ideas about women were deplorable.<sup>36</sup> Traubel went so far as to criticise Bucke's paper on *Cosmic Consciousness* (a spiritual phenomenon inspired by his first meeting with Whitman) as suffering from a lack of creative imagination.<sup>37</sup> Wallace himself, Traubel wrote, was able to 'get at the spiritual Whitman more infallibly than [did] "the good doctor"'.<sup>38</sup> In response to Wallace's hint that he was likely to 'criticise [Bucke's paper] *sharply*', Traubel expanded on his objections, charging Bucke with a 'provincial intellectualism. It is not intellect', he continued, 'that ships for the longest voyage'. What clearly irked him was Bucke's claim to 'spheric insight', beyond any insight that Traubel might have or aspire to, and thus disqualifying him from judgment.<sup>39</sup> By contrast, Thomas Harned, the third literary executor, seems merely to have irritated Traubel: 'Harned', he opined, 'would be a happier man if he cared less for houses & goods'.<sup>40</sup> Those who show 'little spiritual comprehension of Walt' included Daniel Brinton (another prominent Whitmanite) and the wealthy socialist soap manufacturer Joseph Fels, who paid a visit to the Bolton group early in 1894.<sup>41</sup> John Burroughs, another of Whitman's well-known disciples, came in for criticism for not defending him strongly enough against the charge of self-puffery published in the influential *Christian Register*.<sup>42</sup> Traubel agreed with Burroughs, however, about Herbert Gilchrist, who was 'such

a good fellow I wish he painted better pictures'.<sup>43</sup> To mention Herbert Gilchrist is, incidentally, to evoke a further transatlantic connection, well known in Whitman circles. The painter of the Cleopatra that so 'painfully disappointed' Burroughs was the son and biographer of the redoubtable Anne Gilchrist, a widow who had fallen in love with the poet of *Leaves of Grass* and moved, with her three children, from England to America in order to join him.<sup>44</sup>

Traubel's epistolary style is divagatory; the preoccupations and judgments imparted by him in the course of almost a thousand letters exceeds what can be said of them here. Although the relationship between him and Wallace would cool, it is certain that Wallace and the Eagle Street 'boys' fulfilled a special, irreplaceable role as loving friends. His last words to them, a scrawled note of farewell, were written shortly after the heart attack that would eventually kill him in September, 1919.

Wallace's brief stay with the Traubel family in 1891 resulted in a life-long correspondence not only with Horace Traubel, but also with Anne Montgomerie Traubel. Indeed, Anne quickly became Wallace's disciple in much the same sense as Wallace was that of Whitman. She corresponded with Wallace independently of her husband, Horace himself urging Wallace to maintain the link that was so precious to her. The Traubels named their son after Wallace, and Anne's letters to him after that child died of scarlet fever at the age of four are among the most moving in the archive. Long after the death of her Bolton sage, she continued to write of him to Minnie Whiteside, her correspondence with the Bolton group ending only with her own life in 1954.

It is something of an irony that Dr Johnston's visit to Whitman and his meeting with R.M. Bucke should have resulted in the Bolton group's being put in touch with an important English Whitmanite. When, in July 1891, Dr Bucke made a reciprocal visit to Dr Johnston in England, he met Edward Carpenter in London and brought him to Bolton to meet the group. The whole course of Carpenter's life had been shaped by his reading of Whitman, whom he first encountered in Rossetti's edition while a university student. Like Bucke and Traubel, but in a different way from either, he saw his life's mission as continuing what Whitman's poetry had begun, and to that end he renounced a university career and set about raising the consciousness of working men and women through lectures and writing. He had begun to correspond with Whitman in the early 1870s, and first visited him in 1877. On that occasion they had taken the ferry from Camden to Philadelphia together, but when he next visited him in 1884, he found the poet's health had greatly deteriorated.<sup>45</sup> His visit to

the Bolton group resulted in some friendships with various members.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, while acknowledging their importance in the local promotion of the poet he loved, he tended to hold the Bolton Whitmanites as a group at arm's length. He did, however, form close friendships with two of them: Dr Johnston and Charles Sixsmith. Johnston and Sixsmith each accompanied Carpenter and his partner George Merrill on holidays overseas, and each often visited the couple at Carpenter's home in Millthorpe, near Sheffield. Johnston was especially grateful for Carpenter's visits during his stint as a Non Commissioned Officer at Queen Mary's Military Hospital in Whalley, Lancashire, and then at Townleys Military Hospital in Bolton during the First World War.<sup>47</sup> His diaries record his frequently being depressed by his work as a trauma doctor and oppressed by the bureaucracy of the military regime, and also the great relief and even inspiration provided by those occasional conversations with Carpenter, which included 'socialism, spiritualism and mysticism, sexuality and clairvoyance' amongst the topics discussed.<sup>48</sup>

Carpenter's friendship with the Bolton Whitmanites was not, incidentally, welcomed by Traubel. It seems to have pointed up his sense of failure in being unable to establish a personal friendship with the Englishman whose life's course had, like his own, been so thoroughly influenced by Whitman. About a year after Whitman's death he had proposed a collection of essays by the poet's admirers and had invited Carpenter to contribute a piece. But Carpenter replied with a warning against rushing rashly into print, a warning echoed by John Addington Symonds, who was anxious that private material remain private. It was clear to Traubel that Carpenter disapproved of his notes for what eventually became his essay in *In Re Walt Whitman* and had discussed them with Wallace; however, he professed himself unperturbed by Carpenter's disapproval or by his threatening to withhold his sketch of Whitman.<sup>49</sup> A year later, however, Traubel would praise Carpenter's *Sex and Love* as 'noble – pure in touch, high, absolutely right in motive & general solidity of statement', although 'A few of his details seem dubious.'<sup>50</sup> He was particularly curious to know what Dr Johnston thought of it, since Dr Longaker (Whitman's physician) greatly disapproved of it. Traubel himself thought Longaker's criticism 'stupid', attributing it to a doctor's professional pride which would 'permit no unholy questions from the laity'. In fact, Traubel's admiration for Carpenter's work led him to place an order for 'a good many' of his pamphlets, with a view to selling them on his side of the Atlantic. But Carpenter, who had already written to Traubel 'rather severely' in opposition to his plans for an International Whitman League, did not



honour the order, and their relationship was damaged beyond repair. There is a lingering wistfulness about many of his references to Carpenter in his transatlantic correspondence. 'I wish he knew me better & loved me more', he once wrote to Wallace.<sup>51</sup>

Johnston's demanding work as a trauma doctor during the First World War was born of the compassion that made the surroundings of military hospitals more uncongenial to him than the work itself.<sup>52</sup> It seems probable that at some point during that period he would recall Whitman's work as a nurse during the American Civil War. In fact, Johnston, who had been a member of the Labour Church, was, by conviction, a pacifist and was opposed to both the First World War and the Boer War before it.<sup>53</sup> Wallace, too, was a pacifist; indeed, he is said to have 'discountenanced violence in every form and would rather suffer a wrong than defend himself by force'. His opposition to the First World War drew him into conflict with some of the other members of the Bolton Whitman group who thought his views contrary to Whitman's teaching.<sup>54</sup> Dixon, who reports this disagreement, does not elaborate on it. In the absence of further evidence, it is tempting to characterise various members' conflicting interpretations of Whitman's stance in terms of the radically divergent views embodied in the Drum-Taps section of *Leaves of Grass* that deals with the Civil War. In an early poem in the sequence, 'Beat! Beat! Drums!', Whitman rallies civilians to join the Unionist Cause, urging the necessity of War over any other pressing commitment, in a way that recalls Jesus' instruction to his disciples to let the dead bury their dead (Matthew 8:22). By contrast, further on in the sequence, in 'The Wound-Dresser', the speaker, asked to recall his lasting impressions of the war, dispenses in short order first with any partisan notion of a Cause – '(was one side so brave? the other was equally brave;)' – and then with the notion of soldierly heroism as the proper stuff of legend. What he chooses to recount instead is the scenario of treating the myriad wounded, the fact of the 'refuse pail, / Soon to be fill'd with clotted rags and blood, emptied, and fill'd again'.<sup>55</sup>

There would seem to be little doubt that Wallace's opposition to all warfare was based on religious conviction. Although I have described him as becoming Whitman's disciple through an experience akin to religious conversion, there is nevertheless a continuity in his spiritual development. His background was Presbyterian and his fundamental inspiration remained, like Whitman's, broadly Christian. As a young man, he had gone to St Andrew's Church in Bowker's Row and taught the men's class there, but he later withdrew from public worship, becoming, in Dixon's words, 'more Unitarian than Unitarians' in his belief that the soul of man

was one with the Universal Soul.<sup>56</sup> In his address to the Fellowship of 1915 on Religion in Whitman, Wallace frames his central claim about the poet in terms of a shared insight:

Whitman knew, as a fact of consciousness, that the central and real being of himself and others is the *Universal and Eternal Life we name God* . . . This realisation was followed by its becoming the inspiration and controlling centre of all his work.<sup>57</sup>

In fact, Wallace's version of Protestantism was tempered not only by Whitman – or Emerson's conception of the Over-Soul delivered via Whitman – but also by various antecedents of spiritualism that arose in the second half of the nineteenth century and persisted into the twentieth, such as theosophy, New Thought and Christian Science. This element shows most clearly in his, and his followers', attitude toward death, so that while some contemporary accounts clearly observe the pieties of the age (Horace Traubel's account of Whitman's last days, for example, or his accounts of the death of his small son), other accounts of dying and of the afterlife evince a conviction of the immortality of the soul in a passionately literal way, whereby the departed are perceived as an intermittent presence, imparting a sense of the numinous to the bereaved and acting as a source of inspiration. The dead, and especially Whitman, endured aetherially just beyond reach, providing a strength and an example for his disciples to follow on their journey toward the beyond.<sup>58</sup> Wallace himself would, after his death in 1926, become such a guiding figure for Anne Traubel.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, Anne Traubel's account of her husband's death amounts, in its emphasis on the efficacy of thought in the promotion of healing, to a version of New Thought.

The religious convictions of the Bolton Whitman Fellowship, and particularly of Wallace, are, scholars are beginning to realise, relevant to their interpretation of their intense life as a male group. While many of the members of Eagle Street College were married, the College itself was overwhelmingly a society of men, as their vast collection of photographs shows. The only woman who might have had any depth of knowledge of the psychology of the College was Minnie Whiteside, widowed almost as soon as married and taken in by Wallace as an act of charity. Whilst Minnie was known as Wallace's 'adopted daughter', she was in effect his secretary and eventually also his housekeeper. Wallace was plagued with ill health and with intermittent but painful eye trouble that eventually forced his 'early' retirement. He was both devoted to Minnie Whiteside and dependent on her. Her counterpart in Camden, Anne Traubel, was

more influential in that she participated to some extent in her husband's intellectual life and, for a short time, aided him in putting out *The Conservator*, but her sphere of influence was limited; she took no part, for example, in the establishment of the International Whitman League.

Whitman's 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* marked the first inclusion of both the Children of Adam and the Calamus sequences. It was the explicitness of the former sequence that attracted the immediate wrath of commentators, the poems that treated the subject of 'adhesiveness' or love between men in highly eroticised language went largely unnoticed. Nevertheless, at that point the general disapproval of Whitman, already considered too vulgarly sexual by some readers – and some non-readers – hardened into villification,<sup>60</sup> but Whitman stood by both sequences and simply endured the calumny. The Calamus poems, did, however, attract the attention of men investigating their own homosexual desire, such as Carpenter and John Addington Symonds, who first read these poems in Rossetti's edition while at university. It was Symonds whose tortuous wrestling with the forbidden 'subject' of homosexual love that led him to question Whitman directly and repeatedly and thereby elicited the poet's famous refutation:

That the *Calamus* part has ever allowed the possibility of such construction as mentioned is terrible. I am fain to hope that the pages themselves are not to be even mentioned for such gratuitous and quite at the time undreamed and unwished possibility of morbid inferences – which are disavowed by me and seem damnable.<sup>61</sup>

Since this declaration was made at the end of Whitman's life, it is, in one sense, his final word on the subject. However, it has generally been acknowledged that Whitman was driven by Symonds' desperate insistence to make it, and even Symonds, obliged to accept the poet's statement, was to wonder 'whether his own feelings upon this delicate topic may not have altered since the time when *Calamus* was first composed'.<sup>62</sup> By contrast, Carpenter, who would authorise his praise of 'Uranians' by referring directly to Whitman's Uranian temperament, and to the inspiration of *Calamus* in particular, was sensibly circumspect in his conversations and correspondence with Whitman. His series of explicit publications on 'the intermediate sex' in which (following his friend Henry Havelock Ellis) he argued for a biological basis for homosexuality was issued after Whitman's death.

Some of the Bolton Whitmanites were certainly interested in Whitman's idea of adhesiveness. The edition of *Leaves of Grass* in which

Wallace immersed himself was, as we have already noted, a 'complete' edition rather than the genteel expurgated edition published by Rossetti. Furthermore, Bolton Whitman Fellowship members had access to the various American editions by ordering them direct from the poet.<sup>63</sup> Wallace's commentary on 'The "Calamus" Poems in *Leaves of Grass: An Address in Bolton on Whitman's Birthday, May 31st, 1920*' is therefore of interest; indeed, it is almost certainly the single most studied document in the entire archive in the last ten years – a measure of the recent interest amongst cultural theorists in masculinity in general and dissident forms of masculinity such as homosexuality in particular.

The record of Wallace's commentary is, however, a very carefully censored document. It suggests much, while acknowledging little. There is a sense, most unusual in the archive as a whole, that the written record may be too definite a recording of a daring and exploratory exposition; it evinces a fear of the word, a fear of the monumentalism of *writing*. For example, Wallace's gloss on the phrase 'now wading in a little, fearing not the wet' from 'These I Singing in Spring' is '(Full of meaning, not to be expressed here.)'<sup>64</sup> The record of the discussion of 'Scented Herbage of My Breast' is similarly reticent: '(J.W.W. here read the above poem line by line with expository comments.)'<sup>65</sup> '[P]ink-tinged' from 'Do not fold yourself so in your pink-tinged roots timid leaves!' is glossed literally as pertaining to the calamus root but 'suggesting the heart's blood – and at once bitter and sweet to the taste', which seems a hugely evasive use of a conjunction.<sup>66</sup>

The interpretation of death is the only aspect of the poem with which the recorder seems comfortable, and it is glossed thus: 'the entrance to this abundant life must necessarily be the *death* of all purely personal desires and aims and of all forms of what we call selfishness.'<sup>67</sup> There follow a further two pages on death as the fulfilment or culmination of life rather than its negation. Wallace is clearly concerned with the light that immortality should shed upon the conduct of life rather than with the finality of death; that is, he is interested primarily in the moral import of Whitman's Calamus poems, rather than in any merely literary question of representation. The question is whether and to what extent his moral concerns may have led him to distort the terms in which Whitman represented death, for example, in this sequence:<sup>68</sup>

Give me your tone therefore O death, that I may accord with it,  
Give me yourself, for I see that you belong to me now above all,  
and are folded inseparably together, you love and death are,

Nor will I allow you to balk me any more with what I was calling life,  
 For now it is convey'd to me that you are the purports essential,  
 That you hide in these shifting forms of life, for reasons, and that they  
     are mainly for you,  
 That you beyond them come forth to remain, the real reality,  
 That behind the mask of materials you patiently wait, no matter how  
     long,  
 That you will one day perhaps take control of all,  
 That you will perhaps dissipate this entire show of appearance,  
 That may-be you are what it is all for, but it does not last so very long,  
 But you will last very long.<sup>69</sup>

In a recent account Harry Cocks has focused precisely on the relationship between immortality and adhesiveness in the thinking of Wallace and other of the Bolton Whitmanites. He argues that Wallace advocates a lifelong abnegation of all selfish passions, that those truly selflessly loving relationships may be eternally validated in the hereafter.<sup>70</sup> Cocks's careful trawl through the archive has resulted in the amassing of considerable and sometimes extraordinary evidence of what looks very like deferred same-sex desire, and he has equally carefully contextualised that evidence by establishing the connections between Wallace's conviction of immortality and his views on the appropriate conduct of life.

In Wallace's letter of 8 August 1901 to his favourite cousin (which Cocks quotes briefly), what strikes us immediately is the similarity of the terms in which he advises his cousin about the mundane topic of the management of his financial affairs to the terms in which he speaks of adhesiveness. This letter is also of particular interest to us as it evinces his excitement at the spiritual awakening of the world, and America's particular ferment, together with his conviction that profound spiritual change presents a fundamental moral choice:

My dear Cousin,

I was very glad to get your letter yesterday morning.

I have glanced at the papers, some of which I have seen before, and return them herewith.

Supposing that all their claims are justified – what then?

To be able to bend the wills of others to one's own is *not* an advantage. Or, if it is an immediate gain, it is apt to end in financial loss. Such things belong to what is called 'Black Magic', always reprobated by the wise.

To concentrate one's own will and thought of self-perfectionment, to recognise the perfect One in all others, ignoring all contrary seemings, to cease from personal desire in the Trust which comes from knowing that Good

alone rules our lives, in self-abandonment to that – in all this to assist others to self-realization, leaving their wills untouched – this is the right course for us, and this only.

There is a great spiritual movement going on in the world – in America most of all – and in the wake of it come many greedy adventurers and charlatans seeking personal profit only. They appeal to their like, and supply such experience as *they* need for the time. But let us give them a wide berth.<sup>71</sup>

It is not only wrong to attempt to bend the wills of others, but also materially disadvantageous; financial loss is the just outcome of such conduct. Devotion to right conduct, on the other hand, requires faith in an utterly benign divinity – Wallace, in this respect, evincing a characteristically Emersonian optimism – together with an emphasis on ‘self-abandonment’, a thread that runs right through Wallace’s teaching and recalls at once the millenarian tradition of his upbringing and the Eastern philosophy that he studied during his period of spiritual crisis.

Controversy about Whitman’s sexuality continues with unabated passion, and the sexual mores of Whitman’s disciples on both sides of the Atlantic are increasingly subject to scrutiny.<sup>72</sup> The correspondence between Wallace and Traubel reveals Wallace to have been close to Katharine St John Conway, a reformer in her own right whose zeal he much admired. Recent research confirms that he proposed that she become his ‘spirit wife’, an offer which she declined. Shortly afterward she married John Bruce Glasier, but remained a friend to Wallace and a fellow reformer.<sup>73</sup> Salvesson has claimed that Charles Sixsmith was ‘the most clearly bi-sexual member of the group’.<sup>74</sup> His claim that Sixsmith had an affair with Philip Dalmas, a gifted American composer and singer who was, for a time, in love with Horace Traubel, has proven difficult to substantiate. Dalmas appears to have been immensely charismatic, charming not only Sixsmith and Carpenter, with both of whom he stayed during his visit to England in 1894, but also Wallace and Johnston. The question of whether Dalmas and Traubel had been sexually intimate shortly before this visit remains an open one.<sup>75</sup> Announcing Dalmas’s impending departure from America to visit the Bolton group, Traubel joyfully declared, ‘I give Dalmas my *person* for you all’.<sup>76</sup> A later, jokey letter to Wallace shows Traubel to be well aware of the composer’s charm:

I understand that you had a picture of your group and *Dalmas*. This I have never seen and so I feel slighted. If you wish to regain in my respect you must supply me and explain your dereliction in such a way as will prove me not forgotten.<sup>77</sup>

There would certainly seem to be a subtext here, but how it ought to be read is impossible to determine. What does seem definite is Traubel's later affair with Gustave Percival Wiksell, a dentist and a member of the Boston branch of the International Whitman League.<sup>78</sup> These discoveries provide a certain context for Traubel's well-known refutation of Symonds' intimation of Whitman's homosexuality in his much-quoted letter to Wallace some ten years earlier:

Homosexuality is disease – it is wreck and rot – it is decay and muck – and Walt uttered the master-cries of health, of salvation and purity, of growth & beauty – always & everything elements vital for up-startings, for blossoming, for repair . . . No espousal of Walt can ever be thorough until the Adamic attitude is not only understood but absorbed. A mere intellectual grasp of the situation will not do. One must emotionally realize it – he must absorb it – he must let it wash through him and over him.<sup>79</sup>

However, he then adds the sentence, 'Revolution alone can cleanse the body of the old discredit', which raises all kinds of questions about what that discredit might consist of: sexual shame or same-sex desire?

Just as Wallace's life traces a trajectory away from external institutions, so the Bolton Whitman Fellowship felt no need of any formal organisation or statement of fixed purpose, a difference that would eventually result in a diminution of warmth, if not a rift, between the Bolton Whitmanites and their American counterparts. For the Americans moved in a contrary direction. Horace Traubel, ever the committee man, conceived and orchestrated an International Whitman League, a loosely federal arrangement with a constitution and fixed dues, with the various branches being virtually autonomous.<sup>80</sup> Wallace was opposed to the scheme, and proved either inefficient or reluctant when it came to collecting subscriptions for the various Whitman publications that originated from America, beginning with *In Re Walt Whitman*, as Traubel's repeated iterations and increasingly impatient demands show.<sup>81</sup>

In the end, one could not say which of these two charismatic figures did more to promote Whitman's message. By the time Wallace gave his final address, 'If Whitman Came to Walker Fold', in 1925, Traubel was dead and his own health was failing. With hindsight, this last address takes on an added poignancy, and his claim for Whitman's greatness is also his testimony of personal faith: 'I myself have for half my life believed him to be the greatest, most significant, and most prophetic figure that has appeared in literature since the beginning of the Christian era.'<sup>82</sup>

The Bolton Whitman Fellowship seems to have endured until some

time in the 1960s, when John Ormrod, the last of its members, died. Whilst Ormrod's death (probably) marks the end of the Fellowship as established by Wallace, the Fellowship has not, however, suffered a demise. In the 1980s, Paul Salvesson, then a Bolton resident, decided, on rediscovering the archive, to revive the Whitman birthday celebrations on behalf of the local community.<sup>83</sup> The first of a series of celebrations was launched on 2 June 1984. In Salvesson's account,

During the morning, Bolton's chief librarian Norman Parker spoke about Bolton's priceless Whitman collection, and he was followed by local poet and lecturer [Jeff] Wainwright, who spoke on Whitman's life and work.<sup>84</sup>

Salvesson himself gave an account of the history of the Bolton Whitmanites that was later published as a pamphlet entitled *Loving Comrades*. The following year saw the strengthening of the transatlantic connection through the visit of the eminent Whitman scholar Ed Folsom, who edits *The Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* at the University of Iowa. In 1987 Sheila Rowbotham gave a talk on Edward Carpenter. In the 1990s and beyond, Jacqueline Dagnall, Don Lee and Gloria Gaffney have organised and led an annual walk, on the Saturday nearest Whitman's birthday, to Walker Fold, the site of Wallace's last address to the Bolton Fellowship. In 2001, Michael Robertson from The College of New Jersey read to two dozen listeners from the *Leaves* and everyone drank from the Loving Cup crafted for the original members of the Fellowship by an American Whitmanite. From the perspective of the twenty-first century, the Bolton Whitman Fellowship has not died, but has seemed rather to have entered and re-emerged from a transforming cocoon.

A year after Whitman's death Traubel wrote to Wallace of the 'sweet memories' of Wallace recorded in Whitman's diary: 'little notes of your comings & goings while you visited Camden'.<sup>85</sup> If the tracings of this immensely fruitful transatlantic friendship were a cause of wonder for the correspondents at the time, they are even more wonderful and compelling for those of us who come after. It is in one of Traubel's many letters that we find the article of faith that best expresses their transatlantic accord:

The ways of friends & congenial souls are too often parted. I look for invention to decrease our difficulties year by year. In the end we will shake hands across the sea. I do not know how it can be done but I know it will be done.<sup>86</sup>



## Notes

- 1 Walt Whitman, 'Good-bye My Fancy: Preface Note to 2d Annex, concluding L. of G. – 1891', *Leaves of Grass: The "Death-Bed" Edition*, Modern Library Edition, New York, Random House, p. 656.
- 2 Since the two collections are in every way integral, scholars are obliged to visit both sites: journals and photographs are frequently separated from the correspondence that accompanied them. Hereafter, the John Rylands University Library of Manchester will be referred to as JRULM, and the Bolton Central Library will be referred to as Bolton.
- 3 Wentworth Dixon, 'An Old Friend: An Address Delivered to the Men's Class, Bank St School, Bolton, 7 Feb 1926', JRULM, pp. 3–4; and Fred Wild, 'Sketch of Life of J.A.W. Wallace of Bolton', October 1932, JRULM, p. 3.
- 4 Dixon, 'An Old Friend', pp. 3–4.
- 5 Dixon, 'An Old Friend', p. 9.
- 6 William Broadhurst, 'An Address in Memory of the Late J.W. Wallace, Wentworth Dixon and Dr J. Johnston, delivered at the Swan Hotel, Bolton, 6 Dec 1930', JRULM, p. 2.
- 7 Dixon, 'An Old Friend', pp. 3–4.
- 8 Wild, 'Sketch of Life', p. 5.
- 9 Wild, 'Sketch of Life', p. 3.
- 10 Dixon, 'An Old Friend', pp. 1–2.
- 11 Sixsmith's talk on the subject was broadcast by BBC Radio (Northern Region) on 6 March 1933.
- 12 Paul Salveson, 'Loving Comrades: Lancashire's Links to Walt Whitman', *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 14:2–3 (Autumn 1996/Winter 1997), p. 63.
- 13 Salveson, 'Loving Comrades', p. 62.
- 14 Wild, 'Sketch of Life', p. 4.
- 15 Salveson, 'Loving Comrades', p. 62. Dixon gives the date as 1913, 'An Old Friend', pp. 1–2.
- 16 Wild, 'Sketch of Life', p. 11. See also R.M. Bucke's summary of the pattern of Wallace's life, in which he states that 'The strict parallelism of this case with all the others will be recognized by every careful reader' (*Cosmic Consciousness*, Arkana Books, [1901] 1991, p. 342).
- 17 Wallace's address to the Bolton group, 20 January 1890, reprinted, with some unspecified editorial changes, in Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness*, p. 336. The 'complete' edition of *Leaves of Grass* Wallace refers to would almost certainly have been the 1881 edition.
- 18 Dixon, 'An Old Friend', quoted in Salveson, 'Loving Comrades', p. 63.
- 19 J.W. Wallace to Walt Whitman, 19 September 1890, JRULM.
- 20 Carmine Sarracino, 'Redrawing Whitman's Circle', *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 14:2–3 (Autumn 1996/Winter 1997), pp. 113–27.

- 21 J.W. Wallace, 'Walt Whitman and Religion', a lecture delivered to the Progressive League, Bolton, 28 March 1915; quoted in Salveson, 'Loving Comrades', p. 64.
- 22 J.W. Wallace, 'The Walt Whitman Centennial: The Man and his Message', *The Labour Leader*, 29 May 1919, p. 9.
- 23 I am indebted for these details concerning Johnston's life to Salveson, 'Loving Comrades', p. 63.
- 24 J.W. Wallace and J. Johnston to Walt Whitman, 1887, JRULM.
- 25 Charles F. Sixsmith, 'Centenary of a Prophet: Edward Carpenter's Bolton Following', *The Bolton Journal*, 29 August 1933. Salveson quotes a slightly different version of Whitman's message, delivered by R.M. Bucke, to the Bolton group in 'Loving Comrades', p. 68.
- 26 See Anne Montgomerie Traubel's letter from Philadelphia to Minnie Whiteside, 5 July 1953 (Bolton): 'I received the copy of the Bolton paper containing the account of the Birthday meeting at Ormrod's. To keep the meetings in the homes of all those families for sixty years is beautiful and most unusual'. Anne herself maintained a lifelong connection with the Bolton Whitman Fellowship through her correspondence with Minnie Whiteside. For an account of running of the Fellowship after Wallace's death see Salveson, 'Loving Comrades', pp. 81–2.
- 27 Harold Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1934, p. 14. For a full and entertaining account of the early transmission of the *Leaves* in England, see pp. 14–18.
- 28 Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, p. 28.
- 29 Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, pp. 9, 20.
- 30 Geraldine Hodgson, 'Walt Whitman's Poetry', *The Co-operative News and Journal of Associated Industry*, 30:37 (16 September 1899), pp. 1005–7; G.K. Chesterton: Newspaper cutting [unidentified], 15 October 1904: 'Conventions and the Hero', JRULM.
- 31 'Poet of Big Cities. Whitman's Vision of Skyscrapers. Honours After his Death. Democratic Appeal', *Sunday Times*, 28 June 1931; Broadhurst, 'An Address'.
- 32 'Writing to Whitman': review of *Whitman and Rolleston: A Correspondence*, ed. Horst Frenz, Dublin, Browne and Nolan/The Richview Press, *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 August 1952.
- 33 John Johnston and J.W. Wallace, *Visits to Walt Whitman in 1890–91 by Two Lancashire Friends*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1917.
- 34 A signed copy of Walt's poem to his canary was apparently sent to the Bolton Whitmanites, but has now, sadly, been lost; however, the canary itself was preserved and shipped and is held in the Bolton Library's archive. A postcard of the canary is sold in the Library and Museum shop.
- 35 Jerome Loving, *Walt Whitman, The Song of Himself*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1999, pp. 447–50; Michael

- Robertson, 'Worshipping Walt: Lancashire's Whitman Disciples', *History Today*, forthcoming, 2002; Salveson, 'Loving Comrades', p. 62.
- 36 H.L. Traubel, from Camden, to J.W. Wallace, 28 August 1892, Bolton.
- 37 H.L. Traubel, from Philadelphia, to J.W. Wallace, 10 May 1893, Bolton. Bucke's work on *Cosmic Consciousness* originally took the form of a pamphlet that was published in 1893. By 1901 he had expanded it to book length, since which date it has never been out of print.
- 38 H.L. Traubel, from Philadelphia, to J.W. Wallace and J. Johnston, 27 April 1893, Bolton.
- 39 H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, 6 October 1893, Bolton. See also H.L. Traubel, from Philadelphia, to J.W. Wallace, 26 October 1893 (Bolton), in which many of these criticisms are reiterated and extended to include Daniel Brinton.
- 40 H.L. Traubel, from Camden, to J.W. Wallace, 27 November 1893, Bolton.
- 41 H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, 11 March 1894, Bolton.
- 42 H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, 6 November 1893 and 18 December 1893, Bolton.
- 43 H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, 18 November 1893, Bolton.
- 44 For a general account of this relationship and its transformation from one-sided romantic love to friendship see Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, pp. 87–102.
- 45 Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, pp. 203–4.
- 46 Sixsmith, 'Centenary of a Prophet'.
- 47 Salveson, 'Loving Comrades', p. 63.
- 48 Salveson, 'Loving Comrades', p. 71. Johnston's diaries are held in the Bolton archive.
- 49 H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, n.d., but probably 1892–93; incomplete letter (page 2 only), Bolton. Also H.L. Traubel, from Camden, to J.W. Wallace, 8 January 1893, Bolton.
- 50 H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, 17 May, 8 July, 18 September, 1894, and 5 February and 24 February, 1895, Bolton.
- 51 H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, 11 March 1894, Bolton; also H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, 29 March 1894, Bolton.
- 52 Townleys Hospital was a particular trial, for it incorporated the Bolton Fishpool Institute – that is, the workhouse – and Johnston found the treatment of the preventable diseases of the destitute utterly depressing.
- 53 Salveson, 'Loving Comrades', p. 63.
- 54 Dixon, 'An Old Friend', p. 8.
- 55 See Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, pp. 353–4, 385–9.
- 56 Dixon, 'An Old Friend', p. 8.
- 57 J.W. Wallace, 'Walt Whitman and Religion', quoted in Dixon, 'An Old Friend', p. 12.
- 58 See, for example, Horace Traubel's letter to Wallace of 22 February 1893,

Bolton: 'I have spent the whole day working among Walt's papers. Much needs yet to be examined – two or three barrels of mingled manuscripts letters & scraps of a varied order. Sometimes the sense of my loss overcomes me, and again I seem to expand– to feel myself in a greater presence – one, even, that dwarfs the actual physical man once mine to have known & met & laughed with & kissed.'

- 59 Anne's letters to Minnie Whiteside, held in the Bolton Library, are permeated with a sense of the beyond and the presence of the departed. See, for example, her letter to Minnie Whiteside of 31 December 1937, in which she sends birthday greetings to Wallace's Cousin Jim for his birthday on 14 January and refers to 'that other precious day [26 January 1926, the day of Wallace's death], which would be among the saddest of the year, if I did not believe that nothing really stopped that day but moves upon a plane higher than I have yet reached, still pouring blessing and inspiration on all my feeble acts, mistakes, and aspirations.'
- 60 See, for example, Emily Dickinson's letter of 25 April 1862: 'You speak of Mr Whitman – I never read his Book – but was told that he was disgraceful', *Selected Letters*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, Cambridge MA and London, Belknap Press, 1986, p. 173. Dickinson's second-hand opinion would certainly have pleased her correspondent Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who frequently attacked the poet, on personal as well as poetic grounds. See Loving, *Walt Whitman, The Song of Himself*, pp. 451, 488n.
- 61 Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, p. 66.
- 62 John Addington Symonds, *Walt Whitman: A Study*, London, 1893, p. 75; quoted in Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, p. 68.
- 63 In his letter to Whitman of 9 September 1890 (JRULM), Wallace thanks the poet for the 'pocket book copy' of *Leaves of Grass*. In a further letter, dated 19 September 1890 (JRULM), Wallace reports that Thomas Shorrock, a member of the Bolton Whitman group, would like to purchase the pocket edition, and remits 22/- in payment. Salvesson also mentions that advertisements for editions of the *Leaves* were regularly placed in socialist journals, 'Loving Comrades', p. 62.
- 64 J.W. Wallace, 'The "Calamus" Poems in *Leaves of Grass*: An Address in Bolton on Whitman's Birthday, May 31st, 1920', JRULM, p. 4.
- 65 Wallace, 'The "Calamus" Poems', p. 5.
- 66 Wallace, 'The "Calamus" Poems', p. 7.
- 67 Wallace, 'The "Calamus" Poems', p. 6.
- 68 Wallace, 'The "Calamus" Poems', pp. 8–9.
- 69 Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, pp. 145–6.
- 70 Harry Cocks, 'Calamus in Bolton: Spirituality and Homosexual Desire in Late Victorian England', *Gender and History*, 13:2 (August 2001), 191–223.
- 71 J.W. Wallace, letter to James Wallace, 8 August 1901, JRULM.
- 72 See, in addition to Cocks's article cited above, Salvesson's 'Loving Comrades',

- pp. 77–9, and Joann P. Krieg, ‘Without Walt Whitman in Camden,’ *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 14:2–3 (Autumn 1996/Winter 1997), pp. 85–112.
- 73 Salveson, ‘Loving Comrades,’ p. 79.
- 74 Salveson, ‘Loving Comrades,’ p. 78.
- 75 A detailed discussion of this issue is provided by Joann P. Krieg in ‘Without Walt Whitman,’ pp. 101–5. A measure of Sixsmith’s closeness to Dalmas is afforded by the fact that his bequest to the John Rylands Library includes Dalmas’s own pocket edition of *Leaves of Grass*, i.e. not just a presentation edition.
- 76 H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, 1 June 1894, Bolton.
- 77 H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, 11 October 1894, Bolton.
- 78 Bryan K. Garman, *A Race of Singers: Whitman’s Working-class Hero from Guthrie to Springsteen*, Chapel Hill and London, University of North Carolina Press, 2000, pp. 55–6.
- 79 H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, 10 January 1893, Bolton.
- 80 H.L. Traubel, probably to J.W. Wallace, 20 March 1894, Bolton; H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, 24 March 1894, Bolton; H.L. Traubel, from Philadelphia, to J.W. Wallace, 30 March 1894, Bolton; H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace and J. Johnston, 24 April 1894, Bolton.
- 81 See, for example, Traubel’s letter, from Lakewood, to J.W. Wallace, 13 May 1894 (Bolton), in which he reports that he is working to make the Constitution democratic. ‘I really expect to hear from you to the same effect’, he writes impatiently. In another letter to J.W. Wallace of 12 June 1894, he instructs Wallace to write to Alfred W. Beville, a contact in London sympathetic to the establishment of an International Whitman League, with a view to setting up the League’s English branch. Traubel is again impatient, demanding members’ names immediately. In the same letter he enquires whether Wallace has sold any more copies of *In Re Walt Whitman* (1893) at the new price of three dollars. By 13 July 1894, he is brusque: ‘Not a member of the Fellowship from Bolton. What’s the matter?’
- 82 J.W. Wallace, ‘If Walt Whitman Came to Walker Fold,’ an Address in Celebration of the Anniversary of Walt Whitman’s Birthday, 30 May 1925, Walker Fold, near Bolton, JRULM, p. 8.
- 83 Salveson also mentions Denis and Wendy Pye, Neil Duffield, Eileen Murphy and Barry Wood, who were (and are) involved in the Bolton Socialist Club and Workers’ Educational Association. He pays special tribute to the staff of Bolton Library; see Salveson, ‘Loving Comrades,’ p. 82.
- 84 Salveson, ‘Loving Comrades,’ p. 82.
- 85 H.L. Traubel to J.W. Wallace, 22 February 1893, Bolton.
- 86 H.L. Traubel, from Camden, to J.W. Wallace, 10 November 1893, Bolton.

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Nation making and fiction making:  
Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Tory Lover*,  
and Walter Scott, *Waverley*

*Alison Easton*

‘Writing something entirely different’

Beside Sarah Orne Jewett’s desk where she would have seen it every time she looked up was a small copy of the well-known Raeburn portrait of Sir Walter Scott. No critic has commented on this, yet Scott was important to her. As she remarks in a 1905 letter to her dearest friend and companion, Annie Fields, ‘How one admires that great man more and more.’<sup>1</sup> So, what was New England’s most notable, late-nineteenth-century regional writer’s interest in Scott? True, any well-read person would have known Scott’s novels: ‘To be alive and literate in the nineteenth century was to have been affected in some way by the *Waverley* novels.’<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere in this volume (Chapter 1) Susan Manning discusses Mark Twain’s vexed relation to Scott; the connection between Scott and Jewett is also a complex one.

At the end of her long career charting the social, economic and emotional complexities of contemporary New England through her fictions of small local communities, Jewett turned to write ‘something entirely different’, *The Tory Lover* (1901), her historical novel about Patriot/Loyalist tensions during the American War of Independence. It was Scott, I believe, who helped her negotiate the complexities of this civil conflict in the creating of nations.<sup>3</sup> I want to argue that this was not simply some vague influence diffused through popular, partial views of Scott’s novels, but was based on a more thoughtful reading that may also help us with the vexed question of how Jewett positioned herself socially and politically in her fictions.

Starting in the winter of 1777–78 when Independence still hung in the balance, the action of *The Tory Lover* takes place in Maine, France and England. Although Jewett originally intended to focus on John Paul Jones (who commanded the new republic’s first ship and who appears in her

novel as Paul Jones), the novel's narrative interest is as much, if not more, on Mary Hamilton, sister of one of the leading Patriot gentry. Jewett writes of her involvement with the Loyalist Wallingford family, both Roger (whom she encourages to join the Revolutionary campaign on Jones' ship, the *Ranger*, and whom she comes to love) and his mother, who remains throughout fiercely loyal to the British Crown. The novel interweaves Wallingford's transatlantic adventures on the *Ranger* (voyage to France, raiding the English coast, imprisonment in Plymouth and escape) with Mary's life in wartime Maine, her support of Madam Wallingford in spite of their big political differences and the two women's attempt to rescue Roger in England.

*The Tory Lover* is a problematic text in the Jewett oeuvre. Even Jewett expressed her doubts: 'I grow very melancholy if I fall to thinking of the distance between my poor story and the first dreams of it'.<sup>4</sup> Although it sold well at time of publication, even then some of her admirers expressed the disappointment subsequently experienced by most readers. A disabling accident the year after the novel's publication ended Jewett's writing career, and *The Tory Lover* with its failures of plot, its uncertain focus, its awkward characterisation and apparent stereotypes has been neglected by most readers and practically every critic since.<sup>5</sup>

For all its deficiencies I want to reinstate *The Tory Lover* into the narrative of Jewett's career, to identify its ambitions and strengths, and, through placing it in the transatlantic context of Scott's work, to attempt to understand what conflicts its hybrid nature signifies. I see the novel as an extension of Jewett's earlier explorations in class, gender and region in relation to America following the Civil War. Whereas her earlier novel, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), deliberately addressed issues of late-nineteenth-century America by attempting to imagine a present-day utopia (albeit one recognising inevitable insufficiencies and constraints), *The Tory Lover* approaches the same issues indirectly by constructing a narrative of the Republic's beginnings.<sup>6</sup>

Its reasons for doing this were compelling. The Civil War had put strain on the nation's idea of itself, and because creative writers were for the most part unwilling to recognise its hatreds, this war was subsequently repressed or rewritten in superficial ways. In spite of attempted sectional reconciliation between North and South in the 1890s, there was continuing division which prevailing historical narratives could not deal with. By the turn into the twentieth century, classical republicanism was under threat: social diversity, class conflict, a largely laissez-faire economy, an entirely commercial politics and an individualistic ethic held sway.<sup>7</sup>

In writing about the American Revolution, however, Jewett was not simply beating a retreat to a supposedly better, past time when the nation was created and ostensibly unified. Although the Loyalist side of the War of Independence was ignored by professional historians in the interests of maintaining a narrative of unity and triumph, Loyalist/Patriot divisions had been a standard subject for fiction in the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Jewett capitalises upon this in her own way as a means of exploring the nation's continuing internal power struggles. With the Revolutionary period she could work with a respected society that was none the less both unambiguously stratified by class (unlike the subsequent veiling of class division in the prevailing national ideology), as well as by 'race' and gender. This classed society could be represented as interactive and nuanced in the way that a society structured along the exclusive division of what the late nineteenth century called 'labour' and 'capital' could not be, while as the roots of present-day America it had potential significance for Jewett's contemporaries that could not be ignored. Furthermore, by repeatedly showing us that both Patriot and Loyalist Maine families kept slaves (something ignored in earlier histories), she unmistakably touches on that other internal conflict, the American Civil War.

Jewett's project of writing a historical novel of the Revolution needs first to be seen in the context of an evolving historiographical tradition in America. As John P. Farrell remarks, revolution was a complex phenomenon: 'Something prodigious occurred when the space for public decision was opened to the public at large, when the propositions of the philosophical few were redefined by the oppressed many, when the uncertain measures of men became dogmas of history, and when the imagery of human purpose was shifted from the world of memory and recentered in the world of hope . . . [T]hough designed as a clarification, it developed as an ambiguity.'<sup>9</sup> To have a 'Revolutionary tradition' – an oxymoron in itself – was an additional problem for later Americans, especially as the society became increasingly unequal and ever less revolutionary in impulse as the nineteenth century went on.

The Revolution was much written about in the nineteenth century by both professional historians and authors of fiction – it remained inescapably the country's originary moment – yet the simplifications and selectivities displayed by many in dealing with this past suggest discomfort about, as well as a desired connection with, their heritage. Even the earliest histories of the Revolution had been shaped by the political need to create a unified national past and to gloss over any factional difference that might threaten the new republic. As the first generation died out, Romantic

histories emerged that presented Americans as a uniquely liberty-loving people, disavowing Britain and led by heroes. These would be read as schooltexts by Jewett's generation in the 1850s (or at least such writings would have shaped the period's dominant historical narrative).<sup>10</sup> By the start of the Civil War, however, the Revolutionary tradition was in shambles. Then, from 1876, as Michael Kammer argues, the Revolution became culturally a matter for imagination rather than memory, and while professional historians became interested in the economic and political conflicts of the Revolutionary period, historical novels were nostalgic and lacked interest in historical accuracy; they also ignored class conflict, dissented from the ideal of equality and in effect derevolutionised the revolution.<sup>11</sup>

To get the measure of *The Tory Lover* we need to have some sense of these historical novels of the 1890s. The first flourish of American historical novels occurred from 1821 and lasted for about twenty-five years. After further waves in the 1850s, there came a period when reading tastes preferred realistic and domestic fiction. Then, between 1890 and 1902, historical romances became the major best-sellers, and their main American topic was the Revolution, particularly the military conflict. Whether considering these novels in the context of United States involvement in imperialistic ventures with Cuba and the Philippines, or in the context of the Colonial Revival (an anti-modernist, upper-class antiquarian aesthetic movement of the period), twentieth-century commentators have noted the novels' racist, elitist and jingoistic values: a sense of Anglo-Saxon lineage, distaste for foreigners (the English, however, are figured as 'family') and contempt for the lower classes (especially when disputing with their 'superiors'), love of fine houses and nostalgia for a lost wholeness. They reflect, as Amy Kaplan argues in a survey of all kinds of historical romance of this period, a culture 'in the process of redefining white middle-class masculinity from a republican quality of character based on self-control and social responsibility to a corporeal essence identified with the vigour and prowess of the individual male body'. The hero uses spectacular violence against his inferiors, and apparently self-reliant women are depicted as subduing themselves to his natural aristocracy. The American Revolution is presented as a simple, natural process of devolution and 'lodged firmly in the past'.<sup>12</sup>

Is, then, *The Tory Lover* simply an example of these romances? Undoubtedly there are certain parallels, but significantly Jewett handles many common motifs in an original way as if some process of revision and dissent were going on, engaging with these romances and negotiating a different version. So, though Jewett was instrumental in encouraging a

friend, involved in the Colonial Revival movement, to preserve Hamilton House, the fine house and garden that is the novel's principal setting, her novel does not present the house as an upper-class museum of itemised artefacts divorced from their original users. Instead, it is always the hub of a wider community whose life and work, at many social levels, is the object of Jewett's imaginative reconstruction. While her protagonists are typically upper class, and the mob and her villain are lower class, the majority of the town's population do not resemble the common people in typical romances (where they are cowardly, meanminded and lacking the altruism of their 'betters'). In *The Tory Lover*, instead, a wide range of feeling and motive is displayed by the local men turned sailors, both on the *Ranger* and in prison in England (where we are given what reads like a historically genuine letter sent by one prisoner). There is no gratuitous violence, no exaltation of virile, martial manhood and no heroine subordinating her judgement and will to the wiser Patriot man who will succeed a patriarchal father. Conventional concerns with courtship/marriage are relatively marginal to the plot, and the non-combatant world of women's lives counterpoints male military adventures.

Furthermore, as in other contemporary romances, there are scenes in England that may appear to tie Americans to an Anglo-Saxon heritage, but what the characters learn here is that this is not their 'home': the long Atlantic voyages and devotedly described Maine landscapes enhance a sense of a different history and distinctive, independent country. Her repetition of the image of the family to describe the Britain/US quarrel (a standard metaphor for some contemporary historians) does not produce the 'coming of age' motif with which conservative romances had deradicalised Independence: Jewett's Patriots, as we shall see, speak unambiguously of 'rights' to be fought for. To understand this different envisioning of the transatlantic relationship as well as her adaptations of Revolutionary romance in general, we shall need now to look at certain enabling influences that would have encouraged complexity in the handling of this historical moment. It is the novel's contrapuntal relationship to Scott that we now need to turn to – contrapuntal in the sense that it is a relationship making powerful connections across the Atlantic out of two national narratives that none the less remain distinct and different.

### 'That great man'

Scott's nineteenth-century readers entertained a variety of notions about his work; they took from it what they wanted or needed. Readers in the

South (mis)read themselves nostalgically as the truly heroic Jacobites of America, and Northern romantic escapists, inspired by *Ivanhoe* (1819), enjoyed what W.D. Howells calls the 'horrid tumult of the swashbuckler swashing on his buckler'.<sup>13</sup> Yet there were also those who took from Scott's best novels (those set in periods of division within Scotland) an understanding of the importance of the past to the present, an interest in regional dialect, a sympathetic portrayal of common life, a sense of landscape and, most importantly, a certain complicated political moderation.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the century Scott's reputation in America fluctuated, from enthusiasm between the 1820s and the 1850s for his legitimisation of historical fiction, to a point in the 1870s when his reputation sank to its lowest. As T.J. Jackson Lears observes, Scott became 'the central figure in the literary polemics of the late nineteenth century. To the apologists for domestic realism, his work embodied outmoded theories of human nature and the social order. To advocates of romance, he seemed the potential savior of American character and society'.<sup>15</sup>

Although, as Lears notes, the romanticist view of Scott triumphed in the 1890s with the resurgence of a martial ideal, the way that Jewett handled her one historical novel suggests that she bypassed this Scott-inspired polarisation of domestic realism and the chivalric ideal. I want to suggest that Jewett, born 1849, belonged instead to a generation that was raised on great quantities of serious history writing of many kinds (including fiction) by women, widely disseminated through the culture and some of it initially inspired by Scott.<sup>16</sup> If her stated admiration of Scott has this foundation, it would certainly have set her at a tangent to the dominant 1890s view, thus avoiding the placing of Scott's work anti-thetically to the realism and domesticity that had been basic to Jewett's preceding work.

The most striking parallel with Scott is her felt historicism, her sense of a historical, regional geography that draws on local memory played against present-day topography. This is predicated on a sense of enormous social change and the subsequent need to maintain a connection with the past. In 1814, in *Waverley*, Scott writes, 'There is no European nation which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland'; a citizen of the United States in 1901 could have echoed this sentiment.<sup>17</sup>

True, as with Scott, there are alterations of historical fact in *The Tory Lover* (for instance, Jewett was well aware that the historical Wallingford did not survive the war), but hers is not just an imagined Revolution and she is concerned to record as well as invent. Indeed, that 1905 letter noting

her admiration of Scott begins triumphantly with the news that one of the things she thought she had invented in her novel, namely that Wallingford was a Loyalist until challenged by the woman he loved, had just been proved by family papers to be historically true. *Waverley* (the novel that seems closest to *The Tory Lover* in its dealing with civil war and nation making) was written within living memory of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745: as the novel's subtitle tells us, 'Tis Sixty Years Since'. Jewett, writing 120 years since the Revolution, none the less had plenty of local and family history to draw on – what she called 'real knowledge' as distinct from her 'dreams' (that is, imaginings of the past).<sup>18</sup> Her doctor father cared for one of the *Ranger* sailors in old age, she had listened to many stories locally, and was aware of the Revolutionary history of her family, both Patriot and Loyalist (one great-grandfather, survivor of Washington's army at Valley Forge, lived until Jewett was four).

Making a fiction of past lives is effected by Jewett through an attention to the actual land shaped by human activity – something that *Waverley* had pioneered. At important turns in *The Tory Lover* Mary Hamilton is given Jewett's own capacity to see the landscape and buildings of Maine in terms of their history and the lives lived there, extending this vision back into an embattled seventeenth century and across the Atlantic to England. We have, thus, a version of a pattern (though less realised emotionally and politically) that Cairns Craig identifies in Scott's work as his means of dramatising historical turning points: 'his heroes can stand on both sides of a *historical* divide precisely because they can travel across a *geographical* boundary and in so doing experience the changes in history at a *psychological* level'.<sup>19</sup>

This past is shared through the telling of stories. Story-telling was the source of some of Jewett's material, and a repeated motif as well as a common narrative strategy in her previous work. It is an important fictional resource in Scott's work: the Postscript to *Waverley* stresses that the 'imaginary scenes' are based on stories Scott has been told by 'actors in them'. As Ina Ferris argues in relation to Scott, story-telling, a preliterate form of narrative with a different motive, opened up the nineteenth-century novel because it 'both represents and encourages a historicist insight into the temporality and heterogeneity of cultures'. As an important act of cultural transmission, it focused on the margins and gave a space for the local.<sup>20</sup> In Jewett's novel it narrows the distance between Patriot Mary and her Loyalist friend, Madam Wallingford.

The voices are insistently regional in both Scott's and Jewett's work, and the implications of such a perspective need now to be explored. In the case

of Scott, though the word ‘national’ occurs frequently in his work,<sup>21</sup> there are two nations in question here, Scotland and Britain, and *Waverley* explores divisions both in Britain and within Scotland. Scott himself combined support for the 1707 Union of Scotland and England (albeit somewhat ambivalently) with a Scottish cultural nationalism that now required identifying images and stories. He knew he was drawn emotionally (but never politically) to the Jacobites, though this meant ‘not so much devotion to the Stuarts as devotion to his idea of the character, structure, and value of the old Scottish kingdom.’<sup>22</sup> There is consequently a complex narrative in his works in which, as Cairns Craig observes, we get both the ‘composed’ order of a progressive official history (linked in *Waverley* with the Union) and the ‘counter-historical flux of human events which, though “buried in silence and oblivion” as far as narrated history is concerned, are not without an immediate – and potentially destructive – power of their own.’<sup>23</sup>

We find these competing loyalties born of sectional conflict (whether between region and nation, or nation and nation, or between various sections within a country) repeated in American literature. Jewett was a regional writer for all her long writing career, and *The Tory Lover* retains the local in its turn to the historical, even as late-nineteenth-century academic historians themselves turned to the local.<sup>24</sup> Pre-Revolutionary America had been composed of local societies. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Maine found itself economically, politically and culturally at the margins of continental America, so that readers needed to be informed of Maine’s central role in the Revolution. For Jewett to go back to Revolutionary Maine is, then, to fold the larger history into the local, to find central national concerns and look at them from a fresh perspective.<sup>25</sup>

This, I want to argue, placed Jewett in an interesting position: as a member of the Boston cultural elite and resident in Massachusetts half of each year, she was at the centre, but she retained her family and community roots in Maine, where she also lived for six months yearly. In the debate that has arisen in the 1990s about Jewett’s social and political affiliations, which dualistically assigns her either to female outsiderdom or to complicity with white conservative privilege, I align myself with Marjorie Pryse, who argues instead that Jewett’s fiction is characterised by liminality that resists classification and teaches fluidity: Jewett lives on borders.<sup>26</sup>

But how similar, then, is this position to that of *Waverley*, protagonist of Scott’s first novel, who crosses geographical and political borders to see



the Second Jacobite Rebellion from several perspectives, and how might this also resemble Scott's own, much debated political position? Scott's political views were more overtly stated than Jewett's, yet there is a much-noted doubleness in his writing that might, alternatively, be figured as a straddling of borders. His imagination engages complexly with the lives and subjectivities of those whom he would oppose politically and whom the forces of 'progress', he believes, will inevitably defeat. So, when Flora accuses herself of 'murdering' her brother by encouraging him in armed insurrection against the Hanoverians, Scott leaves her political principles unassailed, but makes her regret her failure to acknowledge that their cause was bound to lose (*W*, pp. 468–9).

History, then, is on the side of what Scott and his contemporaries called 'Improvement' or 'Progress'. This Enlightenment view of progress involves loss as well as gain, and constitutes a less optimistic notion than that of later Whig historians. Its effects are cushioned by imagining it as gradual reformation rather than radical change: some of the old in *Waverley* is conserved in the new structures of power, the ancient house of Tully-Veolan remains in the hands of the Baron, though his former authority is gone and Waverley, son of a Hanoverian and nephew of a Jacobite, will inherit. Most importantly, the idea of progress gave Scott the sense that social values change over time and, as Cyrus Vakil argues, this led him to a historicist understanding that people act within a specific place and moment.<sup>27</sup> In *Waverley* Fergus explicitly exemplifies this: 'Had Fergus MacIvor lived Sixty Years sooner than he did, he would, in all probability, have wanted the polished manner and knowledge of the world he now possessed; and had he lived Sixty Years later, his ambition and love of rule would have lacked the fuel which his situation now afforded' (*W*, p. 157).

While such a sympathetic understanding of those on the 'wrong' side of history bears some resemblance to Jewett's handling of the Loyalists, who are seen as products of a previous era, the American Revolution makes for crucial differences in her tale. This is not simply because Scott was hostile to radical democratic reform in Britain and had no use for the idea of equality (in his view events in France in his lifetime showed that revolution leads only to anarchy and military rule).<sup>28</sup> While some of his nineteenth-century readers might be drawn to what they thought of as Scott's *via media*, finding its combination of progress and conservatism appealing, Jewett's novel insists on the issue of 'rights' (paradoxically rights learnt, across the Atlantic, from Britain) and hence the unavoidable break with established authority to secure these. The novel

plays self-consciously several times with the image of the conflict simply as a family quarrel, and each time the metaphor is rethought, and revised or rejected.<sup>29</sup> It dwells on the consequences of the Declaration of Independence for every individual; none escapes making a public choice of allegiance. This is the issue with which the book begins and which precipitates the plot: 'There is no place left for those who will take neither side' (*TL*, p. 30). This contrasts with Scott's hero, Waverley, who, true to his name, wavers in his engagement in the civil war and with surprising impunity survives his switch from being an officer in King George's army to a combatant in the Jacobite forces, welcomed in person by Prince Charles Edward Stuart. Waverley's pardon for treason (punished brutally in the case of Fergus) is due to a certain emotional fence-sitting that results at the battle of Prestonpans in his taking care of some members of the opposing side. His lack of principled commitment is explicitly commented – 'blown by every wind of doctrine' (*W*, p. 353), he would prefer to be at home. True, home is where Jewett's Wallingford ends up, but not before fighting hard for the Republic.

What Scott is cleverly capturing is the tangle that civil war makes of the web of loyalties, responsibilities and ties of indebtedness for most people. Revolutions, on the other hand, are radical precisely because commitments become sharper and permanent. This is, as Jewett's old Major realises, a different war – 'war with moral enemies, and for opinion's sake' (*TL*, p. 61) – that lacks the 'happy certainties' (*TL*, p. 60, my emphasis) of previous conflicts. Her novel chronicles a break with the old life, making one a 'stranger in the familiar house' (*TL*, p. 84). So, for all its concern for the Loyalists' plight and unorthodox sense that this was in effect a civil war, *The Tory Lover* is in no doubt that there is a 'right side'. The novel is not neutral, though at times it is drawn to this position. The recurrent presence of Paul Jones – the naval commander later enshrined as a hero – keeps readers minded (in spite of Jones' personal shortcomings) of the Revolutionary urge and the American promise in an unqualified form. The foregrounding of the heroine's vigorously expressed political views and the postponing of the love plot also confirm the novel's commitment to one side of the conflict. Scott's clearest message in *Waverley* in a journey north past bodies left on battlefields and destroyed homes is that civil war is dreadful and worth most prices to avoid. *The Tory Lover* also acknowledges quite movingly the suffering of the bereaved, destitute and imprisoned as the price of liberty – the novel's best chapter, set with the women in the spinning room, proleptically mourns the wounded and the dead. But for all its revelations of

mixed motives for fighting on the Patriot side and Jones's betrayal of old, poor friends in the Whitehaven raid, the novel still has recourse to Revolutionary heroic narratives in recounting Jones's campaign during the difficult winter of 1777.

The Civil War of 1861–65 is an unspoken presence in the text, and not just because older readers would touch their own memories in the depiction of non-combatants (for example, hurriedly packing the bags of the soldier leaving for war). The novel's opening dinner party counterpoints the issue of slavery with the debate about Loyalists, and Paul Jones makes a point of including the Hamiltons' African slave in the revolutionary toast to freedom. This signals the unfinished business of slavery inherited by the new republic, and despite of Jewett's racialist stereotyping in her characterisation of the slaves, it is clear that this later civil conflict also had for her its 'right side'.<sup>30</sup>

None the less, like *Waverley* before it, *The Tory Lover* refuses any simple notion of what commitment means. Arguably, Jewett found in *Waverley* useful material on this. She replays Flora MacIvor's tragic influence on her brother to support the Stuart army in order to explore what it means for a young woman to persuade a man, who loves her, to join the war on her side when his mother, to whom she is deeply attached, thinks it is utterly wrong. Her novel then goes on to make these two women's difficult but loving relationship the most important in the narrative.

Jewett also combines her unequivocal support of this Revolution with some understanding that its values must apply to a later America too and with a understated handling of divisions and airing of contrary views. The narrative's lack of critical comment at certain points has made some readers think this a highly conservative text, but some reactionary opinions expressed by her characters are not necessarily there for approval, even if attendant ironies are not underlined: for instance, one respectable dinner guest thinks that switching the conversation from Loyalists to slavery is to move to 'safer ground' (*TL*, p. 14). Like Scott, who upheld the 1707 Union yet understood the situation of his Jacobites, Jewett's novel is *politically* clear about the Revolution's rightness and necessity, yet by foregrounding the plight of Loyalists it gives her readers no easy place *emotionally*: as Benjamin Franklin observes in the novel, Wallingford (sympathetic to peace with Britain and a reluctant combatant) is putting his political principles 'to a greater strain than if you stood among the Patriots, who can see but one side' (*TL*, p. 199).

### 'Natural Tories'?

This 'strain' shows up most clearly in Jewett's handling of social class. 'Race' too presents problems (her constructions of Native Americans, Africans and varieties of Whiteness such as Irish and 'Norman'), but the novel's principal site of disturbance is class, and we need to ask to what extent the novel's attempt to look fully at all sides of the conflict (that is, national conflict acted out locally) produces some uncontrolled confusion and contradiction specifically in this area. It is here that Scott ceases to be an enabling influence; apparent similarities in social structure in the fictional worlds of Scott and Jewett mask essential differences and difficulties.

Historically, society in America at the time of the Revolution had a hierarchical structure, evolved from English models in which deference was paid to its most powerful families. This is recorded mostly without remark in *The Tory Lover* (except when Paul Jones takes exception to the term 'lower classes', used to describe the poorer, more extremist Patriots, and when Wallingford looks back appreciatively at the different structure on board ship). None the less, these great Maine houses of wealth and refinement have, as the novel indicates, only a 'look of rich ancestry' (*TL*, p. 14), since they are built instead on mercantile success by men of poor origins, such as Colonel Hamilton who started life as an itinerant shoemaker. This is not an inherited system of privilege and power such as underpins the world of *Waverley*.

But this tricky American combination of democratic opportunity and admiration for upper-class life is disturbed by a persistent discourse of aristocracy, royalty and 'good blood': the words, 'sovereign', 'king', 'prince', 'queen', 'royalty', 'courtiers', 'great lady', 'gentleman', 'genteel', 'high breeding', 'descent' and 'antecedents', are pervasive terms of praise, though not just of the actual gentry but also the poorer born and some African slaves. In a novel that includes actual British and French aristocrats and deals with the establishment of a society based on the principle of equality, the meaning of these words is confused, all the more for Jewett making the villain (cardboard cutout though he is) of a lower class and deeply resentful of his 'betters.' Furthermore, the mob that actually attacks Madam Wallingford are clearly labourers and she is rescued by the Patriot gentry, themselves loyal to their class.

One way of understanding this would be to relate it to the elitism of America's late-nineteenth-century Establishment, the wealthy patrician caste that emerged out of Northern urban mercantile success and that was

currently constructing a history of the nation that would legitimate the outcome of the Civil War and its power.<sup>31</sup> To this elite Scott's images of great aristocratic power and unquestioned authority were appealing; he was, as I have indicated, vastly popular at this time.

But, I would argue, there seems no nostalgic hankering after past hierarchies or legitimising of present power structures in Jewett's portrayal of Revolutionary society. Quite apart from her well-established imaginative commitment to the wide range of Maine society in her other writings, her historical sense militates against such a response. She knows this to be a colonial order long since passed. Instead, given Jewett's understandings of her present-day America as a classed society in her previous work, the society of *The Tory Lover* may have seemed attractive as an example of an upper class that, *unlike* the America of her own day, combined refinement and the possibility of advancement from poverty with an ethic of responsibility for one's economic dependants – Mary and Madam Wallingford are 'mistresses of great houses and the caretakers of many dependents' (*TL*, p. 289).

Scott can be no help to her here. His solution to the class war that he feared did not involve him in the discourses of social equality; instead, in his view, society was naturally stratified. Like Jewett, he imagines his fictional pre-industrial societies functioning well as communities; happiness depends on community, and this is based on landed property that gives its owners responsibility towards dependants. But he was cautious about innovation and would not have given the common people political power.<sup>32</sup> So, the importance that Scott placed on community within the nation could have been attractive to Jewett, but not his antagonism to equality as a political ideal.

None the less, genteel culture appealed to her as it had done to many Americans since the Revolution, but in America this was not a privileged or exclusive lifestyle. The historian Richard L. Bushman argues that gentility became increasingly accessible throughout the nineteenth century, blurring social distinctions as some barriers were overcome (though obviously the urban and rural poor were excluded). The involvement of America's gentry in farming, trade and industry eased this process. Aristocratic gentility could thus be reconciled with republican equality, and the 'best people' came to constitute an aspirational 'vision of noble life'. Women were central to this development.<sup>33</sup> It is, then, possible that the upper-class discourses of Jewett's novel, unlike in Scott's, are part of this would-be democratic appropriation.

Gender is the other factor to be taken into consideration in charting

where Jewett's novel pulls away from connections with Scott – that is, history written by women, the Revolution seen from female perspectives and Jewett's politics. Nina Baym in *American Women Writers and the Work of History* has shown the importance of history for women writers contesting the public/domestic divisions in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, in the post-bellum period women lacked access to the developing academy and women's role in the Revolution continued to be ignored (indeed until the 1970s). In addition, most Revolutionary romances in the 1890s focused on the military conflict.

The example that Scott could give in respect of gender in historical fiction would have been limited but not negligible. There is evidence that Scott's novels were read by nineteenth-century readers in ways that appealed to women as well as men: *Waverley*, with its power to heighten sympathies, retained its female readers while opening fiction to a male audience, and its hero, more acted upon than acting and ultimately domestic in his fate, was 'feminised'. Increasingly emancipated women found in Scott 'independence, intelligence, bravery, unconventionality, and continual protests against the inferior position of women'.<sup>34</sup> *Waverley* finally gives the conventional Rose a happy marriage and consigns the determinedly political Flora to a convent, but its Chapter 52 is an extended and knowing disquisition from both women's point of view on social notions of femininity and masculinity that the novel's four main actors embody.

But such readings run against the dominant grain of Scott's novels. Jewett still needed to revise male-authored historical narratives of the Revolution, imagining the experience of civil conflict and nation-making from her own perspectives as a woman with a long career writing about contemporary female lives. It is most likely that she drew on local memory, much as Elizabeth Ellet's pioneering historiographical work (four volumes published between 1848 and 1852) on the domestic experience of women in the American Revolution had done in turning to private archives when political histories told her little.<sup>35</sup> *The Tory Lover*, particularly Chapter 32 where Mary and Madam Wallingford recount the past lives of Mrs Davis and her mother, occasionally suggests an unofficial history of women's lives passed down the female line and not recognised by their menfolk. Scott's counter-historical sense of the past is given here a gendered inflection.

As we now understand from twentieth-century historians, the Revolution did erode barriers between the male political world and women's domestic domain: it was, as Linda K. Kerber shows, 'a strongly

politicising experience' for women, though mainstream arguments on political liberty ignored gender.<sup>36</sup> Although women had the reputation for neutrality or hesitant patriotism (the war was something looked back upon as a nightmare), they had to commit themselves. They did not become 'citizens' in the new republic, but practised 'civic virtue' in the home.

Something of this sense of the Revolution survives in Jewett's text, awkwardly grafted onto an unconvincing, indeed silly, adventure story and adapted to late-nineteenth-century perceptions of women as capable of independent lives. The notion of Republican motherhood, dominant for half the century, is totally absent from Jewett's novel. Jewett, working probably with a late-nineteenth-century sense of women's rights, stresses only the basic radicalism of the Revolution in Mary's arguments for the former colonies rather than its actual conservative outcome for women. Still, 'home' here is not the limited space of the nineteenth-century bourgeois family, but denotes the whole wider community of her town in which Mary is active as a responsible agent. The spinning room scene is powerful, not only because it records women's pre-industrial daily work as well as folk images of women's webs of connection and classical images of life's thread, but also because spinning was regarded a patriotic activity, making clothes and bandages without imported cloth.

Jewett thus revises the narratives of civil conflict and nation-making, both British and American. She invests much less imagination in the masculine plot of the novel (Paul Jones) and the conventional feminine plot of courtship. To the surprise of her brother, Mary is 'no lovelorn maiden' and speaks to him 'in the tone of comradeship', animated by political events (*TL*, p. 69). Unlike the typical woman-authored Revolution romance earlier in the century, Mary has no patriarchal tyrannical father or Patriot lover to rescue her.<sup>37</sup> The novel gives her the role of arguing for Independence, though it retains an awareness that such political discussion is the 'talk of men' (*TL*, p. 296) and as such is hard for older men to take from her (*TL*, p. 313): Paul Jones forgets she had listened to 'the most serious plans and secret conferences at her brother's side' (*TL*, p. 44). Her acts have consequences.

Yet Mary's web of ties and responsibilities is different from those of the 'gentlemen' assembled in the opening chapters' dinner party from which she chooses to absent herself to pursue other priorities protecting old friends of the wrong political persuasion. Women supporting other women (across generations, classes and political commitments) is a repeated motif, though this is mixed up with a more conventional plot

where Mary's beauty and her male connections get her what she needs. '[W]omen folk', comments a boatman, 'is natural Tories; they hold by the past, same as men are fain to reach out and want change' (*TL*, p. 79). But this simplistic generalising explanation of female (and indeed male) conduct is immediately deconstructed both by Mary's superior river skills as she canoes past to face Madam Wallingford's anger at her getting Roger onto Paul Jones's ship, and by the second boatman who understands the other mixed allegiances in this privileged family. In Mary, then, Jewett has created a fresh model of the national character (not an easy thing to do with a woman protagonist), who holds to the correct principles and is involved in events of recognised historical significance while demonstrating a breadth of sympathy and pity for everyone caught up in the national conflict. These are the borders on which Jewett stands.

In conclusion, since we know that Jewett, an American regionalist and a woman with liberal politics, read Scott with admiration, then from the evidence of her own historical novel it is likely that she read him in ways that were different from the majority of her contemporaries. For us to read Scott and Jewett in conjunction is to revise the history of his reception in America, distinguishing at least one individual reader from the generality of his audience. It also allows us to see how Scott's work in certain ways supported Jewett's attempt to write her history of the Revolution somewhat differently from contemporary romances, even if it somewhat muddied the waters in matters of social class. Furthermore, *The Tory Lover* is not simply a piece of Scott-influenced fiction. It has its own, quite deliberate transatlantic project – to think positively about the connections and, vitally, the differences between the two nations both in their making and by implication their present states.

#### Notes

- 1 Sarah Orne Jewett, *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*, ed. Annie Fields, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1911, p. 210.
- 2 John Henry Raleigh, 'What Scott Meant to the Victorians', in Harry E. Shaw (ed.), *Critical Essays on Sir Walter Scott: The Waverley Novels*, New York, G.K. Hall, 1996, p. 49. See also George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- 3 Sarah Orne Jewett, *Sarah Orne Jewett: Letters*, ed. Richard Cary, Waterville ME, Colby College Press, 1967, p. 138: 'it is certainly a dangerous thing to try to write something entirely different after one has been for years and years making stories as short and round as possible but I have long had a dream of doing this, as you know, and I suppose I had to do it'.



- 4 Letter, 28 August 1901, quoted in Marie Donahue, 'Introduction', Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Tory Lover*, South Berwick ME, Old Berwick Historical Society, 1975, p. vii. Hereafter, *TL*.
- 5 There is only one extended critical account of *The Tory Lover*, in Paula Blanchard, *Sarah Orne Jewett: Her World and Her Work*, Reading MA, Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1994, pp. 339–48. Passing references elsewhere tend to castigate her alleged upper-class racism, or simply categorise the novel alongside historical potboilers of the period.
- 6 For a discussion of her career in these terms, see Alison Easton, "How Clearly the Gradations of Society were Defined": Negotiating Class in Sarah Orne Jewett', in Karen L. Kilcup and Thomas S. Edwards (eds), *Jewett and her Contemporaries: Reshaping the Canon*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1999, pp. 207–22. See also Alison Easton, 'Introduction: History and Utopia', in Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories*, ed. Alison Easton, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1995, pp. vii–xxii.
- 7 For political responses at the period, see John Patrick Diggins, 'Republicanism and Progressivism', *American Quarterly*, 37 (1985), 572–98. On writing the Civil War, see Michael Kammer, *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1978, pp. 256–9.
- 8 Historiographical neglect of Loyalists continued until the 1970s: see Kammer, *Season of Youth*, p. 177. See also Lester H. Cohen, *The Revolutionary Histories: Contemporary Narratives of the American Revolution*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980, pp. 213 and 223, who comments on the absence of ethical ambiguity in nineteenth-century histories of the Revolution.
- 9 John P. Farrell, *Revolution as Tragedy: The Dilemma of the Moderate from Scott to Arnold*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980, p. 17.
- 10 See Kammer, *Season of Youth*, pp. 221–2; Arthur H. Shaffer, *The Politics of History: Writing the History of the American Revolution, 1783–1815*, Chicago, Precedent Publishing, 1975, pp. 161–83; and Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790–1860*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1995.
- 11 Kammer, *Season of Youth*, pp. 33–75.
- 12 Amy Kaplan, 'Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of American Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890s', *American Literary History*, 2 (1990), 659–90, pp. 662, 682. See also Beverly Seaton, 'A Pedigree for a New Century: The Colonial Experience in Popular Historical Novels, 1890–1910', in Alan Axelrod (ed.), *The Colonial Revival in America*, New York, Norton, 1985, pp. 278–93; and Kammer, *Season of Youth*, pp. 145–220.
- 13 See Dekker, *American Historical Romance*, pp. 275–8; and W.D. Howells, 'The New Historical Romances', *The North American Review*, 171 (December 1900), 936. *The Tory Lover* began its serialisation in *The Atlantic Monthly* a

month before this essay appeared. Howells's essay, a witty but serious protest against 'the recent deluge of historical romance' (p. 935), argues for a better alternative historical fiction based on 'knowledge and penetrating sympathy' (p. 947) which refuses a simplified patriotism and romanticised violence, and challenges easy present-day social, political and national values. It seems not unlikely that, as a friend and early supporter of Jewett, Howells had discussed such matters with her.

- 14 See Robin Gilmour, 'Scott and the Victorian Novel: The Case of *Wuthering Heights*', in J.H. Alexander and David Hewitt (eds), *Scott and His Influence*, Aberdeen, Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1983, pp. 363–71, for such influences on the English provincial novel.
- 15 T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1981, 105. For a fuller discussion see pp. 101–6.
- 16 See Baym, *American Women Writers*, pp. 1–10.
- 17 Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972, p. 492. Hereafter, *W*.
- 18 Letter to W.D. Howells, quoted in Donahue, 'Introduction', *The Tory Lover*, p. viii. For information on Jewett's family, see Blanchard, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, pp. 7–9.
- 19 Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Patterns in Scottish and English Culture*, Edinburgh, Polygon, 1996, p. 71 (his emphasis).
- 20 Ina Ferris, 'Story-telling and the Subversion of Literary Form in Walter Scott's Fiction', in Shaw (ed.), *Critical Essays*, pp. 98 and 101. This may partly explain why the nineteenth century read Scott both as a romancer and a realist.
- 21 This is especially true of *Waverley*, and the other Jacobite novel, *Redgauntlet*. See Richard Humphrey, *Walter Scott, 'Waverley'*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 20.
- 22 P.H. Scott, 'The Politics of Sir Walter Scott', in Alexander and Hewitt (eds), *Scott and His Influence*, p. 209.
- 23 Craig, *Out of History*, p. 68. See also Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991, pp. 119–22, and 195–236; and Humphrey, *Walter Scott, 'Waverley'*.
- 24 See Kammer, *Season of Youth*, p. 63. Dekker, *American Historical Romance*, pp. 103–4, notes how Scott was attractive to a sectionalised American South.
- 25 For other aspects of this, see Susan Manning, 'Scott and Hawthorne: The Making of a National Literary Tradition', in Alexander and Hewitt (eds), *Scott and His Influence*, pp. 421–31; and June Howard, 'Unraveling Regions, Unsettling Periods: Sarah Orne Jewett and American Literary History', *American Literature*, 68 (1996), 365–84.
- 26 Marjorie Pryse, 'Sex, Class, and "Category Crisis": Reading Jewett's

- Transitivity', in Kilcup and Edwards (eds), *Jewett and Her Contemporaries*, pp. 31–62.
- 27 See Cyrus Vakil, 'Walter Scott and the Historicism of Scottish Enlightenment Philosophical History', in J.H. Alexander and David Hewitt (eds), *Scott in Carnival*, Aberdeen, Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993, pp. 404–18. On Scott on 'progress', see also Harry E. Shaw, *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983, and Craig, *Out of History*, pp. 64–73.
- 28 See Thomas R. Mockaitis, 'Scott and the Problem of Revolution', in Alexander and Hewitt (eds), *Scott in Carnival*, pp. 419–33.
- 29 See TL, pp. 19, 197–8 and 319–20.
- 30 Jewett's two short stories with Civil War material, 'The Mistress of the Sydenham Plantation' (1891) and 'A War Debt' (1896), are an earlier, queasy attempt to imagine reconciliation with the South. *The Tory Lover*, I suggest, reconsiders this, rejecting it as politically impossible.
- 31 See Peter Dobkin Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700–1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality*, New York, New York University Press, 1984.
- 32 See P.H. Scott, 'The Politics of Sir Walter Scott', pp. 208–17.
- 33 Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Person, Houses, Cities*, New York, Knopf, 1992.
- 34 Raleigh, 'What Scott Meant to the Victorians', p. 55. See also Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, pp. 80–101.
- 35 See Baym, *American Women Writers*, pp. 233–8; and Linda K. Kerber, "'History can do it no Justice": Women and the Reinterpretation of the American Revolution', in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (eds), *Women in the Age of the American Revolution*, Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1989, pp. 3–42.
- 36 Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1980, p. 11.
- 37 See Baym, *American Women Writers*, pp. 170–2.

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## Beyond the Americana: Henry James reads George Eliot

*Lindsey Traub*

With typically magisterial conviction, F.R. Leavis announced in the first chapter of *The Great Tradition* that 'it can be shown, with a conclusiveness rarely possible in these matters, that James did actually go to school to George Eliot'.<sup>1</sup> His argument is certainly convincing but his acute observations about the development of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) out of *Daniel Deronda* (1876), include the assertion that 'Isabel Archer is Gwendolen Harleth and Osmond is Grandcourt' or, on concession, that 'Isabel Archer is Gwendolen seen by a man'.<sup>2</sup> Leavis does not crudely suggest that the fruit of George Eliot's tutelage is plagiarism: the influence of Gwendolen and Grandcourt on *The Portrait of a Lady* must have suggested itself to many readers. But James's assiduous reading of George Eliot and particularly his reflections on her heroines offered him much more than a set of characters to borrow. This essay will trace the progress of an important and far-reaching lesson James drew from this literary mentor along a trail to be found in his essays and reviews of the older novelist. He read and studied her in the 1860s and 1870s, during her years of major achievement and his apprenticeship. In 1880 he began *The Portrait of a Lady* and George Eliot died. I shall begin to explore, through those essays and reviews, how the woman he described wonderingly, after her death, as 'this quiet, anxious, sedentary, serious, invalidical English lady'<sup>3</sup> helped the ambitious young American writer to an understanding of the possibilities of fiction far beyond the adventures of the American Girl, with which he was fast becoming associated.

Although they were almost a generation apart in age (Eliot was born in 1819 and James in 1843), the two novelists shared a transatlantic literary network which embodied an easy flow of mutual interest and appreciation between their two milieux. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a close friend of Henry James Snr, was also a long-standing friend of Thomas Carlyle and

visited and lectured in England. In 1848 (when Henry James Jnr was five years old) Mary Ann Evans, having rebelled against her father's Evangelical Anglicanism, was introduced to Emerson by her friends the Brays and exclaimed in a letter to Sarah Hennell, 'I have seen Emerson – the first *man* I have ever seen'.<sup>4</sup> On moving to London and entering the intellectual circle around the *Westminster Review* that brought her to George Henry Lewes, she went on to review a range of religious and philosophical books. In 1855, two of these were texts by writers from Emerson's immediate circle, also well known to Henry James Snr, Thoreau's *Walden* and Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. In discussing Fuller's book in 1855 (ten years after its publication), in conjunction with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), the still anonymous George Eliot justified her choice of Fuller's book like this:

because we think it has been unduly thrust into the background by less comprehensive and candid productions on the same subject. Notwithstanding certain defects of taste and a sort of vague spiritualism and grandiloquence which belong to all but the very best of American writers, the book is a valuable one.<sup>5</sup>

In view of the comprehensive neglect that Fuller was to suffer over the following century, it is significant to see that for George Eliot she was a figure who needed no introduction. For Henry James, a generation later, although her death in a shipwreck in 1850 and the shock and distress that caused his parents was one of his earliest memories, she remained a poignant and virtually legendary figure.<sup>6</sup>

In October 1856, George Eliot reviewed a very different group of texts: novels which included Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred*. She expressed her admiration for the American author and refused to deprecate her production of 'a second Negro novel' because:

her genius seems to be of a very special character: her *Sunny Memories* were as feeble as her novels are powerful. But whatever else she may write, or may not write, *Uncle Tom* and *Dred* will assure her a place in that highest rank of novelists who can give us a national life in all its phases – popular and aristocratic, humorous and tragic, political and religious.<sup>7</sup>

Stowe's record-breaking success with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was in fact part of an unprecedented phenomenon in the United States: homegrown best-selling novels by authors now celebrated as Hawthorne's deplored 'scribbling women'. In the absence of international copyright arrangements, homegrown fiction was an uncertain investment for American

publishers, in competition with established English favourites such as Dickens, whose work could be imported and reproduced with impunity and success. To set out to be a professional writer, as Hawthorne and Melville did, was to face grave financial uncertainty at best. Meanwhile, a series of women who took to writing as a means of financial support, Susan Warner, Fanny Fern and others, found themselves rewarded beyond their wildest expectations. This discrepancy was not lost on the young Henry James, surveying the literary scene as a scribbling adolescent whose first story was published in 1864, the year that Hawthorne died.

George Eliot's work was readily available and admired by American readers. In James's account of his own growth in both *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914) and *The Middle Years* (1917) and in his notebooks, George Eliot and her work were very early part of his emotional and aesthetic consciousness. In them he recalls, in connection with her, more than one of those moments of revelatory bewilderment—later a feature of his own narrative method—which mark key passages of transition in the development of an individual. For example, James remembers how, in Geneva in 1860, on one of the family's European journeys, his parents were 'in their prompt flush of admiration for George Eliot's first novel, *Adam Bede*'. Having excitedly lent their copy to an English family, they were astonished and mortified to hear that 'their fellow Anglo-Saxons' had found it impossible to be interested in 'village carpenters and Methodists'. Such a discrimination had a profound and lasting effect on the impressionable seventeen-year-old Henry James. There was his parents' outrage but also his

own excited wonder about such other people, those of the style in question . . . It *referred* them, and to a social order, making life more interesting and more various; even while our clear democratic air, that of our little family circle, quivered as with the monstrosity. It might . . . fairly have opened to me that great and up to then unsuspected door of the world from which the general collection of monstrosities, its existence suddenly brought home to us, would doubtless stretch grandly away.<sup>8</sup>

That powerful intimation of 'a world elsewhere' awaiting him, beyond New England where the family settled in 1860, of its social and imaginative dimensions and the possible relations between them, were among the strongest claims that Europe, and England above all, were to have on James's life and art. During the summer of 1866, he recalls hearing news of his friend Oliver Wendell Holmes, far away on tour in England, which provoked an emotion, 'exquisite of its kind' that was to make 'a sovereign contribution . . . so much later on (ten years!) [to] my own vision-haunted



migration.<sup>9</sup> And in the same overpowering flood of memory ‘linking on . . . somehow’, comes that of lying on his bed, on holiday at Swampscott, Massachusetts, and reading George Eliot’s newly published *Felix Holt* – ‘in ever so thrilled a state’<sup>10</sup> – for which he was to write a review for the *Nation*.

That review of *Felix Holt* in 1866, was by no means James’s first attempt at the form. He had begun sending ‘notices’ to the *North American Review* in 1864, and immediately finding a mentor and friend in the coeditor, of the *Review* and the *Nation*, Charles Eliot Norton, had reviewed for both journals regularly for two years. In fact, in the 1860s and 1870s, the initial phase of his career which led up to the writing of *The Portrait of a Lady*, James wrote more reviews than in any other period of his career: a stream of essays about a huge range of his contemporaries, European, English and American, at all levels of literary art. Though they often adopt the fashionably avuncular tones of the book reviewer, they actually contain the reactions of a hungry young pretender: feedback to himself on the art of fiction and, as it happens, more of them on George Eliot than on anyone else. These were the great years of George Eliot’s settled creative success and literary acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic and while she emerged as a great practitioner of the novel, he read her work, absorbed his own lessons from it and experimented with fiction himself.

His review of *Felix Holt* was, however, James’s first public pronouncement about George Eliot, a writer whom, if later memory is to be trusted, he already greatly admired and enjoyed. The review is anonymous, dogmatic and very revealing. The reviewer was just twenty-three years old with three published stories to his name. George Eliot, on the other hand, was the acclaimed author of *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861) and *Romola* (1863). But he had no compunction about taking the lofty view of the experienced critic. He complains that her plots ‘have always been artificial – clumsily artificial – the conduct of her story slow, and her style diffuse. Her conclusions have been signally weak’.<sup>11</sup>

In fact not very much about the book impresses him. He warns against overestimation of the novel and of the novelist herself: her works are not masterpieces. They belong to the same English tradition as Miss Edgeworth and Miss Austen, the ‘clever, voluble, bright-coloured novel of manners’. And with a flourish, he concludes:

With a certain masculine comprehensiveness which they [Edgeworth and Austen] lack, she is eventually a feminine – a delightfully feminine – writer.

She has the microscopic observation, not a myriad of whose keen notations are worth a single one of those great synthetic guesses with which a real master attacks the truth, and which, by their occasional occurrence in the stories of Mr. Charles Reade (the much abused *Griffith Gaunt* included), make him, to our mind, the most readable of living English novelists, and prove him a distant kinsman of Shakespeare.<sup>12</sup>

Here the callow youth betrays more than just his failures of taste and critical judgement; his anxiety to deprecate George Eliot as ‘delightfully feminine’ has as much to do with his nationality as with a crude chauvinism. The anxiety of the young, male, would-be novelist in mid-century America arose from a painful mixture of morality, financial necessity and gender role-modelling. Young men, even unusual creatures like the Jameses with their inherited family income, needed ‘proper’ work to support themselves and to be respectable, democratic Americans. Writing fiction was beginning to be more profitable and respectable than it had been for Hawthorne, in the previous generation, but in practice, earning a regular living from fiction was visibly ‘women’s work’. In effect, what James displays here is an anxiety of influence which is unmistakably maternal – but reading George Eliot was, quite dramatically, to help him grow out of it.

There was, however, already at least one sign that amid his haste to point out her weaknesses James was paying attention to Eliot with an eye to his own embryonic creative interests. He appreciated the reflection of her ‘intellectual culture’ in her style: ‘a style the secret of whose force is the union of the tenderest sympathies with a body of knowledge so ample and so active as to be absolutely free from pedantry.’<sup>13</sup> It seems curiously prescient that the young reader/writer should articulate and admire this observed quality in the older novelist which was to be so fatally lacking in Edward Casaubon, in the yet unwritten *Middlemarch*, and so malignantly perverted in Gilbert Osmond in the *Portrait of a Lady*. Dorothea Brooke and Isabel Archer could both be said to long for ‘knowledge so ample and active’ as indeed the heroines of his little clutch of stories already showed interesting signs of doing – and continued to do throughout his work.

Reviewing *Felix Holt* sent James back to George Eliot in earnest and he published a long article called ‘The Novels of George Eliot’ later the same year, in the *Atlantic Monthly*. This article is full of the young writer’s real interest and desire to understand his response to a major novelist. It drew from him attempts at critical discrimination and articulation that show he was growing in seriousness and subtlety. For reviewing his contemporaries had a multiple function for the young James in his struggle to

become a *professional* writer. While providing him with tangible financial evidence of his professionalism, it gave him ample opportunity to practise the art of criticism, to rehearse and articulate his own ideas, not only by taking on the great and the good, but the flawed and mediocre as well. It helped him to develop a critical vocabulary and to define the elements of aesthetic response which were directly related to the forms and principles of fiction.

In this second Eliot article of 1866, he is still occasionally hampered by a dependence on unexamined – perhaps defensive – stereotypes; but overall he has moved on. While Eliot's powers of observation are still 'decidedly of the feminine kind', she shapes up well against other models – all of them transatlantic. She is more of a thinker than Dickens or Thackeray and her study of the Dodsons in *The Mill on the Floss* is 'not unworthy of Balzac'. Even at this early stage, the heroine, Maggie Tulliver catches at his imagination and he embarks on a lifelong habit of rewriting other people's novels for them. He is unhappy with the flood at the end of the *Mill on the Floss*, which sweeps Maggie to her death after she rejects her lover, Stephen Guest. James does not want Maggie to drown, helplessly, by the agency of the flood. He would have 'infinitely preferred that Maggie should have been left to her own devices'. He questions that 'a lonely spinsterhood' would have been her only alternative and suggests that 'a denouement by which Maggie should have called Stephen back would have been extremely interesting and would have had far more in its favor than can be put to confusion by a mere exclamation of horror'.<sup>14</sup>

The exclamation of horror refers to the outrage he well knows would have met such an immoral conclusion. Indeed there is a long tradition stretching from the first reviewers, through Swinburne to Leslie Stephen then F.R. Leavis, that the suave Stephen and their guilty love were misconceived by George Eliot, that a girl of Maggie's quality would have been disgusted by him, not passionately attracted. But Henry James, at twenty-three, not only knows that Eliot is right but longs to take the erotic suggestion to its conclusion, imagining a possibly reprehensible but possibly more exciting and challenging conclusion to the couple's dilemma. George Eliot has him engaged and working and he offers this interesting reflection, which seems to contain a tacit aspiration:

In every novel the work is divided between the writer and the reader; but the writer makes the reader very much as he makes his characters. When he makes him ill, that is indifferent, he does no work; the writer does it all. When he makes him well, that is makes him interested, then the reader does quite half the labor . . . I hold there is a way. It is perhaps a secret; but until

it is found out, I think the art of story-telling cannot be said to have approached perfection.<sup>15</sup>

In 1868 George Eliot published something entirely different, a long dramatic poem called *The Spanish Gypsy*, and James reviewed it for both the *Nation* and *The North American Review*. Now Eliot is a 'real novelist' with 'a large, rich intellect which shines in her writings'.<sup>16</sup> To follow her successful novels with a long poem is to court disaster, he warns, but she has carried it off and, if not pure poetry, the work has other strengths. For the aspiring young novelist it also had considerable theoretical interest. The work is above all 'a romance' and 'carries much farther that compromise with reality which is the basis of all imaginative writing. In romance this principle of compromise pervades the superstructure as well as the basis.'<sup>17</sup>

While James is pursuing this idea, but before he has written a single novel himself, the heroine of George Eliot's poem appears to give him a transparent pause for thought which was to have a lasting influence on his work. Quite suddenly he can be seen finding words for his growing interest in the representation of women – already visible in his stories – an interest in the difference between the real and ideal, actual or stereotypical, admirable or merely palatable. The romantic nature of the poem enables the heroine, Fedelma, a beautiful young gypsy, to renounce her aristocratic lover in order to lead her people, out of loyalty to them and to their last great leader, her dead father. Such a renunciation would be impossible, James observes, 'In our modern novels', where the interest depends upon a similarity of circumstances between the heroine and the reader. But that raises an important question about what might be expected of the heroine of a novel. Fedelma is in a higher key than what he calls 'ordinary women, or even ordinary heroines', and here he makes a discovery, while he works through the implications of what he has said, which indicates how his own assumptions have developed and which is worth quoting at length:

[Fedelma] is natural, I think, in a poetical sense. She is consistent with her own superfine character. From a lower point of view than that of the author, she lacks some of the desirable feminine qualities – a certain womanly warmth and petulance, a graceful irrationality. Her mind is very much too lucid, and her aspirations too lofty. Her conscience, especially is decidedly over-active. But this is distinction which she shares with all the author's heroines. Dinah Morris, Maggie Tulliver, Romola and Esther Lyon – a distinction moreover, for which I should be very sorry to hold George Eliot to account. There are assuredly women and women. While Messrs. Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins, and Miss Braddon and her school, tell one half of

the story, it is no more than fair that the author of the Spanish Gypsy should, all unassisted, attempt to relate the other.<sup>18</sup>

So it is a 'lower point of view' than George Eliot's which regards 'womanly warmth and petulance and a certain graceful irrationality' as 'desirable feminine qualities'. This inferior position is now identified with Charles Reade – whose 'great synthetic guesses', so superior to Eliot's 'myriad of keen notations', were the mark of a 'real master' just two years before. Furthermore, what is distinguished and admirable about George Eliot's heroines – lucidity, aspiration, conscience – is unique to her, 'developed all unassisted'. There is evident confusion in the mind of the young critic over the nature of *The Spanish Gypsy* as literary achievement, but that may be in part because it has elicited some articulation of a developing idea of his own. Heroines like Fedelma and her predecessors in George Eliot's work may not be 'ordinary women', but then whose is the standard, especially the literary standard, for what is 'ordinary' or to stretch a point 'real' – Charles Reade's or George Eliot's? Might not the fine conscience which distinguishes George Eliot's heroines itself become a vehicle for exploring what is real? Here, indeed, George Eliot was ahead of him, having long before made some acutely discriminating remarks about Charles Reade in the review of 1856 which included Stowe's *Dred*. Referring to his *It is never Too Late to Mend*, she had commented:

Mr. Reade's novel does not rise above the level of cleverness: we feel throughout the presence of remarkable talent, which makes affective use of materials, but nowhere of the genius which absorbs material and reproduces it as a living whole . . . Mr. Reade, on the contrary, seems always self-conscious, always elaborating a character, after a certain type, and carrying his elaboration a little too far.<sup>19</sup>

The year that followed *The Spanish Gypsy*, 1869, was a momentous one for the young Henry James. He took his first adult journey to Europe, alone, and at last gained from his experiences there the inner confidence to be a literary artist himself. One of the first of these experiences was meeting George Eliot. Unfortunately for all concerned, his visit on 8 May, sponsored by Charles Eliot Norton who was staying nearby with his family, coincided with the return home of G.H. Lewes's son Thornie, desperately ill and in agony with undiagnosed tuberculosis of the spine. Eliot, none the less, appears to have received the young American graciously and kindly, presumably for the sake of his family connections and perhaps his aspirations, since he had written only a handful of undistinguished

stories for the *Atlantic Monthly* by then. In spite of the brevity of the visit, which closed with his rushing out to find the doctor, he was captivated by her and wrote home exuberantly:

I was immensely impressed, interested and pleased. To begin with she is magnificently ugly – deliciously hideous . . . Now in this vast ugliness resides a most powerful beauty which, in a few minutes steals forth and charms the mind, so that you end up as I ended, in falling in love with her. Yes, behold me literally in love with this great horse-faced blue-stocking.<sup>20</sup>

At the time, George Eliot was beginning on the long labour of composing *Middlemarch*, which appeared in serial form during 1872. By then Henry James had reluctantly been home to Cambridge in 1870 and mourned the loss of his cousin Minny Temple, but returned delightedly to Europe to chaperone his sister Alice and Aunt Kate on their own grand tour in 1872. When they recrossed the Atlantic he remained in Paris, determined to support himself by writing if he could. He also read *Middlemarch* and sent a review, as usual, to the *Nation*. They had already assigned the work to another reviewer and his piece appeared in the *Galaxy* in March 1873. In January of that year he wrote about it in a letter to his brother William, having moved on to Rome:

I am far from surprised at the admiration you express in your last for *Middlemarch* . . . I admired and relished [it ] hugely and yet I am afraid you will think I have spoken of it stingily . . . I didn't make perhaps, a sufficiently succinct statement of its rare intellectual power. This is amazing.<sup>21</sup>

The novel, James claimed in his review for the *Galaxy*, is the work of a natural idealist who has 'commissioned herself to be real'. He could see the panorama but missed the pattern, the reflective analysis he pronounced 'obscure' and he suspected her of trying to 'recommend herself to a scientific audience . . . *Middlemarch* is too often an echo of Messrs. Darwin and Huxley'.<sup>22</sup> While hugely admiring the novel, he had missed a great deal and actually objected to some of the sources of its greatness. But this may be explicable in part by the intense but limited focus of his own interest in the book and his frustrated sense that it had been curtailed in the service of a diffuse and unsatisfactory form. For:

nominally, *Middlemarch* has a definite subject – the subject indicated in the eloquent preface. An ardent young girl was to have been the central figure, a young girl framed for a larger moral life than circumstance often affords, yearning for motive for sustained spiritual effort and only wasting her ardor and soiling her wings against meanness of opportunity.<sup>23</sup>

Such a figure was and continued to be very much in James's mind, already a recurrent character in his stories – the novella *Watch and Ward* (1870) was as yet his only longer fiction – and for a moment he came revealingly close to losing his critical objectivity in considering Dorothea:

With its abundant and massive ingredients 'Middlemarch' ought somehow to have depicted a weightier drama. Dorothea was altogether too superb a heroine to be wasted; yet she plays a narrower part than the imagination of the reader demands. She is of more consequence than the action of which she is the nominal centre.<sup>24</sup>

So it is clear that what the imagination of this highly interested reader demanded, to the disparagement of what the novel actually achieves, is an 'ado' about Dorothea Brooke. To his preoccupied sense it would have done justice to her 'consequence' if she *were* the centre of the action, and therein would be depicted a 'weightier drama' than the vast array of contributory dramas *Middlemarch* provides. It took fifteen years of preliminary writing to produce the 'ado' about Isabel Archer, as he calls it in the Preface, but here the process of inner discussion and discrimination is suddenly visible.

Indeed, the declared frustration over Dorothea is not the only revelation of an important lesson James learned – and learned to articulate – in reading and writing about *Middlemarch*. In exploring his unconditional admiration for the drawing of Lydgate, 'a really complete portrait of a *man*', James identifies something else of supreme significance in his own contribution to the art of fiction. In creating 'the real hero of the story', Eliot has remained 'serenely impersonal' and:

It is striking evidence of the altogether superior quality of George Eliot's imagination that, though elaborately represented, Lydgate should be treated so little from what we may roughly (and we trust without offence) call the sexual point of view . . . Several English romancers – notably Fielding, Thackeray and Charles Reade – have won great praise for their figures of women; but they owe it, in reversed conditions, to a meaner sort of art, it seems to us, than George Eliot has used in the case of Lydgate; to an indefinable appeal to masculine prejudice – to a sort of titillation of the masculine sense of difference.<sup>25</sup>

In this bold, radical and astonishingly perceptive piece of critical discrimination, the young James (still only twenty-nine years old) finds words for something he recognises as 'indefinable'. He makes explicit the invisible and unquestioned attitudes behind the writing of some admired male writers – including the now much deplored Charles Reade – and their

impoverishing effect on the creation of women characters. It is a form of cheating, he maintains, resourced and defined by 'masculine prejudice' and owing its specious success to 'a sort of titillation of the masculine sense of difference'. He identifies the existence of specifically male-oriented representation of character and calls it a 'meaner sort of art', which denies the fictional character independent subjecthood and implicitly positions woman as 'other'. Merely eliciting a vaguely erotic response in a section of the audience or conforming with stereotype, no matter how ingrained in the lives and imaginations of readers, he maintains is not a respectable or ultimately productive basis for the creation of character. George Eliot has risen above it, with Lydgate, her 'really complete *portrait of a man*' (my emphasis) and set the younger writer an invaluable example and encouragement.

By 1873 when his *Middlemarch* review shows him to have drawn such thoughtful, if idiosyncratic, conclusions from reading George Eliot, he had published twenty-one stories and a novella, *Watch and Ward*, over nine years in the American magazines *Atlantic Monthly* and *Galaxy*. Learning to be literary was a slow process on the surface, but much had taken place beneath. Among the stories he wrote during this time of transatlantic journeying and literary experimentation, there were several about or including artists – frequently painters – and their models, stories about the creative process, the artistic personality and the relation of art to life. As had been the case from his earliest stories, there was often an interesting young woman at the centre of the text. Reading *Middlemarch* he was powerfully receptive to the potential in Dorothea and in a state of mind in which he could grasp what he saw as Eliot's achievement in the disinterested representation of Lydgate. George Eliot's work of art was in creating a fully realised character, taken from the opposite sex from her own, but 'serenely impersonal', without resorting to the 'meaner sort of art' which indulges, or fails to transcend, the attraction and limitation of sexual difference. What he saw done in Lydgate was at the heart of what in story after story, and at full length in *Roderick Hudson*, with Rowland Mallet, Roderick Hudson and Christina Light, he explored and dramatised. Moving from Paris to Rome, James wrote his way through 1873 in this vein, starting *Roderick Hudson* in 1874. He finished it in 1875 in New York, where he made a final attempt to live and work in America. At the very end of 1875 he gave up and returned to Paris, spending most of 1876 there before his last move to London, his future home.

Paris in 1876 was an invigorating place for the 33-year-old writer, albeit



an outsider, an American. But James's French was fluent, he was sure of his vocation and felt he was coming into possession of his powers. Befriended by Turgenev and the Flaubert circle, he wrote a new novel, *The American*, and, while sending the chapters for publication to W.D. Howells at *The Atlantic*, started to tell him about what he called 'my new novel'. In October 1876 he refers to it specifically: 'My novel is to be an *Americana* – the adventures in Europe of a female Newman, who of course equally triumphs over the insolent foreigner.'<sup>26</sup>

That letter to Howells also refers gratefully to his friend's positive reaction to a newly submitted critical review. For something else happened in 1876 which made a significant impact on James's creative life and plans. George Eliot published *Daniel Deronda* and James read and wrote about it. Like other commentators, he had mixed feelings about what George Eliot had done. His review for the *Atlantic* takes the form of a 'Conversation' where three notional characters conduct a dialogue representing their differing responses to the novel. Their discussion voices a range of the thoughts, doubts and pleasures that had appeared in James's letters home, all that year as the book was serialised, and it was only at the end, after long reflection that his admiration for it matured.

The three disputants in the review are Theodora, who likes the novel, Pulcheria who is sceptical about it and Constantius – a young critic who has published one novel – who tries to see both sides. This is Theodora's judgement on Gwendolen Harleth:

Gwendolen is a perfect picture of youthfulness – its eagerness, its presumption, its preoccupation with itself, its vanity and silliness, its sense of its own absoluteness . . . I can think of nothing more powerful than the way in which the growth of her conscience is traced, nothing more touching than the picture of its helpless maturity<sup>27</sup>

George Eliot's Gwendolen is not Isabel Archer, but James's portrait of Gwendolen involves an important observation which contributes to her gestation. His Theodora reflects that, through Gwendolen's intelligence and her response to events, George Eliot goes beyond the familiar salutary tale of remorse, to trace the very formation of conscience, exploring the growth of moral consciousness itself. That, Theodora maintains, has tragic potential. In *Daniel Deronda* James saw this literary achievement playing a major part in a substantial novel. Constantius agrees with Theodora and amplifies her sense of the pain of Gwendolen's particular tragedy of consciousness in a description which could almost be a rough sketch for Isabel's:

The universe forcing itself with slow inexorable pressure into a narrow, complacent, and yet after all extremely sensitive mind and making it ache with the pain of the process . . . the very chance to embrace what the author is so fond of calling 'a larger life' seems refused to her. She is punished for being narrow and she is not allowed a chance to expand<sup>28</sup>

In Grancourt, after Casaubon, there is a husband not only sterile but malignant and cruel. Is Gwendolen more afraid of him or of admitting her mistake, James wonders. Would she be afraid of him because he is a lord? Would an American girl be any more afraid of him for the same reason – or just amused? Finally, a passing comment by Constantius may be one of the most interesting in this process of tracing James's long-term train of thought. Speaking as James himself once did, ten years before, about George Eliot's 'delightfully, almost touchingly feminine' way of indulging herself – here over the personality of Deronda himself – he cites other examples in George Eliot's work including the marriage of Dorothea and Will Ladislaw and observes: 'if Dorothea had married anyone after her misadventure with Casaubon, she would have married a trooper'.<sup>29</sup> If it is not fanciful to trace the origin of this odd remark, it could be a reference to Bathsheba Everdene and Sergeant Troy in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, which James had reviewed in New York the year before. He had thought the novel was at best second-rate George Eliot and he objected to the presentation of the heroine in ways which emerge as familiar:

But we cannot say that we either like or understand Bathsheba. She is a young lady of the inconsequential, wilful, mettlesome type which has lately become so much the fashion for heroines, and of which Mr. Charles Reade is in a manner the inventor – the type that aims at giving one a very intimate sense of a young lady's womanishness. But Mr. Hardy's embodiment of it seems to lack reality; he puts her through the Charles Reade paces, but she remains alternately vague and coarse, and seems always artificial.<sup>30</sup>

Here, rightly or wrongly, relegating Hardy to the ranks of the practitioners of 'a meaner sort of art', James identifies again an approach to writing about women he finds intolerable. In her glancing reference to the trooper marriage, the cynical and disapproving Pulcheria gestures towards this other kind of heroine, closer to fantasy than reality or tragedy. But James is on his guard against Charles Readeism and 'the titillation the masculine sense of difference'. He will try instead, as his other character, Theodora puts it 'to unlock with as firm a hand as George Eliot some of the greater chambers of the human character'.<sup>31</sup>

*Daniel Deronda* and his reflections on it clearly remained very powerfully with Henry James after he had written his review and received Howells's approval. Three months after the letter acknowledging that approval and containing his reference to 'an *Americana*', he wrote to Howells again and it was clear that something much bigger and, to his sense, more significant was growing in his mind. Indeed, the subject in mind had meanwhile subtly changed its character and emphasis. Now: 'It is the portrait of the character and recital of the adventures of a woman – a great swell, psychologically; a *grande nature* – accompanied with many "developments"'.<sup>32</sup> The language of this revelation is obviously very interesting in itself but doubly so in the light of the language of the 'Conversation', in which James had celebrated George Eliot's achievement the year before. Constantius, who praises Gwendolen as a 'masterpiece', admires her as 'known, felt and presented psychologically, altogether in the grand manner'. He also exclaims, 'see how the girl is known, inside and out, how thoroughly she is felt and understood, it holds such a wealth of psychological detail, it is more than masterly'.<sup>33</sup> So much comes together here; if James deprecated Hardy's *Bathsheba* because he had failed to 'understand' her and found her lacking 'reality' and 'artificial', the strength of Eliot's creation is that she is 'known', 'felt' and 'understood' 'inside and out'. Her presentation 'psychologically' is in 'the grand manner' – befitting a *grande nature* – through 'a *wealth* of psychological detail'. The conception of this book then is to supersede the simple transatlantic scenario of an *Americana*; indeed of the simple American Girl herself. It is to be, essentially, centrally, 'the portrait of a woman' and her large and interesting inner life. Under George Eliot's hand, as an invaluable example, such a woman, though only part of a novel, was 'a masterpiece' and her rendering earned Eliot the ultimate – and as it turned out the final – accolade, 'more than masterly'.

The gestation of *The Portrait of a Lady* took another three years, during which James finally found that his most congenial habitat was London. Here and in England as he explored it, he found the kind of complex social environment of which he had had such excited intimations as a boy when his parents read *Adam Bede*. He visited the Lewes household several times; for literary bachelors were among the most common and welcome guests in that socially anomalous ménage. He also wrote, with some diffidence, his short literary biography of Hawthorne for John Morley's *English Men of Letters* series, published in 1879. James's diffidence is not hard to understand. At this moment, when he had decided to commit himself to a working life outside his homeland, he

was confronted with a request to consider the life and work of his own most admired literary compatriot. Indeed, in the event, much as he admired Hawthorne's work, it was his ability to do it and to do it uniquely well from purely American materials that won his highest praise. Putting himself in Hawthorne's place, he considered what he saw as his peculiar difficulties.

If one were to enter as closely as possible into Hawthorne's situation one must endeavour to reproduce his circumstances. We are struck by the number of elements that were absent from them and the coldness, the thinness, the blankness . . . If Hawthorne had been a young Englishman, or a Frenchman of the same degree of genius . . . his sense of the life of his fellow-mortals would have been almost infinitely more various.<sup>34</sup>

He pondered these problems for several pages and concluded with the notorious – and ultimately tongue-in-cheek – list of omissions from the scene available to the young American writer. Yet while this reading of Hawthorne's achievement was arguably an act of covert, or unconscious, self-defence, James was publishing and delighting a growing audience with a whole series of stories about Americans and their transatlantic adventures, especially those of young American women, including the one who finally brought him unequivocal fame – and some sharp disapproval – *Daisy Miller* (1878–79). But in the late summer of 1880, a few months before George Eliot's death in December, James began *The Portrait of a Lady*, that first 'masterpiece' in which an American girl develops suddenly and irrevocably into something deeper and more interesting; what he was to call in the Preface, the 'Subject'. Well beyond the *Americana*, James showed that he had learned to place a woman, in her own right, in the centre of his stage, and through her begin to dramatise the growth and transformation of consciousness itself.

Twenty-seven years later, reviewing his life's work in the prefaces to the New York Edition, he calls *The Portrait of a Lady* a 'monument' built, rather surprisingly, upon a 'single small cornerstone, the conception of a certain young woman affronting her destiny'.<sup>35</sup> He goes on to ask himself, somewhat disingenuously, 'By what process of logical accretion was this slight "personality", the mere slim shade of an intelligent but presumptuous girl, to find itself endowed with the high attributes of a Subject?'<sup>36</sup> and he turns at once, for reassurance and justification, to George Eliot. He cites her heroines and quotes her own answer to an identical question posed by her in *Daniel Deronda*: 'George Eliot has admirably noted it – "In these frail vessels is borne onward through the

ages the treasure of human affection.”<sup>37</sup> He is, in fact, deeply interested in the provenance of this young woman and with reason. She had been vivid and familiar to him for ‘a long time’ and to account for her would be, he claims, no less than ‘so subtle, if not so monstrous, a thing as to write the history of the growth of one’s imagination.’<sup>38</sup> The Prefaces are full of such tantalising revelations and mystifications, but for once it is tempting to take James at his word and follow up this invitation to study the growth of his imagination. For the figure he describes is clearly fundamental to his art and the recourse to George Eliot and her heroines is a generous clue. In revisiting old haunts of the imagination he recognised her defining presence and the way in which her understanding had enriched and extended his own. When he summed up what he felt the writing of *The Portrait of a Lady* had taught him, he seems to sum up what he had learned from George Eliot as he thought aloud in review after review:

the frail vessel, charged with George Eliot’s ‘treasure’, and thereby of such importance to those who curiously approach it, has likewise possibilities of importance to itself, possibilities which permit of treatment and in fact peculiarly require it from the moment they are considered at all . . . ‘Place the centre of the subject in the young woman’s own consciousness’ I said to myself, ‘and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish.’<sup>39</sup>

That richly productive ‘difficulty’ was to occupy him for the rest of his creative life.

But what of George Eliot, the ‘delightfully feminine’ writer of *Felix Holt* in 1866, incapable of ‘those great synthetic guesses with which a real master attacks the truth’; then the ‘masterly’ author of *Daniel Deronda*, her last novel, in 1876. James did not write of her again until 1885, in response to the biography written by John Cross, to whom she had been briefly married in the months before her death. He does not question in his article, which is not simply an effusion, the magnificent stature of her literary achievement. The effect of Cross’s book, furthermore, containing letters and journal entries, is that she strikes him as ‘one of the noblest and most beautiful minds of our time . . . living, in the intelligence, a freer, larger life than probably had ever been the portion of any woman’. And here, at last, he reconsiders and integrates his sense of her achievement as a woman, an Englishwoman, and an artist. She put paid forever, he maintains, to any essentialist assumption of *inherent* limitation in women. She could not, practically, go swashbuckling and produce the works of

Dumas, he points out, and G.H. Lewes may even have cramped her style while providing her with invaluable protection; but James's conclusion reveres her as his idea of a model artist and a 'master':

There is much talk today about things being 'open to women'; but George Eliot showed that there is nothing that is closed . . . What is remarkable, extraordinary, – and the process remains inscrutable, mysterious – is that this quiet, sedentary, serious, invalidical English lady, without animal spirits, without adventures or sensations, should have made us believe that nothing in the world was alien to her; should have produced such rich, deep, masterly pictures of the multiform life of man.<sup>40</sup>

#### Notes

- 1 F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972, p. 24.
- 2 Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 104.
- 3 *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1885, reprinted in *Partial Portraits*, 1888. Reprinted in Henry James, *Literary Criticism; Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, New York, The Library of America, 1984, p. 1010. All references to James's essays on George Eliot will be taken from this edition.
- 4 George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon Haight, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1954–78, Vol. 1, p. 270, 14 July 1848, to Sarah Hennell (ms. Harvard).
- 5 George Eliot, 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft', in the *Leader*, 13 October 1855, reprinted in *George Eliot, Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, eds A.S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren, London, Penguin, 1990, p. 332.
- 6 See Henry James, *William Wetmore Story and his Friends*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1903, pp. 121–31.
- 7 Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 380.
- 8 Henry James, *Autobiography*, ed. F.W. Dupee, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 250.
- 9 Henry James, *The Notebooks of Henry James*, eds F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981, pp. 319–20.
- 10 James, *Notebooks*, p. 320.
- 11 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 907.
- 12 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 911.
- 13 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 908.
- 14 James, *Literary Criticism*, pp. 930–1.
- 15 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 922.
- 16 James, *Literary Criticism*, pp. 933–4.
- 17 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 948.
- 18 This quotation and preceding paragraph: James, *Literary Criticism*, pp. 949–50.
- 19 Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 283.

- 20 26 April 1869, see Henry James, *Letters*, ed. Leon Edel, London, Macmillan, 1974–84, Vol. 1, pp. 116–17.
- 21 James, *Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 324.
- 22 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 965.
- 23 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 959.
- 24 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 960.
- 25 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 962.
- 26 James, *Letters*, Vol. 2, pp. 70–2.
- 27 James, *Literary Criticism*, pp. 989–90.
- 28 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 990.
- 29 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 985.
- 30 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 1048.
- 31 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 983.
- 32 James, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 97.
- 33 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 979.
- 34 James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 351.
- 35 Henry James, *The Art of the Novel*, ed. R.P. Blackmur, New York, Scribner's, 1962, p. 48.
- 36 James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 48.
- 37 James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 49.
- 38 James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 47.
- 39 James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 51.
- 40 All quotations in this paragraph from James, *Literary Criticism*, p. 1010.

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## 'If I Were a Man': Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sarah Grand and the sexual education of girls

*Janet Beer and Ann Heilmann*

'I wish and I wish I were a man,' Christina Rossetti wrote wistfully in 1854, adding that the most felicitous condition for women was perhaps that which allowed the cessation of existence altogether: 'Or, better than any being, were not:/Were nothing at all in all the world'. To Rossetti, writing at a time of public and private disenfranchisement, woman appeared but a 'doubly blank' slate, at best to be inscribed with the desire for masculine agency, yet doomed to long for self-erasure and death as the only available gateways to freedom.<sup>1</sup> Half a century and a successful women's movement later, woman's accession to masculine power was no longer the stuff of fantasies or delayed until the afterlife. For Charlotte Perkins Gilman, on the other side of the Atlantic, writing the fantasy with homiletic edges, 'If I Were a Man', in 1914, her 'If' rather than 'I wish' illustrates a real development made simply through the expression of the educative mission she would undertake as well as the power she would feel. To gain access to power, to be able to act, to be effective in achieving change rather than awaiting her womanly destiny is Gilman's constantly iterated desire and nowhere is this more evident than in the protestations she makes on behalf of women's rights to full and active humanity:

So in our social world today, men and women who are familiar with liquefied air and Roentgen rays, who have accepted electric transit and look forward with complacency to air ships, people who are as liberal and progressive in mechanical lines as need be hoped, remain sodden and buried in their pre-historic sentiment as to the domestic relations. The world of science and invention may change; industry, commerce and manufacturing may change; but women and the home are supposed to remain as they are, forever.<sup>2</sup>

Gilman was not working in a vacuum. In 1893 in Great Britain the writer Sarah Grand had argued that human advancement was dependent



upon 'the attributes of both minds, masculine and feminine, perfectly united in one person of either sex'. In evidence everywhere in nature, this 'union . . . of the male and female principles' was, she stressed, the very foundation stone of good government.<sup>3</sup> Gilman defined ethical law and civic virtue as gender-neutral human concepts which had become corrupted as a result of the patriarchal imposition of the moral double standard; as she says in her 1911 book *The Man-Made World, or, Our Androcentric Culture*: 'Ethical laws are laws . . . because [they] promot[e] human welfare – not because men happen to prize [them] in women and ignore [them] themselves.'<sup>4</sup> Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, feminist sexual purity movements on both sides of the Atlantic had invested femininity with an evangelical drive for social reform; from the mid-century onwards, the belief that national and 'racial' regeneration was women's special mission served to bolster the political claim to citizenship and the notion that women should spearhead the moral management of society.<sup>5</sup> Gilman and Grand positioned themselves within this feminist tradition when they argued, separately, that existing conditions in a male-dominated society sanctioned the sacrifice of women and children to men's pursuit of self-gratification, and that, as a result, women were in duty bound to assert their authority by taking charge of the moral education of the nation.<sup>5</sup> Both sexes needed, as far as they were concerned, to foster and promote an active sense of responsibility towards the body social. Unlike more radical turn-of-the-century feminists like the British Mona Caird and South African Olive Schreiner, Grand and Gilman were not prepared to advocate the dismantling of marriage altogether, but they certainly felt that the 'true' purpose of the family had been distorted. As Gilman put it in *The Man-Made World*: 'What man has done to the family, speaking broadly, is to change it from an institution for the best service of the child to one modified to his own service, the vehicle of his comfort, power and pride' (*MMW*, p. 27). This is why the role of the mother as educator was all-important: 'The nursery', Grand observed, was 'the proper place to teach the equality of the sexes' and particularly well suited to instil in girls and boys a strong sense of morality and social responsibility.<sup>6</sup> Since for Gilman and Grand, as for many of their feminist contemporaries, the very survival of humanity was at stake, radical measures could be justified in the effort to regenerate the 'race'.

It is perhaps the prominent role of race in Gilman's work that distinguishes it from the traditions of late eighteenth- and mid-nineteenth-century feminist activism. Her views were very much in tune with the arguments put forward by the physician Prince Morrow, active as a

practitioner and reformer in New York during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. His book, *Social Diseases and Marriage* (1904), alerted both medical practitioners and the wider public to the serious dangers to which women and children were exposed as victims of the hidden infections of syphilis and gonorrhoea. Morrow had also become alarmed at the different birth rates between the established American and the immigrant population and saw the effects of venereal disease amongst Americans as one of the contributory factors to the decrease in the birth rate. The rhetoric and tenets of the eugenics movement, held in common by Morrow and Gilman, declared that 'The function of eugenics is to produce a race healthy, well-formed and vigorous by keeping the springs of heredity pure and undefiled, and improving the inborn qualities of the offspring',<sup>7</sup> and a number of American states put 'eugenic marriage laws' in place, which required a physical examination of the male partner before a marriage could take place.<sup>8</sup> Morrow established the American Society for Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis in 1905, and at a meeting of the society held in 1910 Charlotte Perkins Gilman told her audience that 'With motherhood we should have maturity and that knowledge which is power and protection',<sup>9</sup> her advocacy of civic maternalism chiming absolutely with that of Sarah Grand. Both women saw no contradiction in espousing this maternalism alongside a more controversial state-controlled system of eugenic sexual selection, exhaustively promulgated by Gilman in essays and lectures and in Utopian fictions such as the 1913 story 'Bee Wise' and, programmatically, by Grand in short story titles like 'Eugenia' (1894).

Whilst the work of both women was widely circulated in both Europe and America there seems to be no cross-reference between them and they appear never to have met. Although each went on widely publicised lecture tours in the other's country, there is no indication that they even knew of each other's existence. During her extended tour of Britain in 1896 and again in 1899 Gilman met many British feminists, among them the New Woman writer Mona Caird, who knew Grand but disapproved of some aspects of her work.<sup>10</sup> Visiting America in 1901, Grand made friends with Mark Twain among others, but there is no mention of any meeting with Gilman.<sup>11</sup> Had the two women met it is not unlikely that their strong personalities would have clashed. In the absence of any real-life interchange, their writings, as well as their lives, present a prime example of the interconnections between turn-of-the-century American and British social purity feminisms. It is this congruity of ideas and visions which we will explore in this essay.

Both writers were prominent in their respective countries as among the

most vocal and outspoken critics of the moral and medical establishment mores of their time. They employed the medium of popular fiction and the New Journalism in a period which saw the consolidation of mass market culture. Both wrote from experience, having left their husbands for full-time writing and lecturing careers, and both exorcised their clash with marital and medical structures of authority in powerful semi-autobiographical narratives which mobilised mothering and house-keeping metaphors in order to reverse the prevalent gender hierarchies. One crucial key to the work of these writers is the sexual purity didacticism which infuses every aspect of their endeavours: art, for them, served a political purpose, and their writing was designed to make up for the (sex) education that women were denied by society and the state.

Gilman and Grand were, throughout their writing lives, exercised by the social and economic costs of the enforced ignorance of women and girls in matters of sexual hygiene. The association between the ill-health of the individual and the nation were, they contended, intimately connected with the paucity of educational opportunities for girls. Even where formal education did exist, moral and social imperatives impeded the real development of the woman's intellect and her capacity to make informed choices. Grand and Gilman made central to their sociological writings and their fiction the terrible social consequences of the maintenance of girls in a state of ignorance. Throughout their work they invoke what was becoming a staple of feminist social theory, that the health of their respective nations was dependent upon the health of the female body. By extension, the abuse of that body is made symptomatic of the degenerate value systems of their societies. Through reference to questions of women's dress, to male and female bodily hygiene, to the conduct of the medical establishment and the whole culturally invidious effects of the low esteem in which mothering is held, both writers charge their polemic with warnings of the gravest of social sickness, the sexually transmitted disease. The hidden danger of venereal disease – a secret kept from half the population by the other half – is the largest threat to the youthful intellectual and physical promise they can envisage. It is through manifestations of the disease that they locate their most telling criticism of the social and moral order. By drawing on this highly significant *fin-de-siècle* trope, used by many other writers, feminists and social reformers of the time, including Zola and Ibsen, they placed themselves in direct opposition to metaphors of degeneracy, ennui and illness that characterised writers like Wilde, Huysmans, Symons and others.<sup>12</sup> They, therefore, distanced themselves from the label of 'decadence' applied indiscriminately to both groups of

writers by conservative critics.<sup>13</sup> We will here examine venereal disease as one of the central narrative drivers as well as plot device in works by Grand and Gilman, both of whose chief concern was to achieve social reform rather than high art.

‘The future of the race has come to be a question of morality and a question of health’, Grand proclaimed in *Ideala* (1888),<sup>14</sup> the first part of a trilogy of novels which established her international reputation as the foremost representative, in Britain, of the “‘revolting woman” school of fiction.’<sup>15</sup> *Ideala* leaves her unfaithful, emotionally and physically abusive husband in order to dedicate herself to feminist social work in the form of dress reform and the rehabilitation of prostitutes: an odd set of objectives at first glance. Indeed, Grand’s reviewers invariably took the author to task for the ‘bathos’ of this incongruous conjunction of dressing and slumming matters.<sup>16</sup> However, *Ideala*’s battle against tight-lacing is much more than a trivial fad, for, as the text suggests, the physical confinement of women in unnatural and cramping clothes is only too apt a reflection of their cultural-conceptual immurement in injurious roles where they are forced to represent the extremes of Angel or Whore, thereby keeping in place the oppressive structures of the institutions of marriage and prostitution. *Ideala*’s dual line of attack challenges the very foundations of the body politic by reclaiming the body for the woman herself. Such a reclamation is also Gilman’s purpose in her 1915 Utopian novel, *Herland*, where the hair and clothing of the women is carefully constructed as androgynous, as practical and not sexually provocative.<sup>17</sup> Public and private forms of oppression – and liberation – are closely aligned in *Ideala* and are always enacted on women’s bodies: it is her encounter with a dying prostitute who turns out to be her husband’s discarded mistress that sets into motion the process which sees *Ideala* move from marital separation to feminist separatism. The ‘public’ woman’s diseased body with its unspeakable affliction scarcely concealed behind telling references to ‘scarlet’ fever, mirrors the ‘private’ malady of the wife, whose mind has been indelibly scarred by close contact with a degraded and degrading partner: ‘you make us breathe corruption’, *Ideala* exclaims, ‘and wonder that we lose our health’ (*ID*, 20).

Charlotte Perkins Gilman also portrays women as helpless victims of venereal disease, caught in the fiction maintained by the sexual double standard. The conspiracy of silence that keeps the origin of the disease from those most vulnerable, women and children, is given straightforward expression in her 1916 tale, ‘The Vintage’:

She did not know what was the matter with her, or with her children. She never had known that there was such a danger before 'a decent woman,' though aware of some dark horror connected with 'sin,' impossible even to mention. Her old family physician told her nothing – that was not his place. Her minister told her that her affliction was 'the will of God.' It is astonishing what a low opinion of God some people hold.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, in her short story of 1894, 'Boommellen,' Grand holds the church and 'the unquestioning obedience' of spineless women jointly responsible for lending themselves to the 'manufacture of [ever] more reprobates.'<sup>19</sup> Imprisoned in ignorance by the twin forces of medicine and religion the women in Gilman's and Grand's short stories soon die but, as in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, the founding text of *fin-de-siècle* sexual purity fictions, the infection endures in their children. As the opening lines of Gilman's tale stipulate: 'This is not a short story. It stretches out for generations' (*TYW&SS*, p. 104). What preoccupies the writer is the generational dimension of the tale: there is no end to this story except in the radical realignment of what constitutes the public good, a move away from the secretive practices of the medical and religious establishment to a new configuration of real public interest.

There is no subsequent life in the public sphere for Leslie Montroy in 'The Vintage' but Gilman does give an active and reforming role to many of her heroines, especially those who are re-inventing themselves in the public, professional domain after years as wife and/or mother. One such woman is Ellen Burrell in the 1914 story 'His Mother,' who becomes a 'special agent . . . with a police badge inside her coat' (*TYW&SS*, p. 77) in order to entrap her own son, a white slaver. In so doing she is said to be, in one of Gilman's most repellently doctrinaire stories, making 'up for her own share in his evil' (*TYW&SS*, p. 80), an evil unequivocally attributed to the fact of his having 'a Dago' (*TYW&SS*, p. 73) for a father. Another of her late-start career women, Jane Bellair in the novel *The Crucifix*, serialised in *The Forerunner* in 1910, becomes a doctor after having been infected with venereal disease by her husband. Her own chance at motherhood thus blighted she makes the enlightenment of girls as to the dangers of infection her special duty.

Like Gilman's active heroines, Grand's Ideala transforms her individual tragedy into collective gain by moving into feminist social reform. The closing chapters of the book suggest that the conjunction of personal and political agency sanctifies women; Ideala is, in fact, reconfigured as the female saviour whose coming Florence Nightingale had invoked in the 1850s.<sup>20</sup> A Christ-like figure of redemption, Ideala passes through

all the stages which presage sainthood: temptation, renunciation and spiritual purification. Ending with a prophecy of things to come – the close embrace of public and private women – the final vignette of the book offers us a vision of Ideala's feminist manifesto:

What I want to do is to make women discontented . . . Women have never yet united to use their influence steadily and all together against that of which they disapprove. They work too much for themselves, each trying to make their own life happier. They have yet to learn to take a wider view of things, and to be shown that the only way to gain their end is by working for everybody else, with intent to make the whole world better, which means happier . . . It is to help in the direction of that force that I am going to devote my life. (*ID*, p. 188)

Ideala's renunciation of a 'personal' life in favour of her public mission is identified with both political and quasi-religious agency; early on in the text the narrator sets the scene by referring to Ideala's divine calling (*ID*, p. 39), and in the second and most notorious part of the trilogy, *The Heavenly Twins*, Ideala explicitly associates feminist activism with a new and better religion which has emerged to replace the *ancien régime* of the established churches. The 'true spirit of God', she argues, is not to be found in the 'terrible clergy', whose 'dreadful cant of obedience' has harmed women and the 'race', but:

It is in us *women*. We have preserved it, and handed it down from one generation to another of our own sex unsullied; and very soon we shall be called upon to prove the possession of it, for . . . already I – that is to say Woman – am a power in the land, while you – that is to say Priest – retain ever less and less even of the semblance of power.' (*HT*, pp. 266–7, emphasis in original)

That this new religion is equated with social purity feminism is not a new departure; Grand drew on the long-established tradition of the evangelical moral-reform movement, modelling her 'ideal' heroine on her own avowed role model, Josephine Butler, whose courage and supreme determination in waging a twenty-year war against the Contagious Diseases Acts had earned her the reputation of a saint in social-reform circles.<sup>21</sup> The conjunction of evangelical, medical and eugenic discourses reflects the specific concerns of her time and also anticipates the language of the Edwardian suffragettes. Grand's *fin-de-siècle* brand of sexual purity feminism can be seen to share a rhetoric with Gilman and, indeed, other turn-of-the-century feminists such as Emma Frances Brooke, Frances Swiney and Ellen Key.<sup>22</sup>

As Angelique Richardson has noted, Grand's novels were self-consciously "medicinal": antidotes to the traditional male, dysgenic

romance, and guidebooks to responsible sexual selection and marriage, steeped in medical aims and allusions.<sup>23</sup> Grand herself drew attention to the remedial function of her anarchical twins, whom she said she had conceived as an 'allopathic pill' that her readers would 'mistak[e] for a bonbon and swallo[w] without a suspicion of its medicinal properties. Once swallowed, it would act'.<sup>24</sup> And act it certainly did, although its effect, the journalist W.T. Stead wrote, was rather that of a 'bomb of dynamite' than a bonbon.<sup>25</sup> *The Heavenly Twins* became the sensation number one on the international book markets of the 1890s,<sup>26</sup> opening up the hitherto unmentionable subject of venereal disease to general discussion over tea-tables and bringing the 'delicately nurtured women' who had been carefully kept from all knowledge of it to the 'boiling point of open rebellion'.<sup>27</sup> Many years later, Grand recorded with great satisfaction the message she received from a women's committee during World War One: 'Tell Sarah Grand . . . that we, representative women of all classes, have agreed unanimously that she was right in all that she said and wise in all that she advocated'.<sup>28</sup> At the time of Grand's death, Rebecca West's sister, Letitia Fairfield, celebrated her as 'the real pioneer of public enlightenment on venereal disease', emphasising that the present generation of women could 'only guess dimly how much courage this took fifty years ago'.<sup>29</sup> Ironically, though, Grand's older contemporary, Josephine Butler, whose example had fired her into action in the first place, disapproved of her book, which she thought lacked religious feeling.<sup>30</sup>

Convinced that venereal disease was the 'cornerstone of the whole foundation of patriarchy',<sup>31</sup> Grand advocated the implementation of a state-controlled system of hygienic monitoring. In order to safeguard the health of the nation, she advocated compulsory marriage training with licences issued only on production of satisfactory exam results (*ID*, 150). Men who failed to come up to scratch were to be banned from marriage for life, while those who spread the disease would be liable to criminal prosecution. This was what the women's movement should press for, she urged in interviews, arguing that the female vote and the introduction of a 'House of Ladies' were bound to bring about a 'purif[ication of] the political atmosphere'.<sup>32</sup>

These ideas are also reflected in Gilman's work, in particular her utopia *Moving the Mountain*, serialised in *The Forerunner* in 1911. Not only is society here organised on uncompromisingly eugenic principles, but men who have venereal disease are forced, by law, 'to die bachelors' whilst the women they would have married 'wise, conscientious, strong women . . . poured all their tremendous force into social service'.<sup>33</sup> A concomitant

effect of the outlawing of the infected male, reversing the gender politics of the Contagious Diseases Acts, is the disappearance of prostitution.<sup>34</sup> In envisaging a society in which doctors are required to register syphilitic men (not women) with the Department of Eugenics and where the transmission of venereal disease is a criminal offence, Gilman foregrounds the fact that 'It was on the line of health [women legislators] made their stand, not on "morality" alone' (*MtM*, p. 139). It is education which has effected social change here: 'That new religious movement stirred the socio-ethical sense to sudden power; it coincided with the women's political movement, urging measures for social improvement; its enormous spread, both by preaching and literature, lit up the whole community with new facts, ideas and feelings' (*MtM*, p. 138). Alongside this revision of social attitudes to sexual health Gilman, characteristically, embeds a system of ethnic cleansing in her Utopian vision; not ethnic cleansing as we have, of late, seen used as a euphemism for genocide, but the literal cleansing of the immigrant to America, with Ellis Island replaced by a series of 'Gates', through which, according to nationality, would-be Americans must pass in order to receive a 'welcome in their own language – and instruction in ours . . . physical examination – the most searching and thorough – microscopic – chemical' (*MtM*, p. 80).<sup>35</sup>

Gilman explored the futuristic dimension of the eugenic moral cleansing that was to follow in the wake of female enfranchisement and the ideological embrace of comprehensive measures to ensure public health, which did, in spite of its drastic inversion of the status quo, attract some support from men. For instance, the Manchester Men's League for Women's Suffrage recommended that Gilman's works were suitable reading for the members of its Girls' Club.<sup>36</sup> Grand, in contrast, concentrated on spelling out the horrors concealed beneath the patriarchal myths of romantic love, maidenly innocence and womanly submission. As she protested in her journalistic as well as her narrative work, to deny girls access to vital sexual knowledge amounted to criminal negligence, for, far from protecting girls from corrupting influences, it made them vulnerable to abuse by depriving them of the insight required to make informed decisions. This is illustrated in graphic detail in *The Heavenly Twins*, where Edith Beale, a bishop's daughter who aspires to nothing higher than marriage, motherhood and a life spent in domestic pursuits in the shadow of superior masculinity, goes mad as a result of galloping syphilis contracted from her profligate husband and dies after giving birth to a syphilis-ridden baby. As is suggested in the text, the communication of full knowledge of the facts of life is essential if the health and



happiness of girls is to be safeguarded; such knowledge may even prove to be life-saving. In the event, Edith's carefully nurtured and self-consciously maintained 'innocence' destroys her life and that of her child. For although her parents and particularly her father should have known better than to countenance their daughter's marriage to a man who admits to youthful 'errors' (*HT*, p. 235), Edith herself is not entirely blameless in her positive refusal to contemplate disagreeable truths: 'She did not want to think. When any obtrusive thought presented itself she instantly strove to banish it' (*HT*, p. 168). The beggar woman with the sickly child whom she passes in her coach during the days of her courtship is in fact the abandoned mistress of her prospective husband. Had Edith stopped to think (and talk), she would have discovered the 'truth' about Sir Mosley Menteith in time to be saved from a similar fate. When, a year later, she is prepared to listen to the Other Woman's story, it is too late – the disease knows no class barriers. A similar fate awaits Gilman's heroine in 'The Vintage'. A Southern belle, with an aristocratic string of names, 'Leslie Vauremont Barrington Montroy', she is as ill-educated as the village girls in the 1916 story 'The Unnatural Mother' whose parents actually pride themselves on their daughters' ignorance of 'the Bad Disease'.<sup>37</sup>

Reclaiming the fallen woman as a victim of society's failure to protect its weakest members, Sarah Grand turned the spotlight firmly on male offenders of the purity code, impressing on her female readers that, once fallen, men were nothing but contagious matter which women did well to leave alone: 'one can't touch pitch without being defiled' (*ID*, 48). 'There is no reclaiming a corrupt *constitution*', she warned prospective brides; 'laxity' and 'levity' in the marriage relation would result in the 'final extinction of our modern civilisation'.<sup>38</sup> The threat of 'race' suicide is the central metaphor in 'Boomellen', whose protagonist is the sad end-product of hereditary degeneracy bred on a diet of male debauchery and female self-sacrifice.<sup>39</sup> Boomellen drowns in a vain attempt to save a shipwrecked crew, the wreckage forming a grim reminder of society's impending collapse in the wake of women's criminal negligence of their responsibility as 'mother[s] of . . . the dominant race'.<sup>40</sup> The tragedy of women's lives, Grand deplored, was that they had been so much in the habit of 'always ignorantly idealising when they ought to know': '[d]runkenness, dissipation, extravagance and disease, all the misery-making tendencies they ignored when they chose their husbands'.<sup>41</sup> Not so Eugenia, the eponymous heroine of a companion story to 'Boomellen', who presents an exemplary, eugenic response to the problem of social hygiene.

Repulsed by the idea of attaching herself to an ‘amended, patched-up’ society man, tellingly named ‘Brinkham’, she chooses a spotless, morally ‘whole’ yeoman farmer instead named ‘Saxon Wake’.<sup>42</sup> The result of this choice is that she produces the first male child born to the family for centuries and thus removes the curse that lies over her ‘race’. As an allegory on society’s destructive impact on ‘true’ manliness and the possibility of male regeneration with strong female guidance, the baby boy signals the emergence of New Manhood. The story also implies that feminism and especially women’s empowerment is a necessary survival strategy for the ‘race’. In the absence of male heirs, the women of Eugenia’s family attained the position and property rights previously reserved for the men, and this enables Eugenia to marry a man who is her equal in matters of health and ‘hygiene’.

Gilman also advocated eugenic sexual selection as the only course of action in the pursuit of ‘race regeneration’. Setting many of her Utopian tales in the West, specifically California, she could offer her women, as Judith Allen points out, a place where they could hold ‘a better sexual economic bargaining position’ (*CPG:OR*, p. 176). The outnumbering of women by men meant that prostitution was a major problem but alongside that, the demographics of the frontier gave women the opportunity to make a fresh start in a manner not practically possible elsewhere in more established communities. Gilman’s woman-centred Utopian narratives<sup>43</sup> expound principles of community organisation which are not separatist but into which the screening of male applicants for citizenship is built, here in ‘Bee Wise’, a story of 1913: ‘the men were carefully selected. They must prove clean health – for a high grade of motherhood was the continuing ideal of the group’.<sup>44</sup> In *Women and Economics*, published in 1898, Gilman broadens the argument, however, beyond the sexual health of men – and concomitantly, women – in a discussion of women as overly sexualised, diagnosing economic dependence as the cause of women being ‘modified to sex to an excessive degree’,<sup>45</sup> and thus demonstrating the biological implications of social conditions. In Gilman’s fable, ‘Improving on Nature’, published in 1912, both man and woman are hauled before Mother Nature in order to account for their conduct. The woman, she suggests, is guilty because complicit: ‘she was a plump, pink little person; hobbled, stilted, and profusely decorated’ (*YW&SS*, p. 213), whilst the man is guilty of interfering with the natural order, which, in every species except the human, gives physical equality to the woman: “I love my pet,” he said. “I made her like this. By careful selection and education I have made her the kind of woman I like.” (*YW&SS*, p. 216). The

man-made woman, Gilman repeats, in essay and in story, is merely a domestic convenience, not a full member of the human race. As the woman explains to Mother Nature: 'He likes us that way. He keeps us shut up in houses and tied up in clothes, and says it isn't proper for us to do anything to develop strength, and he only marries the weak ones.' (*YW&SS*, p. 214).

Like Gilman, Grand promoted the interrogation of the terms on which marriages and sexual relations were conducted to the extent of endorsing marriage rejection and sexual withdrawal. If a woman found herself unwittingly trapped in an unsuitable marriage with an improper man, she was perfectly justified, in the interest of her health and that of future generations, to seek a separation. Although Grand was strongly opposed to divorce,<sup>46</sup> she vigorously defended women's right to leave husbands who fell short of the required standard, or to refuse to have sex with them. Thus in *The Heavenly Twins* the New Woman Evadne decamps on the day of her wedding after realising that she has married a man with an unwholesome past. Grand leaves the exact nature of Colquhoun's misdemeanours open to speculation, but the hints in the narrative which point at Josephine Butler as Evadne's source of information suggest a past involvement with prostitutes, and possibly venereal disease. Undeterred by her father's fury, Evadne asserts her right to refuse sex to her husband since her marriage vows were 'taken under a grave misapprehension': 'having been kept in ignorance, I consider . . . that every law of morality absolves me from fulfilling my share of the contract' (*HT*, 89).

Grand and Gilman were of course not the only feminists to take pains to impress on women the risks that marriage and motherhood entailed. In 1870, Josephine Butler had stated that among men venereal disease was 'almost universal at one time or another',<sup>47</sup> and some forty years later Christabel Pankhurst came up with a figure of 80 per cent.<sup>48</sup> According to a Royal Commission report of 1916, 10 per cent of men had contracted syphilis; the figure for gonorrhoea was estimated to be considerably higher.<sup>49</sup> Amongst the American troops stationed on the border between Texas and Mexico to repel the incursions of Pancho Villa in 1916, it was estimated that 30 per cent of the men in an army of 10,000 had some form of venereal infection.<sup>50</sup> Even if only one man in ten was, in actual fact, afflicted with some form of venereal disease, this was hardly a promising state of affairs for women contemplating marriage – especially if they had friends and relatives who were directly affected by the disease. This is the situation portrayed in Gilman's novel *The Crux*, and Grand knew '8 of those dreadful Edith cases' personally and had, she said, been urged to

write *The Heavenly Twins* 'by other women, who send me accounts of cases so horrifying and so heartrending' that 'to pretend to ignore [the subject] any longer would be criminal'.<sup>51</sup> The spectre of syphilis in Grand and Gilman, and in feminist fiction of the time more generally, has to be placed in the context of mainstream discourses of Victorian medicine and fiction in both countries. By making men, especially of the upper classes, into sites of contagion, feminists sought to turn the tables on the medical establishment which, in order to legitimise the implementation of legal sanctions against prostitutes, had demonised working-class women.<sup>52</sup> As American social reformer Maude Glasgow wrote in 1910: 'the man who has voluntarily exposed himself to the contagion of a loathsome disease continued even after his infection by the prostitute to have business and social relations as before, with the result that innocent members of society are exposed to a dangerous and contagious disorder to which they have not exposed themselves and from which no effort is made to protect them.'<sup>53</sup> Until the discovery of antibiotics, syphilis was incurable and treatment was at best traumatic.<sup>54</sup> If manifested in its congenital form, the disease was already in its secondary stage and would have started to affect the nervous system: the repercussions on children were therefore particularly grave. Gilman's Leslie Montroy gives birth to one crippled son and then to a series of 'little blasted buds [which] came and went, without even breathing' (*YW&SS*, p. 106), whilst in *The Heavenly Twins* Edith Beale's disabled baby—'a little old man baby . . . with a cold in his head . . . exhausted with suffering' (*HT*, pp. 288–9) could have sprung straight from medical reports of the time, in which syphilitic children figure as 'small, wizened, atrophied, weakly, sickly', monkey-like, quasi-racialised and atavistic creatures.<sup>55</sup>

Like other *fin-de-siècle* feminists Grand and Gilman were outraged at the institutionalised double standard which treated women's health and welfare with cynical indifference whilst male access to prostitutes was effectively safeguarded. Grand's villains are drawn from three bastions of patriarchy in Britain – the House of Lords, the army and the medical profession – groups which could be said to have a vested interest in upholding the sexual *status quo* and in keeping the existing system of prostitution in place. Gilman's American villains are also often professional men: her doctors are complicit or even negligent, her white slavers and carriers of venereal disease are educated, well travelled and charming like the prodigal male in the parable 'Wild Oats and Tame Wheat', published in *The Forerunner* in 1913. Amongst the gifts he brings back to his sweet and virginal bride from his adventures in foreign lands are 'one or two diseases

not easily dismissed' which he then, naturally, 'shared with her' (*YW&SS*, pp. 218–19). It is in their attack on the medical establishment that both authors are most hard-hitting, perhaps because both had bitter home truths to impart. Each had experienced medical misogyny at first hand, Gilman in the various treatments for her severe and debilitating post-natal depression, culminating in the 'rest-cure' she took with Silas Weir Mitchell, which produced, as she says in her autobiography, 'the inevitable result, progressive insanity'.<sup>56</sup> Weir Mitchell seems to have had more success with Grand, who took the cure in 1903.<sup>57</sup> Grand was also the wife of an army surgeon involved in the implementation of the Contagious Diseases Acts; his responsibilities included the monitoring of prostitutes and their referral to Lock Hospitals.<sup>58</sup> The collision between medical and feminist world views and responses to matters of health, hygiene, and hysteria is a defining feature of the work of both women in fiction and non-fiction.

By throwing into relief the pervasive nature of medical and marital violence against women and the way in which familial and religious authorities turned a blind eye to these crimes, Grand and Gilman dramatised the collapse of paternalism, thereby justifying feminist resistance to the law of the father as a matter of the most basic self-defence: 'There is no law . . . either to protect us or avenge us', Angelica tells her sympathetic brother in *The Heavenly Twins*: 'That is because men made the law for themselves, and that is why women are fighting for the right to make laws too' (*HT*, p. 307). The syphilis and medical abuse plots constituted Gilman's and Grand's most powerful weapons in the war against male sexual, marital, religious, legal and medical mistreatment of women.

If in her fiction Grand illustrated the havoc wrought by the failure of patriarchy, in her journalistic writings she discussed and outlined the concrete steps and courses of action that needed to be taken in order to redress the situation. The remedy she offered her readers was eugenic maternalism: women had to take charge of politics as nature had, after all, designed them for leadership by making them mothers. She paints a sad picture of race regression, 'the man of the moment' needing nothing so much as the helping hand of the mothers of the nation: 'It is the woman's place and pride and pleasure to teach the child, and man morally is in his infancy . . . woman holds out a strong hand to the child-man, and insists, but with infinite tenderness and pity, upon helping him up'.<sup>59</sup> Gilman's polemic is uniform between fiction and non-fiction; her language, her rhetorical strategies, her plots are all identical in promotion of her ideas of social and race progress. Like Grand, her narrative imperative or informing

argument is invariably caught up in a nexus of maternal, political and socio-biological necessity; only where women are free to be other than wife and mother can they fully be wife and mother; as she says in *Women and Economics*: 'It is not motherhood that keeps the housewife on her feet from dawn till dark; it is house-service, not child-service' (*W&E*, p. 20).

Both women followed in the footsteps of Josephine Butler, who had mobilised the metaphor of the conscientious housewife in the 1860s in order to justify interference with the Contagious Diseases Acts. Grand suggested that all the New Woman wanted to do was 'set the human household in order':

the first principle of good housekeeping is to have no dark corners, and . . . we go to work with a will to sweep them out. It is for us to set the human household in order, to see to it that all is clean and sweet and comfortable for the men who are fit to help us to make home in it. We are bound to raise the dust while we are at work, but only those who are in it will suffer any inconvenience from it . . . For the rest it will be all benefits.<sup>60</sup>

Whereas, at least on the face of it, Grand went out of her way to uphold domestic values, Gilman, by contrast, used the metaphor of the home as the expression of all that is sick and repressive in society. In her detective novel, *Unpunished*, written in 1929 but which remained unpublished at her death, the domestic tyrant, Wade Vaughn, holds his extended family in thrall both emotionally and financially and keeps them in check with any dirty and devious means he can contrive. He is the literal representation in fiction of Gilman's frequently repeated assertion that the structure of the family has become outdated, that women function within it as 'private servants' and that 'change . . . for the advantage of individual and race' (*W&E*, pp. 210–11) is vital if the 'race' is to progress.

With the demand for full human rights for women and children also comes, however, the promise of a balanced and healthy role for the man in the culture. Both writers stress that women's primary aim was to ensure the upward movement of the 'race'.<sup>61</sup> Far from wishing to bring destructive forces into play in society, the woman's movement reflected, for Grand, 'an evolutionary effort [of the human race] to raise itself a step higher in the scale of development'.<sup>62</sup> The feminist call for equality would be pointless if it were to 'lower the woman'; what was required instead was to 'raise the man'.<sup>63</sup> Girls and women had every right to demand access to an academic training and adequate sexual knowledge, whereas boys and men were in need of a different kind of 'higher education', one that would instill in them a sense of morality and social responsibility.<sup>64</sup>

As Claudia Nelson has noted, sex education was promoted by two distinctly separate camps at the turn of the century, with 'maternalists' differing considerably from 'professionalists' on the issue of exactly what girls and boys should be taught, and by whom. Professionalists emphasised the need for public male instructors, thereby revalidating the idea of separate spheres, which feminists considered the root cause of all evil, by insisting that, while girls should be trained for motherhood, boys needed to channel their sexual energies into the 'proper' expression of masculinity. Maternalists were primarily concerned with policing unchaste men so that their dangerous and abusive sexual practices would cease to afflict the 'body' of the 'race', that is, the women and children. Professionalists were also anxious to repress any desire and above all masturbation and homosexual experimentation, which were likely to impair the development of an 'appropriate' and 'virile' male body politic.<sup>65</sup> Maternalists like Grand and Gilman drew on women's mothering capacities in order to demand that women be given an appropriate education so as to demonstrate that there was nobody better suited to guide children of both sexes towards a moral understanding of their reproductive duties. Voicing sentiments indistinguishable from those expressed by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *Women and Economics*, Grand wrote in 1900:

We insist that the highest, holiest, and noblest position on earth is the position of wife and mother, and we demand that the fact shall be recognised practically as well as theoretically; we demand that the wife and mother shall receive due . . . reverence for her pains, and that those who may hope to become wives and mothers shall have every advantage of education and training . . . to fit them for their sacred duties. This is the primary outcome of the woman movement.<sup>66</sup>

Since the state continued to ignore women's demands, Grand believed that it was up to feminist writers like herself to take charge of the neglected sex education of their readers. It is no accident that she contributed a never-ending series of articles to journals like *Young Woman* and *Woman at Home*, and while the conservative and even reactionary tone of many of her essays is at odds with her more radical fictional work, there was a method to her journalistic mildness. In her letters she frequently refers to her maxim 'reculer pour mieux sauter', a strategy evident in her periodical writings for the 'homely' market, particularly since she usually managed to bury some sort of feminist message between the lines. Despairing of the editorial practices of the mainstream journal editors,

Charlotte Perkins Gilman concentrated her efforts on writing both social theory and fiction for her own journal, *The Forerunner*, published between 1909 and 1916. As has already been emphasised she made no distinction between the rhetoric and topics of her fiction and non-fiction, the same blend of radicalism and reaction is evident in everything she wrote, and during *The Forerunner* years she had no editor to please but herself. The imperative for Gilman was to enlighten her readers; as she says in her 1923 treatise, *His Religion and Hers: A Study of the Faith of Our Fathers and the Work of Our Mothers*: 'For women already educated enough to grasp the facts and their relations, and able to make a conviction work, it should require no more than a book or two, a lecture or two, to start swifter social evolution.'<sup>67</sup> Both women conceived of themselves as great 'teachers and preachers' of their time,<sup>68</sup> both were unequivocal in their determination to impart a feminist sex education to the *fin-de-siècle* reading public of Great Britain and America.

#### Notes

- 1 Christina Rossetti, 'From the Antique' (1854), in *Poems and Prose*, ed. Jan Marsh, London, Everyman, 1994, p. 37, ll. 2–5.
- 2 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 'Economic Basis of the Woman Question', 1898, collected in Aileen S. Kraditor (ed.), *Up from the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism*, Chicago, Quadrangle Books, 1968, pp. 175–6.
- 3 Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins*, London, Heinemann, [1893] 1908, pp. 403, xi. Hereafter *HT*.
- 4 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Man-Made World or, Our Androcentric Culture*, New York, Johnson Reprint Corporation, [1911] 1971, p. 134. Hereafter *MMW*.
- 5 For the evangelical roots of much of nineteenth-century feminism see Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780–1860*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1985, pp. 73–107. For details of social/sexual purity feminism in Britain and the United States see Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885–1914*, London, Penguin, 1995, and Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875–1920*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999.
- 6 Sarah A. Tooley, 'The Woman's Question: An Interview with Madame Sarah Grand', *Humanitarian*, 8 (1896), 166, repr. in Ann Heilmann (ed.), *The Late-Victorian Marriage Question: A Collection of Key New Woman Texts*, Vol. 5, London, Routledge Thoemmes Press, 1998.
- 7 Prince A. Morrow, cited in Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History*



of *Venerable Disease in the United States since 1880*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 19.

- 8 See Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, pp. 14–31 for a discussion of Morrow's work.
- 9 Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, p. 29.
- 10 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Diaries of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Denise D. Knight, Vol. 2, Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1994, pp. 668, 774, 783, 786. For Caird's criticism of Grand's position and her novel *Ideala*, see her article, 'Ideal Marriage', *Westminster Review*, Vol. 130 (1888), p. 620.
- 11 Gillian Kersley, *Darling Madame: Sarah Grand & Devoted Friend*, London, Virago, 1983, p. x.
- 12 For a discussion of degeneration and decadence see Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummel to Beerbohm*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1978; William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880–1940*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994. For Wilde and other 'degenerate'/'effeminate' writers of the *fin de siècle* see Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Movement*, London, Cassell, 1994; Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1995; Sally Ledger, 'The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism', in Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (eds), *Cultural Politics of the Fin de Siècle*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 22–44; and Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997, pp. 94–121.
- 13 See Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, London, Bloomsbury, 1991, pp. 169–87; Lyn Pykett, *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century*, London, Edward Arnold, 1995, pp. 14–53; Linda Dowling, 'The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s', in Lyn Pykett (ed.), *Reading Fin de Siècle Fictions*, London, Longman, 1996, pp. 47–63; and Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism*, Basingstoke, Macmillan/Palgrave, 2000, pp. 46–53. For contemporary criticism's conflation of aesthetes and feminists see Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, [1895] 1968; Janet E. Hogarth, 'Literary Degenerates', *Fortnightly Review*, 57 ns (1895), pp. 586–92, repr. in Heilmann (ed.), *Late-Victorian Marriage Question*, Vol. 5, and Hugh E. Stutfield, 'Tommyrotics', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 157 (1895), pp. 833–45, repr. in Heilmann (ed.), *Late-Victorian Marriage Question*, Vol. 5.
- 14 Sarah Grand, *Ideala: A Study from Life*, London, Richard Bentley, 1889, p. 185. First published privately in 1888. Hereafter *ID*.
- 15 'Sarah Grand: Novelist of the Nineties' [unsigned obituary], *The Times*, 13 May 1943, repr. in Ann Heilmann and Stephanie Forward (eds), *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, Vol. 1, London, Routledge, 2000, p. 559.

- 16 See contemporary reviews of *Ideala* in Heilmann and Forward (eds), *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, pp. 377–94.
- 17 See Bridget Bennett's essay on 'Pockets of Resistance: Some Notes Towards an Exploration of Gender and Genre Boundaries in *Herland*', in Val Gough and Jill Rudd (eds), *A Very Different Story: Studies on the Fiction of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1998, pp. 38–53.
- 18 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, '*The Yellow Wallpaper*' and *Selected Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Denise D. Knight, London, Associated University Presses, 1994, p. 107. Hereafter TYW&SS.
- 19 Sarah Grand, 'Boommellen', *Our Manifold Nature*, London, Heinemann, 1894, repr. in Heilmann and Forward (eds), *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, Vol. 4, p. 160.
- 20 Florence Nightingale, 'Cassandra', in Ray Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain*, London, Virago, 1988, p. 416.
- 21 Passed in the 1860s, these Acts introduced the forcible gynaecological examination of any woman believed to be a prostitute to ensure her freedom from venereal disease. It took two decades for the repeal movement, in which Josephine Butler was a leading figure, to achieve its aim; in 1886 the acts were abolished. See Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980. For the evangelical roots of social purity feminism see Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, pp. 13–27, 63–102, and Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism & Sexual Morality 1885–1914*, London, Penguin, 1995, pp. 95–123, 143–50. For Butler's influence on Grand see "'The Heavenly Twins': Bath Mayoress Tells Their Story – Josephine Butler Centenary', *Bath and Wilts Chronicle and Herald*, 19 June 1928, p. 7, repr. in Heilmann and Forward (eds) *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, Vol. 1, pp. 317–20.
- 22 As William Greenslade notes, eugenicist ideas held considerable attraction for Edwardian feminists not least because they enabled a shift from personal to public discourses of injustice, substantiating demands for political redress. See *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880–1940*, pp. 207–9.
- 23 Angelique Richardson, 'The Eugenization of Love: Darwin, Galton, and New Woman Fictions of Heredity and Eugenics', doctoral thesis, Birkbeck College, University of London, 1999, p. 215.
- 24 Sarah Grand, 'Foreword' to *The Heavenly Twins*, London, Heinemann, 1923, repr. in Heilmann and Forward (eds), *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, Vol. 1, p. 404.
- 25 W.T. Stead, 'The Novel of the Modern Woman', *Review of Reviews*, 10 (1894), p. 68, repr. in Heilmann (ed.), *The Late-Victorian Marriage Question: A Collection of Key New Woman Texts*, Vol. 5.
- 26 For details see Gillian Kersley, *Darling Madame*, pp. 72–3.

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- 28 Grand, 'Foreword' to *The Heavenly Twins*, repr. in Heilmann and Forward (eds), *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, Vol. 1, p. 400.
- 29 Letitia Fairfield, 'Mme Sarah Grand' [letter to the] *Manchester Guardian*, 19 May 1943, p. 4, repr. in Heilmann and Forward (eds), *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, Vol. 1, p. 568.
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- 44 Carol Farley Kessler (ed.), *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress Toward Utopia*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1995, p. 217.
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- 51 Sarah Grand to William Blackwood, 23 September 1891, repr. in Heilmann and Forward (eds), *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, Vol. 2, p. 24. See also Grand's 'Foreword' to the 1923 edition of *The Heavenly Twins*, Vol. 1, pp. 403–4.
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- 56 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, [1935] 1990, p. 119.
- 57 Stephanie Forward, 'Introduction' to *Selected Letters*, Vol. 2 of Heilmann and Forward (eds), *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, p. 7.
- 58 Kersley, *Darling Madame*, p. 47.
- 59 Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', *North American Review*, 158 (1894), p. 273, in Heilmann (ed.), *Late-Victorian Marriage Question*, Vol. 2.
- 60 Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', p. 276. Compare with Josephine Butler's 'Introduction' to *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays*, London, Macmillan, 1869, p. xvii: 'any theory of life . . . which

... deals with [prostitution] as a fact ... which must be as much as possible pushed into a corner ... resembles ... an indolent housewife who is aware of a certain chamber in her house which is full of the accumulated dirt of years, but which she fears to look into, hopeless of any possible cleansing, and the door of which she keeps carefully closed, content so long as the rest of the dwelling is not fatally infected by the presence of the evil.

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## ‘Embattled tendencies’: Wharton, Woolf and the nature of Modernism

*Katherine Joslin*

Edith Wharton eyed Bloomsbury as an intellectually remote and morally murky world, admiring only one of its members, Lytton Strachey. After Mary Berenson urged her to read Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* in 1928, Wharton responded viscerally to the advertising photographs of Woolf, claiming the images made her ‘quite ill’. The novel’s portrait of Vita Sackville-West, who had had an affair with Wharton’s friend Geoffrey Scott just prior to her liaison with Woolf, pressed a nerve: ‘I can’t believe that where there is exhibitionism of that order there can be any real creative gift’. Woolf’s ‘creative gift’, however, could not be dismissed easily; Wharton grudgingly gave with one hand and took with the other. ‘Virginia had a very imaginative mind, perhaps a very poetic mind’, Wharton conceded in a conversation with Lady Aberconway, ‘but was she fundamentally endowed with true curiosity?’<sup>1</sup> The sentence turns midway, curling into a question that exposes her sense of Woolf as a rival.

Woolf, too, could give and take. After reading Wharton’s autobiography, *A Backward Glance*, in 1934, she wrote to Ethel Smyth, praising Wharton’s prose style: ‘I like the way she places colour in her sentences’; but on the subject of intellect, Woolf pulled back: ‘There’s the shell of a distinguished mind’.<sup>2</sup> Wharton was by this time, after all, a woman in her seventies, and the word ‘shell’ may have referred to the frailty of age. However, the letter descends, as Wharton’s conversation had, into suspicion: ‘I vaguely surmise that there’s something you hated and loathed in her. Is there?’ Her search for the ‘hated and loathed’ in Wharton signals Woolf’s own anxiety over a rival’s genius.

And we might simply leave the transatlantic quarrel there: Edith Wharton and Virginia Woolf, perhaps the two most articulate and influential literary women of the modern period, gossiping with friends.



The two women apparently never met, never talked directly across the Atlantic or, indeed, across the English Channel. We might leave them if not for the insistent sound of their voices, wrangling in letters, diaries, essays, even in novels, disrupting our view of them as novelists and the literary world they both inhabited. Their indirect dialogue about the nature of the novel typifies the often loud and sometimes angry cacophony of literary opinion that clashed early in the twentieth century and has reverberated ever since.

'Down with Henry James! Down with Edith Wharton!' was the rallying cry of Left-Bank literary radicals in the early years of the twentieth century, according to Kay Boyle, herself a younger member of the group of American expatriate writers living in Paris. In the 1980s Boyle remarked that her contemporaries were in 'revolt against all literary pretentiousness, against weary, dreary rhetoric, against all the outworn literary and academic conventions'.<sup>3</sup> The term Modernism, as we have come to understand it, surfaced in Harry Levin's 1960 essay, 'What Was Modernism?' Since that time, scholars have sought ways of grouping early twentieth-century writers, pulling the literary fabric into two distinct pieces. In that configuration, Wharton and Woolf can be seen as proponents of two opposing impulses, one 'traditional' and the other Modernist. Most of the studies of Modernism written during the 1960s, however, feature male experimenters, ignoring female contributions on either side of the divide.

Feminist scholars in the 1980s and 1990s grappled with the term Modernism, seeking ways of expanding our understanding of how women writers may have participated in the male-defined literary movement. Most have come to see Edith Wharton as a transitional figure on a literary journey from the traditional novel forms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries toward the supposedly braver, bolder experimental Modernist forms of the twentieth century. Elaine Showalter, in 'The Death of the Lady (Novelist)' (1985), proclaims: '*The House of Mirth* is a pivotal text in the historical transition from one house of American women's fiction to another, from the homosocial women's culture and literature of the nineteenth century to the heterosexual fiction of Modernism'.<sup>4</sup> Amy Kaplan acknowledges Wharton's 'un-easy dialogue with twentieth-century Modernism' in her essay 'Edith Wharton's Profession of Authorship' (1986).<sup>5</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *Sexchanges* (1989), classify Wharton as an 'antiutopian skeptic' yet exclude her from Woolf's somehow more evolved group, 'apocalyptic engendering'.<sup>6</sup> Bonnie Kime Scott in her reappraising anthology *The Gender of*

*Modernism* (1990) appears to agree.<sup>7</sup> Although she promises to look hard at new patterns and to take into account issues of gender, race, and class, she ignores Wharton in what she calls ‘A Tangled Mesh of Modernists’, although she includes Jessie Fauset, the Harlem Renaissance writer who followed in Wharton’s tradition of the novel of manners.

In her first treatment of Wharton as a resident of the Left Bank, Shari Benstock portrays her as a hold-over from the nineteenth century: ‘Wharton belonged totally to the nineteenth century’, Benstock tells her readers, ‘although she spent thirty-seven years of her life in the twentieth.’<sup>8</sup> Benstock’s later biography of Wharton, *No Gifts from Chance* (1994), while seeking a closer link between Modernist experimenters and Wharton, still maintains the notion of a clear divide. Andrew Delbanco likewise characterises Wharton as ‘a woman who, though contemptuous of the saturated Victorian interiors in which she had grown up, had not yet made the turn into the modern.’<sup>9</sup> Yet those thirty-seven years, containing half of Wharton’s life and nearly all her writing, were synchronous with Woolf’s life and writing.

Reading Wharton and Woolf together allows us to hear the dialogue between the writers, two dissonant yet overlapping voices. Mikhail Bakhtin, no stranger to the literary and ideological antagonisms of the 1920s, theorised that language is layered – words exist in constant interaction between meanings conditioned by surrounding language. In ‘Discourse in the Novel’, he depicted the play of language as a raucous drama:

Such is the fleeting language of a day, of an epoch, a social group, a genre, a school and so forth. It is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language.<sup>10</sup>

The utterance modern or Modernism is an especially contradiction-ridden term, full of the drama Bakhtin had in mind. Wharton’s voice yields meaning in juxtaposition to Woolf’s voice; their argument intones the social, ideological, and literary tensions of their literary epoch. Listening to both women may allow us to ‘penetrate’ (Bakhtin’s suggestively male metaphor) the ‘heteroglossia’ or semantic layering of the term modern or Modernism, freeing us to hear and see the ‘movement’ more clearly.

The nature of Modernism, I am arguing, is not a radical shift from traditional to experimental literary forms but rather a sharp dialogue, here a transatlantic dialogue, over literary possibilities.

Wharton's book *The Writing of Fiction* (1925) and Woolf's essay 'Modern Fiction' (1919; included in *The Common Reader*, 1925) set the stage for their dialogic battle. 'Modern fiction really began,' Wharton asserted, 'when the action of the novel was transferred from the street to the soul'.<sup>11</sup> By 'modern' Wharton has two ideas in mind: first, she distinguishes modern fiction from classical and medieval literature; and second, she refers to the writers of her own age. She claims that the seventeenth-century novelist Madame de Lafayette gave birth to 'modern fiction' with her novel *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678). Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Thackeray, and George Eliot were her literary progeny, adding subtle refinements and individual distinctions to the novel as a study of manners and a chronicle of social history. Any novelist, indeed any human being, comes embedded in culture, society, and history: 'the bounds of a personality are not reproducible by a sharp black line,' Wharton argues in the essay, 'each of us flows imperceptibly into adjacent people and things'.<sup>12</sup> Novelists as well as scholars have the job of fusing seemingly disparate characters; in this drama, she casts herself as literary heir to the social realism she celebrates. Wharton perceives modern fiction as 'an art in the making, fluent and dirigible,' capable of flight yet, like the airships of her day, subject to guidance.<sup>13</sup>

Actually, Woolf would have agreed with Wharton that 'each of us flows imperceptibly into adjacent people and things' and that fiction is 'fluent and dirigible'. In 'Modern Fiction' she sees the 'soul' as literary animator, especially the spirit expressed in Russian fiction; by the term 'soul' she has in mind, as Wharton does, psychological truth. Woolf is not, however, having any part of Wharton's argument for literary progress: 'It is doubtful whether in the course of the centuries, though we have learnt much about making machines, we have learnt anything about making literature'.<sup>14</sup> The term 'modern' fiction denotes, for her, the writing of the twentieth century. Unlike Wharton, she distinguishes the merely fashionable writers from serious experimenters, especially James Joyce, who proclaim a revolutionary break with past tradition. Singling out H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy for scorn as mere writers *à la mode*, Woolf launches her (in)famous attack:

The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour.<sup>15</sup>

The very conventions that Wharton venerates Woolf castigates; what should animate embalms; Madame de Lafayette metamorphoses from mother to tyrant. The unfortunate trio of male writers continue to look ridiculous to us as we imagine them parading down Bond Street, buttons flashing.

Wharton had met Wells and Galsworthy in 1908, befriended Wells, but rejected Galsworthy, probably for the same reasons Woolf did. Listen to her derisory tone in a letter she wrote to her lover Morton Fullerton about an essay by Henry James: ‘After being bracketed in Henry’s article with Galsworthy & Hichens (wasn’t it?) I feel that my niche in the Hall of Fame is in the most fashionable of its many mansions.’<sup>16</sup> The idea of being merely *à la mode* irked her as much as it did Virginia Woolf – both women kept a contemptuous distance from writers who pandered to popular taste.

In *The Writing of Fiction*, Wharton tried to turn the tables on Woolf, accusing contemporary experimenters of slavish devotion to literary fashion, the ‘now-that-it-can-be-told school’ or ‘dirt-for-dirt’s sake’. James Joyce’s *Ulysses* typified for her ‘dirt-for-dirt’s sake’. Writing to Bernard Berenson in January 1923, Wharton reported that she had ‘tackled’ the novel and ‘cast it from her’: ‘It’s a turgid welter of pornography (the rudest schoolboy kind) & unformed & unimportant drivel.’<sup>17</sup> What may seem surprising, in light of the fact that she celebrates *Ulysses* in ‘Modern Fiction’, is that Virginia Woolf’s diary of 6 September 1922, registers the same revulsion that Wharton felt: ‘The book is diffuse. It is brackish. It is pretentious. It is underbred’. Judging it a ‘mis-fire’, she hears in the novel the same voice Wharton heard, that of ‘some callow board school boy’.<sup>18</sup>

At another point of agreement, both women admired the maturity of Proust and Conrad. The two women’s voices blend almost into a single note. Woolf might have spoken for Wharton in assessing Conrad’s talent when she wrote: ‘For when the question is asked, what of Conrad will survive and where in the ranks of novelists we are to place him, these books, with their air of telling us something very old and perfectly true, which had lain hidden but is now revealed, will come to mind and make such questions and comparisons seems a little futile’.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Wharton might have spoken for Woolf in praising Proust: ‘There are many ways of conveying this sense of the footfall of Destiny; and nothing shows the quality of the novelist’s imagination more clearly than the incidents he singles out to illuminate the course of events and the inner working of his people’s souls’.<sup>20</sup> Both novelists valued a writer’s ability to reveal old truths and to record impressions hidden with the soul.

They both struggled, however, with the form such revelations might take in their own writing. Wharton fretted over the shape of her fiction and even assigned genders to modes of novel building. Consider her letter to Robert Grant after the failure of her industrial novel, *The Fruit of the Tree* (1907):

The fact is that I am beginning to see exactly where my weakest point is. – I conceive my subjects like a man – that is, rather more architectonically & dramatically than most women – & then execute them like a woman; or rather, I sacrifice, to my desire for construction & breath, the small incidental effects that women have always excelled in, the episodic characterisation, I mean.<sup>21</sup>

She implies that male design – architectonic and dramatic – carries more intellectual and artistic weight than female design – episodic and incidental – and wonders how she can become a successful novelist, wedged, as she sees herself, between genders.<sup>22</sup>

Woolf, in 'Modern Fiction', wages war against the conventional structure of realism, the novel of social history and manners that Wharton worked so hard to build. Her 'modern' manifesto urges young novelists to embrace the episodic; she might have said, in Wharton's words, that novelists should write 'like a woman'.

Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.<sup>23</sup>

'Disconnected and incoherent', the far reaches of 'incidental' and 'episodic', unnerved Wharton, who agonises over the necessity of conventional linear (male-styled) plotting. 'Stream of consciousness', she lectures young writers, has always been used:

This attempt to note down every half-aware stirring of thought and sensation, the automatic reactions to every passing impression, is not as new as its present exponents appear to think. It has been used by most of the greatest novelists, not as an end in itself, but as it happened to serve their general design.<sup>24</sup>

She insists that the fictional rendering of mental activity be placed in 'some recognizable relation to a familiar social or moral standard'. Balzac and Thackeray (we might add Edith Wharton) 'have made use of the stammerings and murmurings of the half-conscious mind whenever – and only when – such a state of mental flux fitted into the whole picture', she argues.<sup>25</sup> Woolf posits that the 'half-conscious' mind might be the 'whole picture'.

The two women became more directly aware of each other's criticism after Woolf's essay, 'American Fiction', appeared in the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 1925 (their gossiping with friends begins at this time). Wharton followed with her essay, 'The Great American Novel', in the *Yale Review* in 1927. The two critics are sceptical about the ability of a writer or a critic to cross cultures, to create convincing characters or to judge literary works across the Atlantic. As Wharton puts it, 'It is doubtful if a novelist of one race can ever really penetrate into the soul of another'.<sup>26</sup> Woolf, as a critic, casts herself as a transatlantic tourist: 'Thus having qualified the tourist's attitude, in its crudity and onesidedness, let us begin our excursion into modern American fiction by asking what are the sights we ought to see'.<sup>27</sup> Claiming bewilderment over the number of American writers, she lets her reader know that, as a tourist, she intends to 'concentrate on two or three at most' in order 'to sketch a theory' of American literature. The truth is that neither woman took American writers as seriously as one might expect.

Of nineteenth-century writers Woolf prefers Whitman to Emerson and Hawthorne because he appears as an 'undisguised' American to a British reader. Agreeing with Woolf on the significance of Whitman in the American canon, Wharton once wrote to her editor William Brownell that he, along with Poe and Emerson, 'are the best we have – in fact, the all we have'.<sup>28</sup> *Leaves of Grass* was apparently exotic enough to earn the admiration of both women in their youth. Woolf notes its 'very unlikeness becomes a merit'. And Wharton, in the same playful tone, remembers that when Whitman's poem began to circulate among intellectuals in Old New York, it 'was kept under lock and key, and brought out, like tobacco, only in the absence of 'the ladies', to whom the name of Walt Whitman was unmentionable, if not utterly unknown'.<sup>29</sup> He, in fact, appears in her Old New York novel, *The Spark* (1924), as Old Walt, a hero to the Civil War soldiers he had nursed, although his experimental poetry seems like 'rubbish' to them.

Melville, a distant member of Old New York society, is another nineteenth-century writer who intrigued both women. Wharton, who read *Moby-Dick* in 1911, considers his place in the canon in 'The Great American Novel': 'The writer who sees life in terms of South Sea cannibals, as Herman Melville did, will waste his time (as, incidentally, Melville did) if he tries to depict it as found in drawing-rooms and conservatories'.<sup>30</sup> In a *Times Literary Supplement* essay marking the Melville centenary in 1919, Woolf notes that most British readers had lost contact with the American writer: 'Somewhere upon the horizon of the mind, not

recognisable yet in existence, *Typee* and *Omoo*, together with the name of Herman Melville, float in company'. Woolf too describes his South Sea islanders: 'They were savages, they were idolaters, they were inhuman beasts who licked their lips over the tender thighs of their kindred'. Woolf registers an ambivalence that both women felt about Melville, a writer whom most Modernists had yet to rediscover: 'perhaps it would be wrong to call him an artist'.<sup>31</sup>

In 'American Fiction', Woolf applauds Sherwood Anderson for his psychological vignettes and criticises Sinclair Lewis for his social analyses. Wharton, exactly to the contrary, sees Lewis among the best writers that twentieth-century American literature has to offer. He had become her friend during the dispute over the Pulitzer Prize in 1920. She eventually won the prize for *The Age of Innocence* although his *Main Street* had been the original choice of the committee and was discarded because it was deemed un-American. She wrote him to express her own disappointment over the insult to them both, and he dedicated his next novel *Babbitt* to her (and he had, we might note, named a child after Wells). Reading Woolf's essay, one gets the sense that she would like to place Wharton with Lewis, and by association with Bennett and Wells, and dismiss them all. Yet Woolf grudgingly admires Wharton's literary talents and couples her instead with Henry James, a friend of her father's.

Her analysis is subtler than Kay Boyle's manifesto. The expatriates Wharton and James, to her mind, suffer from anglophilia and cultural displacement in their transatlantic flight from their mother country. Ironically, though they admire English culture, it remains foreign territory to them. One can again hear Wharton's voice warning that it is 'doubtful if a novelist of one race can ever really penetrate into the soul of another'. Woolf is talking about literary form and how difficult it is to depict one culture using the literary modes of another. The British novel of manners in the hands of an American writer, she argues, distorts the significance of social class. 'What their work gains in refinement it loses in that perpetual distortion of values, that obsession with surface distinctions – the age of old houses, the glamour of great names – which makes it necessary to remember that Henry James was a foreigner if we are not to call him a snob', Woolf snobbishly asserts.<sup>32</sup>

The literary tourist Virginia Woolf criticises the Old New Yorkers Wharton and James for not offering English readers 'anything that we have not got already', as though pleasing the English reader ought to be their first order of business. Whitman and Anderson, especially, along with Ring Lardner from Michigan and Willa Cather from Nebraska seem

to her closer to the American terrain she wants to explore: 'in America there is baseball instead of society; instead of the old landscape which had moved men to emotion for endless summers and springs, a new land, its tin cans, its prairies, its cornfields flung disorderly about like a mosaic of incongruous pieces waiting order at the artist's hands'. Baseball, tin cans and the cornfields of the Midwest suggest America as an exotic world across the ocean, clearly and significantly different from the culture of England. Wharton, too, saw the American landscape as disorderly and incongruous; New York to her always appeared ugly, vulgar and chaotic on the surface. Wharton sought in her fiction an underlying order, a mosaic perhaps hidden from Woolf, who was herself an outsider in America.

Wharton's and Woolf's letters, diaries and essays allow us to view a drama of 'embattled tendencies' between individuals and cultures. Their voices speak to us, too, in their novels, filtered through the medium of art. Both novelists depict the psychological complexities of daily living, the rough edges of prosaic reality as they intrude on and disrupt individual lives. Both women are shrewd readers of culture, especially its elaborate rituals and encoded values, and are perhaps at their best when recording the layers of individual voices and thoughts during social gatherings – dinner parties and chats over tea.

Wharton's configurations foreground the narrative voice, often entwining it with a thinly disguised version of her own voice; she illustrates the significant points of the narrative with dramatic dialogue interspersed with soliloquy. Woolf's more episodic design foregrounds the half-conscious musings of individual characters and their often fragmented conversations, moving the narrative/authorial voice to the background. Wharton employs two distancing devices; she speaks in a detached, ironic, at times satiric tone, and she sets many of her narratives in the past, especially in the mid- to late nineteenth century, allowing her an historical view of events surrounding the immediate action. Woolf remains closer to her narrative in tone, using at times subtle traces of irony, and she places most of her novels in twentieth-century England, before and after the First World War.

Reading their novels together, we can see how their literary debate spilled over into their fiction. Woolf first read a Wharton novel in 1905, proclaiming *The House of Mirth* 'a serious work of fiction' in her review for the *Guardian*. Wharton's portrait of the American moneyed class struck her as true: 'The members of the community in which the heroine, Lily Bart, is placed are bound together not only by the possession of



wealth, but also by a certain gift, which has its equivalent with us, too, perhaps – “a force of negation which eliminated everything beyond their own range of perception”<sup>33</sup> The irony in Woolf’s metaphor ‘certain gift’ and the quotation she selects from the novel capture Wharton’s intention exactly. The myopia of New York society ultimately destroys the novel’s heroine, Lily Bart.

Woolf’s first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), has a good deal in common with *The House of Mirth*; both are novels of manners detailing the trials of heroines who must find their way through the business of romance and marriage without the guidance of a mother and against the prevailing ‘force of negation’. Lily Bart and Woolf’s heroine Rachel Vinrace have a heightened sense of aesthetics; Lily knows instinctively how to dress well, furnish a room, and create a *tableau vivant*; and Rachel has considerable talent as a musician and sees the world in abstract shapes and colours. They might, the novelists hint, do just as well, even better, without a mate and without conventional social claims on their time and talents. Lily’s story takes place in Old New York although she longs for a world beyond its stultifying culture; she seals her letters with ‘Beyond!’ beneath a flying ship. Rachel’s story begins on such a ship that takes her beyond England to South America. Once there, Rachel journeys into the interior, a female version of Conrad’s ‘heart of darkness’, and explores sexual passion, a form of Wharton’s ‘Roman Fever’.

Both novelists try to manoeuvre around the traditional plot of domestic fiction, disrupting courtships with intrusions by sexually aggressive older married men.<sup>34</sup> Gus Trenor lures Lily Bart to his house at night, when his wife is away, in order to ‘collect’ sexual favours. Likewise, in Woolf’s novel *Richard Dalloway* (of all people) boards the ship mid-voyage with his wife, lectures on the inferiority of women, and gropes the unsuspecting heroine. Rachel Vinrace, confused by the sensations aroused in her, has nightmares about a demonic male figure, yet ironically finds herself thus awakened to sexuality. In what seems an odd reversal considering Wharton’s later squeamishness about *Orlando* (1928), Lily Bart is repulsed by heterosexual contact and drawn instead to the homosexual comfort of the social worker Gerty Ferrish in a suggestive night of female affection.

Neither heroine marries; rather, the novels end in the only other conventional way for a domestic novel to end, the death of the beautiful woman. Both novelists deliver the final thoughts of their heroines as heightened stream-of-consciousness; Lily, under the influence of laudanum, imagines a baby nestled against her body; Rachel, racked with fever,

separates mind from body and drifts into solitude. At the deathbed (Woolf may well have had Wharton's novel in mind), the heroes hover over the corpses as 'words' supposedly float between the living and the dead.<sup>35</sup> Wharton never gives us the 'word', although Lily's emblematic 'Beyond!' comes to mind in that heroine and hero are realistically beyond communication; indeed the hero seems to prefer his woman dead.<sup>36</sup> The grim exchange, truncated in this way, parodies the deathbed convention of sentimental fiction. Woolf's hero bends over the heroine as she dies unaware of whether he speaks or thinks the words: 'No two people have ever been so happy as we have been. No One has ever loved as we have loved.'<sup>37</sup> This scene is much harder to read ironically in light of the fact that we now know Woolf's own last note to her husband Leonard, before her suicide, will echo the line: 'I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been.'<sup>38</sup>

By the time Wharton and Woolf get to what many critics consider their finest novels, however, they have moved sharply apart in form and, though less so, in content. *The Age of Innocence* (1920) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927) continue to tell stories about the shape of the family and its force on individual members, especially on women. Woolf reduces the cast to a single family, the Ramseys, and some few friends; Wharton's world encompasses all of Old New York and its tending of one family, the Welland/Archers.

The most dramatic feature of both novels involves the splitting of the female protagonist into two opposing figures: one the conventional domestic, maternal woman and the other a creative, sensitive, even artistic woman (a character close to the novelists themselves). The bifurcation permits variations on the theme of femininity and frees the artist/heroine from the trap set in the conventional mode of their early novels: marriage or death. Woolf's Mrs Ramsey and Wharton's May Archer marry and live traditionally sanctioned female lives; they have children, manage households, and exercise considerable influence over their husbands, men who need female encouragement in order to feel more powerful than, in reality, they are. Woolf's Lily Briscoe and Wharton's Ellen Olenska, by contrast, free from convention, devise aesthetically, intellectually and financially independent lives. By killing off the domestic women and making the artistic women too formidable to be chosen as second wives by the widowers, Wharton and Woolf experiment with a new narrative for females.<sup>39</sup> Lily Briscoe finishes her painting (with her vision as inviolate as Woolf desired her own to be), and Ellen Olenska expatriates to Paris (to live among artists and bohemians in Wharton's own neighborhood in the Rue de Varenne).

The two novels, however, differ significantly in texture and tone, in movement and emphasis. Long lyrical soliloquies carry Woolf's story, presented as pools of consciousness, requiring the reader to take on much of the task of interpreting the images and constructing the plot. The opening scene between James and his mother gives the reader a clue to reading the novel: 'any turn in the wheel of sensation has the power to crystallise and transfix the moment'. Such turns of the wheel move us through the novel, placing us moment by moment in sensations experienced by different minds. The narrator's job is to record the 'atoms as they fall' in an order that gives the impression of her not being there at all. No voice sorts and arranges a clear linear sequence, although at times we know, through traces of irony, that a narrator exists. James Ramsey's thought: '[he] endowed the picture of a refrigerator, as his mother spoke, with heavenly bliss', that opens the novel, for example, blends into his mother's observation of him at the line 'though he appeared the image of stark and uncompromising severity'. The narrator then intrudes, pulling us back from their thoughts – 'so that his mother, watching him guide his scissors neatly round the refrigerator, imagined him all red and ermine of the Bench' – allowing us to see Mrs Ramsey in the role of doting mother, looking foolish, as parents often do.<sup>40</sup>

The reader's satisfaction and delight come as much from the weaving of images and the beauty of language as from the interplay of meanings inherent in the word 'family'. Woolf invites us to read viscerally with aesthetic awareness, an experience close to the reading of poetry. Bakhtin argues that poetry breaks through 'heteroglot' language with its semantic layers to create unitary speech, so that the intended meaning correlates word with object more clearly than fiction can do. The lyricism of Woolf's novel, the intricate patterning of consciousness, often takes the mind away from history and culture into Bakhtin's world of pure language.

Wharton's prose comes almost always embedded in the 'heteroglot' ooze of competing meanings, 'still warm from that struggle and hostility, as yet unresolved and still fraught with hostile intentions and accents'.<sup>41</sup> Less poetic than Woolf's prose, Wharton's prose loosens the connection between word and object and plays with variations on meaning. Wharton's narrator, restricted most of the time to reporting Newland Archer's moments, keeps an ironic distance from the hero, pointing out to the reader various absurdities and inconsistencies in his thinking. The reader, in this way, is encouraged to separate from the hero and to identify with the narrator who exhibits superior reason and wit. Early in the novel, Newland returns from a cigar with Sillerton Jackson to ponder the

ramifications of his hasty ‘feminist’ assertion: ‘Women should be free – as free as we are’.<sup>42</sup> Newland knows that Old New York codes deny equality between the sexes, and the narrator lets us know that Newland’s fling with Mrs Thorley Rushworth, his sense of superiority to the virginal May Welland, and his powerful sexual attraction to Ellen Olenska all leave him only dimly aware of the implications of the word ‘free’ and of his own ambivalence concerning the meaning of female freedom. Even less does he see that in most situations throughout the novel women run the show. Much of the pleasure and satisfaction in reading Wharton’s novel arises from the reader’s sense of being a step or two ahead of the hero, dissecting and analysing the culture and all the possible meanings of Newland’s words, ‘Women should be free’.

The epistemological difference between Wharton and Woolf, a difference that becomes more apparent over time, affects how they create characters and how they construct narratives. Wharton’s protagonists, rarely as smart as she is, struggle to understand the ramifications of their social, cultural, even psychological situations. For that reason, she employs a narrator (one hard to distinguish from her own presence in the novel) to act as liaison between characters and readers, a group she hopes will be as perceptive as she is. In a letter to John Hugh Smith about her novel *A Mother’s Recompense* (1925), Wharton explains her heroine, Kate Clephane’s limitations: ‘I felt, in writing it, all the force of what you say about the incest-element, & its importance in justifying her anguish – but I felt it wd [sic] be hardly visible in its exact sense to her’.<sup>43</sup> Lily Bart, Newland Archer and Kate Clephane all face a world ‘hardly visible’ to them, but a world the narrator knows quite well.

Virginia Woolf, perhaps trusting more in human insight and certainly believing that scattered impressions are all we ultimately have, records the conscious and semi-conscious musings of characters who are, for the most part, as intellectually complex, sensitive and perceptive as she herself is. Her novels eschew an intermediary voice, an intellect who can make random details cohere. Her technique requires readers, as Wharton’s does, to detect subtleties of tone and nuances of detail, but Woolf also asks her reader to puzzle over the incoherence of a world that does not provide a narrative guide.

In the middle of the 1920s, a British reviewer depicted the relationship between Woolf and Wharton as the rivalry of youth versus age, contrasting the innovative vigor of *Mrs Dalloway* with the ‘old-fashioned’ flatness of *A Mother’s Recompense*. Wharton’s letter to John Hugh Smith records her chagrin: ‘I was not trying to follow the new methods, as May Sinclair

so pantingly & anxiously does; & my heroine belongs to the day when scruples existed'.<sup>44</sup> Ironically, she soothes herself with the knowledge that other reviewers, as well as friends like Percy Lubbock, had often misread and misjudged her work.<sup>45</sup>

The novels *A Mother's Recompense* and *Mrs Dalloway* typify, perhaps better than other pairings, the striking difference between the two writers, especially clear because both novels depict the same situation: the effect of ageing on a woman's psyche. What Virginia Woolf presents as pools of half-conscious murmurings, Wharton dramatises as spectral encounters, dressed as ghostly figures that float into the heroine's mind. The heroine Kate Clephane, in her youth, had abandoned both husband and three-year-old daughter in order to free herself from the constraints of Old New York society that allowed almost no air for a young woman to breath. Adrift for twenty years in the socially nebulous atmosphere of expatriate Europe, Kate had taken a youthful lover, resisted the responsibilities of adulthood, and ignored the signs of her ageing. The novel opens with the death of her husband and the invitation from her grown daughter to return to New York, a world that has little interest in her prior rebellion and no qualms about her past sins. Wharton's story has an elaborate social stage; she presents enough of Old New York and the new Jazz Age to set Kate Clephane's 'ghosts' in relief, culminating in the incestuously suggestive image of her daughter and her former lover in an embrace. Her moral dilemma in the novel is whether or not to tell her daughter about her past affair with the still youngish man. Only by returning to her dilatory expatriate life in Europe can the heroine exorcise the ghosts and thus define her ageing self.

As Wharton divides youth and age into the characters of mother and daughter, Woolf pairs two seemingly disconnected characters: Clarissa Dalloway, a wealthy wife in her fifties, and Septimus Warren Smith, a disturbed war veteran of thirty. Woolf juxtaposes their philosophies, experiences, and patterns of thought, and links them by proximity of time and place and, on a deeper level, by metaphor. She records, for example, Clarissa's mind as she watches the omnibuses in Piccadilly and thinks about her own early affair with Peter Walsh:

somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself.<sup>46</sup>

The past does not appear before her as a series of ghostly figures, as it does for Wharton's heroine, rather the past appears as a tree, a natural outgrowth. As the novel moves from Clarissa's thoughts to those of Septimus, Woolf retains the metaphor:

But they beckoned; leaves were alive, trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement.<sup>47</sup>

Woolf uses an organic metaphor, tree and branch, to depict a vital world, although the reassurance of organic unity gives way to a vision much darker than any Wharton imagined as Septimus moves toward suicide: 'Scientifically speaking, the flesh was melted off the world. His body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock.'<sup>48</sup> The plot moves episodically, pitting one metaphor against another – we read the image of rack against that of tree, of maceration against connection – in the movement toward the death of youth, a grim reversal that Wharton's novel never considers. Yet both Wharton and Woolf allow the ageing female protagonists to survive.

After the open clashes between Woolf and Wharton in 'Modern Fiction' and *The Writing of Fiction*, their dispute over the nature of the novel surfaces sharply in Wharton's fiction, especially in *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929) and its sequel *The Gods Arrive* (1932), the last novel she completed before her death in 1937. The novels are ideologically driven, brittle and shrill in their response to experimental writers such as Woolf. The hero Advance G. Weston, Esq., a 'Middle-Western yahoo',<sup>49</sup> from Euphoria, Illinois, by way of Pruneville, Nebraska, and Hallelujah, Missouri, has as his intellectual and cultural roots a college degree, a week in Chicago, a brief stint as editor of *Getting There*, an even briefer affair with Floss Delaney, and faith in his own newly invented religion.

As Weston reads modern novels, he puzzles over their resemblance to life itself; through his musings Wharton answers Woolf's questions in 'Modern Fiction'.

WOOLF: Is life like this? Must novels be like this?<sup>50</sup>

WHARTON: No, life's not like that, people are not like that. The real stuff is way down, not on the surface.<sup>51</sup>

The central question of Wharton's novel is what type of literary form carries more mimetic power? Wharton's hero, in a jumble of metaphors, catches a 'literary infection' in the back of Jane Megg's bookshop that causes him to write 'a masterpiece according to the new recipe'.<sup>52</sup> The

novel's heroine Halo Spear, Vance's intellectual mentor, speaks in a voice indistinguishable from Wharton's. We can hear the echo of Wharton's letter to Mary Berenson where she explains she is 'quite ill' from looking at photos of Virginia Woolf:

. . . Vance had been too much influenced by the stream-of-consciousness school which Jane's group proclaimed to a bewildered public to be the one model of modern fiction.

Jane Meggs! How a woman of that sort would know how to flatter Vance, astonish his inexperience, amuse him by her literary jargon, fascinate him by her moral perversity. Even the ugliness which Jane flaunted as though it were *her* kind of beauty, the kind she wanted and had deliberately chosen, might have a coarse fascination for him.<sup>53</sup>

The hero finds the 'modern' literary world appealing, sexually and aesthetically, but comes to suspect that: 'The fishers in the turbid stream-of-consciousness had reduced their fictitious characters to a bundle of loosely tied instincts and habits, borne along blindly on the current of existence'.<sup>54</sup> The hero's quest, though 'hardly visible' to him, is to free himself from salons, like the ones frequented by Virginia Woolf, and make his way back to the heroine who waits pregnant, both literally and figuratively. Halo Spears, so very thinly veiled, asks Wharton's question: 'Why not try giving your readers the exact opposite of what all the other on-the-spot editors are straining to provide? Something quiet, logical, Jane Austen-y'.<sup>55</sup> We can imagine her voice chiding novelists to write something 'Wharton-ian'.

Literary criticism seeps into Woolf's later novels as well. In *Jacob's Room* (1922), she doubts the ability of the novel to grasp human experience: 'It is thus that we live, they say, driven by an unseizable force. They say that the novelists never catch it; it goes hurtling through their nets and leaves them torn to ribbons'.<sup>56</sup> Again in *The Waves* (1931), she presents a portrait of the artist as a young man who takes his lines from her essay 'Modern Fiction':

But why impose my arbitrary design? Why stress this and shape that and twist up little figures like the toys men sell in trays in the street? Why select this, out of all that, – one detail?<sup>57</sup>

In a voice as thinly veiled as Wharton's, the critic Virginia Woolf poses questions about the nature of literary form.

In her final novel, *Between the Acts* (1941), Woolf turns attention, literally and figuratively, on her audience, a group she comes to trust less and less. The literary artist as a mature woman, the playwright Miss La Trobe,

stages her work for an intellectually and aesthetically obtuse crowd. Socialites and townsfolk have been invited to a luncheon and tea interspersed with the villagers' annual pageant about English history performed in an outdoor theatre. In the background, Isa Oliver, a symbol of female literary reticence, hides her poetry from her husband's gaze in a 'book bound like an account book'. The bold Miss La Trobe, to the contrary, parades her words before the village gossips, who suspect that she cannot really be British; such brazenness must come from the taint of Russian blood. Her passion for language surely cannot be feminine either:

Outwardly she was swarthy, sturdy and thick set; strode about the fields in a smock frock; sometimes with a cigarette in her mouth; often with a whip in her hands; and used rather strong language – perhaps, then she wasn't altogether a lady?<sup>58</sup>

Woolf offers us a colourful, witty self-portrait. The gramophone's 'chuff, chuff, chuff' punctuates the silences between chronological scenes of British history, building to the climactic representation of the modern world, where La Trobe turns a literal mirror on the townsfolk who are clearly unsettled about her intentions. Woolf playfully threatens both the audience and her own readers: 'Words this afternoon ceased to lie flat in the sentence. They rose, became menacing and shook their fists at you.'<sup>59</sup>

What if the experiment remains a mystery to the audience? 'If they had understood her meaning; if they had known their parts; if the pearls had been real and the funds illimitable – it would have been a better gift', La Trobe concludes, pronouncing her work a 'failure'.<sup>60</sup> All the good humour of the novel moves toward doubt. The writer's final struggle, Woolf reminds us, is with the audience, both reader and critic, and what they will make of the 'gift'. Wharton was in much the same mood in 1925 when she wrote to close friend Daisy Chandler about the seeming inability of critics to understand her intention: 'You will wonder that the priestess of the life of reason should take such things to heart, & I wonder too. I never have minded before; but as my work reaches its close, I feel so sure that it is either nothing, or far more than they know. . . . And I wonder, a little desolately, which?'<sup>61</sup>

Wharton and Woolf, the odd transatlantic pair, end their writing careers in considerable doubt about how they will be read, interpreted, and catalogued by future readers and critics. Reading the two women together, we hear their common lament. The two writers represent 'embattled tendencies' that overlap and, at times, merge in the early years of the twentieth century. As readers and critics, we reduce the tension,



deny the contradictions, and ultimately lose the texture of the period we have come to call Modernist if we ignore their rich dialogue. Passionate disagreement over form and content characterises Modernism and links these two writers. The voices of Wharton and Woolf resonate throughout the period, not one or the other, not one and then the other, but rather the two together.

#### Notes

- 1 R.W.B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography*, New York, Scribner's, 1988, p. 474.
- 2 Virginia Woolf, *The Sickie Side of the Moon: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume V: 1932–1935*, ed. Nigel Nicolson, London, Hogarth Press, 1979, p. 305.
- 3 Leo Litwak, 'Kay Boyle – Paris Wasn't Like That', *New York Times Book Review*, 15 July 1984, 2.
- 4 Elaine Showalter, 'The Death of the Lady (Novelist): Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth*', *Representations*, 9 (Winter 1985), p. 134.
- 5 Amy Kaplan, 'Edith Wharton's Profession of Authorship', *ELH*, 30:2 (1986), 433–57.
- 6 See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume 2: Sexchanges*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989.
- 7 Bonnie Kime Scott, *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 10.
- 8 Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900–1940*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1989, p. 37. Benstock portrays Wharton as something of a Neanderthal: 'We try to trace our descent from her'. Yet in her later biography, *No Gifts from Chance* (New York, Scribner's, 1994), Benstock situates Wharton in the period but maintains the view of her as outside 'Modernism'; see p. 290.
- 9 Andrew Delbanco, 'Missed Manners', *New Republic*, 25 October 1993, pp. 31–7.
- 10 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 272.
- 11 Edith Wharton, *The Writing of Fiction*, New York, Scribner's, 1925, p. 3.
- 12 Wharton, *Writing of Fiction*, p. 7.
- 13 Wharton, *Writing of Fiction*, p. 8.
- 14 Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', in *The Common Reader*, New York, Harcourt Brace & World, [1925] 1953, p. 150.
- 15 Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', pp. 153–4.
- 16 Edith Wharton, *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, eds R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy

- Lewis, New York, Scribner's, 1988, pp. 316–17; on friendship with Wells, see pp. 596–7.
- 17 Wharton, *Letters*, p. 461.
  - 18 Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, Vol. 2, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, p. 199.
  - 19 Woolf, *Common Reader*, p. 235.
  - 20 Wharton, *Writing of Fiction*, p. 161.
  - 21 Wharton, *Letters*, p. 124.
  - 22 See Katherine Joslin, 'Architectonic or Episodic?: Edith Wharton, Gender, and *The Fruit of the Tree*', in Clare Colquitt, Susan Goodman and Candace Waid, eds, *Edith Wharton: A Forward Glance: New Essays on Edith Wharton*, London, Associated University Presses, and University of Delaware Press, 1999, pp. 62–75.
  - 23 Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', p. 155.
  - 24 Wharton, *Writing of Fiction*, p. 12.
  - 25 Wharton, *Writing of Fiction*, p. 13.
  - 26 Edith Wharton, 'The Great American Novel', in Frederick Wegener (ed.), *Edith Wharton: The Uncollected Critical Writings*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 157.
  - 27 Virginia Woolf, 'American Fiction', *Saturday Review of Literature*, 2:1 (1925), 1–3.
  - 28 Wharton, *Uncollected Critical Writings*, p. 34.
  - 29 Wharton, 'A Little Girl's New York', *Uncollected Critical Writings*, p. 282.
  - 30 Wharton, *Uncollected Critical Writings*, p. 153.
  - 31 Virginia Woolf, 'Herman Melville', *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 August 1919, in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 3, 1919–1924, ed. Andrew McNeillie, London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988, p. 77.
  - 32 Woolf, 'American Fiction'.
  - 33 Virginia Woolf, Review of *The House of Mirth*, *The Guardian*, 15 November 1905.
  - 34 See Louise DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1989. She sees the incestuous step-brother Gerald Duckworth as the root cause of Woolf's sexual anxiety that surfaces in her fiction and expresses itself most forcefully in the psychotic episodes that punctuated her life. See also Gloria Erhlick, *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992, for an analysis of how Wharton's early sexual guilt, more imagined than real, may have influenced her fiction and affected her long bout with neurasthenia over the first twelve years of her marriage to Teddy Wharton.
  - 35 Cynthia Griffin Wolff discusses the final scene of the novel in the context of popular drama where the dying heroine and the unspoken word were rather commonly used devices. Cynthia Griffin Wolff, 'Lily Bart and Masquerade Inscribed in the Female Body', in Alan Price and Katherine Joslin (eds),

- Wretched Exotic: Essays on Edith Wharton in Europe*, New York, Lang, 1993, pp. 259–95,
- 36 For a fuller discussion of the novel's final 'word' as 'Beyond!' see Katherine Joslin, *Edith Wharton*, Women Writers Series, London, Macmillan, New York, St Martin's Press, 1991, pp. 49–69.
- 37 Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1920, p. 353.
- 38 Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, p. 226.
- 39 See Showalter, 'The Death of the Lady (Novelist)' for a discussion of Wharton's use of the dead heroine. Showalter argues that Lily Bart dies to free Gerty Ferrish, a model of the new professional woman.
- 40 Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1927, p. 9.
- 41 Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 331.
- 42 Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, New York, Appleton, 1920, p. 43.
- 43 Wharton, *Letters*, p. 480.
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- 45 See Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 372.
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- 49 Edith Wharton, *Hudson River Bracketed*, New York, Scribner's, 1929, p. 267.
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- 56 Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, [1922] 1950, p. 156.
- 57 Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1931, p. 188.
- 58 Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1941, p. 58.
- 59 Woolf, *Between the Acts*, p. 59.
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Unreal cities and undead legacies: T.S. Eliot  
and Gothic hauntings in Waugh's *A Handful  
of Dust* and Barnes's *Nightwood*

*Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik*

By the mid 1930s, when Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* and Barnes's *Nightwood* were published, *The Waste Land* (1922) had been absorbed into high culture and T.S. Eliot was established as an important man of letters both in England and in the United States. The transatlantic nature of Modernism itself, exemplified by the lives and works of Eliot, H.D., Pound, Stein and Barnes, was part of a newly dynamised interchange between America and Europe that was to influence the course of culture and politics for the rest of the twentieth century. However, assessments of Eliot's role as poet and critic have been heavily coloured by his own self-representation as an intellectual in the European tradition. What we wish to argue here is that Eliot's ambivalence concerning the American dimension of his identity is significant for any study of transatlantic exchanges, especially in relation to Modernism and the Gothic. Eliot's embrace of European high culture (particularly the French symbolist tradition), so evident in his critical writings, is accompanied by an elision of the American and the popular, including the Gothic – despite the fact that his own poetry (*The Waste Land* in particular) contains powerful Gothic resonances. His enormous influence as a critic clearly shaped subsequent histories of Modernism and contributed to a dominant narrative which held sway until the latter part of the twentieth century, when new theoretical perspectives prompted the examination of the popular and Gothic in relation to Modernism.

As is now evident, the early canonisation of certain authors and certain Modernist texts produced a narrative which, while recognising a high level of intertextuality and cosmopolitan interchange, failed to include women writers and the influence of popular culture. At this time, Modernist written texts seemed to be eschewing the melodramatic and

the supernatural. The Gothic, a sensationalist and popular form, therefore appeared to have found its 'proper' home in the popular realm of film (as in, for example, Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) and Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931)). The academy itself, as an intellectual elite, has until recently been all too ready to accept Modernism's own narrative of itself, including this one. However, since the 1980s, feminist critics and theorists such as Rachel Blau du Plessis and Bonnie Kime Scott have successfully challenged and altered what was an essentially masculine conception of the Modernist canon.<sup>1</sup> Their work has been complemented by that of critics such as Andreas Huyssen and John Carey, who have argued that Modernist writers sought to distinguish themselves from what they perceived as a rising popular, more literate and increasingly feminised culture by creating texts that were difficult and abstruse.<sup>2</sup> The recent theorisation of the Gothic, however, allows us to recognise that many Modernist texts are also haunted by a Gothic legacy which remains persistently undead. It is now clear that the Gothic survived within Modernism in various shapes and forms; as Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace argue in their *Gothic Modernisms*, there is an intriguing relation between Modernism and the Gothic, not least in the fact that the Gothic's representation of a fragmented self is echoed by Modernist portrayals of the subject as shattered in the aftermath of the Great War.<sup>3</sup> We wish to argue here, however, that although Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* and Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* selectively parody the Gothic, in so doing they draw upon its powerful resources in order to create a darkly comic critique of Modernity. In Chapter 3 of this volume, Anne-Marie Ford shows the influences which obtained in the exercise of the Gothic mode in the work of Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Stoddard. In using Eliot as a key reference point for this re-assessment, we also draw attention to the way in which both Barnes and Waugh use his work as a touchstone to negotiate the Gothic within their novels. We suggest that Eliot's relationships with these two texts, when taken together, offer an interesting perspective on the relationship borne by Modernism in its late phase to literary traditions, both English and American. Furthermore, Eliot's critical appraisal of Barnes's work is shown to be informed by a perspective which reveals an American anxiety concerning tradition and the individual talent.

The coupling of *A Handful of Dust* (1934) and Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936) might initially seem a strange one, given Waugh's image as an essentially conservative satirist of English society and the recent retrieval of Barnes as a radical lesbian Modernist. Furthermore, an initial reading

of the two novels suggests some sharp contrasts: *A Handful of Dust*, as a linear narrative, appears more conventional in form than *Nightwood's* fractured, dream-like narration. Whereas an apparently detached, third-person narrator leads the reader through Waugh's novel, *Nightwood's* lengthy monologues (like those of Joyce's *Ulysses*) create a more polyphonic effect. However, despite these differences, the two novels share more than such superficial contrasts would suggest. At the heart of both is an engagement with Modernism which is qualified by an explicit acknowledgement of a Gothic inheritance. This acknowledgment manifests itself in both texts through parodic reworkings of Gothic tropes. Their recourse to Gothic parody, while on the one hand mocking the forms and tenor of an older literature, paradoxically reaffirms it as a mode of articulating contemporary fear and anxiety. Also linking these two novels – one written by a male English eccentric and the other by an expatriate female American – is the transatlantic figure of T.S. Eliot. Eliot's Introduction to the 1937 edition of *Nightwood* constituted an influential critical response to the novel's unorthodoxies; in Waugh's novel, the imprint of Eliot is there throughout the text and signalled unmistakably in the title.<sup>4</sup>

Written at what has conventionally been thought of as the tail-end of the Modernist movement, the two novels express the disenchantment of a post-war generation and anticipate the comic nihilism of writers such as Beckett. Both Waugh's tale of the ill-fated English 'Gothic man',<sup>5</sup> Tony Last, and Barnes's story of American expatriate Paris, however, have at their heart the characteristically Modernist preoccupation with the city and the wilderness as a binary which deconstructs itself. Yet even within this binary the meaning of the city is not stable. As Deborah Parsons suggests in a comment which seems particularly pertinent to a consideration of these two novels: 'The Modernist fascination with the formal studies of urban life . . . can be seen at its two extremes of 'concept' city, the radiant Utopia and the degenerate wasteland'.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the location of these texts within Modernism is clearly signalled by their intertextual resonances. Waugh's borrowing of his title from Eliot is echoed by further allusion in the text but the influence of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is also clearly evident. In the words of Jeffrey Heath:

Tony's relationship with Todd resembles that of Marlow and Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. But unlike Tony, Marlow escapes from that deadly symbiosis when he realises that he, too, is capable of Kurtz's crimes.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to Marlow, who, through this realisation, changes into an older and a wiser man, Tony Last regresses to a child-like dependency on



Todd as a Father figure, whilst being condemned to read and re-read, in perpetuity, the word of the literary father, Charles Dickens. Everything in this novel turns, like *Dracula*, to a handful of dust, a Gothic motif that, as we shall see, is highly significant.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, but less obviously, Barnes's novel situates itself in relation to other Modernist texts. *Nightwood*, like several Modernist narratives of the city (for example, Joyce's *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*), uses both the freedom and the alienation intrinsic to the modern city as a backdrop to its characters' monologues and quests for meaning. Not surprisingly, given Barnes's eleven-year stay in Paris prior to writing the novel, there is also evidence of a strong French Modernist influence. Diane Chisholm and Deborah Parsons have both drawn attention to the influence of Surrealism – in particular, Breton's *Nadja* (1928), on Barnes's work.<sup>9</sup> We would suggest other literary debts to the French: for example, Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868–9) and also Céline's *Voyage au Bout de la Nuit* (1932) which, according to Phillip Herring, Barnes had read during the early 1930s.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the *Times Literary Supplement* review of *Nightwood* likened its 'sickness of the soul' to that of Céline's experimental novel, suggesting that contemporaries recognised such influence.<sup>11</sup>

Waugh's use of the Gothic for parodic purposes in *A Handful of Dust* is overt. By 1934, he had already gained a reputation as a writer of surreal satirical comic novels. All of these had taken as their subject the moral bankruptcy of contemporary urban society. *Vile Bodies* (1930) presents an unrelenting portrait of futility in the party-going society of 1920s London: its narrative exposes the underlying barbarity of the amorality of this modern 'unreal' city and culminates in a scene set on 'the biggest battlefield in the history of the world'.<sup>12</sup> His 1932 novel, *Black Mischief*, however, unlike Huxley's *Brave New World*, offers no redemptive vision of the noble savage but turns the same sharp satiric eye on an equally corrupt and barbarous African society. Tony Last, Waugh's 'hero' in *A Handful of Dust*, is – like *Decline and Fall*'s Paul Pennyfeather and *Vile Bodies*' Adam Symes – a passive figure who takes much for granted and is motivated by a vague desire to do the right thing. He is a man who, in the words of a contemporary reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 'is so incapable of helping himself that he is not worth helping'.<sup>13</sup> Like them, he is defenceless against the depredations of the ruthlessly selfish characters who people Waugh's metropolis. London is the scene of modern life where human relationships have become debased and meaningless. This is Eliot's 'unreal city' with its 'dead' population. In his representation of the city in this way, Waugh is conforming to the prevailing intellectual

orthodoxy of his time, an intellectual orthodoxy which, according to John Carey, was created largely through Eliot's influence.<sup>14</sup> The adultery of Tony's wife, Brenda, is represented as a further development of her regular visits to London for such banal pursuits as shopping and probably unnecessary visits to the 'bone-setter' Mr Cruttwell.<sup>15</sup> There are echoes, too, of Eliot's Madame Sosostriis in Brenda's visit to the home of her friend Polly Cockpurse to consult Mrs Northcote, a fortune-teller, 'who read fortunes in a different way, by reading the soles of the feet'.<sup>16</sup> The affair with the penniless and worthless socialite, John Beaver, is no grand passion but rather a project taken on by a bored wife with no apparent moral compass. Tony's all-too-ready compliance with her demand for a divorce in which he will be cited as the guilty party is without conscience turned by Brenda, her family and, not least, the unlikeable Beaver into an assumption of his guilt and a licence to ruin him financially. The emotionless and conscienceless behaviour of those who find their natural home in London is the marker of a specifically modern barbarity. Waugh's representation of human nature in this way accords with both Eliot's portrayal of London citizens within *The Waste Land* and David Punter's definition of the Gothic:

Gothic is . . . intimately to do with the notion of the barbaric . . . (since) those writers who are referred to as Gothic turn out to be those who bring us up against the boundaries of the civilized, who demonstrate to us the relative nature of ethical and behavioural codes, and who place, over against the conventional world, a different sphere in which these codes operate at best in distorted forms.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast with the rootless anti-heroes of the earlier novels, Tony is the owner of a large country estate and sees himself as the custodian of a valuable heritage. Initially, it might seem that Tony's rootedness in the countryside and his identity as an English squire is the counterbalance to the spiritual 'waste land' of London. However, this very identity is the means through which the novel introduces its element of Gothic parody, an identity which led Waugh to describe him as 'a Gothic man in the hands of savages'.<sup>18</sup> Hetton Abbey, Tony's country seat to which he dedicates both his emotional and financial resources, has been since the middle of the previous century an elaborate fake, as the 'quotation' from the county Guide Book at the opening of Chapter Two indicates: 'This, formerly one of the notable houses of the county, was entirely rebuilt in the Gothic style and is now devoid of interest' (*HD*, p. 14). The outward and visible sign of the heritage that Tony is so committed to maintaining

is, to use one of the key words of *Vile Bodies*, 'bogus'. Hetton, with its elaborate Gothic features, its 'lancet windows of armorial stained glass', its 'dining hall with its hammer-beam roof and pitch-pine minstrel gallery', its bedrooms named after Arthurian characters is, like Walpole's 'Gothic Villa', an artefact dedicated to the assertion of a remote and unreliable history. For Tony, 'all these thing with which he had grown up were a source of constant delight and exultation . . . things of tender memory and proud possession' (*HD*, p. 15). Walpole's Gothic imagination, however, provides a means of giving shape to fear and the literature of which he is considered a founding father constituted a powerful means of engagement with the anxieties generated by the formation of new subjectivities in a modern world. In contrast, the Victorian use of Gothic forms, adopted in order to create myths of origin, represented a sentimental attempt to recreate a world from which the rapidly modernising nineteenth century felt exiled. This Victorian fascination with a sanitised Middle Ages, particularly its version of the Arthurian legend, has been enshrined in Hetton and edifices like it. The corollary of this is Tony's ritual observance of religion: church-going is portrayed as part of his social duty but provides no source of strength in times of trouble ('the last thing one wants to talk about at a time like this is religion', he remarks after the death of his son: *HD*, p. 115). The domestication and trivialisation of Gothic represented by Hetton, therefore, is a symptom of his exile from the possibilities of spiritual fulfilment, an exile that is made physical at the end of the novel. This 'Gothic man' is therefore also a 'modern' man.

Tony's perception of himself as guardian of this history is at odds with the events of his life in which his Guinevere deserts him not for a Lancelot but for Beaver and the heir to his line is killed in a random accident. Brenda is often shown in Guinevere, her room at Hetton, being visited by her husband while resting in her bed on a dais or attending to her hair and make-up. His visits are not particularly welcome and he is kept cordially at arm's length; the echoes of Eliot's woman in her chamber in Part II of *The Waste Land* are subtle but unmistakable. Tony's affectionate espousal of Gothic has been selective: his is an 'English Gothic', purged of its power to represent darkness and barbarity and leaving Tony prey to a savagery which he cannot identify. On realising that Brenda and her lawyers intend to take everything:

His mind had become suddenly clearer on many points that had puzzled him. A whole Gothic world had come to grief . . . there was now no armour

glittering through the forest glades, no embroidered feet on the green sward; the cream and dappled unicorns had fled (*HD*, p. 151)

This bleak vision of loss is what tempts Tony into joining the explorer Dr Messinger in his search for a fabled South American city. Here the city as utopia beckons and its achievement will entail sacrifice and quest. The city can only be reached by crossing the perilous wilderness of the Brazilian jungle. In Tony's mind, this city is a place whose discovery will, in his naive imagination, restore the joy of Hetton to his besieged soul. He embarks upon his quest still ensnared by the delusion that is Hetton. He conceives of the fabled city as a 'transfigured Hetton', a city:

Gothic in character, all vanes and pinnacles, gargoyles, battlements, groining and tracery, pavilions and terraces . . . pennons and banners floating on the sweet breeze, everything luminous and translucent. (*HD*, p. 160)

If, in his fevered delirium, alone in the Brazilian jungle, Tony's vision almost transmutes into a spiritual apprehension of the metaphysical Augustinian *civitas dei* with 'gilded cupolas and spires of alabaster', it is rudely and bathetically interrupted by the imagined sound of the voice of Ambrose (Hetton's butler) announcing, 'The City is served' (*HD*, p. 203).

From this point in the novel it becomes apparent that Tony is to be denied a heroically tragic outcome in any conventional sense. It remains for him to be shown fear in a handful of dust, through an horrific incarceration in the middle of the Brazilian jungle where he is condemned to read over and over again the novels of Dickens to the illiterate Mr Todd. Thus is his life measured out not in coffee spoons but through the dusty and ant-ridden pages of a Victorian optimistic humanist narrative about the possibility of human fulfilment in that seat of barbarism, London. (It should be noted that Waugh apparently loathed Dickens, considering his novels to be smug and complacent and dubbing him 'unhappy hypocrite'.<sup>19</sup>) The closure of the novel, therefore, offers no consoling end but gives us a Modernist vision of eternal exile and a Gothic stasis of perpetual torture. This is a parodic comic Gothic: after the desertion of the Brazilian 'savages' (frightened by a clockwork mouse), the undramatic death of Dr Messinger (drowned in ten feet of falls), and Tony's fevered solitary journey haunted by visions of Brenda and other English 'savages', there is no body horror (indeed, Mr Todd rescues the delirious Tony with his body swollen, cut and covered with insect bites and restores him to physical health). There is no more haunting by visible ghosts, only the monotonous reiteration of the Word of a bogus literary Father. Hetton meanwhile falls into the hands of the thrifty, bourgeois and irredeemably

modern 'impoverished Lasts' who hope to restore its fortunes by means of a silver fox farm (the third set of savages to which Tony succumbs, according to Waugh<sup>20</sup>) while the human savage, Mrs Beaver, in truly modern entrepreneurial spirit, has taken the opportunity to arrange the erection of a memorial to 'Anthony Last of Hetton, Explorer'. Last things, indeed. This is a bleaker vision than Eliot's: there is no 'Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata', no 'Shantih shantih shantih', only a living death for Tony Last and for Hetton a destiny perhaps already mapped out with the destruction of the old pre-Reformation house and the erection of the bogus Gothic edifice that in the end betrays him. In Waugh's work, it is not until *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) that such an act of vandalism is redeemed through spirituality. Waugh's vision is profoundly conservative and his hope lies in an older religious commitment not dreamt of by the hapless Tony Last who, it transpires, believes himself to be a Gothic man but is irredeemably a modern man.

We would suggest, then, that the effect of Waugh's borrowings from and debts to Eliot's work is to foreground the Gothic strain within Eliot's own writing. *A Handful of Dust* both lightly nods to the moment of high Modernism whilst pillaging the Gothic tradition for the appropriate tropes and motifs with which to represent the alienation inherent in the modern condition. Moreover, the Gothic element in Eliot's poetry – which his critical silence in this respect obscures as an intellectual legacy – is made entirely evident in Waugh's novel. *A Handful of Dust*, in making us conscious of that element within Eliot's work, offers a dialogue with Modernist writing which reveals an intuitive awareness of the importance of the Gothic within Modernism long before critics set their minds to this conjunction.

Eliot's work also influenced that of Djuna Barnes. Ahmed Nimeiri argues that in Barnes's works 'the similarities to Eliot's poems are abundant and the debt to Eliot is obvious' – not least in the likenesses to be drawn between the character of O'Connor in *Nightwood* and the Tiresias of 'The Waste Land'.<sup>21</sup> *The Antiphon*, published in 1958, while drawing on European sources such as Ibsen, Strindberg and O'Neill, clearly owes much to Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, which Barnes saw performed in 1939, the year of its publication (significantly, *The Antiphon* is set in 1939).<sup>22</sup> However, Eliot had a direct involvement in the publication of Barnes's work whereas he had no such link with Waugh. After rejection by several publishing houses, both *Nightwood* and *The Antiphon* achieved publication in Europe mainly because of Eliot's support for, and intervention on behalf of, Barnes's writing. His role in enabling the publication of

*Nightwood* by Faber and Faber is well known. The revival of critical interest in Barnes's work during the 1990s has tended to construct his editorial role as a negative one, a prevailing view that has been challenged by Georgette Fleischer who suggests that:

Eliot published *Nightwood*, despite the anticipation that it would not do well commercially and despite the danger of censorship, because he identified with its spiritual crisis and because he recognized it as a work of genius.<sup>23</sup>

Fleischer's article argues persuasively that feminist retrievals of *Nightwood* have constructed Eliot as the 'high priest of patriarchal Anglo-American high Modernism', exercising a negative influence on the work of the woman writer.<sup>24</sup> It is not our intention to enter into this debate but to suggest that in recognising *Nightwood* 'as a work of genius', Eliot aligned it critically with a European poetic tradition and failed to acknowledge the novel's debt to more populist Gothic traditions, both European and American. His introduction to *Nightwood*, in recommending the novel to readers, identifies qualities which place it in a poetic and dramatic tradition. It also defines it as a work which will appeal mainly to a highly cultivated elite:

A prose that is altogether alive demands something of the reader that the ordinary novel-reader is not prepared to give. To say that *Nightwood* will appeal primarily to readers of poetry does not mean that it is not a novel, but that it is so good a novel that only sensibilities trained on poetry can wholly appreciate it.<sup>25</sup>

For Eliot, then, *Nightwood*'s Modernist credentials as a difficult text are to be applauded. He exhorts the reader not to dismiss 'this group of people as a horrid sideshow of freaks', condemning such a judgement as being symptomatic both of a Puritan morality and of a modern tendency to ascribe individual misery to 'society'. Without dismissing the novel's grotesque elements, he accommodates them in an identification of its 'quality of horror and doom' with Elizabethan tragedy. This is not surprising, given Eliot's anglophilia and his rejection of American culture in favour of the European tradition. Like Eliot and Pound, Barnes also reconstructed her identity along European lines. Herring goes so far as to suggest that Barnes's 'intense alienation from both family and nation' resulted in her developing a sense of herself as a European rather than an American writer:

Her values and loyalties were much more English, and what she knew of the United States was mostly New York. She became convinced that European

culture was superior to American; other than love and friendship, art and culture were about all that she valued.<sup>26</sup>

What interests us here, however, is the fact that Eliot's construction of himself as a European intellectual blinds him to certain aspects of *Nightwood*: he does not place its grotesque elements in a tradition of Gothic fiction, a tradition which was considered to be populist and sensational, nor is he alert to the novel's particularly American inflection of the Gothic, which places the city in direct contrast to the wilderness.

In contrast with *A Handful of Dust*, the Gothic parodying in *Nightwood* is more implicit than explicit although a careful reading of the book reveals the appropriation of several Gothic tropes. The title evokes not only the wilderness of Modernist preoccupation but also the tradition of American Gothic in which, as Leslie Fiedler has pointed out, the haunted forest and the haunted cave were substituted for the haunted castles, ruined abbeys and dungeons of its European precursor.<sup>27</sup> In a country whose early settlers were conscious of living on the edge of a vast wilderness, the virgin forest became an enduring setting within American Gothic, particularly in the fiction of authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne (his 'Young Goodman Brown' is an obvious example). In Barnes's representation of expatriate Americans in a modern European metropolis, this American legacy is never far away and indeed the novel's climactic final scene takes place in a ruined chapel in the rambling woods on Nora Flood's American estate. Paul West's comment on *Ryder* (1928) that 'One of the most fascinating things about Barnes's antic novel is to watch her partly Anglo mind whisk across the Atlantic only to hustle back to the States', also holds true for *Nightwood*.<sup>28</sup> Much of the setting, however, places the action in several European cities but predominantly Paris, which appears as another modern 'unreal city'. The novel's plot revolves around the life and relationships of Robin Vote who, as a young American living in Paris, marries into the Austrian Volkbein family and bears her husband a son whom she deserts within the space of a few weeks. The novel follows her quest for emotional, sexual and intellectual liberation enacted through lesbian relationships with Nora Flood and Jenny Petherbridge, both fellow American expatriates in Paris. Robin herself speaks very little in the novel and the reader is rarely made privy to her thoughts; however, the unsatisfactory nature of her relationships with others is perhaps signalled by the fact that the novel's final scene involves an interaction that is outside human relationships. The unfolding of this bizarre plot is counterpointed by the anguished but comic

monologues of Matthew O'Connor, an Irish American expatriate living in Paris.

As in Waugh's novel, fakery and fraudulence are seen to be aspects of the human condition within Modernity. The portraits of Guido Volkbein's mother and father, for example, turn out to be fakes ('Had anyone cared to look into the matter they would have discovered these canvases to be reproductions of two intrepid and ancient actors'<sup>29</sup>). This false ancestry, however, is not mere snobbery but a ruse for survival: as a Jew of Italian descent living in Vienna in the 1920s (where anti-Semitic feeling was stronger than in Berlin), Guido Volkbein is a potential victim of an incipient fascism and therefore seeks refuge in a false Austrian aristocrat identity. An unqualified 'doctor' and a transvestite, Matthew O'Connor is also a fake, a man who goes 'back into his dress' at night:

In the narrow iron bed, with its heavy and dirty linen sheets, lay the doctor in a woman's flannel night gown. The doctor's head, with its over-large black eyes, its full gun-metal cheeks and chin, was framed in the golden semi-circle of a wig with long pendent curls that touched his shoulders, and falling back against the pillow, turned up the shadowy interior of their cylinders. He was heavily rouged and his lashes painted. (*N*, pp. 116–17)

As a man who has wanted nothing more in life than to be a woman with 'deep corn curls to my bum, with a womb as big as the king's kettle, and a bosom as high as the bowsprit of a fishing schooner' (*N*, p. 132), O'Connor's daytime identity is deeply dislocated from his more authentic night 'self'. Robin's fake appearance as young male *flâneur* on the streets of Paris (she dresses like a boy and enacts a 'masculine' sexual promiscuity) indicates a similarly fractured identity. The binary of 'fakery'/'authenticity' that helps structure the novel is indicative of a specifically modern and fractured subjectivity. As Jerrold E. Hogle has pointed out, however, this particular binary is intrinsic also to the Gothic mode and, indeed, is one which is self-consciously played out in Gothic texts and artefacts.<sup>30</sup> Hogle argues that:

the Gothic refaking of fakery becomes a major repository of the newest contradictions and anxieties in western life that most need to be abjected by those who face them so that middle-class westerners can keep constructing a distinct sense of identity. The progress of abjection in the Gothic is inseparable from the progress of the ghost of the counterfeit, particularly as that symbolic mode and the ideologies at war within it keep employing each other – and acting out abjections – both to conceal and to confront some of the basic conflicts in western culture.<sup>31</sup>



Drawing on Jean Baudrillard's *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Hogle suggests that the rise of Modernity, from the Renaissance onwards, resulted in a crisis of identity in the western world. The stability of the feudal world was replaced by the social mobility and geographical displacements/relocations characteristic of a post-Renaissance world; the resulting psychological instability manifested itself in a breakdown between the sign and its referent: 'Educated Europeans felt that they were leaving behind the age of the "obligatory sign", the notion of signifiers as always referring to an ordained status in people and things where "assignation is absolute and there is no class mobility"'.<sup>32</sup>

It is not surprising, then, to find that the binary of fakery/authenticity within *Nightwood* is overlaid by a Gothic patina. As in Eugène Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris*, Barnes's Paris is presented as an 'unreal city' which is dark and labyrinthine – as a Gothic space in which the boundaries of an everyday reality threaten to dissolve. The novel's emphasis on the grey areas between night and day draws attention to borderline states and blurred identities. More specifically, the novel offers parodic reworkings of the Gothic tradition in, for example, the Volkbeins' expensive Viennese home, described as a Gothic mansion: 'large, dark and imposing', its floors covered with a 'thick dragon's blood pile of rugs from Madrid' (*N*, p. 17). Furthermore, whilst Felix Volkbein is explicitly linked with the Wandering Jew (*N*, p. 20), Robin is implicitly associated with the figure of the Vampire. As a *flâneuse* on the streets of Paris in the 1920s, Robin enacts a masculine promiscuity that drives her lover, Nora, to distraction. In her predatory wanderings and her 'feeding off' her café victims, however, Robin demonstrates not only the sexual voracity of the vamp, but also the desires of a quasi-vampiric figure. Keith Tester has asked 'Could it be that the flâneur is rather like a metropolitan vampire – a domesticated variant of the figure popularized by Bram Stoker?'<sup>33</sup> In this respect, we should perhaps view Robin in the context of Barnes's complete oeuvre, in particular the early play *The Dove*, in which, as Bonnie Kime Scott notes, intimacy is associated with 'vampirism and eating the beloved'.<sup>34</sup>

The parodic reworking of the Gothic that we see in Barnes's *Nightwood* allows her to present a vision of the Gothic sublime through the eyes of the socially abjected (the Jew, the lesbian, the transvestite) and to question the very validity of terms such as 'transgression' and 'normality'. This, in turn, allows the envisioning of a different social/sexual reality typical of Modernity's restless instability. The first is apparent in the novel's erasure of the 'normal' nuclear family and its replacement by alternative structures. Thus the holy trinity of father, mother and child which has so

dominated Western religion and culture is replaced by other trinities: Jenny, Robin and the child (Sylvia); Robin, Nora and the doll; Felix, Frau Mann and young Guido; Nora, Robin and the dog. Despite the emotional anguish of these triads, such 'families' are seen as no more damaging than the conventional nuclear family; 'normality' as benign is therefore thrown into question. In this spirit, the novel's disconcerting closure, which portrays Robin's union with a dog, offers a celebration of bestiality in a final moment of bleak climax and reconciliation:

He ran this way and that, low down in his throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees. (N, p. 239)

This scene recalls the traditional Gothic novel's fondness for the sacrilegious act – for example, the rape of the drugged Antonia by Ambrosio the monk in the Convent of St Clare that we find in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) or the staking of Lucy Westenra's body in the churchyard in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). However, like the climax of Waugh's novel, the final scene of *Nightwood* offers us parodic Gothic. There is no violence or demonic presence conjured up within the ruined chapel: only its sanctity, already dissipated through neglect, is violated. Thus the only boundary breached is that between the human and the bestial in so far as the encounter leads to mutual fulfilment for woman and beast. However, this is in itself radically ambiguous: on one level, the act harms no one and merely exposes the relativity of moral values (particularly in relation to the sexual act). On the other hand, however, it symbolically suggests – in its erasure of the boundaries between the human and the animal – a possible descent into irrationality, one all too readily illustrated by the rise of fascism in the 1930s. In thus dissolving the line between the civilised and the barbaric, *Nightwood* – like *A Handful of Dust* – reveals its Gothic credentials. Parodic though it is, the ending of Barnes's novel remains Gothic in that it questions the notion that Modernity is synonymous with progress. Indeed, such parodic Gothic, while parading its credentials as a sophisticated form of intertextuality, is able to offer a critique of Modernity quite as disturbing as that afforded by 'serious' Gothic. It would seem, therefore, that on one level the novel's climax articulates the insight that Modernism's anxieties concerning the fragmentation of the self are essentially Gothic. Mocking the vile body of Modernity in this novel, then, indicates a deep anxiety about

what it means to be human. *Nightwood's* strange inconclusive closure, like that of Waugh's novel, asserts that despair, alienation and homelessness are characteristic of Modernity. Mr Todd, as his name suggests, represents a slow, lingering death of the soul in a place far from home where Tony's waiting for rescue is tantamount to waiting for Godot. Robin's coupling with a dog reduces her to something we might see as less than human. Significantly, the blackly comic nature of both endings has much to do with their incongruous juxtaposition of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*: a celebrated English novelist's works which centre on London, becoming instruments of torture in a Brazilian jungle; man's best friend becoming, as it were, woman's. Neither novel's ending offers a reabsorption into society, despite the strong comic element in both. Significantly, while both authors reject Modernity and its myth of progress, both recognise – with regret, perhaps – the impossibility of return to the values of a pre-Reformation world. The only possible solace lies in religion: Catholicism hovers in the margins of *Nightwood*; for Waugh, the Catholicism he embraced in his own life during the 1930s had yet to take central place in his novels. Eliot's adoption of Anglo-Catholicism is well-known. In the words of Delmore Schwartz, 'only one who has known fully the deracination and alienation inherent in modern life can be moved to make so extreme an effort at returning to the traditional community as Eliot makes in attaching himself to Anglo-Catholicism and Royalism'.<sup>35</sup>

In recognising genius in *Nightwood*, Eliot places it in the literary tradition of high culture. He sees the skull beneath the skin in describing its 'quality of horror and doom' as 'very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy'.<sup>36</sup> Not dissimilarly, Waugh described the end of his novel as 'a "conceit" in the Webster manner'.<sup>37</sup> What was perhaps not so evident to contemporary readers is the fact that the element of Gothic parody used by both authors allowed them to deal with twentieth-century horrors in the wake of the Great War in a manner which avoided either gratuitous textual violence or the deliberate mimesis of dismembered bodies and butchered corpses. In a sense, that scenario is taken for granted as part of the modern consciousness: Frau Mann comments in *Nightwood*, 'I've an album of my own . . . and everyone in it looks like a soldier – even though they are dead' (*N*, p. 47). The Gothic dismembered body is all too present as a shared cultural memory. Thus Gothic as body horror is eschewed and replaced by Gothic parody or comic gothic – a generic appropriation which allows engagement with horror at one remove. If Linda Hutcheon is right in defining parody as 'repetition with critical difference',<sup>38</sup> what we

have in these two 1930s texts is an appropriation of Gothic which allows exploration of metaphysical rather than physical horror. The scene of horror is both the 'unreal city' and the wilderness; they are ultimately interchangeable. Just as Robin returns to her American origins in her ultimate embrace of the primitive, Barnes implicitly acknowledges the locus of a specifically American Gothic in her title which, in her own words, 'makes it sound like night-shade, poison and night and forest'.<sup>39</sup> Such a legacy is not accommodated by Eliot's determinedly Eurocentric critical paradigm which, in seeking cultural authenticity in the past and across the Atlantic, ignores the significance of both the Gothic in Modernist texts in general and the legacy of American Gothic in Barnes's *Nightwood* in particular.

#### Notes

- 1 See Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1985, and Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism: Postmodern Feminist Readings of Woolf, West, and Barnes*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995.
- 2 See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, PostModernism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1986, and John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880–1939*, London, Faber & Faber, 1992.
- 3 Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace (eds), *Gothic Modernisms*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2001.
- 4 And I will show you something different from either / Your shadow at morning striding behind you / Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you; / I will show you fear in a handful of dust. T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', in *The Waste Land and Other Poems*, London, Faber & Faber, 1922.
- 5 Waugh in a letter to Henry Yorke (Green), describing Tony Last. Cited in Martin Stannard (ed.), *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984, p. 157.
- 6 Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 9.
- 7 Jeffrey Heath, *The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and his Writing*, London, Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1982, p. 119.
- 8 'It was like a miracle, but before our very eyes, and almost in the drawing of a breath, the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight.' (Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, [1897] 1993, p. 484.)
- 9 See Diane Chisholm, 'Obscene Modernism: Eros Noir and the Profane Illumination of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*', in *American Literature*, 69:1

- (March 1997) pp. 167–206, and Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, pp. 173–6 and 180.
- 10 Phillip Herring, *Djuna: The Life and Work of Djuna Barnes*, New York, Viking, 1995, p. 219.
  - 11 Jane Marcus, 'Mousemeat', in Mary Lynn Broe (ed.), *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes*, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois Press, 1991, p. 196.
  - 12 Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, [1930] 1938, p. 220.
  - 13 Unsigned review, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 September 1934, cited in Stannard (ed.), *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*, p. 149.
  - 14 'Largely through Eliot's influence, the assumption that most people are dead became, by the 1930s, a standard item in the repertoire of any self-respecting intellectual.' Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 10.
  - 15 The name 'Cruttwell' appears attached to a variety of unglamorous characters in Waugh's fiction, a low-key but enduring revenge against Waugh's hated Dean of the same name at Hertford College, Oxford.
  - 16 Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, [1934] 1951, p. 116. Hereafter, *HD*.
  - 17 David Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, Vol. 2, *The Modern Gothic*, London, Longman, 1996, pp. 183–4.
  - 18 Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 9.
  - 19 Cited in Heath, *The Picturesque Prison*, p. 118.
  - 20 Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 9.
  - 21 Ahmed Nimeiri, 'Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* and "the Experience of America"', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 34:1 (1993), p. 111.
  - 22 Herring, *Djuna*, p. 262.
  - 23 Georgette Fleischer, 'Djuna Barnes and T.S. Eliot: The Politics and Poetics of *Nightwood*', *Studies in the Novel*, 30:3 (Autumn 1998), 405–35.
  - 24 Fleischer, 'Djuna Barnes and T.S. Eliot', p. 416.
  - 25 T.S. Eliot, 'Introduction', in Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, London, Faber & Faber, 1936, p. 3.
  - 26 Herring, *Djuna*, p. 85.
  - 27 Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, London, Jonathan Cape, [1960] 1967, p. 144.
  - 28 Paul West, "'The Havoc of this Nicety'", Afterword to Barnes's *Ryder*, Elmwood Park, Dalkey Archive Press, 1999, p. 243.
  - 29 Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, London, Faber & Faber, [1936] 1985, p. 19. Hereafter, *N*.
  - 30 As in, for example, Walpole's Strawberry Hill home and in the publication of *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 as a true translation by 'William Marshall, Gent.' of a sixteenth-century Italian manuscript by 'Onuphrio Muralto', supposedly a 'Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto'.

- 31 Jerrold E. Hogle, 'The Ghost of the Counterfeit and the Progress of Abjection', in David Punter (ed.), *A Companion to the Gothic*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000, p. 297.
- 32 *Ibid.* p. 297.
- 33 Keith Tester (ed.), *The Flâneur*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 19.
- 34 Scott, *Refiguring Modernism*, p. 112.
- 35 Delmore Schwartz, 'T.S. Eliot as the International Hero', in Jay Martin (ed.), *A Collection of Critical Essays on 'The Waste Land'*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1968, p. 104.
- 36 Eliot, 'Introduction', in Barnes, *Nightwood*, p. 7.
- 37 Waugh in a letter to Henry Yorke (Green). Cited in Stannard (ed.), *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*, p. 157.
- 38 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, London, Methuen, 1985, p. 7.
- 39 Letter from Barnes to Emily Coleman, 23 June 1935, cited in Fleischer, 'Djuna Barnes and T.S. Eliot', p. 411.

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## Encounters with genius: Gertrude Stein and Alfred North Whitehead

*Kate Fullbrook*

Notoriously, in her *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), Gertrude Stein assigns to her lifelong companion the repeated comment that she has met three geniuses in her life: Stein, Picasso, and Alfred North Whitehead. This remarkable statement, which functions as one of the main structural elements of the text, first appears at the end of the first chapter, in the context of Alice's initial encounter with the woman who was to become her friend and lover. In typical Steinian fashion, everyday observations are mixed with wry, audacious gravity as Toklas first sets eyes on her future partner in the Paris house of Stein's sister-in-law:

I had come to Paris. There I went to see Mrs Stein who had in the meantime returned to Paris, and there at her house I met Gertrude Stein. I was impressed by the coral brooch she wore and by her voice. I may say that only three times in my life have I met a genius and each time a bell within me rang and I was not mistaken, and I may say in each case it was before there was any general recognition of them of the quality of genius in them. The three geniuses of whom I wish to speak are Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso and Alfred Whitehead. I have met many important people, I have met several great people but I have only known three first class geniuses and in each case on sight within me something rang. In no one of the three cases have I been mistaken. In this way my new full life began.<sup>1</sup>

This famous, amusing passage is dense with various kinds of significance. Most importantly, it declares a judgment on whose work is important in the development of modernity with astonishing brevity and certainty. It offers a striking example of Stein's habit of deftly twitching traditional, even moribund, tropes in such a way as to make them serve fresh purposes (in this case, love at first sight is transformed into the activation of Toklas's innate genius-detector). It presents a view of genius which is not dependent on general recognition, which is a matter of degree, and which



changes the lives of at least some who come in contact with it. Finally, it intimately aligns Stein with two other contemporary figures, Picasso and Whitehead, who are linked as the sole clear possessors of genius of the highest quality whom Toklas has encountered. Stein emphasises this classificatory ranking of the quality of genius. As Toklas is later made to explain, her own function with regard to the geniuses she and Stein collected was to tend to their wives. This is so much the case that, during the time Toklas contemplated writing her autobiography herself, notes Stein, she thought of calling it ‘The wives of geniuses I have sat with’.

I have sat with so many. I have sat with wives who were not wives, of geniuses who were real geniuses. I have sat with real wives of geniuses who were not real geniuses. I have sat with wives of geniuses, of near geniuses, of would be geniuses, in short I have sat very often and very long with many wives and wives of many geniuses.<sup>2</sup>

What interests me here are Stein’s taxonomic categories of the genus genius: the real, the not real, the near, the would be. It is only herself, Picasso and Whitehead who are awarded the supreme accolade of being recognised as ‘first class geniuses’; only they ring Toklas’s bell. Further, the transnational, transcultural, transhistorical orientation of each of these figures forms an important part of their significance. For Stein, who regarded herself as the embodiment both of modernity and of its tendency to draw its features from an amalgamation of cultural sources, internationalism was an integral part of the true modern genius. And, as an American, which she saw as a national identity which, in its subsumption of many divergent origins, created the pattern for the modern, Stein’s choice of geniuses to flank her in this trio is especially revealing.

Given the combination of her sense of her own importance in the development of Modernist writing along with her failure to attract publishers and readers, it is scarcely surprising that Stein placed herself in the lead position of this famous triad. She needed all the recognition she could get, even if she had to generate it herself. And, besides, she seriously regarded herself in these terms. Toklas undoubtedly concurred. The inclusion of Picasso is also expected. By the early 1930s, when Stein wrote Alice’s *Autobiography*, Picasso’s international fame was secure. The mutually formative process of his painting Stein’s portrait shapes one of the most memorable anecdotes in the *Autobiography*. Stein’s part in her friend’s rise to international success is stressed in the text. It is Stein who first buys Picasso’s work, shows it to the many visitors to her home on the rue de Fleurus (when she and her brother, Leo, went their separate ways

and divided their astonishing collection of Modernist paintings, Stein kept the Picassos), befriends the impecunious Picasso before fame has secured his fortune. And, just as the Spaniard used Stein as the model for one of his most notable portraits, so Stein made Picasso the subject of a number of her writings.<sup>3</sup> The links between the two were particularly strong early in both artists' careers when they were developing their techniques. It is a tantalising and important association and has been treated accordingly by critics and biographers.

Stein and Picasso complement each other beautifully in their personal flamboyance, their analytical intelligence in their respective arts, their adventurousness, their iconographic status in the annals of twentieth-century avant-garde practice and aesthetics, their fulfilment of the myth of the alien coming to artistic fruition in Modernist Paris. However, the inclusion of the third genius – Alfred North Whitehead – in Stein's triad seems altogether peculiar. In comparison to the swashbuckling and eccentric reputations of Stein and Picasso the choice of the mild, deeply respectable Cambridge mathematician (who was notably good in committees) as the third genius looks, at first glance, most peculiar. Of course, delight in startling is one of Stein's (and the twentieth-century avant-garde's) most cherished tactics. And, in the context of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, the choice of the gentle, establishment figure of Whitehead as the third genius parallels exactly Stein's account of the role of the equally modest Henri Rousseau at the wild bohemian banquet given in his honour in Montmartre by Picasso. But, as always, Stein is also very serious when she makes categorical statements, offers judgements, or selects notable figures for attention. And the insistent entwining of herself, Picasso and Whitehead affords a telling clue as to Stein's personal, yet very American, view of the internationalist cast of the intellectual and artistic development of the tendencies which shaped what she very consciously analysed as the new, modern era.

The notion of genius has its own deeply interesting history.<sup>4</sup> Stein's frequent evocation of this concept throughout her writing partakes of this history in that she characteristically links the title of genius with those she sees as outriders of the *Zeitgeist*, those who are most sensitively attuned to faint vibrations of coming historical shifts and who help to bring them to fruition. This usage links her, among writers in English, back through Emerson, Matthew Arnold and Coleridge and through them, to Hegel, that is, to a major strain in American and European romantic thought. But aside from her implicit acceptance of standard romantic usage, Stein inflects the concept of genius with kinds of emphasis which are particu-

larly her own. For example, in 'Portraits and Repetition', one of the lectures from her American tour of 1934, she comments:

Nothing makes any difference as long as some one is listening while they are talking. If the same person does the talking and the listening why so much the better there is just by so much the greater concentration. One may really indeed say that that is the essence of genius, of being most intensely alive, that is being one who is at the same time talking and listening. It is really that that makes one a genius.<sup>5</sup>

Again, several comments from Stein's *Everybody's Autobiography*, published in 1937, help to clarify her use of the term. 'It takes a lot of time to be a genius, you have to sit around so much doing nothing, really doing nothing'. Again, musing about the onset of her conviction of her own genius, during the composition of her massive novel, *The Making of Americans* (1925) and her brother, Leo's jealous unwillingness to admit it without the endorsement of public recognition which she did not then have:

It is funny this thing of being a genius, there is no reason for it, there is no reason it should be you and should not have been him, no reason at all that it should have been you, no no reason at all.

'What is a genius', she asks later in the book:

If you are one how do you know you are one. It is not a conviction lots of people are convinced they are one sometime in the course of their living but they are not one and what is the difference between being one and not being one. There is of course a difference but what is it . . . being a genius is not a worrisome thing, because it is so occupying . . . and anyway a genius need not think, because if he does think he has to be wrong or right he has to argue or decide and after all he might just as well not do that, nor need he be himself inside him.<sup>6</sup>

The question of genius continues to trouble the text. And Stein continues to generate requirements and partial definitions of genius. 'After all a genius has to be made in a country which is forming itself to be what it is but is not yet that is what it is not yet common property. And so I do know what a genius is', she states, 'a genius is some one who does not have to remember the two hundred years that everybody else has to remember'. Or, most fulsomely, 'when one is completely wise that is when one is a genius the things that make you a genius make you live but have nothing to do with being living that is with the struggle for existence. Really genius that is the existing without any internal recognition of time has nothing

to do with the will to live'. For Stein, then, genius is not personal. It has nothing to do with identity or the struggle for survival. It is intensely located in a present to which it is preternaturally receptive in ways which override the determining influence of the past. It is enunciatory, almost oracularly ventriloquistic: it simultaneously listens to its time and speaks it. Finally, it is connected not so much with place but with the process of place-in-formation as complex entities available to consciousness. It is this last characteristic which at least partially leads Stein to add another (Jewish) genius to her roster in a series of remarks about 'the peaceful Oriental penetration into European culture' which she sees as characteristic of the twentieth century 'because perhaps Europe is finished'. And these are the grounds to which she appeals when she notes that 'Einstein was the creative philosophic mind of the century and I have been the creative literary mind of the century also with the Oriental mixing with the European.'<sup>7</sup> It is not fixity but fluidity with regard to place that characterises the minds which will map the future.

Stein had good reason to gesture toward her innate internationalism, which she saw as a feature of her Americanness, a crucial part of her identity on which she always insisted. The modern, she believed, was antithetical to material fixities of any kind and characterised instead by the kaleidoscopic and often brutal flow of ideas in practice. For this reason, she saw America as the paradigmatic modern nation. 'America', she noted, 'created the twentieth century . . . America having begun the creation in the sixties of the nineteenth century is now the oldest country in the world'. The American Civil War marked the coalescence of the cruelty, disembodiedness, abstraction, and passion for sheer action which are the hallmarks both of modernity and of the American experience.<sup>8</sup> For Stein, the governing qualities of abstraction and cruelty are ones which America shares with Spain. All this goes a long way toward explaining the theoretical principles behind Stein's high regard for Picasso as a Spaniard with profound internationalist interests. The modern, for Stein, involves the disintegration of exclusively European modes of thought, and the coalescence of a new intellectual formation which is a composite of the habitual casts of mind of diverse cultures, presided over by a tendency toward action and abstraction rather than rootedness and tradition.

With all this in mind, Stein's selection of Whitehead as Toklas's third genius becomes less mysterious. Before considering the ways in which Whitehead might have occupied intellectual territory which was particularly attractive to Stein, the intense circumstances of their personal encounter need to be noted.

Stein met Whitehead in 1914 when she and Toklas travelled from Paris to London with hopes of securing a contract with John Lane for the publication of *Three Lives*. At the time the forty-year-old Stein was immensely frustrated by her failure to secure publishers for her work (she paid for the initial publication of much of her writing herself). Most gallingly of all, the book which she regarded as her most important, *The Making of Americans*, on which she had laboured from 1902 to 1911, was still unpublished, and would not be published until 1925. Further, her personal life had been utterly transformed when her beloved brother, Leo, with whom she had lived since 1903, quarrelled with her and left Paris for Florence in April 1914. Stein's life was now allied firmly with that of Toklas, who was as at least as ambitious to promote Stein's fame and ensure the wide circulation of her work as Stein was herself. Late in the spring of 1914 the publisher, John Lane, visited Stein and Toklas in Paris, talked about bringing out an English edition of *Three Lives*, and asked them to come to London in July to discuss the contract. Delighted, the pair left for England on 5 July 1914, planning to stay for a few weeks, and found themselves in a London full of talk of the coming war. After inviting them to tea on the first Sunday of their trip, Lane told them he had to leave town for a week and made an appointment to see Stein at the end of the month, when the contract for *Three Lives* would be arranged. In high spirits, Stein and Toklas accepted an invitation by the mother of Hope Mirlees, a young woman they had met in Paris, to stay in Cambridge for ten days. The Mirlees were very hospitable. Stein and Toklas were shown around Cambridge and taken to lunch at Newnham College. At a dinner given by Mrs Mirlees they met A.E. Housman and Alfred North Whitehead and his wife, Evelyn. Stein and the Whiteheads took to each other immediately, and the Cambridge dinner was followed by an invitation for Stein and Toklas to join the Whiteheads for dinner at home in London and then to spend a weekend with them at their country house in Lockridge, just outside of Marlborough in Wiltshire. On 31 July Stein signed the contract with Lane for *Three Lives*. In the afternoon she and Toklas boarded the train for Marlborough, where Whitehead met them. While they were at Lockridge, war was declared. Stein and Toklas could not return to France and the Whiteheads insisted they extend their stay until they could go back to Paris. They remained with the Whiteheads until 17 October, when they left for France with Evelyn Whitehead who secured a military pass through her friend, Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of War, to take a coat to her son, North, who had secured an army commission at the outbreak of the war. The Whiteheads' other two children,

their daughter, Jessie, and their youngest son, Eric, were also to serve in the war. Eric was killed when his plane was shot down in 1918. For Whitehead, said Bertrand Russell, the loss of his son led to ‘appalling grief’, and ‘it was only by an immense effort of moral discipline that he was able to go on with his work. The pain of this loss had a great deal to do with turning his thoughts to philosophy and with causing him to seek ways of escaping from belief in a merely mechanistic universe’.<sup>9</sup> During the summer of 1914 the grief the war would bring lay in the future. The emotions at Lockridge were those of Europe in general: fear, confusion, panic and dread. When Toklas told Stein that the Germans had retreated from what appeared to be their imminent invasion of Paris, the two women simply broke down and wept for relief, a relief which was their main reaction when they finally managed to return home to the rue de Fleurus in the autumn.<sup>10</sup> Lane’s cancellation of the publication of *Three Lives* was a very minor casualty of the war.

If Stein’s life during her extended encounter with Whitehead had fallen into new patterns in 1914, Whitehead’s had also undergone a recent transformation. But if Stein’s life had been full of changes and movement – this was, after all, a paradigmatically cosmopolitan woman who had spent her early childhood in Vienna and Paris; her late childhood in Oakland, California; her early young adulthood in Baltimore and Cambridge, Massachusetts, before living with her brother in Paris after a good deal of European travel, taking in, along the way, the early deaths of both parents, the disintegration of her close Jewish family, the near-completion of a medical degree after study with some of the most distinguished minds in America, the assumption of a clear lesbian sexuality, a foundational role as patron of Modernist art, and the construction of a new theory of writing – Whitehead’s, at least externally, had been staid, quiet and eventless. Born in 1861 to a clerical family at Ramsgate on the Isle of Thanet, a locality to which he always remained inordinately attached, Whitehead’s life followed an entirely predictable English, middle-class pattern. After his childhood in Kent, he was sent at the age of fourteen to Sherborne in Dorset where he served as Head Boy and Captain of Games in his final year. Always mathematically talented, he was awarded a scholarship at Trinity College, Cambridge, which he entered in 1880. He stayed at Trinity until 1910, as a student, then a Fellow and Lecturer. Aside from his marriage in 1890 to a lively woman (whose passion for expensive household decorating led her to extract money secretly from Bertrand Russell), Whitehead’s life was superficially placid. He was a good teacher, a good husband, a good father, a good colleague, and a good mathematician,

whose work was of interest only to specialists. He seems to have been an amiable, if often abstracted, man whose character was known for its sweetness.

When Stein met Whitehead the predictable patterns which had governed his life had dissolved. His extraordinary collaboration with his former student, Bertrand Russell, had produced the monumental *Principia Mathematica*, with its magisterial project of subsuming mathematics into logic. The first three volumes of the work were published in 1910, 1912 and 1913. Their appearance was one of the great intellectual events of its era. Whitehead had moved from Cambridge to London in 1910, and his teaching at University College, London and a professorship in Applied Mathematics at Imperial College would lead him to the deanship of the Faculty of Science of the University of London in 1921 and a view of the radically new needs of modern education which undercut the classicism of his educational experience. His move to Harvard in the 1920s, which Whitehead saw as another act of embracing the modern, and his turn from mathematics to philosophy again transformed his life and refocused his thought. When Stein wrote the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in the early 1930s, the text which contains most of her remarks on Whitehead, Whitehead's great popular success with *Science and the Modern World*, the chapters of which were first given as the Lowell Lectures at Harvard in 1925, was behind him. He would spend the rest of his life as one of the most admired and beloved of international intellectual figures.

From the end of July to the middle of October in 1914, in the peace of the Wiltshire countryside and against a background of the growing war, Stein and Whitehead spent a great deal of time together. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* the comments about the nature of their intense discussions are meagre if tantalising, and marked by a portentous resonance.

Gertrude Stein and Doctor Whitehead walked endlessly around the country. They talked of philosophy and history, it was during these days that Gertrude Stein realised how completely it was Doctor Whitehead and not Russell who had had the ideas for their great book. Doctor Whitehead, the gentlest and most simply generous of human beings never claimed anything for himself and enormously admired anyone who was brilliant, and Russell undoubtedly was brilliant.<sup>11</sup>

Amid the frantic conversations about the war and the parade of other guests at Lockridge, which included Russell and Lytton Strachey, the

Stein/Whitehead dialogue continued. 'The long summer wore on. It was beautiful weather and beautiful country, and Doctor Whitehead and Gertrude Stein never ceased wandering around in it and talking about all things'. Precisely what the two talked about is not recorded, but a few instances of the nature of the more general discussions in the household are. For example, in order to divert Russell from arguing for his well-known principle of pacifism, which the Whiteheads felt they could not bear as their children prepared to go to war, Stein introduced the topic of education. Russell co-operated nicely and attacked the weaknesses of American education, concentrating particularly on its indifference to Greek. 'Gertrude Stein replied that of course England which was an island needed Greece which was or might have been an island. At any rate greek was essentially an island culture, while America needed essentially the culture of a continent which was of necessity latin'. The psychology of the English and the Americans were quite different, and Stein spoke eloquently 'on the disembodied abstract quality of the american character and cited examples, mingling automobiles with Emerson, and all proving that they did not need greek'. On another occasion, Stein ridiculed the notion of the potency of German organisation on the grounds that the Germans 'are not modern'. Equally, she was certain that the United States would not back a 'medieval' country like Germany in the war. America's political sympathies would be governed by the fact of its being a republic, 'and a republic can have everything in common with France and a great deal in common with England but . . . nothing in common with Germany'.<sup>12</sup> Aside from her personal concern about the fate of Paris and her home, Stein's own interest in the war tended toward the abstract, toward the ubiquitous and general experience of war which is part of the geography of the human mind, She speaks of this phenomenon in *Everybody's Autobiography* in relation to her time at the Whiteheads':

When we were in England when the nineteen fourteen war began after all we never did think it would be the only war anybody can remember just as they always do with any war. When I was very young it was the civil war and when they said long before the war they meant that war. And then there was the Spanish war. One always does mean the war they had and I suppose sooner or later everybody has had a war.

She recalls being puzzled by the Whiteheads' altogether different view:

When we were in England before the nineteen fourteen war and just at its beginning the Whiteheads worried me they were so much more interested



in the destruction of libraries and buildings in Belgium than they were in the war and why not, now I understand why not.<sup>13</sup>

At this time the details of the ongoing destruction did not particularly interest Stein. She was almost solely concerned with war in the abstract, as a recurrent human activity. It took the onset of the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s for Stein fully to comprehend concern about the specificities of destruction in individual wars as opposed to the general impact of the phenomenon of war as a part of the historical repertoire of typical human experience.

But if Stein's attitude toward war as a general rather than a specific phenomenon is somewhat chilling, her own actions during the First World War were admirable. She and Toklas equipped and drove an ambulance for the American Fund for the French Wounded. And the celebrations in Paris to mark the end of the war brought Stein and Toklas back into the Whitehead ambit. The members of the American Fund for the French War Wounded were to have seats on the benches on the Champs-Élysées for the grand defile under the Arc de Triomphe. But the benches were removed because they obscured the general view of the parade. Yet Stein and Toklas got their privileged seats after all. Jessie Whitehead, who was in Paris as secretary to one of the delegations to the peace commission, invited the pair to watch the procession from her hotel room overlooking the Arc de Triomphe. Stein and Toklas drove to the hotel in their soon-to-be-retired ambulance and joined in the general euphoria. Tracing a great coincidental circle, the war which had begun for them in the presence of the Whiteheads ended in the company of one of their number.<sup>14</sup>

The circumstances of Stein's personal contact with the Whiteheads were dramatic and altogether too memorable, inextricably mixed, as they were, with onset and conclusion of the war. Stein's own intellectual links with Alfred North Whitehead, along with the reasons for her proclamation of his genius, however, are left unaddressed in her texts. Of course, it is possible that there was no such affinity, and in pointing up Whitehead's genius Stein simply may have been making a judgement which had nothing to do with her own projects. However, this is unlikely. Stein tended to value most highly those whose work in some way validated or abutted on her own. Several critics have suggested possible links between Stein and Whitehead. For example, in *Favored Strangers*, her meticulously researched biography of Gertrude Stein, Linda Wagner-Martin states that when Stein met Whitehead she had 'long been intrigued with Whitehead's concept that all life – event, time, character – is interactive.'<sup>15</sup>

However, since Whitehead's publications prior to meeting Stein had been on mathematics or formal logic it is difficult to see how Stein would have known of his views on these topics as they belong to Whitehead's philosophical period which only started in the 1920s. Still, Wagner-Martin is undoubtedly correct in identifying these topics as of sustained mutual concern. And despite Russell's remark that it was his youngest son's death in 1918 that turned Whitehead to philosophy, when he and Stein took their walks in the Wiltshire countryside, Whitehead was a man in his fifties whose life had been spent in an academic environment in Cambridge which valued general discussion and humane thought. Whitehead, furthermore, had been a member of the Cambridge Apostles, the elite group noted for its intellectual quality and for the liveliness of its wide-ranging debates. Whitehead was never a narrow specialist in his private intellectual life, and if he was publicly still more exclusively a mathematician in 1914 than he was to be later in his life, his passionate interest in both process and exactitude could only have matched Stein's own.

In attempting to construe which elements of Whitehead's thought might have interested Stein, one can only speculate rather anachronistically, drawing on Whitehead's work subsequent to 1914. What becomes clear when this later work is considered is the fact that Whitehead and Stein demonstrate a pronounced intellectual affinity. Their sensibilities are attuned to many of the same questions. And the answers they give to these questions bear a striking resemblance in contour, though the manner of their expression could not diverge more widely, with Whitehead's writing serving as a model of approachable lucidity where Stein's is usually fairly obscure until its tenor is grasped. Further, the international switchbacks in the intellectual territory shared by Stein and Whitehead become even more complex when their shared precursors are considered. The major figures to note here are Stein's most important teacher – who Whitehead, in his own admiration, called 'that adorable genius, William James' – and the French philosopher revered by Stein, Whitehead and James alike: Henri Bergson.<sup>16</sup> All four thinkers are deeply concerned with the nature of time and process and with their impact on personal and cultural identity. All are fascinated with the delineation of the modern. And all believed that their current world deviated from that which had gone before in significant, even epochal ways.

When considering Stein, it is wise to remember that her university education prepared her equally for careers in science and in philosophy. As an undergraduate at Radcliffe (then the Harvard Annex) she attended

classes taught by some of the most distinguished academics in America, including Josiah Royce, George Santayana and William Vaughm Moody. But her most significant lecturer was James, who became something of a mentor for her and who recommended that she continue her education in either philosophy or psychology, that is, in the disciplines in which he featured as one of the foundational figures in the articulation of American Pragmatism and as one of the pioneers in the new discipline of psychology. Stein regarded James as a great teacher whose thought underpinned her own.<sup>17</sup> For example, Stein's fascination with a devising a method for fiction that could capture the types of 'bottom nature' possessed by humans derives directly from her work on psychology with James, who was himself concerned with this kind of human typology which provided a framework for some of his major productions such as *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). Stein also shares his interest in consciousness. Most significantly of all, she adopts wholesale his views on time, on the continuous present, on the thinness of experience as it is lived, and on the invalidity of tradition as the guide to behaviour amid the fundamental evanescence of the stream of life. Stein equally admired Henry James, who she thought 'was the first person in literature to find the way to the literary methods of the twentieth century'.<sup>18</sup> Stein adopted and refined the younger James brother's narrative methods of hesitation, indirection, repetition, incompleteness, and the experience of the field of perception (as opposed to discourse) as the manner of intersubjective communication and used them as the basis for her own narrative practice. Stein owed immense debts both to William and Henry James: there is a good deal of justice in regarding her as the most complete Jamesian of her generation. And like both Henry and William James, Stein needs to be read as a radical empiricist, with an unswerving interest in life as it is lived, in the characteristic nature of humans as a species, and particularly in the human experience of mind and in the ways it intersects with time.

While Stein's characteristic concern is with the narrative and poetic representation of the fabric of modern human experience and Whitehead's is the place of science in the modern world, their points of agreement are startlingly common. Whitehead, like Stein, pointed both to the importance of repetition in human experience and to its impossibility.

It is unnecessary to labour the point, that in broad outline certain general states of nature recur, and that our very natures have adapted themselves to such repetitions.

But there is a complementary fact which is equally true and equally obvious: nothing ever really recurs in exact detail. No two days are identical, no two winters. What has gone has gone forever.<sup>19</sup>

Exactly. And Stein spent a lifetime trying to explain the significance of the literary tactics she devised to convey aspects of just this fact which Whitehead outlines so lucidly. For example, she addresses the topic directly in her lecture, 'Portraits and Repetition', in a characteristically Steinian prose which precisely and amusingly enacts the points she makes:

there is the important question of repetition and is there any such thing. Is there repetition or is there insistence. I am inclined to believe there is no such thing as repetition. And really how can there be . . . every time one of the hundreds of times a newspaper man makes fun of my writing and of my repetition he always has the same theme, always having the same theme, that is, if you like, repetition, that is if you like the repeating that is the same thing, but once started expressing this thing, expressing any thing there can be no repetition because the essence of that expression is insistence, and if you insist you must each time use emphasis and if you use emphasis it is not possible while anybody is alive that they should use exactly the same emphasis.<sup>20</sup>

Stein's great work, *The Making of Americans*, is grounded on one facet of this principle. As Stein explains, when she left medical school, without her degree but with a growing interest in human 'types', she says

I then began again to think about the bottom nature in people, I began to get enormously interested in hearing how everybody said the same thing over and over again with infinite variations but over and over again until finally if you listened with great intensity you could hear it rise and fall and tell all that there was inside them, not so much by the actual words they said or the thoughts they had but the movement of their thoughts and words endlessly the same and endlessly different.<sup>21</sup>

'Endlessly the same and endlessly different' might serve as a motto for both Whitehead and Stein. Recurrence and divergence as the twin determinants of human experience are seen by both of them as the starting points for analysing the variant questions which attract their interest. This basic premise as much informs the logical cast of Whitehead's work as it does Stein's experiments with narrative and with the prosody of her poetry.

Equally important for both Stein and Whitehead is a shared conception of process, of movement, as the universal feature of all that exists. As Whitehead puts it in *Adventures of Ideas*:

the very essence of real actuality – that is, of the completely real – is *process*. Thus each actual thing is only to be understood in terms of its becoming and perishing. There is no halt in which the actuality is just its static self, accidentally played upon by the qualifications derived from the shift of circumstances. The converse is the truth.<sup>22</sup>

For Whitehead, actualities have no essences. Everything is spread out in a spatial-temporal field, everything is process. His idiosyncratic and central notion of ‘prehension’ is generated by this view of the real. The sense of the solid identity of any entity is the sum of its relations to all the other entities in the world which surround it. It is these relations, rather than any persistent qualities, which give entities their identities, identities which must, necessarily, shift as process works its way through space and time.

It is ideas akin to this that lead Stein to her experiments with the continuous present as the dominant mode of her prose and to her interest in the portrait as the way of capturing the evanescent intersection of the ever-changing fields of time and space between subject and object and subject and subject. ‘The business of Art’, she notes, ‘is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and completely express that complete actual present.’<sup>23</sup> Stein’s focus on the present in this radical way allies her not only to Whitehead, William James and Bergson, but is the reason for her sympathy with Cubism, with its attempt to capture minute shifts in the human perceptual field, and for her designation of America as the most modern of cultures with its dedication to transience and movement, which are, for Stein, the two distinguishing features of its culture that are also key features of its modernity.

With such wide areas of fundamental and shared intellectual sympathies, I think it does, after all, make a great deal of sense for Stein to have chosen Whitehead as one of Toklas’s bell-ringing, first-class geniuses. The more their ideas are compared, the more harmonious they appear. Whitehead came to agree with Stein on the place of America in the formation of modernity. He concurred with the notion that the Americans were ‘creating a world’. (He even seems to have agreed with Stein’s opinion that study of his beloved classical Greeks was unnecessary and perhaps even inappropriate for Americans.<sup>24</sup>) His view of the social utility of the arts could have been written with Stein in mind: ‘that society prospers best which can provide the conditions necessary for artists to give freest scope to their capacities for novelty – not eccentricity, not the bizarre – but origination in the furtherance of an artistic tradition’. Stein, with Emerson, Whitman (who Whitehead thought was the greatest contributor to

American culture)<sup>25</sup> and Henry James quite consciously serving as her literary precursors, and Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, and Thornton Wilder primed as the next generation of her descendants, qualifies absolutely as an example of the kind of artist who fulfils the terms of Whitehead's definition. She also fits Whitehead's own definition of genius: 'I put it in the metaphor of a ship; the masses are the vessel and crew, genius is captain.'<sup>26</sup> The statement evokes an irresistible image: Captain Whitehead and Captain Stein sailing the ship of modernity into dangerous international waters, ringing bells.

#### Notes

- 1 Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, London, Penguin, 1966, p. 9. Toklas handles this moment rather differently in her own autobiography, *What is Remembered* (London, Sphere, 1989), which was first published in 1963. Biographical information throughout the essay is taken from Stein and Toklas's books and also from Bettina L. Knapp, *Gertrude Stein*, New York, Continuum, 1990; James R. Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein & Company*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1974; Diana Souhami, *Gertrude and Alice*, London, Pandora, 1991; and Linda Wagner-Martin, 'Favored Strangers': *Gertrude Stein and Her Family*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1995.
- 2 Stein, *Toklas*, p. 18.
- 3 Picasso's portrait of Stein now hangs in a place of honour in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Stein wrote frequently on Picasso and her writing on her friend was gathered together in 1970 in a volume now available as Gertrude Stein, *Picasso: The Complete Writings*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1985.
- 4 For interesting and relevant discussions of the history of the notion of genius see Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*, London, The Women's Press, 1989, and Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990.
- 5 Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America*, London, Virago, 1988, p. 170.
- 6 Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*, New York, Cooper Square, 1971, pp. 70, 77, 85–6.
- 7 Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*, pp. 92, 121, 243, 21, 21–2.
- 8 Stein, *Toklas*, pp. 87, 100.
- 9 Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, 1872–1914*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1967, p. 188.
- 10 Stein, *Toklas*, pp. 162, 168–9.
- 11 Stein, *Toklas*, pp. 161–2. What Whitehead thought of his encounter with

Stein is more uncertain. He rarely wrote letters, and his modest autobiography is a mere essay. This has left the record of his opinions of personal encounters somewhat sketchy. For Whitehead on Whitehead see 'Autobiographical Notes', in *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, *The Library of Living Philosopher*, New York, Tudor Publishing Company, 1951, pp. 1–14.

- 12 Stein, *Toklas*, pp. 167, 165, 166, 167.
- 13 Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*, p. 89.
- 14 Stein, *Toklas*, pp. 206–8.
- 15 Wagner-Martin, 'Favored Strangers', pp. 123.
- 16 Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, London, Macmillan, 1925, p. 10.
- 17 Mellow, *Charmed Circle*, p. 34.
- 18 Stein, *Toklas*, p. 87.
- 19 Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, p. 12.
- 20 Stein, *Lectures in America*, p. 167.
- 21 Stein, 'The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans', in *Lectures in America*, p. 138.
- 23 Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, London, Collier-Macmillan, 1967, pp. 274–5.
- 23 Stein, 'Plays', in *Lectures in America*, pp. 104–5.
- 24 Lucien Price, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*, Boston, New American Library, 1954, p. 98.
- 25 Price, *Dialogues*, p. 24.
- 26 Price, *Dialogues*, p. 101.

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