

English Literature

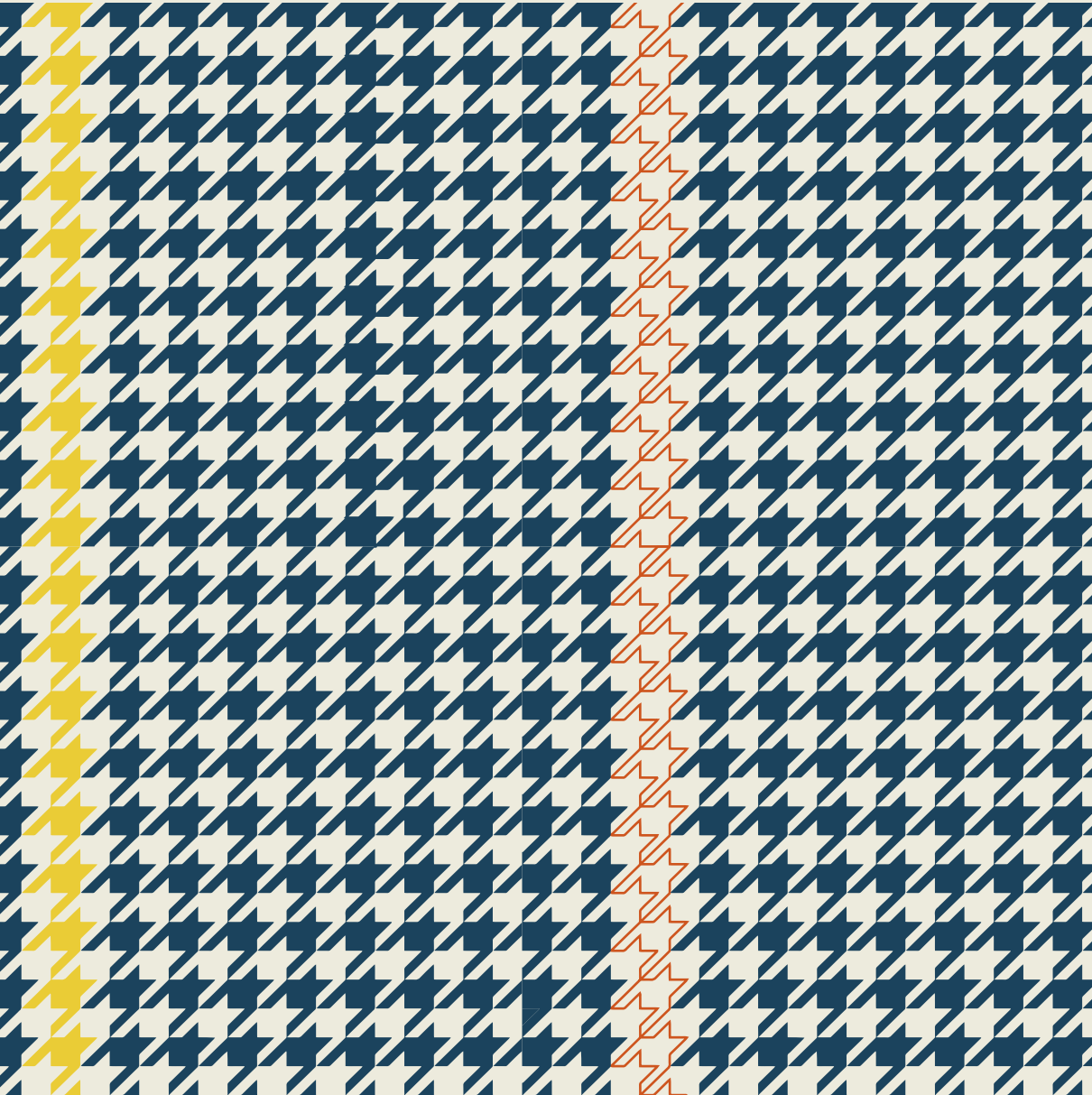
Theories, Interpretations, Contexts

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Edizioni Ca' Foscari – Digital Publishing | Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia, Italia | ecf@unive.it

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Section 1

Fictions, Facts and 'Effects of Reality':
Questioning the Mimetic in the Nineteenth-
Century

edited by Luisa Villa

Introduction

Luisa Villa

Università degli Studi di Genova, Italia

A concept pertaining to aesthetics and handed down by a time-honoured critical tradition harking back to Plato, 'mimesis' comes to us today as fraught with a cluster of new (or rediscovered) meanings and implications – the result of intense multidisciplinary work in the last three decades. They branch off in all sorts of directions – from the realm of historical anthropology to neuroscience – while the idea of mimesis as imitation, which has often been taken to imply a naïve mirroring relationship between the artistic or literary image and a pre-existing original, gives way to more dynamic conceptions: mimesis as *creation* of similarities (out of ineradicable diversities), world-making (out of the chaotic pressure of the non-mediated present), fictional identification (with the otherwise wholly impervious 'other'), and the balancing of stabilization and transformation crucial to processes of cultural transmission. Besides, and of more immediate concern for teachers and university lecturers: as a quintessentially human praxis and as a form of knowledge based on personal experience and rooted in bodily perception, mimesis as it is being shaped nowadays may provide a conceptual tool suitable to articulating our perplexities at educational institutions where MOOC platforms and depersonalised testing seem poised to supersede human interaction.¹

In literary and cultural studies the discourse of mimesis and its cognates intersects a good many areas. In connection with the concept of *imitatio*, mimesis has long been at the core of traditional concerns with rhetoric, genre and style as well as with questions of influence and, more recently, anxieties thereof. By way of 'identification', 'mimicry', 'masquerade', 'parody' and cognate concepts, mimesis has

1 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf's monograph ([1992] 1995) provides a high-profile historical approach to the notion of 'mimesis', its history, multiple implications and relevance not just to the study of the arts and literature but to contemporary philosophy, historical anthropology, and studies of cultural transmission. Reflections generated by the belated publication of its Italian translation have helped me understand some aspects of the mimetic's current topicality and update my awareness of the wider scientific debate thereon (Cappelletto, Griffero, Portera 2019). For a very useful survey of the relevance of mimesis to contemporary theory and criticism see Potolski 2006.

come to play a considerable role in critical approaches to literature concerned with the constructed or performative quality of identity, a notion that figures prominently in gender, race/postcolonial, and theatre studies. More to our point, as traditionally positing the question of representation (be it true or false, enlightening or misleading) in terms of its relationship with 'nature' or 'life', mimesis has been almost coterminous with the aesthetic notion of 'realism'. Indeed, in spite of sustained deconstructive and post-modern assaults on the notion of 'reality', the question of fictional 'realism' has never been relinquished by academics, and even after the turn of the millennium has attracted high-profile scholars like Peter Brooks or Fredric Jameson. The fiction-imitation nexus - with the similarities between 'fictional worlds' and 'real' ones, or 'fictional' characters and 'real' individuals, and the historical-anthropological issue of the functions of 'fiction' - has likewise engaged distinguished theorists and critics, Catherine Gallagher's research work on "the rise of fictionality" (2006) being perhaps most notable in our field of inquiry.

In short, though the term 'mimesis' may not be especially fashionable in contemporary criticism, the 'mimetic' remains central to literary studies, entwined as it is with the question of the status, uses and misuses of literary and artistic creativity. Indeed, as Hans Blumenberg once remarked, "at no time in the history of Western Aesthetic theory has there been any serious departure from the tendency to legitimize the work of art in terms of its relation to reality" (1977, 30). The present climate is hardly likely to be conducive to theoretical revolutions in this respect. The supersession of the practice of reading by visual consumption (of fiction, information, etc), the obtrusive proliferation and dissemination of 'disreputable' fictions (fake news, and pseudo-anecdotal and pseudo-informational texts aimed at advertising products or purveyors of services), the shrinking of literary departments, the pressure to abandon historical approaches to literature for others more immediately marketable as 'public engagement', make it all the more compelling to investigate, debate and ultimately enhance literature's special purchase on the real. The recent lively critical debate over the notion of realism and its usefulness in the critical understanding of contemporary world fiction amply testifies to this (see Esty, Lye 2012; Dalley 2014; Goodlad 2016).

The present thematic section of *English Literature* was conceived within this context. It is by and large concerned with 'questioning the mimetic' in the Victorian novel, although the call for articles envisaged a wider range of potentially relevant subjects: the relationship between fictional and non-fictional narrations, the integration of factual reference in fiction and the fictional tampering with non-fictional data (such as occur, for instance, in historical novels), the interaction of the 'realist' novel with other genres or representational modes (such as melodrama, the Gothic, allegory, satire), and nineteenth-century

theoretical reflections on narrative mimesis. The project included the examination of such 'transitional' fictions as were produced in the early part of the century, when the profile of the nineteenth-century 'realist' novel (with the connected readerly expectations) was still on its way to being consolidated.² The fact that the Journal did not receive proposals clearly related to this particular area of interest testifies to the enduring marginality of the late romantic-early Victorian transition in the nineteenth-century fictional canon. Thus, much room is left for further research into those aspects of the 'mimetic' approach to 'reality' that characterise the Romantic and early Victorian age, also in their intermingling with other forms of fictional representation. Having said that, the collection of articles here included contribute to highlight the diversity of approach to the question of 'mimesis' and the 'effects of reality' in Victorian fiction and other literary forms, and its significance in the complex relation between aesthetics and the socio-historical and cultural contexts.

Ann-Marie Richardson's *The Kingdom Where Nobody Dies: Shirley's Caroline Helstone and the Mimicry of Childhood Collaboration* tackles the intersection of facts and fiction in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849). Eschewing the critical issues related to the novel's engagement with the Luddite movement and other socio-historical questions (connected with class, gender and political alignment), the article focuses on the way traumatic biographical facts (the loss of three siblings/co-authors between September 1848 and May 1849) get inscribed into the fictional text, and especially on how they inflect the characterization (and the plot-strand) of its co-protagonist Caroline Helstone. Richardson's emphasis is on the mediation provided by Charlotte's siblings' textual productions – inclusive of diaries and (published and unpublished) letters. Special attention is granted to Branwell's contribution to the Angrian saga and some of his poetical works, and Anne's governess novels *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). A rich web of inter-textual references to the Brontës' corpus is brought to bear on *Shirley* highlighting the nuanced 'mimicry' (imitation and variation) by which they are put to use in the new narrative. This impressively underscores the 'elegiac' quality of the novel (and its connection with the painful realities of life) while at the same time testifying to the always-already fictionalised quality of the writer's access to her own biographical experience.

² 'Silver-fork' novels (with their penchant for satire and *roman-à-clef*) and 'Newgate' novels (drawing on, and messing about with, historical or pseudohistorical accounts of criminals' lives, deeds and judicial retribution) – large understudied narrative corpora highly characteristic of the 1820s-1830s – together with freak works like Pierce Egan's popular urban narratives (*Life in London*, 1823) or Disraeli's extravagant historical novel *Venetia* (1837) evince a pronounced tendency to cross the border between fiction and non-fiction in ways that seem to await thorough investigation.

Likewise addressing a highly canonical text and author but pursuing a wholly different contextual approach, Gail Marshall's *Adam Bede, Realism, the Past, and Readers in 1859*, focuses on George Eliot's first published novel with its humble protagonist and painful rural story set in the early years of the century. It is of course of some relevance, in our context, that Eliot's early realist poetics - with its pronounced ethically *engagé* profile - is explicitly articulated in the novel, in chapter XVII, "In which the story pauses a little". Marshall is not interested, however, in analysing Eliot's shaping of her own authoritative stance *vis-à-vis* the perplexities of the 'mimetic', the derivation of her programmatic statements from Wordsworth and the Romantic/idealistic tradition, or their proximity to Ruskin's 'doctrine' of realism. Her article focuses on the year 1859, and her aim is to highlight *Adam Bede's* brand of 'realism' by conjuring up a number of contextual facts mostly pertaining to the contemporary burgeoning leisure industry. They include competing forms of cultural entertainment (preachers, public lectures and readings, theatrical performances, dioramas, etc.) that Eliot's novel had to face in the week it became available to the public; advertisements of recently published novels and contemporary concerns expressed at such a profusion of light literature; the Queen's overly optimistic speech delivered on 3 February 1859 (two days after *Adam Bede's* publication), and her diary entries of the period recording the theatricals she attended - which appear to have been unlikely to increase the sovereign's own 'realism' (that is, her "grasp on the conditions of her country"). In thus surveying her chosen field, Marshall makes us intensely aware of the ambitiously innovative quality of *Adam Bede*, of the unusual concentration and "committed, empathetic investment" it demanded of its readers, and ultimately of the odds against which the novel succeeded in conquering the general public and became the most widely reviewed fiction of that year.

Silvana Colella's *The Disappearing Act: Heritage Making in Charlotte Riddell's Novels* takes us on less familiar ground. Riddell is certainly non-canonical. Her special insertion in the marketplace of literature was predicated on the representation of commercial modernity and the lives of men of business - with their struggles and failures, hopes and anxieties, joys and sorrows. This choice violated expectations regarding what was suitable subject-matter for novelists in general, and women novelists in particular - the meddling with petty economic and financial questions being regarded as low and gross, and certainly most unladylike. In fact, Riddell's deliberate commitment to the representation of the 'prose' of average business life may be viewed as paralleling George Eliot's choice to recount the annals of "unfashionable families", be they the Poysers in *Adam Bede*, or the Tullivers and the Dodsons of *The Mill on the Floss* - "which

even sorrow hardly suffices to lift above the level of the tragic comic" (Eliot [1860] 1981, 272). Both might well rate as Auerbachian breakthroughs in realism (see Auerbach [1953] 2003): George Eliot focuses on the recent, fast-receding rural and provincial past as a sedate antidote to the inauthentic metropolitan present inhabited by herself and her audience; her lesser-known colleague privileges the hectic dynamics of metropolitan life, "mimetically reproducing the quick tempo of urban modernity". Colella's article, however, more specifically investigates Riddell's focus on the City of London, her narrative deployment of 'facts' pertaining to its topography and history, her growing concern with its vertiginous transformation, her dismay at the "impermanence of the built environment" and the loss of practices, traditions, institutions, which nowadays go under the cumulative label of "intangible heritage". Colella's argument starts from the tension between, on the one hand, the modernist progressive ideology underlying Riddell's investment in the vagaries of contemporary commercial life and, on the other hand, her articulation of the fledgling discourse of heritage, itself one of the products of Victorian modernity. It is one of her key-contentions that the skilful rhetorical balancing of such diverging issues contributed to the 'self-validation' of Riddell's narrative voice. On the other hand, by analysing Riddell's use of the evocations of the past as an integral part of her mimetic representational mode, Colella underscores its performativeness as generator of 'heritage value' and participant in the making of 'heritage' as "an actively constructed understanding" about the past and its significance.

Rebecca Hutcheon's *George Gissing: A Story of English Realism* takes us to the late Victorians. As one of the young novelists that started writing fiction in the late Seventies, Gissing was a participant in the avant-garde temper of his time. He belonged to a new generation of authors dissatisfied with the representational and marketing strategies routinely associated with the Victorian novel: they looked at continental models for inspiration, discussed realism, naturalism and 'the art of fiction', and waxed polemical about the circulating libraries, censorship and 'Mrs. Grundy'. Gissing's early letters to his siblings show his awareness of these new trends, and his deliberate participation in the new climate, with his desire resolutely to address an adult (not a family) readership, and extend the gamut of what was deemed representable in British fiction. He never became conspicuous, however, for militant aesthetic pronouncements and has been perceived more as a belated Victorian than as a forerunner of Modernism, the specific accessories of his position in-between these two epochs still awaiting full elucidation. Rebecca Hutcheon's article sets out to cast light on Gissing's transitional position, concisely recalling the terms of his reception by early twentieth-century authors, comparing and contrasting it with some of Gissing's

own reflections on 'realism' (which he never naively mistook for an objective representation of the social or material world), and eventually zooming in on some passages of *Demos* (1886), which she close-reads to determine if and how Gissing "practice[s] what he preaches". *Demos* is an industrial novel which quietly subverts the narrative structures (and connected readerly expectations) of the Victorian strand of fiction it mimics. Largely leaving subject-matter in the background, Hutcheon chooses here to focus on the "uneasy tension between diegesis and mimesis", the subtle rhetorical construction of seemingly 'objective' descriptions, the narrator's intrusions that shift "the narrative mode from description to comment" and the use of free indirect discourse that blurs the boundaries between character and narrator - neither to reinforce the narrating voice's control over its materials, nor modernistically to curtail "the role and authority of the narrator via increased focalization", much rather to elude responsibility for the narrator's opinions and generalization. To put it otherwise: Gissing was no naïve subscriber to what he himself perceived as the 'old' convention of the omniscient narrator; he believed that the novelist's representation of the world could at best be "a bit of life as seen by *him*", an objective achievable by "hinting" and "surmising" rather than by striving for mimetic exhaustiveness (Gissing 1991: 320). But he was not fully at ease with the actual practice of such early-modernist tenets, and his fictions were negotiated in-between competing literary fashions and personal inclinations. Henry James, on the other hand, famously made the subjective 'point of view' the linchpin of his narrative theory and mature praxis, skilfully balancing selection and inclusiveness, his characters' subjective take on the world and his narrator's cool impartiality.

Indeed, as Gary Totter's *The Problem of Completeness in Henry James's "The Spoils of Poynton"* recalls, 'completeness' was to him a feature of the successful fictional work: it had to do with its internal economy of parts and whole, and its constructed typicality - not a quality pertaining to its immediately matching 'life'. The latter is not representable in non-mediated (naively mimetic) terms, coming to us as it does - James would say - in "confusion" and "splendid waste". James would often look to art objects and art collections, and their way to arrange selected details/objects to achieve their aesthetic effect, for 'analogues' to fiction; and critics have often mined the inter-art vein to get new insights into his fictions. Totter especially chooses to draw on James's reviews of art exhibitions in counterpoint with the vicissitudes of the Poynton art-objects, while he construes the plight of the protagonist's psychological investment in the integrity of the collection in the light of fetishism, phantom limbs and concentrated *versus* distracted gaze. His argument confirms those readings of the novel that underscore the meta-fictional significance of its sensational

denouement: the bonfire of Poynton with its (emphatically celebrated, but hardly described) contents – with Fleda’s unmitigated frustration at the end – is construed as a diegetic literalisation of James’s distance from nineteenth-century (Balzac-like) realism with its pronounced visual cathexis on material objects, and its unmanageable urge to mimetic ‘completeness’.

Alertness to the mediated, selective and constructed quality of fictional ‘realism’, however, or inter-textual involvement with other art forms were hardly the preserve of *fin-de-siècle* high-brow novelists. As Carolyn Williams’ *Tableaux and Melodramatic Realism* authoritatively recalls, during the nineteenth century melodrama was endowed with a comparable sophisticated self-awareness. Her chosen focus is here on the tableau, the still picture that momentarily freezes the action allowing for fuller recognition of its salient implications. What Williams is especially bent on demonstrating is the “metatheatrical self-consciousness” the tableau articulates and shares with its audience, for instance in its reproduction of well-known paintings “to certify the realism of the action on stage” or in the prompt perception of its proximity with photography and the latter’s potential for validating represented reality. Throughout Williams highlights how the study of melodrama’s formal features has much to offer to the questioning of the novelistic ‘mimetic’, recalling the narrative deployment of the tableau by Victorian novelists and tantalizingly hinting at the structural similarities between the tableau and free indirect discourse. In the very useful “Coda” to her survey, Williams concisely situates her line of argument on the melodrama-novel connection within the larger context of contemporary theories of novelistic realism. The idea that melodrama’s representative strategies are incorporated in realist novels, or even that melodrama can be viewed as the nineteenth-century realist novel’s ‘internalised other’ is well-established in contemporary theory. Her special line of argument is that nineteenth-century melodrama was endowed with its own specific brand of realism. It had, that is to say, its distinctive take on aspects of social and individual life that novelistic realism was likewise addressing through different representational strategies.

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The Kingdom Where Nobody Dies *Shirley's* Caroline Helstone and the Mimicry of Childhood Collaboration

Ann-Marie Richardson
The University of Liverpool, UK

Abstract This essay explores Charlotte Brontë's 1849 novel *Shirley* as a literary endeavour to recreate the sibling dynamic of the Brontës' childhoods, and the psychological effect of being the 'surviving' sibling of a formally collaborative unit. In their adolescent years, the Brontës famously forged fictional kingdoms together, known collectively as "The Glass Town Saga". Throughout adulthood, each Brontë continuously returned to these stories, oftentimes due to nostalgia and occasionally for creative reinvention. However, by the summer of 1849, their familial collaboration was at an end. Charlotte was the last sibling standing, having lost all her co-authors in the space of nine months. In despair, as a form of catharsis, she turned to her writing and this essay will focus on how protagonist Caroline Helstone became an elegy for both Branwell and Anne Brontë. Mere weeks before Charlotte began volume 1 of *Shirley*, Branwell was determined to return to a heroine created in his childhood, also named "Caroline (1836)". This juvenilia piece explores themes of waning sibling connections, death and heartbreak – issues which tormented Branwell and Charlotte throughout his prolonged final illness. Yet Caroline Helstone's ethereal femininity and infantilization mirrors Anne Brontë's reputation as the 'obedient' sibling, as well as the views expressed in her semi-autobiographical novels *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848).

Keywords Charlotte Brontë. Elegy. Familial collaboration. Juvenilia. Mimicry.

Summary 1 Last Sibling Standing: The Final Brontë Collaboration. – 2 The 'Necessary Deaths' of Branwell Brontë and Caroline Helstone. – 3 Bide My Sister to Arise: Anne Brontë's "Resurrection" of Caroline.



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1 Last Sibling Standing: The Final Brontë Collaboration

Charlotte Brontë approached the conception of *Shirley* (1849) in professional and psychological desperation. She began writing *Shirley's* opening chapters in February 1848; by the time it was completed in August 1849 she had lost all three siblings to consumption. As a sister, Charlotte had been cheated of sibling affection and support; as an author she was now deprived of those co-writers who had shaped the formative years of her writing.

The Brontës' literary apprenticeship began within their juvenile collaboration of "The Glasstown Confederacy", a political saga full of duchesses, genii and pirates, as Gérin explains: "the young Brontës were bound together by an intense affection [...] [which] became an intellectual fusion of like minds that eventually coloured all their thoughts" (1973, 7). The Brontës were prolific in completing their juvenilia, with Charlotte and Branwell focusing on their adventure narrative of 'Angria' and Emily and Anne absorbed in the royal court of 'Gondal'. This study will consider how the successive losses of each sibling during the writing of *Shirley* shaped the narrative and characters as Charlotte attempted, fictionally, to restore her siblings and their creative connection. She accomplished this by emulating their writings and personalities into her own style, maintaining a collaboration which crossed the boundary between life and death.

Critics such as Stoneman (2015), Earnshaw (2015) and O'Callaghan (2018) have explored the eponymous Shirley as an elegy for Emily Brontë (1818-December 1848). She is a representation of Emily's idiosyncrasies "in the guise of the land-owning heiress" (O'Callaghan 2018, 120). If Emily can clearly be seen in *Shirley*, can we also catch literary echoes of Charlotte's other siblings? This essay will argue that Branwell (1817-September 1848) and Anne's (1820-May 1849) influences have in fact merged to create the psychologically complex female protagonist, Caroline Helstone.

The very name "Caroline" spells disaster throughout Brontë fiction, as one of Branwell's favourite heroines of his Angrian saga also bore this name. The doomed sister of Harriet O'Connor - mistress of the ultimate Angrian hero, Alexander Percy (or "Northangerland") - Caroline is shown predominantly as she wastes away on her deathbed. It is possible that Charlotte remembered the ominous connection with the name and thought it perfect for her own tragic character. Charlotte's Caroline, having been abandoned by her long-lost mother, left penniless by her cruel deceased father and dependent upon her uncle, is reportedly wasting away from her unrequited love for mill-

owner Robert Moore. Caroline Helstone is a character in “decline”.¹

This essay will outline the consistent parallels between Caroline’s storyline and those of Branwell’s pieces, “Caroline” ([1836] 1983, 66-76), “On Caroline” ([1837] 1983, 65) and “Sir Henry Tunstall” ([1840] 1983, 53-60), and argue that Charlotte not only wished to resurrect the “tragic Caroline” trope but also the creative capability Branwell possessed but never brought to fruition. St. John Conover stresses that “[f]or the eleven years it lasted [...] [was] in many respects, an ideal alliance [...] united in a joint creative urge” (1999, 16).

Unfortunately, the pitfalls of adulthood resulted in a creative schism between the close-knit pair. In his later years, unemployment and chronic writer’s block led Branwell into drug and alcohol-induced melancholy. The beginning of the end came when Branwell embarked upon an ill-fated love affair with Mrs. Lydia Robinson, the lady of Thorp Green and wife of his final employer – as well as Anne’s, as she was also employed at Thorp Green as a governess. In a letter to John Brown, Branwell described Lydia Robinson as a “pretty” mistress of “about 37 with a darkish skin & bright glancing eyes” and “DAMNABLY TOO FOND OF ME!” ([1843] 1997, 114). His position was subsequently terminated with a death-threat from Mr. Robinson and Branwell descended even further into self-pity and a squandering of his talents. Through Caroline Helstone’s own detrimental heartache over Robert and similarities to the Angrian Caroline, Charlotte could hold a mirror to Branwell’s vices and restore his early promise, potentially recovering the brother she had loved in childhood.

If Caroline Helstone was a reflection of what Branwell could have been, she was also an echo of Anne Brontë as she was. The feminine foil for Shirley, just as Anne was for Emily, she is obedient and beautiful and a vision of how Charlotte perceived her youngest sister. Charlotte identified Anne in such angelic, if often insipid, terms that upon her death in 1849 she wrote to William Smith Williams stating she felt able to “let Anne go to God and felt He had a right to her” ([1849] 1997, 237). While she could not rescue Anne herself from death, she would protect the character she inspired. In order to impress the dangers of toxic relationships, Tompkins explains that Charlotte’s “first intention was to give Shirley to Robert Moore and to let Caroline die of a broken heart” (1961, 21). However a last-minute alteration to Caroline’s storyline demonstrates the effect Anne’s death had upon Charlotte’s writing. Instead, Caroline is protected by a feminine network of Emily’s counterpart, Shirley, and Mrs. Pryor – Shirley’s governess and a character shaped by Anne’s novels *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). *Shirley*,

¹ “The reason for the obsession could be the rhythmic quality of the name itself [...] it rhymed very suitably with decline” (du Maurier 1960, 78).

therefore, can be read as a literary séance of the Brontë family dynamic and an act of catharsis for the ‘surviving sibling’.

2 The ‘Necessary Deaths’ of Branwell Brontë and Caroline Helstone

In his final years, Branwell’s talent may have diminished – distorted by gin and opium – but his need for literary greatness did not. In January 1848, he wrote a missive to his drinking companion, Joseph Bentley Leyland, asking that he might “return me the manuscript volume which I placed in your hands [...] enclose that MS called ‘Caroline’ – left with you many months since” as he did not have his own copy (BC. MS.19c Brontë/02/01/21). Considering Branwell’s creative inactivity during this period, this is most likely a reference to his 1836 verse “Caroline”. In this poem Harriet, sister to the titular heroine, narrates how she watches Caroline slowly decline in health, and eventually die. Van Der Meer emphasises the trauma of Harriet’s experience as “[h]er mother lifts her to see Caroline’s face, and, although Harriet is frightened, this fear turns into unexpected relief that there is beauty in what she sees” (2017, 213). Harriet is the personification of the denial stage of grief, refusing to accept Caroline’s passing and assuring herself that she is merely sleeping: “down I bent and bid adieu. | But, as I looked, forgot affright”(Brontë B. 1836, ll. 151-2). Branwell’s heroine even attempts to lull Caroline back to life crying “‘Speak Caroline!’” as she “bade my sister to arise” (1836, ll. 168-9). Branwell appears to be taking an Angrian perspective on the traditional Snow White fairy tale, whereby Caroline is not dead in Harriet’s eyes, but kept “[i]n slumber sweet” (1836, l. 106) and “listening to my prayer” (1836, l. 98). She is perfectly preserved within her coffin “with wild flowers round her head | And Lillies in her hair” (1836, ll. 99-100). Harriet seems to believe she will wake again when she is needed, a similar belief Charlotte applies to her elegiac writings.

When we re-read the original “Caroline” poem, and its companion pieces “On Caroline (1837)” and “Sir Henry Tunstall (1840)”, we see why Charlotte was compelled to emulate these characters within her novel. The themes of denial, grief and the broken sibling bond must have resonated with its author, who was witnessing her brother descend into a fatal illness. The poems’ author also believed these manuscripts empathised with his current miseries, namely that of separation from Lydia Robinson. Harriet recalls that she was much younger when Caroline died, as emphasised by her mother having to lift her to see within her sister’s coffin, yet she compares these memories to her present heartache over her lost lover, Northangerland. We see the origins of Harriet’s fixation with Percy in “The Life of Feild [*sic*] Marshal the Right Honourable Alexander

Percy" (1999, 92-191), while she was a friend to his first wife, Augusta di Segovia. She obtains private letters between Augusta and her husband, and hopes to comfort him about the losses of his comrades in the battlefield: "poor Harriet was in tears for when Percy entered she sprung unconsciously to meet him and the sneer with which Montmorency beheld her had harshly called her back to reality" (1835, 161). Harriet's inability to distinguish desire from truth continues into "Caroline" where she simultaneously laments the loss of her sister and her affair with Percy. Harriet is now a "fallen" young woman, abandoned by Percy. Branwell's poem "Sir Henry Tunstall" emphasises how she is full of an 'adulterer's shame' (1840, l. 210), now her lover has left her "FALLEN, FORSAKEN, AND FORGOT!" (1840, l. 216). Despite this, Harriet does not seem fully to regret the relationship, only its consequences:

Deaf to warning, dead to shame.
What to me if Jordan Hall
Held all Hell within its wall,
So I might in his embrace
Drown the misery of disgrace!
(1840, ll. 132-6)

The forlorn Harriet becomes "spent and broken" (1840, l. 217), seemingly exiled from society. It seems the disregarded lady will "weep her heart away" (1840, l. 224) for want of Northangerland, until her heartbreak leads her to her "dying dread" (1840, l. 222). Much like Caroline Helstone, Harriet's fixation has caused her to neglect herself, and she is now dying as a result. Still, her last wish is that Northangerland will kiss her goodbye: "Could He have bent above her head - | Even He whose guilt had laid her there" (1840, ll. 233-4; underlining in the original). She acknowledges but does not repent her sins, a premonition of Branwell's insolence during his affair with Mrs. Robinson.

Branwell did not see himself as the Harriet of his story; he was the hypermasculine Northangerland - bound to rescue Mrs. Robinson from her "heartless", "unmanly" and "eunuch-like" husband (1848, BC., MS.19c Brontë/02/01/23). Adopting the Northangerland persona entirely, he would sign his secret missives to her with this name, believing it "could excite no suspicion"(1845, BC. MS.19c Brontë/02/01/09). Mrs. Robinson seems to have encouraged this clandestine correspondence: "she sent the Coachman over to me [Branwell] yesterday, and the account which he gave of her sufferings was enough to burst my heart" (1846, BC. MS.19c Brontë/02/01/11). When Mr. Robinson died in May 1846, Branwell allowed himself "reason to hope that ere ^{very} long I should be the husband of a lady whom I loved best in the world" (1847, BC. MS. 19c. Brontë/02/01/18; addition in the original), seemingly unaware of how his youth and

penury prevented this. Ellis describes how Mrs. Robinson convinced the coachman “to lie that Mr. Robinson’s will stipulated that if his widow saw Branwell again, she would lose everything. [...] Branwell was too tender to see that he was being manipulated” (2017, 222). A letter to Leyland highlights how deeply he believed her: “I know [...] she has been terrified by vows which she was forced to swear to, on her husband’s deathbed” (1847, MS.19c Brontë/02/01/18; underlining in the original). Charlotte was unsympathetic at even the mention of Mrs. Robinson, as she wrote to her friend Ellen Nussey on 28 July 1848: “the more I hear of her the more deeply she revolts me” ([1848] 1997, 201) and her hatred for the woman increased as she saw how Branwell was being manipulated. Anne knew from her former pupils, Mrs. Robinson’s daughters, that she was not living in agony like Branwell, as Charlotte reiterates to Margaret Wooler: “The Misses R – say that their mother does not care in the least what becomes of them [...] [only] that they may be off her hands, and that she may be free to marry Sir E. Scott – whose infatuated slave, it would appear, she is” ([1848] 1997, 204). Once Mr. Robinson died, Charlotte knew that his widow was pursuing Sir Edward Scott, even as his wife lay on her deathbed: “Sir Edward Scott’s wife is said to be dying – if she goes I suppose they will marry – that is if Mrs. R can marry – She affirmed her husband’s will bound her to remain single – but I do not believe anything she says” ([1848] 1997, 182-3; underlining in the original).

Branwell’s determination to defend Mrs. Robinson’s constancy, despite her clear indifference, mimics that of Harriet, who secretly spies on Northangerland’s letter to his wife in “The Life of Feild [sic] Marshal”. She would gaze at the letter “as if its pages hid some unfound meaning as her eyes dwelt on the very form of the hastily written words their impassioned meaning stole insensibly on her soul” (160). She wishes that Northangerland were sharing his confidences with her and, reading Northangerland’s confessions of faltered loyalty to Augusta, allows herself to believe he could desire her: “Can I love anyone but thee [Augusta]? And yet my Augusta forms and feelings crowd around me which are not of thee, whether I am with three or from thee” (1999, 160-1). Branwell wrote the Caroline sequence from Harriet’s point of view to emphasise ‘feminine feelings’, such as the pain of heartbreak and ruptured sisterhood. Similarly, Charlotte channels Branwell and his characters into the lovelorn Caroline Helstone to emphasise the subverted power dynamic of his circumstances. Branwell may have believed himself the seducing hero, Northangerland, but Charlotte knew that it was Robinson who held all the power.

Their toxic dynamic is represented in that of Caroline and Robert in *Shirley*. From the opening chapters, Caroline is depicted as “wasting away” for unrequited love, while she imagines Robert connected instead to the eponymous heiress: “Of course I know he will marry Shirley [...] And he ought to marry her: she can help him [...] But I

[Caroline] shall be forgotten!" (Brontë C. 1849, 156). Her devotion is encouraged by Robert who appears to enjoy the attention: "if I [Robert] were rich, you should live here always: at any rate, you should live with me wherever my habitation might be" (84). This hollow promise is one of multiple "humiliations" that Langland states Caroline suffers, to the extent that she can now "sense the final betrayal - in which Shirley becomes an unwitting accomplice - and collapses" (2002, 12). As a result, it seems Caroline is doomed for the grave, much like Harriet and her creator. In the chapter ominously titled "Valley of the Shadow of Death", a reference to Psalm 23:4 ("though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me"), we see Caroline suffering from a supposedly fatal illness. Her symptoms imitate those of Branwell's Caroline. Harriet recalls her sister in seasonal, pastoral imagery, accentuating her transient presence - she is "glitter" turned to "rust" (Brontë B. 1836, l. 237) and also a flower which has "budded, bloomed, and gone" (l. 90). Charlotte mirrors this motif as Mrs. Pryor, Shirley's governess, nurses the bedridden Caroline: "[w]ith all this care, it seemed strange the sick girl did not get well; yet such was the case: she wasted like any snow-wreath in thaw; she faded like any flower in drought" (Brontë C. 1849, 252). The Carolines are depicted as English roses withering from neglect, with the poetical Caroline's world "void of sunlight" (Brontë B. 1837, l.12) and her beauty compared to the flowers dying "underneath yon churchyard stone!" (1836, l. 92). The lack of nurturing continues as Caroline Helstone attempts to draw "the coverlets close round her, as if to shut out the world and sun" (1836, l. 253), barring any healthy influence into the room. Withdrawn from the world outside her bedroom, Caroline is physically, emotionally and mentally defeated and her deathbed apes that of the Angrian Caroline. Although Branwell does not specify what physical ailment affects his heroine, Harriet does observe that her sister's cheek is "*too bright*" (1836, l. 162; italics added), implying she is also feverish. Equally, Shirley and Mrs. Pryor can only look on as Caroline deteriorates: "oppressed with unwonted languor [...] she missed all sense of appetite: palatable food was as ashes and sawdust to her" (Brontë C. 1849, 251). She also writhes from a horrific fever: "[n]ow followed a hot, parched, thirsty, restless night" (251). Unrequited love has contaminated her physicality, and she does not try to fight it. She appears content to never see Robert marry another woman - when Mrs. Pryor asks if she is in any pain, Caroline simply replies: "I think I am almost happy" (1888, 252).

Art imitates life as Branwell also suffered from insomnia and fever, pronouncing "the wreck of my mind and body which God knows have both during a short life been severely tried. Eleven continued nights of sleepless horrors reduced me to almost blindness" (1848, BC., MS.19c Brontë/02/01/23) - Branwell believed himself reduced to a "thoroughly old man - mentally and bodily" (1847, BC. MS.19c

Brontë/02/01/18); similarly Caroline Helstone grows “old” before her time, losing the bloom of her youth: “[s]he could see that she was altered within the last month; that the hues of her complexion were paler, her eyes changed – a wan shade seemed to circle them, her countenance was dejected” (1888, 107). Branwell is known to have died from tuberculosis, aggravated by his lifestyle and general malaise, seemingly struggling with hallucinations and nonsensical speech as a result. His friend John Brown recalled how “he uttered the words: ‘Oh, John, I am dying!’ then, turning, as if within himself, he murmured: ‘In all my past life I have done nothing either great or good’” (Leyland 1886, 208). Equally, Caroline Helstone struggles with nightmares in the heat of fever, and it is in her delirium that her unrequited devotion echoes Branwell’s. Watching over the ailing Caroline, a concerned Mrs. Pryor attempts to disengage an unusual locket from around Caroline’s neck, lest the fitful girl inadvertently choke herself; however, she agitatedly cries: “Don’t take it from me, Robert! Don’t! It is my last comfort” (Brontë C. 1849, 254). Upon examining the pendant, Mrs. Pryor observes that it contains “a curl of black hair too short and crisp to have been severed from a female head” (1888, 254). In her disorientation, Caroline seems to reveal the full extent to which Robert encouraged her attentions, swearing “I never tell anyone whose hair it is” (1888, 254). Branwell would also continue to claim Mrs. Robinson to his death, as he purportedly sent a lock of her hair to his friend John Brown “which has lain at night on his breast”, for safe keeping. He details this exchange in a letter to Brown of November 1843, expressing his wish to God that “it could do so *legally*” (2007, 55). Sutherland speculates he “was buried still wearing on his chest the lock of hair Lydia had given him in happier days” (2016, 27). Perhaps the etymological affinity between ‘Robinson’ and ‘Robert’ can therefore be interpreted as intentional, as both ensnare a younger, less powerful lover and both are content to abandon their devotees for their social superiors – Mrs. Robinson with Sir Edward Scott, and Robert with Shirley, and even Northangerland abandons Harriet for the ladies of the Angrian elite. Caroline’s storyline is a warning against such intense power imbalance in relationships, whether this is the result of unrequited affection or more pragmatic disparities, such as class or gender.

Langland stresses the inexorableness of Caroline’s sacrifice, arguing death is her escape from feminine restriction. Unable to confront Robert, Caroline entraps herself within her room, only bringing herself to sit in her chair near the window, a “station she would retain till noon was past: whatever degree of exhaustion or debility her wan aspect betrayed” (1888, 253), in the hope of catching a glimpse of Robert on his way to the churchyard. Langland states that this entrapment is a condition of the disempowered woman:

“Brontë has an impressive power to make us feel the coffin of social custom contracting around Caroline in her enforced silence upon witnessing Robert’s courtship of Shirley”. Her restrictions are a physical extension of her inability “to escape the scene of her torture” (Langland 2002, 12-13). Similarly, Harriet finds herself trapped in her “ancestral hall” (Brontë B. 1837, l. 1), looking out of the window and waiting for Northangerland to rescue her from the conflict that surrounds them:

Oh Percy! Percy! - where art Thou!
I’ve sacrificed my god for thee,
And yet thou wilt not come to me!
How thy strong arm might save me now!
(1840, ll. 270-4)

If Caroline is the Snow White of Angria, Harriet is the Rapunzel figure. Kept in her tower, Harriet waits in Woodchurch Hall, surrounded by the “clustered chimneys towering” (1836, l. 27) that have disrupted the skyline. These masculine edifices are a reflection of the change approaching Harriet’s sanctuary. This hall holds the memory of her sister, but the chaos of Northangerland’s war is oncoming, harming the landscape. Harriet subsequently contemplates “Nature’s deep dismay | At what her sons had done” (1836, ll. 300-10). Branwell’s narration implies that Woodchurch Hall will not remain untouched: “The light of thy ancestral hall, | Thy Caroline, no longer smiles” (1837, ll. 1-2). Patriarchy has dominated the kingdom and Harriet can only wait within her feminine tower. Her desperation to be saved leads her to hallucinate, like Branwell and Caroline Helstone, that Northangerland has come:

But - my own head whirls dizzily,
For these are visions that I see -
Save me! - I’m falling - was that him
Me thought I saw a sudden beam
(1840, ll. 293-6; underlining in the original)

Similarly, Shirley’s home of Fieldhead is described as an “ancestral hall” surrounded by a “thick, lofty stack of chimneys” (Brontë C. 1849, 15), and her sisterly bond with Caroline is threatened by the mill-owning, landscape-damaging Robert Moore - who had previously stated “my mill is my castle” (1888, 56). Charlotte must have seen the irony that her brother, with all his protestations of heroism, was experiencing the feminine subjection that he had envisioned so perceptively in his teenage years. In order to escape the male influence, Harriet tries too late to seek the solidarity of sisterhood. In “Sir Henry Tunstall”, Harriet is withering away and

when Northangerland does not appear, she calls on Caroline:

As long ago she used to cry
When – When at rest in eve’s decline –
Till Caroline all tenderly
Would bed above her golden head
And sing to sleep the guieless child
(Brontë B. 1840, ll. 244-8)

In her final moments, Harriet seeks sibling support and the memory of childhood innocence this invokes.

Equally, Caroline Helstone eventually finds a lifeline amongst her female network. Perhaps Charlotte is beckoning Branwell back to his sisters, to recall the collaboration of childhood and find solace. Sadly, Branwell died in infamy, arousing little sympathy in those around him, on 24th September 1848. Joseph Bentley Leyland never returned “Caroline” to Branwell (Neufeldt 1999, 413), but her name and her message nevertheless spoke to the divided Angrian collaborators.

3 Bade My Sister to Arise: Anne Brontë’s “Resurrection” of Caroline

Charlotte Brontë did not publicly mourn the death of her brother with the same sisterly despair with which she would come to mourn Emily and Anne. Writing to her publisher William Smith Williams immediately following Branwell’s burial, Charlotte could not help but criticise how he had died without making his mark upon the world, writing this scathing recollection:

Branwell was his Father’s and his Sisters’ pride and hope in boyhood, but since Manhood, the case has been otherwise. [...] I do not weep from a sense of bereavement – there is no prop withdrawn, no consolation torn away, no dear companion lost – but for the wreck of talent, the ruin of promise. (1997, 208-9)

Her unsympathetic tone emphasises Charlotte’s belief that the brother she knew, the one who devised Angrian tales with her, had long been absent. The public and private afterlife of Branwell is one “of trivialities [...] a thing of intellectual rags and patches, an object of amused contempt, a necessary death that confirms retribution” (Collins 1996, 253). Charlotte believes that Branwell and Caroline could only escape their self-destructive ways through the demise of their attachments – which both claim can only be eradicated in death. Caroline Helstone must die in order to confirm retribution for the crimes against one’s self. If Charlotte had always intended

that Caroline should deteriorate from a broken heart, why does she survive?

Caroline endures “the valley of the shadow of death”, and comes out the other side. Unlike her Angrian predecessor, she escapes her “tower” and is reborn as a stronger female within a female network, including Shirley and Mrs. Pryor. Through this sisterhood, Caroline has been cleansed of her obsession with Robert – Caroline’s obsession has been cleansed, although her affection for Robert perseveres. She is no longer dependent on his approval. In a rather artless decision, it is only then that Robert realises his own dependence on Caroline and proposes to her. Branwell may not have survived his addictions, but Caroline undergoes the happier alternative for those caught up in an obsession: she detoxes herself from Robert. When we re-examine Caroline’s physical condition, we recognise that her symptoms of ‘heartbreak’ – fevers, hallucinations, loss of appetite and anxiety – are those of withdrawal. By enduring, Caroline has cleansed herself of Robert’s toxicity. Perhaps in the wake of Branwell and Emily’s deaths, Charlotte could not bring herself to kill a character, or perhaps she wished that her brother had possessed the willpower to save himself before it was too late. However, Shuttleworth (1996, 207) argues that Caroline survives “the inevitable outcome of her internal collapse [...] only by the discovery of a new identity”. Caroline reinvents herself upon the discovery that Mrs. Pryor, Shirley’s companion and Caroline’s nurse, is actually her long lost mother. Moreover, Caroline was also salvaged once her authoress stopped identifying her with Branwell and instead “reimagined” her in Anne Brontë’s image.

Anne Brontë died in Scarborough of tuberculosis on 28 May 1849. Even as the family contemplated burying Emily, Charlotte could see Anne was also slipping away: “Emily suffers no more [...] She has died in a time of promise – we saw her taken from life in its prime [...] I now look at Anne and wish she were well and strong – but she is neither” (1997, 218). On Christmas Day 1848, Charlotte wrote to Smith Williams, “The sight too of my sister Anne’s very still deep sorrow wakens in me such fear for her that I dare not falter. Somebody must cheer the rest” (1997, 219-20). In the turmoil of having lost two siblings, and on the cusp of losing the surviving sister, Charlotte felt compelled to maintain a brave exterior – encouraged to conceal her grief by their father who would say “almost hourly, ‘Charlotte, you must bear up – I shall sink if you fail me’” (1997, 219-20). More than ever, Charlotte needed the cathartic exercise *Shirley* provided. Still, remorse counteracted diversion as Charlotte explained to Smith Williams: “we do not study, Anne cannot study now; she can scarcely read”. The plural pronoun “we” emphasises the solidarity Charlotte was sustaining with her final co-author, the implication being that, if they could not study together, Charlotte would not study at all. Charlotte displayed the same commonality in literary inactivity as

they had throughout their careers, with her 18 January 1849 missive to Smith Williams, claiming contriteness: “I feel as if I were doing a wrong and a selfish thing” (1997, 223), seemingly ashamed that she was not a constant presence at her sister’s side, a “traitor” to their literary unanimity. Writing when Anne and Emily could not left Charlotte guilt-ridden, although “sometimes I [Charlotte] feel it absolutely necessary to unburden my mind” (1997, 223). Her need to escape within *Shirley* had intensified, and Barker maintains that the hours she could spare from nursing were spent attempting to resume her novel with “something akin to desperation” (1997, 241). Nevertheless, Charlotte felt her talent diminish with grief and the completion of the book was irrevocably tied to Anne: “[s]hould Anne get better, I think I could rally and become Currer Bell once more - but if otherwise - I look no farther - sufficient for the day is the evil thereof” (1997, 224). Sadly, Anne did not get better and Charlotte struggled to resume her Currer Bell pseudonym. Even her pen name brought her lost sisters to mind, as she shared the invented ‘Bell’ surname with ‘Ellis’ (Emily) and ‘Acton’ (Anne). Eventually, she did rally, but Anne had left her impression upon both *Shirley* and its author, and if Charlotte could not collaborate with Anne in the end of her life, she would echo her authorial voice in death.

Charlotte’s perception of Anne as the ‘obedient’ sister was always present in Caroline Helstone’s characterisation, as are the messages of Anne’s completed novels, *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). Time after time, our heroine is treated as delicate and cossetted, in a manner highly reminiscent of Anne’s titular Agnes Grey. For instance, when Caroline states her intention to seek an independent living as a governess, to which Shirley reiterates “Nonsense [...] Be a governess! Better be a slave at once” (144). Shirley is repeating Charlotte’s 1838 letter to Ellen Nussey, written upon learning of Emily’s experiences as a teacher at Law Hill School: “Hard labour from six in the morning until near eleven at night [...] this is slavery” (1997, 59). The main cause for concern, however, is that Caroline herself is not strong enough – physically or emotionally – to undertake the profession, as resident governess; Mrs. Pryor warns her: “you are very young to be a governess, and not sufficiently robust: the duties a governess undertakes are often severe” (Brontë C. 1849, 144). When Caroline approaches her uncle about possibly following this vocation, he simply states: “Pooh! Mere nonsense! I’ll not hear of governessing [...] run away and amuse yourself” (1888, 116). Caroline responds to his condescension by muttering: “What with? My doll?” (1888, 166). Caroline blindly views the self-disciplined work of a governess as an ideal way of becoming a grown woman and leaving her uninspiring home, much like Anne’s Agnes Grey: “How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; to enter upon a new life [...] to exercise my unused

faculties" (Brontë A. 1870, 292). Caroline similarly seeks activity, explaining to Mrs. Pryor: "I want severe duties to occupy me" (Brontë C. 1849, 144). Nevertheless, her opinions are dismissed like those of a child, as happened to Agnes: "What, my little Agnes, a governess!" her father laughs (1888, 292).

The coddling Anne felt in her own life, and which she echoes within her protagonists, is the common experience of the youngest sibling. Anne was eighteen months old when their mother, Maria Branwell Brontë, died, and their Aunt Elizabeth was determined that the vulnerable Anne felt a maternal presence. As Rees (1986, 24) explains: "Miss Branwell took special pains over the upbringing of her favourite niece. [...] Anne was to share with her aunt the room in which her mother had died". Gérin also stresses Aunt Branwell's favouritism stemmed from Anne's "pretty manners and endearing ways" as well as her resemblance to her late mother (Aunt Branwell's sister) which caused the maiden aunt to love "Anne at sight". Caroline Helstone's appearance emulates the gentility which made Anne "unmistakably a Branwell" (Gérin 1959, 13). Unlike the tomboyish Shirley Keeldar, Caroline is the epitome of nineteenth-century femininity: "To her had not been denied the gift of beauty; it was not absolutely necessary to know her in order to like her [...] every curve was neat, every limb proportionate: her face was expressive and gentle; her eyes were handsome, and gifted at times with a winning beam that stole into the heart, with a language that spoke softly to the affections" (Brontë C. 1849, 67). The narrator continues to exalt Caroline's "pretty mouth", "delicate skin" and "a fine flow of brown hair" (1888, 67). The sole difference between Anne's and Caroline's appearance is their eye colour. Anne was known to have violet blue eyes, where Caroline is described with the "soft expression of her brown eyes" (1888, 115). Tompkins explains that Caroline's eye colour was intended to represent Charlotte's friend, Ellen Nussey:

Caroline's appearance fits very well with what we know of Ellen's. [...] curled, brown hair, the brown eyes, the clear forehead, the gentle expressive face, the modest and pretty dress are what we see in Charlotte's water-colour of her friend as a schoolgirl. (Tompkins 1961, 19)

It is possible that in order to highlight the unparalleled loveliness of Caroline, Charlotte made her a blend of the two most refined women in her life, Anne and Ellen. However, in the pivotal "Valley of the Shadow of Death" chapter, Caroline develops entirely into a mirror image of Anne.

Had Caroline died, it would have been an allegory for the death of potential, namely that of Branwell. As a tribute to Anne, Caroline does not die but is 'reborn' into an earlier stage of development. As Mrs.

Pryor cares for the ailing girl, she reveals that she is in fact Caroline's mother: "James Helstone was *my* husband. I say you are *mine*" (Brontë C. 1849, 258). Not only does Mrs. Pryor reveal her true identity, she consistently refers to Caroline as "mine", claiming possession of her. The prisoner of unrequited adoration suddenly finds unconditional love in the form of her mother, granting Caroline an external focus of identity beyond her own fatal meditations and she is "brought back to life". She has been given something to live for, and finds comfort in retreating to her younger self: "You *must* recover. You drew life and strength from my breast when you were a tiny, fair infant [...] [s]he held her to her bosom, she cradled her in her arms: she rocked softly, as if lulling a young child to sleep" (1888, 258-9). It is in the arms of her returned mother that Caroline fully becomes a representation of Charlotte's youngest sister, as Mrs. Pryor recalls her as a "tiny, fair infant, over whose blue eyes I used to weep" (1888, 259). For the rest of the novel, Caroline possesses Anne's blue eyes. Tompkins (1961, 23) argues that sentiment and sisterhood is what "rescued" Caroline: "the first chapter written after Anne's death was the 24th - that called 'The Valley of the Shadow' - in which Caroline goes down to the gates of death, but returns". Not only does Caroline return, she is born-again, having regressed to that early moment of infancy where we recognise our mothers for the first time. All her mistakes are washed clean and Caroline can begin again. By embodying Anne in appearance and temperament, Charlotte could revive the memory of her sister in her writings. Moreover, in the form of Mrs. Pryor, Charlotte can channel the authorial voice of Anne's two novels. She reveals, for instance, that her maiden name was "Miss Grey" (Brontë C. 1849, 227), whilst her first name is, indeed, "Agnes" (1888, 262) - clearly echoing Anne's own governess character. Furthermore, moments of her personal story and speech are also highly reminiscent of Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Much like Helen Huntingdon, Mrs. Pryor explains that she abandoned her husband and child, changing her name to a former family surname, much as Helen adopts her mother's maiden name of 'Graham' when in hiding. She explains that she left, and took work as a governess, due to the torment he inflicted upon her during her marriage: "I *have* suffered! None saw - none knew: there was no sympathy - no redemption - no redress!" (1888, 259). She recalls being fearful of Caroline's beauty when she was born: "I beheld in your very beauty the sign of qualities that had entered my heart like iron" (1888, 259). Her anxieties that Caroline would be taken advantage of are reminiscent of those of Helen's aunt upon meeting her future abusive husband, Arthur Huntingdon: "I want to warn you, Helen [...] you have a fair share of beauty, besides - and I hope you may never have cause to regret it!" (Brontë A. 1893, 208-9). Thus, in her personal storyline, Mrs. Pryor emulates not one, but both of Anne's novels. The substantial references are Charlotte's attempt

to forge a final collaboration with Anne, to include her in the progress of *Shirley* – as she stated she could not when Anne was ill. By having Anne’s counterpart, Caroline, ‘reborn’ in the arms of Mrs. Pryor, a fusion of Anne’s female protagonists, Charlotte is stating that her sister will live on in her work.

The theme of female solidarity is therefore a key theme of *Shirley*. For instance, the mutual respect, friendship and debate-driven partnership of Shirley and Caroline follows that of Emily and Anne during their Gondal collaboration: “it flashes on me [Caroline] at this moment how sisters feel towards each other – affection twined with their life [...] I am supported and soothed when you – that is, you only – are near, Shirley” (Brontë C. 1849, 152). During the most tumultuous periods of their lives, Emily and Anne could often only find solace in each other, and Caroline and Shirley’s dynamic reflects this. These women also echo the literary tastes of Charlotte’s sisters as they were constructing the Gondal kingdoms:

Caroline’s instinct of taste, too, was like her own. Such books as Miss Keeldar had read with the most pleasure were Miss Helstone’s delight also. They held many aversions too in common, and could have the comfort of laughing together over works of false sentimentality and pompous pretension. (1888, 24)

Moreover, Caroline’s almost ethereal femininity perfectly balances Shirley’s more decisive, masculine character, which leads them to embark on “adventures” together. In a scene where the two young women decide to prevent a Luddite rebellion against Robert Moore’s mill, Caroline states:

‘Do not fear that I shall not have breath to run as fast as you can possibly run, Shirley. Take my hand. Let us go straight across the fields.’

[Shirley:] ‘But you cannot climb walls?’
‘To-night I can.’ (1888, 191)

The description of Shirley and Caroline’s observation of the Luddite uprising is not dissimilar to Emily’s and Anne’s diary papers in which they describe the Gondalian Royal Family being threatened by anti-Monarchists. In Emily’s diary paper of 30 July 1845, she depicts the prince and princesses “escaping from the palaces of Instruction to join the Royalists who are hard driven at present by the victorious Republicans” (2010, 490-1). Equally, when Caroline tells Shirley she wishes to become a governess, Shirley’s immediate fear of separation is reminiscent of Emily’s feelings of abandonment while Anne was working “exiled and harassed” as a governess (2010, 489). Shirley tells

Caroline that “You don’t care much for my friendship, then, that you wish to leave me?”, to which Caroline replies “I don’t wish to leave you. I shall never find another friend so dear” (Brontë C. 1849, 144). Unlike Caroline and Shirley, Anne and Emily were separated and they felt the distance keenly – from each other and Gondal. Throughout Anne’s struggles as a governess for the Robinson family in the early 1840s, the two sisters attempted to continue their diary papers separately and therefore maintain the creative presence of their co-author. The effect of the distance from home is evident, however, as Anne’s 30 July 1841 diary paper confesses her ignorance of what is occurring in Gondal, and seems to doubt the longevity of the kingdom: “I wonder whether Gondaliand [*sic*] will still be flourishing and what will be their condition” (2010, 489-90). Anne’s obliviousness can be explained not only by her separation from Emily, but the aforementioned demands on a governess’s time. She emphasises her displeasure at having returned to the uninspiring schoolroom: “I dislike the situation and wish to change it [...] my pupils are gone to bed and I am hastening to finish this before I follow them”. Correspondingly, Emily completed her own diary entry on the same day and reveals recent events within Gondal: “[t]he Gondalians are at present in a threatening state but there is no open rupture as yet” (Brontë E. 2010, 488-9). Although Emily was contently living at home, the Gondalians were suffering under her lack of inspiration. She describes how she has “a good many books on hand – but I am sorry to say that as usual I make small progress with any”. Her imagination falters in Anne’s absence and her diary paper ends with a battle-cry of sisterly encouragement: “now I close sending from far an exhortation of courage! to exiled and harassed Anne wishing she was here” (2010, 489). While their Gondal juvenilia were faltering in their separation, the diary format allowed Emily and Anne to continue their sisterly support system beyond the geographical divide. Charlotte was inspired to recreate this twin-like bond in *Shirley* because she could empathise with this lack of inspiration, although her severance from her siblings was, sadly, far more permanent.

4 Conclusion: Shirley and the Summoning of Sibling Voices

By inviting Branwell back to the promise of his childhood and granting Anne the security of familial connection and protection, Charlotte is guarding her siblings in fiction in a way she could not in life. Caroline Helstone is the personification of those flaws that would contribute to Branwell’s death: his heartbreak and addictions mirrored in Caroline’s self-pity. By having Caroline acknowledge the cause of her suffering, Charlotte makes Branwell do the same. Through her parallels to Branwell’s juvenile creations, Caroline and her sister

Harriet, she is divesting Branwell of his heroic, “Northangerland” sense of self and exposing Branwell’s warped dependencies. Branwell represents Caroline Helstone’s weakness, but Anne inspired her virtues. Her wish for independence and appreciation of sisterhood mirror both Anne’s private and literary lives. Through allusions to Anne’s novels, Charlotte is lauding her youngest sister’s literary ability and lamenting the loss of this influence. Childhood is “the kingdom where nobody dies” (St. Vincent Millay 2003, 148-50, l. 1) but the collaborative kingdoms of Angria and Gondal could not continue. Within *Shirley*, Charlotte builds a new kingdom where she is the sole surviving co-author, but not the only one whose voice can be heard.

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***Adam Bede*, Realism, the Past, and Readers in 1859**

Gail Marshall
University of Reading, UK

Abstract This article gives an account of the immediate publication context of George Eliot's first novel, *Adam Bede*, in terms of competing opportunities for leisure, anxieties about the reading of fiction, the publishing industry, and the social and political context of February 1859. It examines the way in which the novel engages with its first readers, specifically through its treatment of the experience of reading fiction, and the ways in which *Adam Bede* differs from readers' previous experiences. The article argues that the novel's impact is determined by its engagement with the past of its setting, and by the ways in which it encourages a historically-nuanced appreciation in its readers, and that these factors are integral to Eliot's articulating a new form of realist fiction.

Keywords George Eliot. *Adam Bede*. Queen Victoria. Mudie's leisure. Realism. Geraldine Jewsbury. Popular theatre.

Summary 1 Publishing and *Adam Bede*. – 2 Leisure in 1859. – 3 Reviewing *Adam Bede* and Popular Fiction. – 4 Realism, the Home, and the Poor. – 5 Aligning Past, Present, and Future.



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1 Publishing and *Adam Bede*

George Eliot's first novel, *Adam Bede*, was published on 1 February 1859. It was originally meant to have been published months earlier by Blackwood's, but had been held up by Edward Bulwer Lytton's tardiness in correcting the proofs of his 4-volume novel, *What Will He Do With It?*, written whilst he was Secretary of State for the Colonies. In a vivid reminder of the material conditions of writers working at the time, this meant that "about a ton and a half of the same type [that] was being used for *Adam Bede* was locked up" (Haight 1985, 267). With this novel, Eliot took Victorian fiction into a new phase of psychological complexity, via a deeply moral, realist aesthetic, and an ambitious reading practice that demanded not only serious critical attention, but a degree of committed, empathetic investment. With the novel, she herself entered into a contest for the form and status of fiction.

Adam Bede is a historical novel. It begins in 1799, and tells the story of Adam, an aspiring young carpenter in the Derbyshire village of Hayslope who embodies enterprise and dedication to work, which is for him a moral undertaking, and his love for Hetty, the niece of a much-respected local farming family, the Poysers. Hetty's head is turned by the handsome young squire, Arthur Donnithorne, who seduces her. Finding herself pregnant, Hetty leaves Hayslope to seek Arthur, who, unbeknownst to her, has left to serve with his militia unit in Ireland. Failing to find him, she gives birth miles away from her home. Hetty abandons her baby in a wood, where it dies, and she is subsequently tried for infanticide, found guilty, and sentenced to be hung. Our attention as readers is divided between Hetty's trials, and the sufferings of Adam, whose faith and love, as well as his confidence in himself, are devastated by Hetty's actions. She is saved by a last-minute reprieve brought to the gallows by Arthur, and has her sentence commuted to seven years transportation to Australia. She dies on the return journey. Throughout the novel, Hetty's vanity and day-dreaming are contrasted with Dinah Morris, a Methodist preacher, factory-worker, and another niece to the Poysers. It is Dinah who persuades Hetty to confess to her crime, and who accompanies her to the gallows. Following Hetty's transportation, Adam finds himself falling in love with Dinah, and the two eventually marry. Their happy ending sees Adam becoming an independent businessman, and effectively replacing the dissolute and broken Arthur as an authority in the village. Dinah is forbidden by the Methodists to preach any longer, and subsides into domesticity.

February's letters between Eliot, her partner, George Henry Lewes, and their publisher, John Blackwood, reveal the publishing business at the time to be a tough one; Eliot was lucky to have Blackwood's affability and shrewdness, and Lewes's experience, to help negotiate it for her. Amongst other things, they discussed how

to deal with the dominant position of Mudie's Circulating Library. Readers had been borrowing books from Mudie's since 1842, but the company's move to Oxford Street in 1851 had increased its influence and significance, which even extended to the content of the books it lent. In 1858, according to Judith Flanders, Mudie's bought 100,000 new books, a figure which nearly doubled to 180,000 three years later (Flanders 2006, 185). Mindful of Mudie's power, Eliot had queried anxiously why "Mudie has almost always left the C S [i.e. *Clerical Scenes*] out of his advertised list, although he puts in very trashy and obscure books? I hope it is nothing more than chance" (Haight 1954-78, 3, 7). Mudie was trying to drive a hard bargain over *Adam Bede*, initially threatening to take only 50 copies, but finally 'succumbing', to use John Blackwood's term, to 'taking 500 at our terms 10 per cent off sales, to which I think he is entitled when he takes so large a number'. Blackwood was finally satisfied with Mudie's decision, not least because, as he wrote to Lewes, he understood the lender's caution:

As I have often explained before, I felt distinctly that by Clerical Scenes a reputation with readers and men of letters was made, but not a public general reputation [...] When the reviews begin to appear and people who have read [*Adam Bede*] begin to talk about it the movement will take place.

This proved to be the case. Nonetheless, he assured Lewes that he was "sending copies to the Press in all directions" (Haight 1954-78, 3: 9).

2 Leisure in 1859

Publishing is a key part of the industrialisation of leisure, a trope that Eliot uses in her novel to describe her contemporary readers' world. She contrasts leisure's present state to the ways in which it used to be enjoyed:

Leisure is gone - gone where the spinning-wheels are gone, and the pack-horses, and the slow waggons, and the pedlars, who brought bargains to the door on sunny afternoons. Ingenious philosophers tell you, perhaps, that the great work of the steam-engine is to create leisure for mankind. Do not believe them: it only creates a vacuum for eager thought to rush in. Even idleness is eager now - eager for amusement; prone to excursion-trains, art museums, periodical literature, and exciting novels; prone even to scientific theorizing and cursory peeps through microscopes. Old Leisure was quite a different personage. He only read one newspaper, innocent of leaders, and was free from that periodicity

of sensations which we call post-time. He was a contemplative, rather stout gentleman, of excellent digestion; of quiet perceptions, undiseased by hypothesis; happy in his inability to know the causes of things, preferring the things themselves. He lived chiefly in the country, among pleasant seats and homesteads, and was fond of sauntering by the fruit-tree wall and scenting the apricots when they were warmed by the morning sunshine, or of sheltering himself under the orchard boughs at noon, when the summer pears were falling. He knew nothing of weekday services, and thought none the worse of the Sunday sermon if it allowed him to sleep from the text to the blessing; liking the afternoon service best, because the prayers were the shortest, and not ashamed to say so; for he had an easy, jolly conscience, broad-backed like himself, and able to carry a great deal of beer or port-wine, not being made squeamish by doubts and qualms and lofty aspirations. Life was not a task to him, but a sinecure. He fingered the guineas in his pocket, and ate his dinners, and slept the sleep of the irresponsible, for had he not kept up his character by going to church on the Sunday afternoons?

Fine old Leisure! Do not be severe upon him, and judge him by our modern standard. He never went to Exeter Hall, or heard a popular preacher, or read *Tracts for the Times* or *Sartor Resartus*. (Eliot 1859, 3: 283-5)

Eliot's healthy, bucolic "stout gentleman" closely resembles Mr. Pullet, whom she would soon write about in *The Mill on the Floss*, and Mr. Jerome in "Janet's Repentance", one of Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life*. He is a creature of the countryside, lacking intellectual curiosity, content to be guided by the seasons, and in complete contrast with the modern, London-based man of active leisure.

Peter Bailey uses Eliot's passage as an exemplar of modern leisure, where "change and modernity predominated over continuity, and where old leisure was communal, 'answering to the prescriptions of ritual and custom'" (Bailey 2012, 619). Leisure has been "severed from its traditional moorings in work, custom, and community" (622), operates within a different experience of time, and is often located not in the street and public space, but in the home. The reference to "scientific theorizing and cursory peeps through microscopes" might be an affectionately rueful reference to Lewes's scientific work, which flagged in the face of the demands of the couple's imminent house move: "My frogs mutely reproach me for neglect. My microscope gathers the dust of disuse" (Haight 1954-78, 3: 10-11). Modernity is defined by papers, politics, and the post, and a perceptible speeding up of sensation, enabled by the increasing industrialisation which in turn necessitated its workers' distraction.

In the same week as *Adam Bede* was published, popular preachers at St Paul's and Westminster Abbey, not to mention Exeter Hall on

the Strand, were another potential distraction for the reader. “The great room” of Exeter Hall “was well filled on Sunday night” for the preaching of the Rev Samuel Monton of Percy Chapel, Tottenham Court Road, who chose for his text “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich”. He had to compete with the Rev John Staughton of Kensington, who preached the same night at St James’s Hall on “He restoreth my soul”. “In a few minutes after the doors were thrown open the hall was declared full, and vast numbers were disappointed” (*Lloyds*, 6 February 1859, 6). Plenty of secular amusements were on offer too: Monday Popular Concerts and Barnum on “Money Making and Humbug” at the St James’s Hall, Mr. C. Dickens reading “his CHRISTMAS CAROL and the TRIAL FROM PICKWICK” at St Martin’s Hall, “Madame Delevanti’s grand ascent on the Telegraph Wire” at the Alhambra Palace, Leicester Square, “The original and celebrated SPANISH MINSTRELS” at Winchester Hall on the Southward Bridge Road, and the men-only invitations to listen to “Short and interesting interludes between the Musical Portion of the Entertainment, embracing an amount of singular ability never before presented to the public” by “THIRTY VOCALISTS at Evans’s Magnificent Music and Supper Rooms, Covent Garden”, and to learn from lectures at Dr Kahn’s Anatomical Museum on Tichborne Street: “OPEN DAILY (for Gentlemen only)” (*Lloyds*, 6). Many men were also present at the meetings discussing voting reform throughout the country.

This is to say nothing of the bills of the nineteen West End theatres advertising in *Lloyds Weekly London Newspaper*, dioramas of “the Mammoth Caves of Kentucky, the Prairies of Illinois, and the Scenery of Niagara” at the Royal Gallery of Illustration, the Ohio Minstrels, whose only fault is that “They betray too thoroughly their Anglo-Saxon origin”, and the production of *The Gipsy Girl of Madrid; or, the Edict of Spain* at Astley’s Amphitheatre, best-known for its equestrian spectacles (*Lloyds*, 6). Lest they miss out on the explosion in printed matter occurring in the 1850s, “Under the enterprising auspices of Captain Hicks, governor, a library is about to be formed in Whitecross-Street prison, for the use of the debtors confined in the prison” (*Lloyds*, 11). Even prisoners were not immune from the hectic leisure resources around them.

Eliot’s description of “Leisure” gives a strong sense of the conditions in which novelists and publishers were having to compete for the public’s attention, and of how their consumers might need to be guided through leisure’s multiple attractions. *Adam Bede* appeared alongside the millions of words published weekly in newspapers, periodicals, and other new books. But Eliot’s novel insists that time must be found for attentive reading. The genesis of *Adam Bede* was Hetty’s distressing story, which came from a tale recounted to Eliot by an aunt, the bare bones of which appear regularly in newspaper columns telling of

illegitimate births, infanticide, the deaths or suicides of abandoned women, and the chaos that ensues. Eliot took the nub of that story, its “newsworthy” elements, and read them differently, as just one episode in a long narrative whose significance lay elsewhere than in its newsworthiness, and which demanded more consideration than anyone could give to the densely printed newspapers of the 1850s.

3 Reviewing *Adam Bede* and Popular Fiction

As literary insiders, Eliot and Lewes were particularly concerned with how *Adam Bede* might be reviewed, by whom, and how it would fare alongside more overtly popular fiction. An early review from the *Statesman* “disgusted and disheartened” Lewes as “it was laudatory throughout; but the kind of laudation was fatal [...] The nincompoop couldn’t see the distinction between Adam and the mass of novels he has been reading” (Lewes 1859, 153). Eliot herself condemned “damnable praise from ignorant journalists” (Haight 1954-78, 3: 24) and charged Blackwood with making sure that no “hackneyed puffing phrase” be tacked to her book in advertising columns. She goes on:

One sees [such phrases] garnishing every other advertisement of Hurst and Blackett’s trash: surely no being ‘above the rank of an idiot’ can have his inclination coerced by them and it would gall me as much as any trifle could, to see my book recommended by such an authority as the writer in Bell’s Weekly messenger who doesn’t know how to write decent English. (Haight 1954-78, 3: 25)

We can only imagine Eliot’s dismay at the first review of *Adam Bede*, which appeared in the same *John Bull and Britannia* that praised *Onwards*. It was less than glowing, made no mention at all of its hero, and concentrated on Hetty’s attractions as a popular heroine (*John Bull and Britannia* 1859, 107).

Adam Bede went on to become the most widely reviewed novel of the year, and was often written of alongside more popular fiction. John Chapman’s piece in the *Westminster Review* began with a comparison between *Adam Bede* and the more usual run of novels of which he memorably wrote that, “Swinging on a gate is an intellectual amusement compared with reading most of them” (Chapman 1859, 488). Other critics responded discerningly to the novel’s innovations: Ann Mozley thought it unique in having “found its way into hands indifferent to all previous fiction, to readers who welcome it as the voice of their own experience in a sense no other book has ever been” (Mozley 1859, 434), whilst for Geraldine Jewsbury, *Adam Bede* was a work of “true genius”, “of the highest class. Full of quiet power, without exaggeration and without any strain after effect it produces

a deep impression on the reader, which remains long after the book is closed" (Jewsbury 1859a, 284).

Eliot recognised the tensions between different types of fiction, and frequently tried to educate her readers about them, most notably in *Adam Bede's* chapter 17, "In Which the Story Pauses a Little". Eliot anchors readerly sympathies in the possibilities opened up by the absence of the more customary "sorrows of heroines in satin boots and crinoline, and of heroes riding fiery horses, themselves ridden by still more fiery passions" (Eliot 1859, 35) and her concentration on "faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence" which had been inspired by "Dutch paintings". *Adam Bede* is part of a dialogue between Eliot and popular fiction, which had been going on since 1856 when, just before she began her career as a fiction writer, she published a review on "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" in the *Westminster Review* (Ashton 1996, 163). The essay may be read as an apprentice's analysis of the contemporary conditions of the craft she aspired to, and as evidence of the writer's antagonism towards the "particular quality of silliness that predominates" in popular fiction by women (Eliot 1992a, 296). However, despite Eliot's own "higher" aspirations for her fiction and its readers, and some critics' responses, the relationship between silly novels and Eliot's own fiction is far from being so exclusive. Rather there is an energizing symbiosis between the popular and *Adam Bede*.

Adam Bede uses one of popular fiction's most ubiquitous plot structures: in the relationship between Adam, Hetty, and Arthur, Eliot employs a structural trope which underpins a great many other novels by women novelists of this year: the heroine's choice between a worthy lover (like Adam), and an altogether more dashing and exciting, though ultimately unreliable, prospect (such as Arthur). The triangular structure is a staple of romantic fiction. Sometimes the heroines of 1859 get a new chance at success with the worthier man after the flighty, sexier man has inevitably let them down, sometimes not; Hetty's infanticide, transportation, and death represent by far the most drastic punishment for a wrong choice. Some male characters are more despicable and openly calculating than Arthur, whose fault lies mainly in a selfishly lazy desire to indulge and to be indulged, yet which has results just as devastating as the more malign purposes of cold-hearted, often foreign, seducers. But in a twist on this popular model, Eliot cleverly develops the triangular structure by juxtaposing two such plots, one male- and one female-centred: in the first, Hetty opts for Arthur over Adam, only turning to the latter when it is too late, and she is already carrying Arthur's baby. With his first love gone, Adam can turn to Dinah, the woman he has respected from the beginning of their relationship, with whom he is allowed to grow old happily along with their children, and his gentle brother, Seth. This second triangle attempts, not entirely successfully, to re-calibrate the text, and shift its

centre decisively away from illicit romance to the achieved satisfaction of a marriage based in virtue and hard work. This, alongside Hetty's death, and Arthur's emasculation, represents both a chastening dose of Eliot's realism, and also the cost of the security of the novel's ending, which rests in large part on the expulsion of those aberrant and disruptive elements that are personified in Hetty and Arthur.

Eliot was anxious about the reading practices engendered by popular fiction, as were some of her contemporaries. W.R. Greg expressed his concerns in an article on the "False Morality of Lady Novelists". He writes warily of the influence and easy effectiveness of light literature, which as the "sole or the chief reading" of numerous readers in the "idler or more impressionable hours, when the fatigued mind requires rest and recreation", needed to be "watched[ed] with the most vigilant concern" (Greg 1859, 145). The young are most vulnerable to the influence of such fiction, as their experience and education are not yet robust enough to enable them to be discriminating readers, as are women, "who are always impressionable, in whom at all times the emotional element is more awake and more powerful than the critical, whose feelings are more easily roused and whose estimates are more easily influenced than ours" (145-6). The very ease of reading fiction is dangerous. In a metaphor that speaks to the current interest in the digestion and consumption of food, Greg writes that:

Histories, philosophies, political treatises, to a certain extent even first-class poetry, are solid and often tough food which requires laborious and slow mastication. Novels are like soup or jelly; they may be drunk off at a draught or swallowed whole, certain of being easily and rapidly absorbed into the system. (146)

The metaphor speaks to concerns about novels' being intimately ingested. Whilst he admits that novels can often deter wrong-doing by their "life-like pictures of sorrows endured and trials surmounted" (146-7), the fact that so many novels are written by young women, with inadequate moral development, immature judgement, and "superficial insight" (149) is cause for great anxiety. This is interesting evidence of the predominance of fiction in the literary landscape, and of the enthusiasm with which women were taking it up, as both readers and writers. One cannot help wondering this plea actually registers greater competition within this literary field than any other. Certainly a higher proportion of women writers worked in fiction than in any other genre (Tuchman 1989, 125).

Eliot was competing commercially, and in terms of popularity, with the creators of this fiction, those "lady novelists" whose work might have mis-educated Eliot's potential readers. However, whilst there were plenty of "silly" and barely readable novels published in 1859,

not all of them were by women, and female novelists were not as uniformly pernicious, or just plain bad, as Eliot and Greg suggested. *Adam Bede* appeared just after Geraldine Jewsbury's *Right or Wrong*, which was published by Hurst and Blackett, whom Eliot singled out for particular criticism in her letter to Blackwood. Whilst subsequent readers have generally taken for granted the usefulness and authority of Eliot's, and indeed Greg's, derogatory classifications of "silly novels" and their "lady novelists", we need to ask how far such a novel actually meets Eliot's definitions of 'silly novels' and what it is about them that she seeks to distance her work from.

Jewsbury's *Right or Wrong* and *Adam Bede* share an interesting insistence on the sacred importance of the home to their heroes. Adam's work is based in building and improving homes and their furniture; Jewsbury's novel goes into minute details of interior decoration ("The walls were light-grey, stenciled with a graceful trellis pattern, wreathed with green leaves") (Jewsbury 1859b, 2: 121) whilst she asserts the spiritual nature of the home that her hero Paul creates for his wife: "Paul had all along been aspiring after an ideal; to him a *Home* meant so much, something so noble, so sacred, such an innermost life, that the materials took, under his hands, a meaning and expression quite different to their actual existence as articles of furniture" (122-3). The home becomes both the measure and the means of his redemption at the end of the novel. The insistence on male investment in the details and spiritual nature of the home is striking, but perhaps not surprising given the prominence of such details in contemporary newspapers: *The Times'* advertising columns are full of adverts for furniture and domestic goods, and G.H. Lewes was just as invested in domestic purchases as Eliot. Jewsbury's novel insists on an attention to domestic details which closely echoes Eliot's emphasis on the quotidian in *Adam Bede*. Jewsbury's narrator continues:

If we could only realize our daily life instead of taking it as we do, hardened into common use and wont, it would be as when we look through a microscope and see the delicate and minute beauty which lies hidden from us in objects so common that we look at them without seeing. (125)

This moment speaks to the ways in which the technologies of the day, of which the microscope was newly readily accessible, literally offered new views of the world, and subsequently new means of conceptualizing it. Jewsbury attempts to encourage her reader's "realization" of daily life as the repository of wonder and beauty, as do Eliot and scientists of that year, like Lewes, Charles Darwin, and Philip Gosse, for whom the microscope was a revelatory instrument. Jewsbury and Eliot use the domestic as both the vehicle and the essence and substance of their approach to fiction.

4 Realism, the Home, and the Poor

Eliot's use of the home lies at the heart of the moral realist aesthetic which is exemplified in *Adam Bede* and which expresses more fully than *Jewsbury*, the implications of such microscopic attention to domestic detail. In "In Which the Story Pauses a Little", she writes of the "many Dutch paintings, which lofty-minded people despise" that,

I find a source of delicious sympathy in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence, which has been the fate of so many more among my fellow-mortals than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, of tragic suffering or of world-stirring actions. I turn without shrinking, from cloud-borne angels, from prophets, sibyls, and heroic warriors, to an old woman bending over her flower-pot, or eating her solitary dinner, while the noonday light, softened perhaps by a screen of leaves, falls on her mob-cap, and just touches the rim of her spinning-wheel, and her stone jug, and all those cheap common things which are the precious necessities of life to her. (Eliot 1859, 2: 5)

In Eliot, reverence for the details of home is simultaneously a recognition and reverence of a shared humanity, a "deep human sympathy", which over-rides the claims of conventional physical beauty, which was celebrated in popular fiction:

All honour and reverence to the divine beauty of form! Let us cultivate it to the utmost in men, women, and children - in our gardens and in our houses. But let us love that other beauty too, which lies in no secret of proportion, but in the secret of deep human sympathy. Paint us an angel, if you can, with a floating violet robe, and a face paled by the celestial light; paint us yet oftener a Madonna, turning her mild face upward and opening her arms to welcome the divine glory; but do not impose on us any aesthetic rules which shall banish from the region of Art those old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands, those heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house, those rounded backs and stupid weather-beaten faces that have bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world - those homes with their tin pans, their brown pitchers, their rough curs, and their clusters of onions. In this world there are so many of these common coarse people, who have no picturesque sentimental wretchedness! It is so needful we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy and frame lofty theories which only fit a world of extremes. Therefore let Art always remind us of them; therefore let us always have men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representing of

commonplace things – men who see beauty in these commonplace things, and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them. (7-8)

This is one of the most famous of Eliot's expressions of her aesthetic, of her conviction of the morality of a right apprehension of beauty in commonplace things. Properly employed, she argues, this apprehension will build cross-class understanding through art's engendering of "deep human sympathy". Fiction is being employed by Eliot to extend her readers' sympathies with and knowledge of unfamiliar groups within society, particularly the poor, with whom they might not come into contact. The social and political context of February 1859 shows exactly how urgently this was needed.

Two days after *Adam Bede* appeared, Queen Victoria made a speech in the House of Lords at the opening of the new parliamentary session. The State Opening was a glorious social occasion: the *Illustrated London News's* account reported on the crowds who thronged the Queen's route to Westminster, security arrangements, the royal salute, and the procession of eight royal carriages. The overwhelming intention of the Queen's speech was to insist on the stability gained after periods of warfare in the Crimea and India earlier in the decade, and to steady Britain in the face of current European unrest. Victoria began her speech with surprising complacency: "I am happy to think that, in the internal state of the country, there is nothing to excite disquietude, and much to call for satisfaction and thankfulness"; specifically, "Pauperism and crime have considerably diminished during the past year, and a spirit of general contentment prevails" (*The London Gazette* 1859, 457). Unemployment was certainly at the relatively low level of 26% in 1859 (Hoppen 1998, 80), but it did not eradicate all social problems, as we will see. *Reynolds's Newspaper* directly disputed this part of Victoria's speech, describing the alleged decrease in pauperism and crime as "equivocal, and by no means supported by the experience of the judges or the state of the gaols" (*Reynolds's Newspaper* 1859, 1).

Victoria's grasp on the conditions of her country is limited by the extent to which she was exposed to her subjects, and the political leanings of her speech-writers. At dinner on 26th February, two days before the House of Commons began a debate on voting reform, Victoria was assured by Sir George Lewis that the "country was perfectly calm about [Reform] & most contented & peaceful" (Queen Victoria's Journal 1859). The Queen was in Windsor for most of February, going to London only for Parliament's opening and to attend the theatre, a favourite occupation of hers, and one which was not likely to expose her to the nation's real situation. This month she saw *Satanella, or, The Power of Love* three times at the English Opera. Billed as a "romantic opera" it is a light piece combining a

cross-class love-affair, the triumph of humble virtue over aristocratic scheming, the baffling of the devil, and the redemption of one of his female servants, the eponymous Satanella. She is lifted to heaven on a cloud at the finale, accompanied by a host of songs and supernatural effects, culminating with “the melody of ‘The Power of Love’ sung by an invisible choir as the curtain slowly descends” (Harris, Falconer 1858). Victoria also saw “the two last acts of ‘Macbeth’”, at Charles Kean’s *Princess’s*, which she described as “a stupid, though gorgeous Pantomime” (Queen Victoria’s Journal, 17 February); an *Unequal Match* at the Haymarket on the 24th, which she notes in her journal was the anniversary of the French Revolution (she refers to 1848, not 1789); and on the 28th went to see the popular comic actor Frederick Robson in a piece called *The Porter’s Knot*. As was often the case, the play was an adaptation by John Oxenford of a French play by Messieurs Cormon and Grangé. Victoria recalls:

There is such a funny song Robson sings in the last verse of which he speaks of what might have been his lot, had he been a cobbler’s son & sent to the “Foundling Hospital, where the boys are dressed in woollen clothes, to warm their little limbs, - & they smell of yellow soap & sing like Cherubims” -

This is at best a curious form of humour, and yet the piece is described in the *Illustrated London News* as having a subject “well calculated to appeal to English sympathies”:

The circumstances of the plot have been thoroughly Anglicised. The interest turns on the parental solicitude of an honest couple who, having earned sufficient means to live in respectable retirement, and to educate their son as a surgeon, are plunged, by the extravagance of that son, into unexpected poverty. The father carefully conceals the delinquency of the boy from his wife, and pretends that he himself has imprudently lost the money which the youth has squandered in unfortunate speculations. From this peculiarity much of the touching sentiment of the piece arises. The son departs for Australia to redeem his fortunes, and the old man returns to his porter’s knot as the means of procuring his subsistence. The phases of feeling that arise out of this self-sacrifice are distinctly, and with the utmost artistic skill as well as the greatest natural power, brought out by Mr. Robson. [...] Ultimately, his parental sufferings are rewarded by the success of his son, who fortunately and heroically redeems his honour and restores his parents to their comfortable home. The piece [...] promises to be a remarkable success. (*Illustrated London News* 1858, 549)

The English-ness of the play seems to rest in its quality of love and honour redeemed, worth and virtuous hard work rewarded, and the restoration of the prodigal son to the family home. In *Adam Bede* of course neither prodigal returns home unscathed. *The Porter's Knot* sentimentalises a story which was being less happily played out in the courts of London, where parents were unable to cover sons' losses, and where imprisonment, hard labour, and suicide were the more usual results of financial loss and the criminality it could lead to. No wonder Victoria enjoyed a play that enabled her to believe that "general contentment prevailed" even in the face of financial disaster.

Her comments on the play and its subject matter show how the plight of the poor was readily translated into entertainment for the middle classes, whether in the theatre, in the court reports of the daily newspapers, or in fiction. This is the situation that *Adam Bede* recognised and sought to remedy by directly challenging it, and trying to invoke an empathetic response in its readers which would surpass the easy satisfaction of popular art forms suggested by W.R. Greg, and that necessarily entail a form of critical and moral self-consciousness.

5 Aligning Past, Present, and Future

The broader aim of Eliot's realist novel is to bring past, present, and future into alignment. In an age all too conscious of its celebrated predecessors, the development of an active relationship with the past which yet did not preclude progress was vital. Eliot teaches both Adam and her readers that the past-present relationship is vital rather than lapidary, mobile rather than simply commemorative. This contrasts with Queen Victoria's speech to her government in February, where a different historical model is articulated which suggests that a fundamental aspect of success in foreign affairs was the ability to turn back the clock, and resume former relations with other states. The Queen highlights the resumption of good relations with Russia in the wake of the Crimea, cemented by the signing of a Treaty of Commerce, which is "a satisfactory indication of the complete re-establishment of those amicable relations which, until their late unfortunate interruption, had long subsisted between us, to the mutual advantage of our respective dominions" (Ensor 1882, 148). Trade both indicates and effects peace, and returns matters to an earlier state of being. In the case of India, the other most notable scene of recent hostilities, Victoria invokes the blessing of God on the valour of her troops in that country, and on the skill of their commanders, which has "enabled [her] to inflict signal chastisement upon those who are still in arms against [her] authority, whenever they have ventured to encounter [her] forces". She continues:

I trust that, at no distant period, I may be able to announce to you the complete pacification of that great empire, and to devote my attention to the improvement of its condition, and to the obliteration of all traces of the present unhappy conflict. (Ensor 1882, 148)

In a century later characterised by the drive to progress, this intriguing insistence on the pre-eminence of the past as something to aspire to, as a measure of success, might appear contradictory, but Eliot's aesthetic demonstrates how necessary a reconciliation with the living legacy of the past is. Eliot wrote to William Blackwood that when she had finished writing *Adam Bede* she had "arrived at a faith in the past, but not a faith in the future" (Haight 1954, 66).

In the novel, Hetty and Arthur are disruptive characters who threaten the virtue of Adam Bede, and Eliot represents their disruption through their tortuous relations with concepts of history when she shows that they are unable to live contentedly either in their own moment or in full acknowledgement of the shared past of their community. Rather, Hetty spends much of her time in a state of willed removal from that community, and its responsibilities. She lives instead in a world of fantasies of the future, untroubled by those memories of the past which for many of Eliot's characters are the enabler and guarantee of their empathy and moral responsibility. Hetty's fantasies,

are but dim ill-defined pictures that her narrow bit of an imagination can make of the future; but of every picture she is the central figure, in fine clothes; Captain Donnithorne is very close to her, putting his arm round her, perhaps kissing her, and everybody else is admiring and envying her - especially Mary Burge, whose new print dress looks very contemptible by the side of Hetty's resplendent toilette. Does any sweet or sad memory mingle with this dream of the future - any loving thought of her second parents - of the children she had helped to tend - of any youthful companion, any pet animal, any relic of her own childhood even? Not one. There are some plants that have hardly any roots: you may tear them from their native nook of rock or wall, and just lay them over your ornamental flower-pot, and they blossom none the worse. Hetty could have cast all her past life behind her and never cared to be reminded of it again. (Eliot 1859, 1: 286-7)

Likened to a kitten in the novel, Hetty is dehumanised by her lack of loyalty, and the impoverished imagination that can only project forwards, unhampered by thoughts of the past.

Arthur colludes in these fantasies, and this is expressed through time-based metaphors ironically derived from the type of classical

education he received, and which arguably ought to have divided him from Hetty, but which instead enables their mutual delusions. Where Hetty imagines an unrealistic future, Arthur imagines himself back into a past where he is ‘a rich sultan’, with Adam Bede as his “grand-vizier” (1: 110), or into a set of classical references where to Hetty, “quite uneducated – a simple farmer’s girl”, Arthur’s “white hand was dazzling as an Olympian god” (184-85). Classical and Eastern references combine with Hetty’s fantasies of the future to remove the characters from their quotidian lives and enable their devastating kiss in the wood, “just the sort of wood most haunted by nymphs” (239), which propels their relationship forward:

Ah, he doesn’t know in the least what he is saying. This is not what he meant to say. His arm is stealing round the waist again; it is tightening its clasp; he is bending his face nearer and nearer to the round cheek; his lips are meeting those pouting child-lips, and for a long moment time has vanished. He may be a shepherd in Arcadia for aught he knows, he may be the first youth kissing the first maiden, he may be Eros himself, sipping the lips of Psyche – it is all one. (254)

The characters are emotionally and temporally removed from their present, mired in a fantastical past, and thus the chaos of their relationship is unleashed. Eliot’s realism rather insists on the duties of recognizing the past’s determining, collective, and vital influence on the present, and does so in *Adam Bede* by inviting her readers in 1859 to see the continuities between their own present and the past of her characters. In her depiction of the budding businessman in Adam, the collapse of rural hierarchies in the face of Adam’s entrepreneurship, and the encroachment of factories into rural lives, Eliot was laying the foundations for the present of her readers. Thus, by reading sympathetically, by engaging with characters from the past, the reader creates a bridge to their own present that enacts Eliot’s edict about art’s being “the nearest thing to life [...] a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot” (Eliot 1992b, 263-4).

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The Disappearing Act: Heritage Making in Charlotte Riddell's Novels

Silvana Colella
Università degli Studi di Macerata, Italia

Abstract This article examines the strategies of heritage making in Riddell's City novels, popular in the 19th century, but little known today. Drawing on late Victorian debates about the preservation of the past and its material remains, the article focuses on the relationship between fictional and non-fictional elements, in Riddell's urban realism, which frequently pivots on heritage concerns. The main argument is twofold: 1) heritage discourse provides an apt framing for the self-validation of the author's daring narrative choices; 2) Riddell's understanding of heritage changes as her vision of capitalism darkens, culminating in a vocal denunciation of the destructive forces at work in the very idea of progress. Her novels generate heritage value in the very gesture of recording the many disappearing acts mournfully witnessed by the narrator.

Keywords Heritage. City of London. Realism. Preservationism. Business.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The novelist of the City of London. – 3 Heritage Making. – 4 The Disappearing Act. – 5 Preserving the Past. – 6 Conclusion.



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‘Heritage’ is a nomadic term
(Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 1994)

1 Introduction

The current notion of heritage emerged in Europe, particularly in France, Germany and Britain, in the nineteenth century. Concerns with the past and its material remains have a much deeper history, of course, but the nineteenth century saw the rise of a specific discourse of heritage interlaced with the developing narrative of nationalism and a new sense of historical consciousness.¹ In tension with ideas of progress and development, heritage discourse placed much emphasis on the urgent need to conserve and manage historic buildings and ancient monuments, threatened by the massive transformations in the built environment consequent upon industrialisation and urbanisation. In England, John Ruskin’s philosophy, expounded in *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *Stones of Venice* (1851-1853), inspired the activism of William Morris, Octavia Hill and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Building (SPAB), founded in 1877. The SPAB had a crucial role in challenging existing architectural and conservationist practices, especially the extreme forms of restoration associated with the Gothic Revival. The integrity of monuments, Morris argued, was best preserved by means of minimal interventions and repairs that kept buildings as untouched as possible, while protecting them from further decay (Donovan 2008).

But heritage is not just a physical thing; it is also a “performance”, “a cultural and social process” (Smith 2006, 2), “an actively constructed understanding, a discourse about the past which is ever in fluctuation” (Moody 2015, 113). In Victorian England, the expert knowledge of architects, antiquarians and archaeologists oriented this process of meaning making and value creation. Civic participation, however, also played a major part in it, increasingly so as the century was drawing to a close: “emerging ideas of heritage protection”, Cowell explains, “often built upon strong levels of public sympathy and support for the relics of the past” (2008, 55). A popular culture of heritage developed alongside antiquarian and archaeological debates about the future of the past. Heritage awareness, in other words, was widespread. Its traces can also be found in novels of the period: Charlotte Riddell’s City novels are a telling case in point.

¹ In Cowell’s definition “heritage is perhaps best understood as a way of seeing or appreciating the past in the present, in the interests of both the present and the future. A simple definition of heritage [...] might therefore be: an ongoing concern for the tangible and intangible remains of the past, for the benefit of present and future generations” (Cowell 2008, 10). On the discourse of heritage, first formalised in the nineteenth century, see Smith 2006, 16-30, Swenson 2013 and Cowell 2008.

My aim in this article is to explore how Riddell's fiction contributed to the practice of heritage making. Resolutely focused on the present of commercial and financial modernity, on the new realities of nineteenth-century capitalism, Riddell's novels may seem poor candidates for an investigation into concerns, interests and practices related to the preservation of the past. Yet, as Harrison suggests, "heritage is not primarily about the past, but instead about our relationship with the present and the future" (2013, 4). Riddell's urban realism provides ample evidence of heritage in the making, or "past presencing", which Macdonald defines as "the empirical phenomenon of how people variously experience, understand and produce the past in the present" (2013, 58). The first section of this article contains a broad overview of Riddell's City novels, popular in the nineteenth century, but little known today, focusing on recurring themes and approaches.² In the subsequent sections, I analyse Riddell's narrative strategies in relation to the preservationist impulse and the creation of heritage value through fiction. Some of these strategies – topographical realism, for example – are shared by many novelists and are well known to produce an immediate effect of "immersivity" (Ryan 2001, 129). Others are specific to Riddell's unique imaginative commitment to narrating capitalism and business life in the hyper-modern setting of the City of London, the international hub of commerce, trade and finance. Riddell's understanding of heritage changes as her vision of capitalism darkens, culminating in a vocal denunciation of the destructive forces at work in the very idea of progress. Concerns for heritage often develop as "a response to a perceived or actual threat" (Cowell 2008, 20). Riddell's novels are no exception in this respect. Remarkable, however, is the extent to which the heritage idea informs her realism. The rich history of the City of London, strongly evoked at the onset of her stories of modern life, is translated into heritage through repeated acts of imaginative communion with the past that reclaim it as a legacy for all to share and enjoy.

² As I have argued in my book (Colella 2016), Riddell's novels stand out in the canon of nineteenth-century realist fiction for their unique and sustained focus on the City of London, the commercial and financial centre of British capitalism. The expression 'City novels' is meant to capture this specific aspect of Riddell's imaginative engagement with the world of business, trade and finance. The present article looks at Riddell's fiction from a different angle, bringing into sharper focus the articulation of heritage concerns in her novels.

2 The novelist of the City of London

Riddell's City novels are, in a way, forgotten heritage - literary objects that have long remained hidden in the dusty archives of cultural memory. Riddell's popularity peaked in the 1860s and 1870s but did not prove long lasting. In those decades, she was able to command high prices in the market for fiction (Tinsley 1900, 1: 98); her novels captured the attention of both established journals and metropolitan and provincial newspapers, and the editorship of the *St. James's Magazine*, which Riddell held for seven years (1867-73), further contributed to consolidating her media identity. Born in Carrickfergus (Northern Ireland), Charlotte Eliza Cowan (later Riddell) moved to London in 1855 in pursuit of a literary career. She made her mark in the crowded literary marketplace of mid-Victorian England by narrating stories that are mostly set in the City of London, the centre of commerce and finance, and revolve around the *homines novi* of commercial modernity: City men, accountants, manufacturers, clerks, merchants, traders, and businessmen. "I was and still am heartily in love with the City", she declared in an interview (Blathwayt 1890, 3). Although some publishers tried to dissuade her from pursuing such unconventional topics, Riddell persevered: "All the pathos of the City, the pathos in the lives of struggling men entered into my soul", she explained, "and I felt I must write, strongly as my publisher objected to my choice of subject, which he said was one no woman could handle well" (Blathwayt 1890, 3).

The hallmark of her fiction is a unique and striking combination of financial and literary writing; her "wonderful and fearful knowledge of matters financial", as one reviewer described it (Noble 1885, 371), coexists with psychological realism and the exploration of affects related to the changing dynamics of both the business world and the domestic sphere. The City novels published in the 1860s - *Too Much Alone* (1860), *City and Suburb* (1861), *George Geith of Fen Court* (1864), and *The Race for Wealth* (1866) - explore the plights of individuals caught in the "vortex of business" as Victorian commentators liked to describe the hectic world of entrepreneurial capitalism (Smith 1876 and Anon. 1861). Her fiction zooms in on small capitalists, rather than larger-than-life figures of speculators, drawing inspiration from what historians have defined as British "personal capitalism" - the capitalism of small family firms or partnerships which were the preferred form of enterprise throughout the nineteenth-century (Rose 1994; Colli 2003). More systematically than her fellow novelists, Riddell offered readers paradigmatic stories of self-help based on a model of economic individuality in which the acquisitive urge is neither moralistically condemned nor entirely condoned.

On 26 September 1871, her husband, Joseph Hadley Riddell, a relatively unsuccessful businessman, declared bankruptcy. This

traumatic event was to cast a long shadow on their existence: while Joseph never resumed trading, his wife increased her productivity and diversified her output, going on to write the profitable ghost stories for which she is still best known today.³ Novels too kept coming. However, Riddell's early belief in the promises of commercial modernity and the liberal dream of self-determination gave way to a darker outlook, partly determined by her personal crisis, but also aligned with contemporaneous debates about economic decline and the spectre of a permanent deterioration in the fortunes of the nation. *The Senior Partner* (1881) and *Mitre Court* (1885) register late nineteenth-century anxieties about stagnation and lack of progress. In both novels the prevailing mood is one of disillusionment, as a new generation of market players struggle to achieve even a modicum dose of success, and a story of their own in the City, while antiquated figures of senior merchants continue to hold sway.

How does Riddell's imaginative commitment to narrating capitalism intersect with heritage concerns? As I argue in the following pages, the urban realism of her novels (*Too Much Alone* and *George Geith*) relies on narrative strategies that create a space of continuity between the old and the new, the aristocratic past of the City and its bourgeois present. Riddell was breaking new ground when she elected the City as her narrative turf; she went against the grain of a deeply entrenched culture of prestige by opting for 'vulgar' business as her speciality;⁴ finally, she pushed gender boundaries in pursuing what were mostly perceived as masculine topics, hardly the province of lady novelists. These bold experiments necessitated some form of cultural legitimization. My contention is that the acts of heritage making, disseminated in her novels, provided a symbolic frame within which to recalibrate the resolutely modern orientation of her stories in ways that would appeal to the growing public fascination with remains of the past. I would also claim that those acts contributed to generating cultural value around the modern stories Riddell favoured, enshrining them as a legacy worth preserving. In *The Race for Wealth* and *Mitre Court*, a preservationist aesthetic comes to the fore, spurred by the accelerated rate of urban transformations she documented in her fiction. As heritage concerns become more insistent, Riddell's narrative tone veers towards the polemic, echoing the public campaigns organised by the SPAB. The stories she creates attempt to undo in fiction the vanishing of cherished buildings and

³ Nancy Henry has investigated the financial vicissitudes of the Riddells in some detail in her book, see Henry 2018, ch. 6.

⁴ As a vocational trajectory, business lacked the prestige of older and more traditional callings. On the cultural critique of capitalist pursuits, deemed vulgar for their proximity to money making, see Wiener 1981, McKenderick 1986 and Blake 2009.

landmarks she witnessed in reality. Repopulating these sites with imaginary characters, Riddell directs attention to the experiences and feelings associated with historic objects and buildings, thereby enriching the City's repertoire of intangible heritage.

3 Heritage making

Too Much Alone is Riddell's first narrative incursion into the "terra incognita" of the City (Riddell 1860, 1). It sets a pattern that Riddell will revisit in nearly all her City novels: before the commencement of the story, the narrator dons the hat of a tour guide and, by a skilful combination of topographical accuracy and heritage awareness, takes the reader for an instructive walk around narrow streets, dirty lanes and old houses once inhabited by "dukes and earls and young popinjay springs of nobility" (Riddell 1860, 2). The history of the City is only evoked in the vaguest of terms - "heads that once were held high in the land have rolled aside", "women's hearts have been broken", "men's tears have flowed" - while the narrator insists on one truth: "Here, where we stand" history has happened and is still happening (Riddell 1860, 2). The communal "we" is to appreciate not the details of historical vicissitudes but the act of sensing the past, feeling its presence and recognising its affective value. Only after this rite of passage is completed, can the reader be introduced to the modern denizens of the City and their occupations. "Heritage turns the past into something visitable", writes Macdonald (2013, 18). In Riddell's rhetoric, visiting the past is the necessary prelude to engaging with the present.

In *George Geith of Fen Court*, Riddell's most acclaimed novel, the initial strategies of heritage making are even more pronounced. With increased self-confidence, the narrator gathers her readers around Fen Court: "we have paced the City pavements together before now, and I am glad to be threading the familiar streets and alleys in good company again" (Riddell 1864, 1). Visiting the City acquires the features of an immersive experience of communion with the past. Inviting readers to "sit down for a moment on the churchyard wall", the narrator sets the stage for an experiment in time travelling: "we are not looking from the present into the past, we are for the moment existing in the years gone by. It is the din of our day which is the dream, and the memories of the olden time that are the reality" (Riddell 1864, 5). Fragments of historical knowledge pepper the pages of this chapter, bearing testimony to the "ancient glory" of the City, its "romance", which no amount of "Pickford wagons" can destroy (Riddell 1864, 2). But the most significant lesson the chapter conveys pertains to the realm of affect: the narratorial voice speaks to reader-tourists, already versed in the art of contemplating the

remains of the past exhibited in museums, galleries, and country houses, preparing them to elicit the right response to the story about to unfold:⁵ “here, in this August evening, it is quite dark, and an increasing feeling of solemnity creeps over us as we sit by the graves in the gloom, whilst the evening breeze stirs softly and mournfully the leaves above our heads” (Riddell 1864, 7). The solemnity of the past suffuses the present moment with the warm glow of continuity.

Anticipating marketing schemes that would become popular in the twentieth century, with the explosion of what Hewison (1987) has called the “heritage industry”, Riddell offers here a fictional simulation of living history, teletransporting her readers to a physical location, resonant with echoes of past glories, and nudging them to experience the full force of an intimate connection with the ‘olden times’. Replete with direct reader addresses, her rhetoric creates a sense of community among like-minded souls, enchanted by the past of the City and all the more willing, therefore, to credit the value of its present existence. The immersive heritage experience, which introduces the story of George Geith, an accountant in the City, produces the illusion or the impression of continuity in the face of drastic changes and transformations affecting the modern City. Heritage is instrumental in promoting the literary value of a modern life devoted to business pursuits, tainted by association with money making and sorely in need of symbolic legitimization. Judging by the popularity of *George Geith*, Riddell’s approach proved successful. In her review of *Too Much Alone* and *George Geith*, Anne Thackeray Ritchie writes:

It seems strange as one thinks of it that before these books came out no one had ever thought of writing about City life: there is certainly an interest and a charm about old London, its crowded busy streets, its ancient churches and buildings, and narrow lanes and passages with quaint names, of which dwellers in the stucco suburbs have no conception [...] all this queer sentiment belonging to old London, the author feels and describes with great cleverness and appreciation. (Ritchie 1865, 635)

This “queer sentiment” is also thematised in *Too Much Alone*, where two characters, the upper-class, West-End dweller Herbert Clyne, and the struggling man of business Matson, embody two different versions of historical knowledge. Clyne shows an antiquarian interest

⁵ As Gilmore (2013, 7) has argued, in Victorian novels the “authorial maneuvers and interrogations around the subject of readerly response” are often located “at sites where the literary turns to art and issues surrounding artistic reception”. Riddell’s attempts to manage her readers’ response similarly occur in conjunction with an appreciation of the tangible remains of the past.

in the history of the City, which he shrewdly deploys as a seductive strategy to woo Lina, a married woman. Matson, on the other hand, while feigning disinterest for “old ruins, or old houses, or old anything but trees” (Riddell 1860, 88), is far more knowledgeable about the vernacular heritage of the City and the efforts of London tradesmen to safeguard it. “Each man”, Matson claims, “knows the history of his own warehouse and his own shop, also of his parish church; and it is a surprising thing to see the sums of money men, who live away in the suburbs, and never cross the threshold of their ward church, will yet pay for its beautification, preservation and all the rest of it” (Riddell 1860, 89). While antiquarianism is presented mostly as an upper-class pursuit, Matson and his fellow tradesmen cultivate an interest in the local history of warehouses and shops, the vernacular architecture of the commercial City, which appeals to a broader constituency of citizens whose active participation in the preservation of this heritage is a mark of distinction.

Like the London tradesman, Riddell too contributes to the creation of heritage by writing business novels. She implies that much in the daring gesture of self-authorization that inaugurates her series of City novels. This is how the narrator-author explains her poetics in Chapter 4 of *Too Much Alone*:

Business people rarely analyse their feelings and still more rarely express them in words. A novel about business, about their hopes, anxieties, joys and troubles throws a new mental light across the page of their life's history [...] After a fashion, the author turns into poetry the monotonous prose of their existence. (Riddell 1860, 30)

What connects this poetics with heritage making is the awareness that the business world still lacks its bard. “The woes of governess”, Riddell argues in *George Geith*, “are drugs in the market”; explorers, hunters and gold-diggers have all found words to “interest the public ear”: “It is only trade [...] the backbone of England [...] which can find no writer worthy of it, no one who does not jeer at business and treat [it] with contempt” (Riddell 1864, 123). By framing business as an area of life still unrecorded in the annals of literary history, Riddell defines her specialization as a long-overdue act of chronicling and preserving for posterity the “queer sentiment” of the present, the struggles, aspirations, hopes and anxieties of the “business people” whose experiences she deems worthy of literary commemoration. Immersing oneself in the past of the City of London, as readers are solicited to do, is propaedeutic to a full appreciation of the potential heritage value of the modern City, with its rich archive of yet untold stories.

One could object that the features of Riddell's narrative style I have presented as heritage making can hardly be distinguished from realism

tout court. Yet two aspects in particular attest to the significance of heritage awareness for Riddell's representational strategies. First, the evocation of the rich history of the City, at the beginning of her stories, is framed as past presencing; it is not history per se that the narrator is keen to recall, but the vicarious experience of sensing the past, rendered "visitable" via direct appeals to the reader's imagination. Secondly, this understanding of the past as heritage is instrumental to a reconfiguration of the present (the specific segment of reality Riddell is interested in exploring) as future heritage. Just as the past is threatened by oblivion, so too are the experiences of business people, the denizens of the City, who have failed to attract the attention of writers, as Riddell claims. Her poetics, in other words, is a conscious attempt to create a literary legacy for the business world that draws on the history of the City while viewing the present - the "monotonous prose" of business - as equally valuable and deserving of memorialisation. In later novels, the built environment will come to play a non-negligible role in the representation of urban and suburban space. The fast pace of re-development projects, documented in her fiction, will give fresh impetus to Riddell's heritage aesthetic, motivating her attempt to salvage in fiction old London's landmarks vanishing before her very eyes.

4 The Disappearing Act

Riddell's embrace of the cause of business, forcefully defended in *Too Much Alone* and *George Geith*, ran into some troubles as her novels delved into the murky territory of business malpractice - food and drink adulteration, for instance, which is central in *The Race for Wealth* (1866). Adulteration was a widespread practice in the late 1850s, when the novel is set. Sparked by the scientific findings of Arthur Hill Hassal (1855), the public debate on gastronomic frauds was framed by a larger set of concerns about the immorality of the market: "commerce itself", declared *The Leader* in 1860, "as well as the wares transferred in commerce, is adulterated" ("Adulteration of Credit" 1860, 911).⁶ While Riddell's adulterators, Perkins and Sondes, are likeable characters, and "even kind-natured men",⁷ the novel registers fears about the relentless march of urban improvement,

⁶ The issue of the (im)morality of the market was a subject of intense public scrutiny in Victorian Britain, see Searle 1998 and Robb 1992. For a perceptive reading of literary responses to the adulteration debate see Stern 2008.

⁷ Victorian reviewers did not fail to notice the positive connotations associated with the adulterators in this novel: "With a praiseworthy superiority to superficial and obvious view of character, Mrs. Riddell makes both these adulterators anything but bad people [...] they are very honourable and even kind-natured men" ("*The Race for Wealth*" 1866).

the widespread appeal of financial speculation, and the moral tenor of commercial life. Fast and unscrupulous, the capitalism portrayed in this novel can hardly be squared with ideals of honesty, dignity and fair dealing, though they still survive in the actions of most characters. In this fluid context, destabilised by adulteration in the commercial sphere and adultery in the private one,⁸ it is noteworthy that the narrator's most pressing concern is not moral bankruptcy but the threat of annihilation that sprawling urban developments posed to cherished landmarks in the geography of the City and its suburbs. Put differently, heritage concerns take precedence over moral ones.

In terms of narrative rhetoric, this translates into a peculiar type of 'writing to the moment' that attempts to salvage in fiction what the march of progress is destroying in reality: "we are now living at such a pace", the narrator affirms, "that actually the things which are here today, are away tomorrow. We let a week slip by without passing through some familiar thoroughfare, and when we enter it again, behold the old place seems strange to us!" (Riddell 1866, 1: 105). Urgent, therefore, is the work of a novelist whose ambition is to offset the disappearing acts of modernity: ordinary houses, mansions, streets, locales, and landmarks swept away by unrelenting capitalist expansion, but recorded for posterity in the pages of her novel. To convey to her readers this sense of urgency, Riddell replicates the external threat within the story world: "before these pages are finished", the narrator warns, even the "old-fashioned mansion in which Olivine Sondes has spent all the years of her young existence" (Riddell 1866, 1: 51) may no longer stand. The story we are reading could be disrupted in unforeseen ways by the rapidity of change.

Throughout the 1860s, "London was in the possession of the surveyors and masons and was undergoing a continuous process of demolition and reconstruction. Familiar landmarks and streets disappeared in clouds of dust, but the new London never seemed finally to emerge" (Nead 2005, 29). To fully appreciate the sense of impending doom that hovers over nearly every building in *The Race for Wealth*, it is worth recalling that the novel was originally published in part issues in *Once a Week*. With a few exceptions, each weekly instalment begins with a prolonged excursus on the impermanence of the built environment, and the loss of intangible heritage that goes with it. As the plot moves forward, readers are encouraged to take stock of the disappearing acts that, week after week, mark the passage of time. The third instalment is a good case in point. Stepney, the locality where Mr. Sondes and his niece

⁸ The novel features a sub-plot revolving on the adulterous relationship between Lawrence Barbour and Etta Gainswood. This sub-plot suggests that the domestic sphere is not a sacred enclave, untouched by fraud and dishonesty. For a more in-depth discussion of the role adultery plays in Riddell's fiction see Colella 2016, chs 3 and 6.

Olivine (both central characters) live, is altered beyond recognition: "Gone are the palaces, and the ancient mansions - gone the men and women, gone the green fields and the country" (Riddell 1866, 1: 47), gone too are the records, if they ever existed, of what Stepney once was: "there is no famous ground here - for we know not why or wherefore the palace was ever famous" (Riddell 1866, 1: 48). To further emphasise the accelerated temporality of modernity, Riddell informs her readers that Mr. Sondes's home, "six doors south of the railway", has already been repurposed as a "common lodging-house" (Riddell 1866, 1: 49). Nothing stays still for long. As the present quickly morphs into the past, heritage making becomes a frantic activity, which the narrator pursues with indiscriminate ardour, whether etching in her readers' memory the abodes and streets where honest East Enders used to live, or providing precise descriptions of the grand house, in the West End, where Mr. Alwyn (the novel's millionaire running a corrupt business) has taken up residence.

Riddell opens this house to the public of readers, replicating a practice that was popular in Victorian heritage culture: "The first half of the nineteenth century", Cowell remarks, "saw the democratisation of the cult of the country house and the opening up of some mansions to truly mass audiences for the very first time" (2008, 57). Not a country house, Alwyn's residence is nonetheless presented as a tourist destination for the hypothetical reader, with a vivid imagination, who could enjoy walking around "the now deserted rooms", noticing the "ornamented ceilings", the "richly-carved doorways", the "old-fashioned chimney pieces" and enjoying the company of phantom figures: "What more could a dreamer desire than to sit in such a room, in the firelight, and bid the men and the women who formerly peopled it appear again unto him?" (Riddell 1866, 1: 131). In Riddell's rhetoric, heritage value trumps moral considerations: whether associated with good characters or villainous ones, with honesty or corruption, the local patrimony is worth saving, at least in fiction. Heritage discourse, so prominent in this novel, shifts attention away from the much-debated issue of the immorality of the market, to foreground questions of cultural memory against a backdrop of excessive capitalist growth. Impelled by the fast pace of change, Riddell's self-appointed task to chronicle the life of business becomes hurried, mimetically reproducing the quick tempo of urban modernity in the constant anxiety to catch up with a present marked by transience. Even the houses she invented for her characters, in previous novels, are not immune from the forces of transformation:

In a book written not very long ago I described a house with every room in which I was familiar [...] In all save its name Marsh Hall was a reality - well now there is a street through the mansion where those I knew so well lived and suffered; the gable end of Alan

Ruthven's factory still remained a few weeks ago, but even that is now, no doubt, level with the ground [...] there is nothing - nothing left to indicate where the house stood, in which the men and the women whose story I told, lived out the most important years of their lives. (Riddell 1866, 1: 51)

The act of referencing specific locales, and using toponyms to anchor fiction in physical geography, is a staple of Riddell's realism. Her simulations of reality acquire thereby an immersive quality, comparable to similar effects in Balzac's or Dickens's descriptions.⁹ In this novel, however, the geography named in the text is changing as the story is being written - or so the narrator implies, time and again, in her comments. Fiction, therefore, comes loaded with a new responsibility directly linked to the discourse of preservation, which became prominent in the 1870s. If Marsh Hall is no more, the novel in which this building was immortalised (*City and Suburb*) gains further value as the only extant record of the vernacular heritage Riddell is so keen to conserve. Neither an ancient edifice nor a monument of public interest, Marsh Hall is nonetheless glorified as heritage - the type of ordinary, everyday heritage to which Riddell's readers are consistently solicited to respond. Among the many functions novels can perform, creating testimonials of things too quickly gone is the one Riddell self-consciously pursues in this text. Heritage discourse contributes in no negligible manner to reinforcing the authority of her voice.

The Race for Wealth tackles thorny topical issues in ways that eschew the overt moralism of much Victorian thinking about the market. The pro-business and pro-capitalist stance Riddell had already expressed in previous novels still orients much of the story, though awareness of malpractice dents the heroic image of business pursuits finessed in *George Geith*, *Too Much Alone*, and *City and Suburb*. Significantly, as the murky side of capitalism comes to the fore in the twists and turns of a plot involving frauds and reckless speculation, the narrator's discourse draws increasing attention to the built environment, to heritage issues, and the urgent need to create lasting memories of what is about to disappear, including Riddell's own heroic take on the business world. Heritage awareness, in other words, intensifies as capitalist modernity comes to be perceived as a threat. In Riddell's later novels, her fascination with the City takes on negative connotations, while her stance becomes recognisably preservationist, in terms that directly evoke the heritage crusade of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

⁹ "Through the instantaneous character of the act of reference, the use of a place name teletransports the readers to the corresponding location [...] The most immersive toponyms are the names of real places" (Ryan 2001, 129).

5 Preserving the Past

If the whole of London was in the thrall of redevelopment projects which, by the end of the century, had reduced London's past "to little more than fairground scenery in the ongoing staging of metropolitan improvement" (Nead 2005, 34), the square mile corresponding to the City of London was the site where modernisation occurred in a most extreme form, driven by the demands of an expanding commercial and financial sector with global ramifications. By the 1840s, the renovation of local architecture had drastically changed the face of the early-Victorian City, as insurance companies were busy "erecting a series of grandiose headquarters in the grand Italian manner" (Kynaston 1996, 139). In subsequent decades, traditional landmarks (taverns, houses, churches, banking establishments) continued to be pulled down to make room for purpose-built office buildings. The old City "passed into the historical ether" (244) with alarming celerity.

This context helps to understand Riddell's militant tone, in *Mitre Court*, as she inveighs against the loss of cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, with which the romance of the City was interwoven. Chapter 3, entitled "A Complaint", interrupts the unfolding of the plot to make the case for a preservationist policy, which administrators and public bodies in the City seemed to her uninterested in implementing. Once again, the narrator paces the City streets where the "destroying angels" of modernisation – the "speculative builder" and the "clamorous shareholder" (Riddell 1883, 1: 51) – have left indelible marks. The initial focus is on the intangible cultural heritage of the City – rituals, customs and traditions, some of which have survived, while others have been discontinued. Riddell evokes the intangible in its absence. The annual procession of the Fellowship porters¹⁰ was no longer a live tradition, but the novelist, in full heritage mode, appeals to the senses to recreate the atmosphere of a ritual "which need not have been forgotten":

It is perfectly easy to picture that solemn march to the altar where every porter deposits his benevolence for the use of the poor [...] The scent of those old-world flowers fills the church [...] the air is sweet with stocks and lavender and cabbage roses and all those fair vanished flowers that once went to make a perfect bouquet. It was a fanciful and charming custom which need not have been forgotten even in these days of hard utility. (Riddell 1883, 1: 56)

10 The fraternity of tackle-porters and ticket-porters was established in 1603. "By ancient custom a sermon is preached to the fraternity on the Sunday after Midsummer-day at the church of St. Mary-at-Hill. The members assemble in the morning at their hall, and each carrying a nosegay, go in procession to the church" (Weatley 1891, 2: 34).

This evocation is only mildly polemical. Riddell's full-fledged preservationist protest concerns more specifically the tangible heritage of old London, passing under the hammer as she writes. One particular spot captures her attention: the house in Botolph Lane, designed by Sir Christopher Wren, which provides the setting for this novel. Unlike Marsh Hall, this house is a real building, in a precise location, with its own biography documented in history books: "To pass out of the City streets", writes Riddell, "into that spacious hall paved with black and white marble is like stepping back a couple of centuries in England's history" (Riddell 1883, 1: 60). Readers are again invited to revisit the past by noticing features and particulars ("see the massive balustrades"; "notice the easy ascent of the oak steps") no longer part of the architectural style of the present. Observing the "wonderful old mansion" from the perspective of a conservationist, the narrator directs attention to the signs of neglect that attest the passage of time: boards prized from their nails; "strained and cracked" wooden panels, and other marks of dereliction which, however, do not diminish the ancient "dignity" of the place: "Why does not the City buy such houses and preserve them intact?" (Riddell 1883, 1: 63), asks the narrator. Safeguarding heritage is a responsibility that local administrators and public bodies should shoulder. Cranking up the polemical tone, Riddell imagines what she would do, if she had the power to intervene:

Methinks were I, the writer of this book [...] in any capacity free of the City of London - say liveryman, common councillor, deputy sheriff, sheriff, alderman, Lord Mayor - I would make the City [...] my study; I would know every court, lane, alley, house, exhaustively; and were there still left an old mansion hallowed by fact or tradition, I would try to save it; and if I could not I would enter my protest. (Riddell 1883, 1: 66)

If public policy is beyond the novelist's reach, cultural interventions are not. *Mitre Court* has a preservationist platform, which includes not only the heart-felt plea articulated in Chapter 3, but also a narrative campaign to protect Wren's house that leverages the ability of fiction to increment the house's intangible patrimony of associations and imaginary stories. At the time of writing, the house had already been repurposed as a school, a choice Riddell disapproved. Her novel reverses this process, repopulating the old mansion with inhabitants who are instinctively able to appreciate its heritage value and quaint charm. The plot revolves around two locales: Mitre Court, where a new breed of foreign speculators (the German Mr. Katzen) have set up offices to conduct their shady businesses, and the house in Botolph Lane, where the past survives in the present in the shape of slightly antiquated character types - the foundling (Abigail) and the

misanthropic recluse (Brisco) – whose residual narrative presence matches the house's precarious existence. As the narrator explains, Brisco and Katzen “embody the spirit of the Past and the Present” respectively: when the former appears in Mitre Court, his figure looks as much out of place as “a dingy ‘old master’, its frame tarnished and broken, would seem in the drawing room of a *nouveau riche*” (Riddell 1883, 1: 272).

Still interested in chronicling City life and financial activities, Riddell narrates Katzen's grandiose speculations, admirable for their ingenuity, in a crescendo of disillusion. His rascality is more productive, in terms of plot development, than the feeble narrative energies associated with residual character types. Yet, their function is not negligible at the level of “scene”, as Fredric Jameson defines it: “the painterly moment in which the onward drive of narrative is checked if not suspended altogether” (2013, 8). For Jameson realism combines in a symbiotic bond a “pure form of storytelling with impulses of scenic elaborations, description and above all affective investment” (2013, 11). These impulses support the heritage making that goes on in *Mitre Court*. Brisco's presence, for example, does not contribute much to the plot, but his appearances are functional to creating the sense of place associated with the house in which he lives: “Between the old mansion and its occupant there existed a subtle sort of fitness not always to be found” (Riddell 1883, 1: 80), remarks the narrator. In several scenes, Brisco is described as he wanders “like a ghost through the building – flitting from room to room in the twilight” (Riddell 1883, 1: 81), haunted by memories of his own troubled past. Abigail, the waif he saved from destitution, lacks a formal education, but has a keen sense of aesthetic beauty and derives much pleasure from contemplating the architectural features of Wren's house: “The old house – with its leads, its long passages, its steep back-stairs, its brewhouse, its inlaid circles on the drawing-room chimney piece, its panelling – was to her a kingdom, the resources of which seemed inexhaustible” (Riddell 1883, 1: 176). For Frank, a struggling man of business, later revealed to be Brisco's prodigal son, the house is a living organism: “Somehow, as he stood, the fancy struck Frank in its stately separation from the surrounding meanness and turmoil it was like some great soul on the earth, but not of the earth; associating with things vile, yet remaining untainted by them” (Riddell 1883, 3: 91). These and other scenic moments, with very little plot significance, contribute to the creation of that “eternal affective present” that exists in tension with the “chronological continuum” of the action being narrated (Jameson 2013, 83). They provide a space for heritage values to emerge in relation to characters whose ability to appreciate and care for historic remains is a mark of distinction.

Riddell has a keen eye for the kind of heritage that does not fall into the category of the monumental and is, instead, the by-product of

everyday, ordinary history, sustained by the untrained, uncultivated interests of non-experts. In *Mitre Court*, two episodes bring this to the fore, by focusing on the reactions of characters puzzled and fascinated, in equal degrees, by the works of art exhibited in the house in Botolph lane. Decorated by Robert Robinson (1653?-1706) in 1696, the Painted Room was the most valuable artistic item in the old house. The exotic scenes painted on wooden panels feature an imaginary assortment of human and non-human entities – pavilions, pagodas, palm trees, Indians, rhinoceros – and were presumably inspired by the myth of the El Dorado, by travellers' narratives of the time, and Aphra Behn's descriptions of the natives of Surinam in *Oroonoko* (1688), as Mireille Galinou suggests (2002, 5). In the novel this room is the object of much curiosity: bewildered by the strangeness of these visual representations, some characters attempt to describe what they see. Katzen, for example, notices "two funny fellows riding on rhinoceros, and there are others gathering tobacco leaves, and there are chariots drawn by some deer and something like a church, and white people and sea and mountains" (Riddell 1883, 1: 41). His fragmented list of mismatched exotic items does not add up to a full story, but is interpreted by Katzen as a prophetic anticipation of his future appointment as promoter of the New Andalusia Loan. In the second episode, Mrs. Jeffley (who runs a boarding-house) wanders "hopelessly from scene to scene" noticing disparate details: "something like a church", a cat in a boat, a lady among "savages", "a particular jolly-looking savage riding with a companion on a rhinoceros" (Riddell 1883, 1: 126-7). Unable to decipher the whole picture, she asks Abigail for an explanation, which the latter too is incapable of providing.

In the novel, Riddell represents the Painted Room only from the point of view of baffled visitors who lack the expertise to decode the exotic scenes they contemplate, but are drawn to the paintings, puzzling as they are. Capturing this experience of appreciation in all its amateurish confusion, Riddell emphasises not so much the artistic value of Robinson's paintings, but their ability to mesmerise the viewer, to arouse curiosity and invite interpretations. In Victorian England, museums and galleries – the new spaces for exhibiting heritage – had a marked top-down educational mission.¹¹ In Riddell's

11 "Museums and expositions, in drawing on the techniques and rhetorics of display and pedagogic relations developed in earlier nineteenth-century exhibitionary forms, provided a context in which the working- and middle-class publics could be brought together and the former [...] could be exposed to the improving influences of the latter" (Bennett 1995, 73). While Bennett and Black (2000) underscore the disciplinary function of the Victorian museum, other scholars, in more recent years, have investigated how civic participation contributed to making museums more inclusive (see Hill 2016 and Swenson 2013).

novel, the instructive component of looking at art is marginalised, while the enchantment of ordinary viewers comes to the fore. The absence of a pre-determined understanding of the Painted Room allows for the 'visitor's experience' - so central in today's heritage discourse (see Staiff 2014) - to emerge as an integral component of the preservationist approach the novel promotes.

This approach bore some fruit in reality. In the aptly titled volume *London Vanished & Vanishing* (1900), Philip Norman mentions the house in Botoph Lane as one of the artistic gems in the City that should be preserved for posterity: "The house is eloquently described in the pathetic novel *Mitre Court*. Here Mr. Brisco suffered and Abigail Weir passed her innocent girlhood. Their joys and sorrows are true - to human nature at least [...] Can something be done to save it from destruction?" (Norman 1900, 87). Prompted by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the London County Council did save the Painted Room, before the house was finally pulled down in 1906; the panels were re-installed in the boardroom of the Sir John Cass's Foundation school. Whether Riddell's heritage campaign affected in any way this decision is difficult to say. But her novel certainly contributed to keeping alive the memory of the old mansion in the City, enriched with fresh associations.

6 Conclusion

Heritage studies is a blossoming field of research attracting in its orbit a vast array of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences remit. While questions of conservation have long dominated the field, over the last two decades scholars have directed increased attention to the politics and phenomenology of heritage. How heritage is experienced and apprehended in "moments of encounter" (Tolia-Kelly, Waterson, Watson 2017, 5); how people engage with and mobilise the past; what everyday structures of historical narration and awareness subtend different forms of past presencing in the "memorylands" of the present (Macdonald 2013); these are some of the questions posed by the phenomenology of heritage, which have oriented my readings. In Riddell's novels, the relationship between fictional and non-fictional elements frequently pivots on heritage concerns. Past presencing is an integral part of her mimetic representational mode. Riddell's urban realism does not simply document the waves of demolition and reconstruction affecting London and its surroundings. Her novels, I have argued, generate heritage value in the very gesture of recording the many disappearing acts mournfully witnessed by the narrator. Significantly, it is the vernacular heritage of the City that Riddell is most keen to safeguard, the everyday, non-monumental, unsanctioned heritage associated with trade, business and other

prosaic occupations. Of course, the glories of the ancient City are not lost on her; they are powerfully evoked at the beginning of her novels so as to induce her readers to acknowledge the significance of this locality even in its modern incarnation. Riddell's poetics of business has a dual affective orientation: the charm of the past is interlaced with the potential heritage value of modern life in the modern city, which her novels strive to establish. Heritage discourse, in other words, provides an apt frame within which to validate the author's daring narrative choices, as *Too Much Alone* and *George Geith* testify.

In later novels, as the material traces of the old City were being erased, Riddell's narrative strategies became even more attuned to public concerns with the fate of ancient buildings and relics, her preservationist outlook extending to fictive as well as real houses fast disappearing under the hammer of the speculative builder. In *The Race for Wealth*, these concerns affect the very structure of the novel and the style of narration, which anxiously seeks to catch up with the quick tempo of metropolitan transformations. In *Mitre Court*, heritage-making strategies are explicit: as the financial plot unfolds, according to the usual pattern of speculative bubbles followed by a spectacular crash, several scenes are introduced which re-create the lost intangible heritage of the old house in Botolph Lane, thus reversing, at least in fiction, the process of vanishing.

It is slightly ironic that Riddell, so alert to the value of preserving the past for the future, should later incur in the kind of amnesia frequently reserved to 'minor' women writers, her novels encountering the same vanishing fate as the houses she described in her fiction. Yet literary heritage, like other types of heritage, is in flux. Riddell's novels are enjoying a new season of visibility in the works of scholars interested in tracing the many interconnections between finance and fiction (Stern 2008; Michie 2009; Colella 2016; Henry 2018). In this article, I have adopted a different frame of attention to reactivate the memory of her novels, emphasising Riddell's engagement with topical issues of her times, related to capitalist modernity, but centred on heritage concerns. Riddell's acute awareness of these concerns motivates her plea, addressed to the City in *Mitre Court*, which concludes with a question that brings the future to bear on the present: "In the future who will be found possessed of sufficient courage to write a novel about your present?" (Riddell 1883, 1: 72).

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George Gissing: A Story of English Realism

Rebecca Hutcheon
Lancaster University, UK

Abstract George Gissing's novels sit on the permeable boundary between the diegetic tendencies of 19th-century realism and the mimesis-dominated narratives of modernism. In his early novels, characters deliver barely disguised narratorial comments directly to the reader. But this form of realism is already strained. The self-awareness of Gissing's art, manifesting in satire and irony, butts up against his research-led approach to writing. This article shows that what emerges in Gissing is a conflict between narrative intrusion, and the desire to displace authority and represent subjectivity at its broadest. This conflict is a synecdoche for proto-modernism.

Keywords Gissing. Mimesis. Artistic Gaze. Proto-modernism.

Summary 1 The Introduction. – 2 Mr Bennett and Mrs Woolf: Gissing and his Critics. – 3 Gissing's Realism: The Art of Suggestion. – 4 To Show or to Tell? – 5 Conclusion.



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1 The Introduction

George Gissing is hardly a modernist in the traditional sense. His fiction, in the main, is strictly contemporaneous. It is not just set in, but also engaged with, the particularities of time and space. Structurally too, his novels are in some ways markedly realist, following the characters' lives in an essentially chronological fashion. Yet while the narratives might "begin at the beginning [...] and go on till [they] come to the end: then stop", these endings are more disconcertingly proto-modernist in form (Carroll [1872] 2009, 106). Sometimes the novels' finales are open and ambiguous, at others too heavy-handedly conclusive to avoid appearing satirical and ironic. And again, in a manifest departure from the traditions of realism, Gissing's novels certainly do not seek to elevate or improve their audience. Gissing's narrative style mixes, and not always effortlessly, the diegetic form with a detached narrative mimesis that aims, like the modernist fictions that follow, to "show" rather than "tell".

This article begins with a survey of Gissing's reputation among contemporary or near-contemporary authors writing at the kernel of the realist/modernist debate, and asks how these early conclusions affect Gissing's place in literary history. A survey of the critical history registers a further misalignment with modernism; Gissing is censured by Joyce, Woolf and, though to a lesser extent, James, but admired by Wells, Bennett and Orwell. The second section analyses Gissing's writing on realism in its aims and execution in his letters, critical study of Dickens and journalism. Then, in the final section, such critical prescriptions are applied to his fiction to determine whether he does, in fact, practice what he preaches. Via references to Gissing's theses on writing, and his writing itself, this article contends that, in Gissing, art cannot imitate the world because there is not one world but many. What emerges in Gissing is a conflict between the comfort of a cumbersome but familiar realism and a cynicism about its formal means and modes. This is played out as the pull of the intrusive narrator is offset by a desire to displace such monologic authority and represent subjectivity at its broadest. This conflict is a synecdoche for proto-modernism.

2 Mr Bennett and Mrs Woolf: Gissing and his Critics

Early criticism was quick to identify Gissing as a realist, emphasising the rigorously contemporaneous aspect of his work. To H.G. Wells, Gissing's novels are "deliberate attempts to present in typical groupings distinct phases of our social order", and their interest "strictly contemporary" (Wells [1897] 1972, 298, 305). To George Orwell they are "tied more tightly than most [...] to a particular place and time" (Orwell 1943, 45), and for Arnold Bennett they are concerned

with “all the usual meanness of our daily existence” (Bennett [1899] 1972, 362). Typicality, distinctness, social order, particularity, the usual, the quotidian, all this suggests an identifiable, pragmatic and authentic quality in Gissing’s prose and what it describes. There is also, with strictness, order, and “tightly” “tied”, a sense of restriction, and an implicit lack of imaginative freedom innate in the form.

The recognition of the present-day also indicates universality and comparativeness – both Wells and Bennett use the collective pronoun (“our social order”, “our daily existence”). Gissing, they suggest, writes about the here and now, and that here and now is an experiential commonplace. This corresponds with what David Lodge describes as “the assumption that there is a common phenomenal world” that may be “reliably described by the methods of empirical history” in fiction expounded by late realists like Bennett and Wells (Lodge 1977, 47). In critiquing Gissing his realist reviewers are pursuing signs of a shared whole that aligns with their own artistic practice.

After all, according to Bennett, realism, as opposed to idealism and romanticism, means taking

the common grey things which people know and despise, and, without tampering, to disclose their epic significance, their essential grandeur. (Bennett [1899] 1972, 362)

Such profundity is realised in Gissing’s ability to perceive and present “a large coherent movement”, to evoke “from the most obscure phenomena a large ominous idea”, and to see “broadly, in vast wholes” (363). “[W]ithout tampering” is key here: Gissing’s art is successful because it renders snippets of commonplace material as a collective unit without the interfering influence of idealisation. But when Bennett complains that Gissing’s “pictures have no cynosure for the eye”, that his narratives are a “maze of episodes each interrupting the others” (363), what he is identifying is a rationed narrative unity and fragmentation akin to modernist structures.

Modernist critics, however, hardly recognised their own means of aesthetic and formal innovation in Gissing’s works. Virginia Woolf asserts that he “reverenced facts and had no faculty it seems (his language is meagre and unmetaphorical) for impressions” (Woolf 1932, 223). Woolf’s response appears principally determined by a modernist rejection of outmoded ways of writing, and Realism’s seeming devotion to material culture, akin to the criticism levelled in “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” (Woolf [1924] 2008, 32-6). In an effort, perhaps, to emphasise the difference between Gissing’s art and her own, Woolf constructs a false binary between fact and impression. But, for all the geographical specificity and documentary exactitude of Gissing’s prose, it is all of course, only an impression of the real. The reader, such as Woolf, may be coaxed into accepting his writing as referential

but any such “facts” are selected, selective, subjective and personal. What’s more, the “real” is frequently disrupted by the self-reflexive tendencies of his fiction that register a limitation to omniscience. Gissing’s problematic reputation as a composer of documentary-style pseudo-fictions, then, is at least in part a result of a clash between realist and modernist advocate agendas. John Sloan explains that “his place continues to be that of a literary curiosity who stands between two major periods of literary art” (Sloan 1898, 1).

Henry James, after acknowledging the now well-trodden ground of Gissing criticism – that his acquaintance with the lower classes make him “*the authority* [...] on a region vast and unexplored” – moves on to examine that classic formal relationship between dialogue and narrative. His complaint is that Gissing “overdoes the ostensible report of spoken words” (James [1897] 1972, 291-2). To James, “colloquy”, or the mimetic reportage of speech, is a problem because it attempts to banish the author’s voice. A vote from James, then, for diegesis and authorial control. But Gissing’s use, or overuse, of direct speech certainly doesn’t mean that the narrative voice has been banished. In fact, the over-saturated quality, and the jarred impression of an author in exile that James identifies, register an uneasy tension between diegesis and mimesis that is a leitmotif of Gissing’s narrative style.

3 Gissing’s Realism: The Art of Suggestion

The tendency to rely on dialogue, whether internalised or not, was a problem that Gissing recognised. *New Grub Street* (1891) is famously disparaging of the overreliance on dialogue as filler. Experiencing writer’s block, the novelist protagonist Edwin Reardon resorts to:

[d]escription of locality, deliberate analysis of character or motive, demanded far too great an effort for his present condition. He kept as much as possible to dialogue; the space is filled so much more quickly, and at a pinch one can make people talk about the paltriest incidents of life. (Gissing [1891] 2016, 110-11)

In the same novel, Harold Biffen’s project to reproduce the diction of the working-class ‘verbatim’ receives ironic treatment (Gissing [1891] 2016, 128). This draws attention to the artistic vacuity of speech-for-speech’s sake and suggests, *contra* Woolf and James, that Gissing understood successful art, even in the realist tradition, as something quite different from simple and unimaginative reproduction. Gissing claimed elsewhere that realism is not just “the laborious picturing of the dullest phases of life” (Gissing [1895] 1929, 281). He recognised that the word itself was slippery term:

I observe that the word realistic has, in journalistic language, come to mean simply “revolting” or “painful”. In the *Star* of to-day, March 18, '89, is an account of a *Lancet* report on Crudley Heath, & the foll. examples of the word occur:

“The realistic description of this region is *accurate*.” This is not mere tautology, you see. And again: “Here is an account, equally *realistic*, of a house in this blighted region”. (Gissing 1962, 41)

Realism as a term is overused and misused, having become a synonym for either dreary mimesis or crudeness. The essay concludes that “it signifies nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life” (Gissing [1895] 1929, 220). So, the imperative of Gissing’s fictional aesthetic, one that he repeats in his letters, journalism and writings on Dickens, is the vital importance of “sincerity”. Sincerity here doesn’t mean a universal accuracy, the presentation of objective truth. There is, after all, “no science of fiction” (220). Nor does it mean pandering to “the habit of mind which assumes that a novel is written ‘to please people’” (221). Like Bennett, Gissing views idealism as realism’s opposite. Artistic value depends on subjectivity as much as sincerity: “depicting some portion of human life as candidly and vividly as is in the author’s power” (219-20). This is a point that Gissing drums home again and again, both here and elsewhere: the artist sees “only a part of the actual”, “a world of his own”, “that world as it exists to him” (221). “Be he a true artist”, Gissing later contended, “he gives us pictures which represent his own favourite way of looking at life” (Gissing [1898] 2004, 231). This personal vision of the world counters the notion of a shared reality suggested by Bennett and Wells.

In fact, Gissing’s writing on writing suggests a commitment to something more layered than material realism’s preoccupation with “the common things”. A serious novelist’s aim should be “to expose the secrets of the mind, to show humanity in its external combat with fate” (Gissing [1895] 1929, 218). The external world alone is not a sufficient subject for art; sincere realism concerns how individual perception conceives of it. This aim to “show” and “expose” the mental landscape, with the surface constituting only part of the real, corresponds with Henry James’s belief that fiction must have an “air of reality” connected to “the atmosphere of the mind”. Both novelists contend that “the only reason for the existence of the novel is that it does attempt to represent life” (James [1888] 1970, 390, 378).

Despite all his arguments for personality in realism as a mode, though, Gissing advocates elements of the impersonal in its execution: “the artist”, he writes “must not come forward among his characters” (Gissing 1892). And Gissing frequently expressed frustration that critics read his novels as political polemics, complaining that in reviews “the novelist is often represented as holding an opinion which

he simply attributes to one of his characters" (Coustillas, Mattheisen, Young 1990-97, 5: 176). Gissing's views on detachment in writing are very much in the modernist spirit. He advises his brother, Algernon, that in writing one should:

omit the *instructive* part of the description. Hints of association are of course needful, but let them only fill up the background [...] the secret art of fiction is the *indirect*. Nothing must be told too plumply [...] don't give hints of what's to come [...] never treat your story as a story, but as a simple narration of facts. (Coustillas, Mattheisen, Young 1990-97, 2: 178-9)

If mimesis and diegesis sit at opposite ends of a scale, where mimesis is direct speech, moving through reported speech, and description to comment as diegesis, Gissing's "secret art of fiction" warns against the most diegetic form of writing. He also cautions against the overbearing narratorial technique of self-reflection. This is an instance of Gissing separating himself from the older school of realism. The newer method of realism, Gissing writes elsewhere, is "[f]ar more artistic [...] merely suggesting",

dealing with episodes, instead of writing biographies. The old novelist is omniscient; I think it is better to tell a story precisely as one does in real life, - hinting, surmising, telling in detail what *can* so be told, & no more. In fact, it approximates to the dramatic mode of presentation. (Coustillas, Mattheisen, Young 1990-97, 2: 320)

Like Henry James, Gissing may have admired the art of suggestion but showing alone is not enough. In 1892, when approaching "the complex life of to-day", Gissing asserts that mimesis, in its classical definition, must be eschewed: "I am not content to offer only dialogue". This is because the novelistic world, in its amalgam of verbal and non-verbal acts, denies its possibility: "[t]o talk about being "objective" is all very well for those who swear by words. No novelist was ever objective or will ever be. His work is a bit of life as seen by *him*. It is his business to make us feel a distinct pleasure in seeing the world with *his eyes*" (Gissing 1892, 1423). Unlike the dramatic scene, then, the novelistic world is transmuted by the artistic gaze. That "bit of life" consists of a multitude of fragments, consciences, and styles drawn together in one of many possible views in a way that could suggest modernism, were it not for that repeated and emphasised pronoun. The author is the first among equals, claiming neither truth, objectivity, nor fact, but a certain take on the world.

4 To Show or to Tell?

The case for Gissing's later works as proto-modernist or, at the very least, problematizing realism, has been convincingly argued elsewhere.¹ But the 'air of reality' is troubled by form, structure, genre and narrative even in those works commonly considered as exemplars of English naturalism. The perversity of diegesis in *Demos: A Story of English Socialism* (1886) also prefigures modernism's disdain for the omniscient narrator. The book's unsettled realism is clear even when taken as a "broad" "vast whole" (Bennett 1972, 363). For one, the structure is delimited by the overbearing cogs of high Victorian plot mechanics such as lost and discovered wills, returned fortunes and hidden identities. This is the stuff of melodrama, reliant on coincidence, fate and patterning, and as such introduces elements of a starkly non-mimetic mode to the narrative.

Measured on plot motifs alone, *Demos* might appear as a progeny of Victorian industrial novels. The rags-to-riches narrative, the easy resolution of social differences via cross-class marriage alliances are akin to the motifs of, for instance, Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil*, Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. In *Demos*, however, rags are returned to rags, marriages collapse, the classes remained unbridged. In fact, the concluding match between Adela Waltham and Hubert Eldon returns the action to the comfortable and comforting *bourgeois* beginning. So, while the novel is "a satire on working-class aims and capacities", it is also a satire of its presentation in fiction (Coustillas, Mattheisen, Young 1990-97, 2: 360). It is a story of return and restoration rather than the development innate in the typical *Bildungsroman*. The plot goes nowhere, and it circles around an absent moral centre. Hence Bennett's complaint: no centre, no unity, a "maze of episodes". The novel is, after all, *a* and not *the* story of English socialism. It begins and ends, not with socialism, but with feudalism; not in "real" London, but fictional Wanley.

The third chapter of *Demos* marks a shift from the genericisms of provincial and fictional Wanley to the referential topography of Hoxton, London:

On the dun borderland of Islington and Hoxton, in a corner made by the intersection of the New North Road and the Regent's Canal, is discoverable an irregular triangle of small dwelling-houses, bearing the name of Wilton Square. In the midst stands an amorphous structure, which on examination proves to be a very ugly house and a still uglier Baptist chapel built back to back. The pair are enclosed within iron railings, and, more strangely, a circle of trees. (Gissing [1886] 1972, 25)

¹ See, for instance, Harsh 1994; McCracken 2001; James 2003.

The geographical precision, use of toponyms and shift to the present tense establish that 'air of reality', and give the prose a documentary quality. The narrative takes on the role of investigation, uncovering things for the reader: Wilton Square "is discoverable", "examination" of an "amorphous structure [...] proves". Yet there are already signs of an impulse beyond mere reportage – adjectives offer value judgments "dun", "very ugly". And why should it be strange, in objective observation, for there to be trees? Because this is not pure and unadulterated referential mimesis but rather a subjective report of place, replete with value judgements, from a disembodied perspective. The use of the passive voice without a specified subject draws attention away from the actor and onto the effect. This becomes clearer as the narrative focus retreats back from the Mutimers' house and to the more general setting. The passage is worth quoting in full:

The canal – *maladetta e sventurata fossa* – stagnating in utter foulness between coal-wharfs and builders' yards, at this point divides two neighbourhoods of different aspects. On the south is Hoxton, a region of malodorous market streets, of factories, timber yards, grimy warehouses, of alleys swarming with small trades and crafts, of filthy courts and passages leading into pestilential gloom; everywhere toil in its most degrading forms; the thoroughfares thundering with high-laden waggons, the pavements trodden by working folk of the coarsest type, the corners and lurking-holes showing destitution at its ugliest. Walking northwards, the explorer finds himself in freer air, amid broader ways, in a district of dwelling-houses only; the roads seem abandoned to milkmen, cat's-meat vendors, and costermongers. Here will be found streets in which every window has its card advertising lodgings: others claim a higher respectability, the houses retreating behind patches of garden-ground, and occasionally showing plastered pillars and a balcony. The change is from undisguised struggle for subsistence to mean and spirit-broken leisure; hither retreat the better-paid of the great slave-army when they are free to eat and sleep. To walk about a neighbourhood such as this is the dreariest exercise to which man can betake himself; the heart is crushed by uniformity of decent squalor; one remembers that each of these dead-faced houses, often each separate blind window, represents a 'home,' and the associations of the word whisper blank despair. (Gissing [1886] 1972, 25-6)

The continued topographical precision might convince the reader that the paragraph offers a verbal picture of the setting, faithfully reproduced. But the opposition and balance are all a bit too good to be true. The canal, the narrative suggests, bifurcates two neighbourhoods, one of commerce and industry, and one of accommodation. The public

and the private, then, are helpfully kept apart by topography. The rhetorical tools and structure of the passage reinforce and accentuate this observed divide. The first section, describing industrial Hoxton, is loaded with superlatives - “everywhere”, “most degrading”, “coarsest type”, “ugliest” - that suggest archetypal status. Hoxton is an exemplar of working-class labour. The long single sentence that lists the features is as crowded and unrelenting as the setting it purports to describe. The second section, depicting residential streets, employs comparative adjectives - “freer” “broader”, “higher” - that imply rather than state the north’s superiority over the south. And again, physical place is mimicked by the spatial form of the prose: the streets are quieter and emptier, the sentences are shorter and simpler. Observations are now embodied in “the explorer” and carry implications, perhaps, of journalism, or of fact-gathering sociological report. This is a sign of the already jarred relationship with omniscience in the narrative style. Gissing could just as easily state this, why the need for the imagined explorer? By superimposing the explorer figure onto the scene, the narrative mimics the movement of walking, of discovering in the present - “here”, “here” - and coming across things one by one rather than giving the panoramic overview of the omniscient narrator. So, while the passage is far from being the limited point of view of modernist prose, the omniscient narrator of traditional realism is distanced, embodied in the detached position. However, lest the reader should be in any doubt about the crushing dreariness of residential Hoxton, at the end of the passage, marked by the shift in tense and subject (“man” becomes “one”), the “impertinent Ego” enters, and delivers judgment.² The shift into the narrative voice answers to Gissing’s rule that realism must present “the world as it appears to [the artist]” (Gissing [1895] 1929, 220).

Until this point, the narrator and the reader have remained relatively implicit. With the introduction of the Mutimer family, however, the narrative voice shifts:

[O]n the edge of the quieter district, and in one of its houses dwelt at the time of which I write the family on whose behalf. Fate was at work in a valley of mid-England. [...] With [Joseph Mutimer’s] children we shall have to make closer acquaintance; but before doing so, in order to understand their position and follow with intelligence their several stories, it will be necessary to enter a little upon the subject of ancestry. (Gissing [1886] 1972, 26)

Suddenly Gissing commits what he is later to identify as

² The “impertinent Ego” is Gissing’s phrase in his “Preface to the second edition of *The Unclassed*” (1895).

that capital crime against art so light-heartedly committed by Anthony Trollope, who will begin a paragraph in his novels with some such words as these: "Now, if this were fact, and not a story". (Gissing [1898] 2004, 67)

The referential spell is broken by the interjection of an intrusive narrator akin to that characteristic of high Victorianism. This interjection shifts the narrative mode from description to comment, and into complete diegesis. It is also a voice of ironic self-consciousness – the narrator is a writer, recording the "Fate" of the Mutimer family, telling "their several stories", but notably relinquishing responsibility for the action. It is as though Fate (i.e. the plot) is working autonomously. As with the ironic comment in the following chapter – "Start not, dear reader; the Princess is only a subordinate heroine, and happens, moreover, to be a living creature" – the peculiarly contradictory mixture of self-reflexive fiction and fact, of control and detachment, suggest a deep-seated anxiety with omniscience (Gissing [1886] 1972, 38).

The subordinate heroine Alice Mutimer is frequently the subject of scornful sarcasm. Even her name, "the Princess", is caustically ironic. She is, therefore, trapped in the realm of parody. Her story is as conventional and one-dimensional as her characterisation – silly, vulgar and unduly proud, she is destined to fall. The actual heroine, Adela Waltham, is a more complex creation. This, of course, stands in line with the book's stated stance as a story told from "a very Conservative point of view" (Coustillas, Mattheisen, Young 1990-97, 2: 363). Simon J. James has suggested that Gissing's narrators "are rarely reliable judges of character and can even give the impression of actively disliking certain characters" and this is certainly true in *Demos* (James 2003, 43). Adela is the only main character that receives consistent narrative sympathy. After a passage of free indirect discourse where Adela explores her own hypocrisy and mock heroism in the face of Mutimer's duplicity the narrator jumps in:

A pity, is it not? It were so good to have seen her purely noble, indignant with unmixed righteousness. But, knowing our Adela's heart, is it not even sweeter to bear with her? [...] For my part, Adela is more to me for the imperfection, infinitely more to me for the confession of it in her own mind. How can a woman be lovelier than when most womanly, or more precious than when she reflects her own weakness in clarity of soul? (Gissing [1886] 1972, 333)

The reader is poked and prodded, instructed to "bear with her". Adela is complex and human, the narrator clamours, all the better for her weakness. She is the heroine and she must be liked. The rhetorical questions aimed, presumably, to pre-empt or reflect the assumed reader's uncertainty, give the interjection an almost hysterical tone

that undermines narrative authority. Despite claiming to know the “confessions” of Adela’s mind, such omniscience is not sustained.

After the lost will is discovered, restoring the Manor to the disinherited Eldon, “Mutimer”, Adela realises, “must abandon Wanley, and whither he went, thither must she go also. [...] Doubtless he would return to London; their home would be a poor one, like that of ordinary working folk” (Gissing [1886] 1972, 310-11). “Whither” and “thither” resonate strangely here, clashing with Adela’s pragmatic resolution, as though a borrowed authority is allegorising her fate. The necessary move from Wanley to London marks a move from the site of idealism and tradition to that of reality and modernity. At the close of chapter 27, Adela waits for her husband at the station – a space on the boundary between the two places:

Adela made an effort to speak in words of comfort, but her own voice sounded hopeless in her ears. In the station was a constant roaring and hissing, bell-ringing and the shriek of whistles, the heavy trundling of barrows, the slamming of carriage-doors; everywhere a smell of smoke. It impressed her as though all the world had become homeless, and had nothing to do but journey hither and thither in vain search of a resting-place. (Gissing [1886] 1972, 349)

The above passage challenges Woolf’s opinion that Gissing’s texts are “meagre and unmetaphorical” (Woolf 1932, 223), revering fact and lacking impressions. In fact, the passage is psychologically symbolic. The station is a site of modernity, the constant noise and fumes prefiguring, in impressions, the urban environment. But more than this, the station mirrors Adela’s state of mind, not just in the sense of classic pathetic fallacy, but in the way it is described. The unconnected clauses enact both the experiential bombardment to the senses and her mental turmoil. The formal and archaic diction, directly recalling the “whither” and “thither” of the earlier passage, connotes a distancing from language, a feeling of being at once out of oneself, yet at odds with the modern surroundings. Here is Gissing’s negative identification at its finest: loneliness, homelessness and isolation become universal qualities, a shared absence.³

The complexity of this, however, is undermined as the scene unfolds:

The morning had threatened rain; when at length the journey to London began, the black skies yielded a steady downpour [...] Adela glanced up and down the barren fields of type, but there was

3 “Negative identification” is Raymond Williams’s term from *The Country and the City* (1985), 175.

nothing that could hold her attention, and, by chance looking at her husband's face, she continued to examine it. Perhaps he was asleep, perhaps only absorbed in thought. [...] She could not avert her gaze; it seemed to her that she was really scrutinising his face for the first time, and it was as that of a stranger. Not one detail had the stamp of familiarity: the whole repelled her. What was the meaning now first revealed to her in that countenance? The features had a massive regularity; there was nothing grotesque, nothing on the surface repulsive; yet, beholding the face as if it were that of a man unknown to her, she felt that a whole world of natural antipathies was between it and her.

It was the face of a man by birth and breeding altogether beneath her. (Gissing [1886] 1972, 349-50)

Here the symbolism continues, though with less subtlety. The tears that Adela held back in the station are superimposed onto the elements in a heavy-handed metaphor. This is the first clue of narrative determination. Initially, it appears that the narrative remains in her consciousness - without omniscience it is unclear whether Mutimer is awake. As the train moves from provincial Wanley towards London, the reality of the situation and of her husband seems to dawn on Adela: "he was not of her class, not of her world". But whose reality is it? We are supposed to take from this scene Adela's realisation of class difference via her examination of Mutimer's face. But the unmasking of Mutimer's hypocrisy has already occurred: Adela knows that he snubbed his working-class fiancée, that he wanted to hide the rediscovered will, that his commitment to socialism is limited and self-seeking. The complexity of emotion, still present in the bleakness of Adela's loneliness and the repulsion of marital unhappiness, is diminished by that impertinent Ego, committed to the tone of the book: satire and reactionary politics. Free Indirect Discourse, lying between direct and reported speech, occupies the middle ground between mimesis and diegesis. In high realism, like that practised by George Eliot, Free Indirect Discourse is supposed to create an imperceptible blurring of character and narrator, thus reinforcing narrative control. In Woolf's writing, it has a different effect: diminishing the role and authority of the narrator via increased focalisation. But in the passage above, signalled by the shift into the gnomic present ("It was the face [...]"), Adela becomes a silent mouthpiece for the Conservative point of view, a substitute for a narrator that renounces responsibility for such generalisations. Identity, then, is fragmented and incomplete, and class is an easy way out, something fixed and stratified to set against the chaotic worlds of emotion.

5 Conclusion

The failure of physiognomy in Adela's reading of Mutimer, her sudden consciousness of foreignness beneath what is supposedly known and the subsequent awareness of abject disparity and disintegration enacts in microcosm the experiential pattern of Gissing's novels. It correlates with a persistent incongruity between naturalistic surface realism (Woolf's "facts") and the troubling unknown beneath ("impressions"). Thus it is that the world according to Gissing appears incomplete, centreless, a "maze of episodes". Inner monologue, Free Indirect Discourse, direct speech, reported speech, narrative interjection, reflection, and comment all sit unhappily alongside each other, disrupting a narrative unity and control that Gissing can't quite seem to relinquish.

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The Problem of Completeness in Henry James's *The Spoils of Poynton*

Gary Totten
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, USA

Abstract James's essays on art and exhibitions written between the 1870s and the end of the century illustrate his attention to the composition of the art exhibition within the space of the gallery or museum. James's perception of art exhibit design and effect inform his representation of Mrs. Gareth's art collection and its setting in *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897). As James looked to art and the art exhibit for models to represent 'the workings of the novel', *The Spoils of Poynton* suggests the impossibility of artistic 'completeness' within the realistic aesthetic.

Keywords Henry James. Art exhibition. Gaze. Literary realism.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Wholeness and the Aura of the Artwork. – 3 Art's Fetishisation and the Phantom Limb. – 4 James and the Art Exhibition. – 5 Desire and Artistic Unity.



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1 Introduction

Adeline Tintner notes Henry James's interest in art works as "rich and suggestive analogues for what he was trying to do in his prose", works which, in their "ingeniously put-together parts" serve as models for the "workings of the novel" (1986, 1, 4). James's essays on art and exhibitions written between the 1870s and the end of the century illustrate his focus on the composition of individual works, but these essays also reveal his attention to the composition of the art exhibition within the space of the gallery or museum. James's perception of art exhibit design and effect inform his representation of Mrs. Gereth's art collection and its setting in *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897). Specifically, he invokes art exhibitions' deteriorating integrity in his tale of the artistic completeness and eventual destruction of the art collection in *The Spoils of Poynton*. The novel's narrator explains that "[t]here were places much grander and richer [than Poynton], but there was no such complete work of art" (James 1897, 12). Moreover, when she first visits Poynton, Mrs. Gereth's friend, Fleda Vetch, is overwhelmed by the effect of Poynton's perfect composition, shedding tears "for the joy of admiration" (21). In amassing the treasures at Poynton, Mrs. Gereth has devoted her life to "completeness and perfection" (53), yet, when she carries the contents of the estate away to Ricks,¹ it is Fleda who most keenly feels the effects of the removal, which generates an amputation metaphor in the text. For Fleda, the removal of Poynton's treasures from the estate sets in motion both the dissipation of the aura of the collection and the shattering of the artistic illusion of Poynton's completeness. Considering Walter Benjamin's notion that the manipulation of images in film and photography reveals "entirely new structural formations of the subject" ([1936] 1968, 238), a negative effect of such new structural formations is revealed in Fleda's initial perception of the reconstituted spoils at Ricks as repulsive and meaningless. She concludes that she cannot "care for such things when they came to her in such ways; there was a wrong about them all that turned them to ugliness" (James 1897, 83).

The Spoils of Poynton dramatises the ideological relation in literary realism between narrative and reality through Fleda Vetch's gaze. As a gazing subject, Fleda's desire for Poynton's completeness signifies a literal embodiment of realism's narrative drive towards complete representation. Of course, as James indicates in the novel's critical preface, his theory of literary realism qualifies the notion of completeness, privileging the "sublime economy of art" that takes

¹ The widow's cottage where Fleda will live once Mrs. Gereth's son, Owen, and his intended wife, Mona Brigstock, take possession of Poynton.

the “splendid waste” of life, which is “all inclusion and confusion”, and creates art, “being all discrimination and selection” (1934, 120). While James’s notion of realism emphasises the careful selection of details from the welter of life, and thus suggests an aesthetic that stops short of a fully mimetic representation, he also privileges “a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive” ([1884] 1885, 75), with the aim of being “as complete as possible - to make as perfect a work” (85). In James’s hands, terms such as “typical”, “inclusive”, and “complete” paradoxically lead away from strict verisimilitude and gesture towards the quality and discrimination of the artist’s vision.

For Fleda, Poynton’s “completeness” depends on its integrity as a curated collection and does not necessarily depend on a fully mimetic relationship between reality and art. As Fleda observes Poynton’s treasures displaced and replaced, she manages the absence she experiences by “clothing” the reality of Poynton with the “flesh” of her gaze - to borrow Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s terms (1968, 131) - suggesting the selective and personal (ideological) nature of her viewpoint and resulting aesthetic vision. But neither her gaze nor the narrative that she has imposed on Poynton provide her access to the reality of Poynton that she eventually loses. Thus, the idea of “completeness” that plays out in *The Spoils of Poynton* demonstrates how a sensitive consciousness such as Fleda’s might lead the artist to experiences and representations that breakdown into indeterminacy and loss.

We might place Fleda’s encounter with seemingly irreconcilable visions of Poynton in the context of aestheticism. Jonathan Freedman explores James’s interest in the British aestheticism of Walter Pater and others, specifically, the ability to entertain “contradictory assertions without giving up either their contradictoriness or the wish somehow to unify them” while “articulating [...] skepticism over the value of any such potentially unifying force or vision” (1990, 6, 8). James immerses Fleda in the dilemma of dealing with contradictory resolutions to the problem of Poynton, and the novel’s conclusion suggests his skepticism about the possibility of a unifying vision emerging out of her aesthetic and philosophical quagmire. Indeed, as James looked to art and to the art exhibit for models to represent “the workings of the novel” (Tintner 1986, 4), the ending of *The Spoils of Poynton* suggests the impossibility of artistic ‘completeness’ within the realistic aesthetic. The novel both exemplifies James’s perceptions of the state of the art exhibit in the late 1890s and, utilising the notion of the exhibit’s increasing lack of integrity, his questioning of literary realism’s investment in verisimilitude. The novel finally aspires to what David Lodge terms a “condition of ambiguity” (1997, 6) in James’s later fiction, anticipating the self-conscious forms and narrative strategies of early twentieth-century modernist texts.

2 Wholeness and the Aura of the Artwork

The novel's conflict emerges when Adela Gereth learns that her son, Owen, in compliance with English inheritance laws, intends to retain all the artistic treasures that she has accumulated at Poynton, the family estate, for his fiancée, Mona Brigstock. Poynton is characterised as the epitome of wholeness, artistically complete, self-contained, and even, like the notion of verisimilitude, and thus literary realism itself, self-referential; indeed, the narrator observes that "Poynton was in the style of Poynton" (James 1897, 28). Because Mrs. Gereth's whole life has been an "effort toward completeness and perfection" (53), rather than relinquish her carefully composed collection to the philistine sensibilities of Mona, she carries the contents of Poynton away to Ricks, the nearby widow's cottage where she will live once Owen and Mona take possession of Poynton. The novel's amputation metaphor first appears after Mrs. Gereth has transported the spoils to Ricks, where her separation from Poynton is described in terms of a lost limb: "Her leg had come off - she had now begun to stump along with the lovely wooden substitute". Once she is settled at Ricks, she invites her young friend, Fleda Vetch, whom Mrs. Gereth wishes Owen to marry, to come and admire "the beauty of her [debilitated] movement and the noise she made about the house" (74). Fleda takes the "amputation" much more seriously than Mrs. Gereth, and, when she arrives at Ricks, she is immediately struck with a vision of the empty Poynton: she imagines "the great gaps in the other house. [...] the faraway empty sockets, a scandal of nakedness in high, bare walls" (75-76). Responding to Fleda's exclamation that she had "brought away absolutely everything", Mrs. Gereth replies that she "only brought away what [she] required", which, Fleda observes, includes the "very best pieces [...] the individual gems" (77). While Fleda and Mrs. Gereth walk through the house, Fleda tries to imagine the few treasures that remain at Poynton. This effort renews the pain of the separation, and she finds that she cannot envision the "old combinations" of things, but can only imagine "gaps and scars", a "vacancy" that coalesces at moments into a vision of Owen's sad face because of her failure to prevent the despoiling of Poynton. During her first wakeful night as a guest at Ricks, Fleda contemplates Poynton's "dishonor" and realises that she had "cherished it as a happy whole, [...] and the parts of it now around her seemed to suffer like chopped limbs" (83).²

² Leon Edel links James's trope of amputation to several biographical sources: the early amputation of his father's leg, an old back injury James incurred in a Newport stable fire, and the traumatic artistic 'amputation' of his career as a playwright when *Guy Domville* received a devastating critical reception in 1895 (1985, 452). Of James's failure as a dramatist, David Lodge notes that his dalliance in drama provided him with a new "scenic method" that shifted the balance in his fiction between telling and

Considering Benjamin's notion of aura, the authentic presence of the spoils is not completely destroyed when they are moved to Ricks, since Mrs. Gereth, the artist of their selection and composition, remains with them. The spoils thus avoid total reification because the traces of Mrs. Gereth's artistic labour involved in producing Poynton are not rendered completely invisible. In addition, the removal of the artefacts coincides with Benjamin's notions regarding how art reproduction emancipates the art work from "its parasitical dependence on ritual" ([1936] 1968, 226). Benjamin distinguishes between the cult value and exhibition value of art. Ceremonial art objects designed for use in magical or religious ritual are valued for their existence rather than their exhibition value; freeing art from ritual increases its opportunity for exhibition (for example, it is easier to exhibit a work that can be moved from place to place than to exhibit a statue of a deity that must remain fixed within a temple). Once the exhibition value predominates, the gaze directed at the object also intensifies, for the item, now an exhibited 'art-object', serves an aesthetic function rather than a pragmatic one within a religious system. These notions of cult and exhibition value have two implications in James's novel, apparent, first, in the ritual aspect of the idea of Poynton, which is destroyed once the collection is moved; and, second, in the difference between Fleda's more surface-level and all-encompassing visual scrutiny of the artifacts of Poynton in their original context versus the more probing gaze that she directs at the items once they are detached from Poynton, a gaze resulting in her eventual fetishisation of the objects. The cult value of Poynton is pointedly demonstrated by Mrs. Gereth's declaration that the things in the house were her and her husband's "religion, they were our life, they were *us!*" and she suggests that now that Fleda has seen the spoils, she, too, is implicated in their fate (James 1897, 31). Later, considering Mrs. Gereth's reconstitution of Poynton at Ricks, Fleda feels that she, too, "was of the religion, and like any other of the passionately pious she could worship now even in the desert" (252). The cult value of the spoils, maintained to some extent by Mrs. Gereth's continuing presence with them, seems strong enough to allow Fleda to maintain her admiration for them even in their new setting. However, Fleda's gaze eventually reverts to a focus on exhibition value and the fetishisation of the spoils.

showing "radically in favour of 'showing'" (1987, 2-3). For more on James's scenic method in the novel, see Leo Hoar (2018). The heightened emphasis on the scenic together with the trope of amputation underscores the novel's function as a study in the conventions of representation. James suggests an additional medical metaphor, related tangentially to the absent other of the phantom limb, when he notes in the novel's critical preface that the germ of the story, a tale about a woman's battle with her only son over furniture inherited by the son at his father's death, was like "the prick of inoculation; the whole of the virus, as I have called it, being infused by that single touch" (1996a, 121).

3 Art's Fetishisation and the Phantom Limb

Fleda's vision of the spoils becomes complicated by her romantic feelings for Owen. Her experience at Ricks indicates that Poynton (the phantom limb) is an absent and unrecoverable appendage to her relationship with Owen, and anticipates the ways in which the loss of both Poynton and Owen become conflated in her pain. When Fleda later learns that Owen has finally married Mona, her attempts to repress her emotional response to the loss of both Owen and Poynton increases her pain, and her longing for what she has lost leads to her fetishisation of Poynton and even anger at Mrs. Gereth. Indeed, despite the admiration that she and Mrs. Gereth share for the finely chosen and arranged items of Poynton, Fleda begins to resent Mrs. Gereth for imprisoning her in such a "torment of taste", and Fleda entertains the idea that she may hate her friend (84).

Fleda's torment is due, at least in part, to her finely tuned sensibilities. As James observes in his critical preface to the novel, "appreciation, even to that of the very whole, lives in Fleda", and she is the only character in the novel who "both sees and feels" (1934, 129), allowing her to be particularly sensitive to the spoils' integrity. Lee Clarke Mitchell notes that Fleda's heightened abilities allow her, like Isabel Archer, to "imbu[e] a roomful of furniture with consciousness that judges yet sympathizes" (2005, 31). Fleda imagines that the "chopped limbs" (James 1897, 83) of the estate's former splendour suffer, underscoring her commitment to the spoils as a whole collection and her visceral desire to make some sort of meaning of their fate. Indeed, Fleda's desire for the phantom limb of Poynton's former wholeness drives the narrative towards meaning and parallels the operations of representation - that is, desire (the sign) consists of a subject (the signifier, in this case, Fleda) seeking a relationship with a lost or absent object (the other, or signified, comprised both of Owen Gereth and the spoils). This desire is never satisfied because signification's bar of repression defers access to meaning and representation can never be fulfilled. Poynton's deferred restoration reveals realism's lost object, or 'phantom limb', to be complete representation, the transcendental signified, which, the novel suggests, is ultimately unattainable.

Medical explanations for phantom pain further illuminate Fleda's desire for complete representation. Phantom pain sufferers construct a "memory engram", meaning that cerebral structures form a schema of the pain receptors' experience of the damage that resulted in the loss of the limb (Bowser 1991, 59). Phantom pain can thus be seen as (1) wish-fulfilment stemming from denial of the phantom limb; (2) an attempt to deny the emotional response to the amputation; (3) an emotional response to the amputation of a body part possessing significance in the amputee's relationship with others; and (4) the

result of unresolved mourning for the limb, caused by the amputee's fantasies about the limb, and over-valuation of the amputated appendage (57). Research into the phenomenon also suggests that visual input affects phantom pain; using mirrors placed in a "virtual reality box", researchers have been able to resurrect the phantom limb visually, causing patients to experience sensory effects in the missing limb (Ramachandran, Rogers-Ramachandran 1996, 378-9). Through her gaze and her desire, Fleda generates similar patterns of pain and longing. Poynton, as an appendage to her and Owen's relationship, becomes a fetishised artefact of that relationship; her fascination with and over-valuation of Poynton's visual completeness leads to a seemingly endless mourning for its loss; and, finally, as she attempts to deny her emotional response to the loss of both Owen and Poynton through her detached participation in the battle over the spoils, she increases her pain. Only when Fleda confronts the charred ruins of Poynton at the novel's end, does she recognise the impossibility of her desire for completeness.

4 James and the Art Exhibition

James's reviews of art and exhibitions written between the 1870s and the end of the century coincide with notions of completeness in the novel and illustrate his interest in the composition and effect of the art exhibition within specific spaces. In these reviews, James often comments on the exhibit's location, arrangement, and surroundings. For example, in an 1874 review of the Duke of Montpensier's exhibition at the Boston Athenaeum, James comments on the gallery-going experience, noting the manner and appearance of the spectators, and, most significantly, that the gem of the collection (a Murillo) is set off by a "magnificent margin of maroon-colored wall", while the next most impressive work, a Velasquez, is appropriately hung in a large and isolated space (1996a, 44). He is attuned to, and seems to approve of, the details of these design choices and the ways that they accentuate the features of each individual work. In an 1876 article for the *New York Tribune*, James describes his private viewing of two collections of French works, not yet on exhibition. He notes the comfortable room in which he lounges on an ottoman, "in a [Paris] establishment in which the effective presentation of works of art has itself been raised to a fine art", these particular pieces having been "plucked forth from an adjoining place of deposit and arrayed before me in skillful juxtaposition" (1996b, 151). James's admiration for the "well-chosen specimens" (156) underscores how he views Mrs. Gereth as an artist in her own right, as an arranger of effective presentations of art works at Poynton.

Reviewing less than worthy exhibitions, James notes that an 1878 London exhibition of Ruskin's collection of Turner drawings lacks

skilful arrangement: the drawings are “hung without method and without any reference to their chronological order. The room, which is small, is also densely crowded” (1996f, 271-72). Exhibit design also concerns him a month later when he writes, with some amusement, that a woman leaves the second summer exhibition of the Grosvenor Gallery in London (which had acquired a reputation for being “peculiar”), remarking: “I expected the arrangement of the pictures would be more unusual”. While acknowledging the gallery’s reputation for the unusual, James insists that “[t]here is, it would seem, but one manner of arranging pictures at an exhibition, and to this time-honoured system the Grosvenor has rigidly adhered” (1996c, 274). James’s comment establishes the Grosvenor’s unique role in bridging the traditional and nontraditional gallery experience, but, more importantly, emphasises his conviction that there is a ‘correctness’ about exhibiting art works that requires expertise and skill.

James dramatises nuanced levels of such skill in the novel. Fleda recognises a certain lack of skilful juxtaposition at Ricks, at least insofar as she misses the “old combination” of things from Poynton (James 1897, 83). But the things are still arranged well, just not as they were at Poynton, implying Fleda’s inflexibility. Nevertheless, that she is able to make these fine distinctions also emphasises her artistic sensibilities, if not as expertly honed as Mrs. Gereth’s in terms of exhibition design, at least able to fully appreciate the beauty of a well-executed display. In his critical preface to the novel, James draws distinctions between Mrs. Gereth’s and Fleda’s capacities. Mrs. Gereth possesses the finely tuned skill of arrangement in pulling together Poynton’s masterful collection, but she is not “intelligent, [...] only clever”, James notes, while Fleda is “only intelligent, not distinctively able”. Given James’s idea that the “deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer” ([1884] 1885, 83), we might assume that Mrs. Gereth, as the artist responsible for Poynton’s grandeur, is of superior mind. Or, to put it another way, as James does in the critical preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, the many windows of the “house of fiction” has standing at each “a figure with a pair of eyes” representing a “unique instrument” and impression (1934b, 46), such as Mrs. Gereth. Yet this description might just as well evoke Fleda, whom we could represent as that watcher who “see[s] more”, while her neighbour, “watching the same show, [...] sees less” (46). Fleda recognises the authenticity of Poynton’s artistry and confirms the superiority of Mrs. Gereth’s skill through her admiration for her originality and “genius for composition” (James 1897, 83). Even at the end of the novel, when Mrs. Gereth has returned the items to Poynton and is living at Ricks with the furnishings of the previous occupant, a maiden aunt, Fleda admires the effect Mrs. Gereth has wrought through such meagre means. Fleda takes one look at the “few sticks” that Mrs. Gereth

has gathered together and is struck with the “vivid presence of the artist’s idea” (265). “You make things ‘compose’ in spite of yourself”, she exclaims (266).

In contrast to both Fleda and Mrs. Gereth, Mona Brigstock, who possesses the spoils in the end and thus “rides the crisis quite most triumphantly”, as James concludes, “is *all* will, without the smallest leak of force into taste or tenderness or vision, into any sense of shades or relations or proportions” (1934a, 131). James suggests that Mona prevails by being “able at any moment to bear the whole of her dead weight at once on any given inch of a resisting surface”, whilst Fleda “sees and feels but in acres and expanses and blue perspectives” and Mrs. Gereth, “while her imagination broods, drops half the stitches of the web she seeks to weave” (132). Mona’s success is jarring. Despite Mrs. Gereth’s artistic skill or Fleda’s aesthetic sensibility, neither character succeeds in achieving or ultimately possessing her vision of artistic completeness.³ Mona’s triumph thus portends a challenge to the very tenets of the realist aesthetic. Indeed, Stephanie Foote concludes that “the more realist strategies of interpretation are brought to bear on [Mona], the more opaque she will seem because she does not signify her desires within realism’s psychological terms. Her very simplicity or flatness will baffle [readers] accustomed to reading deep interior lives”. Mona thus represents “anxiety about the status of a certain kind of realist reader” at the same “moment when James himself struggled to read and be read by a popular audience” (2006, 43).

James’s anxieties about the possible triumph of commercialism are apparent in his focus on the integrity of the spoils. Walter Isle notes the consumerist stakes of the novel insofar as Mrs. Gereth is aware that the meaning of art, especially at Poynton, is “interwoven with the terms of its possession” (1968, 114), which is why she is so keen to have Fleda become the heiress of the estate rather than Mona. James seems to gesture towards concerns about the growing power of consumerism in his 1877 art review, “The Picture Season in London”, where he comments that even if England is “not among the greatest artistic producers of the world, [it is] among the greatest consumers” (1996e, 246). James argues that “the taste for art in England” during the social season represents “a fashion, a need of luxury”, and, “in the absence of production, on what a scale the consumption has always gone on!” (249). The bulk of the review critiques the works in the London art exhibitions during the social season, but James sets his assessment within his general view of the consumerist nature of the

³ See Lee Clark Mitchell (2005) for more on James’s interest in larger questions of possession in the novel and the ways in which material objects are imbued with consciousness. Peter Donohue argues that what is at stake in the novel is not “mere possession of objects, but rather the self as it attempts to possess” (1997, 41).

London season. He notes that for the “ten weeks” (244) of this “most solidly brilliant, the most richly suggestive, of all great social shows” (245), London’s gloom is replaced by “an enormous, opulent society expanding to the enjoyment of the privileges and responsibilities of wealth and power” in stark contrast to the “amiable coquetry” that characterises the Parisian social season (244). Yet he also views the “great multiplicity of exhibitions” (249) as a “result of that democratisation of all tastes and fashions which marks our glorious period” (250). James takes note of the English propensity to buy good art in large quantities, which means that the exhibitions contain works that are of high quality and are becoming more accessible (250). Indeed, he credits Burlington House with allowing artists to “communicate with the public more directly than under the academic dispensation [such as at the Royal Academy], and in which the more ‘peculiar’ [works] in especial may have a chance to get popular” (252). Of the Grosvenor Gallery, he suggests that the love of good art eclipses any crass commercial interest of the gallery owners (252) and the gallery is “very pretty and elegant” (253). Most important to this analysis, however, is that James situates his assessment within the hyper-consumerist setting of the London social season and its heightened consumption of culture, suggesting his attention to the conflict between aesthetic excellence and consumerist exigencies.

As the century draws to a close, this tension seems to grow more concerning for James, and he documents the increasing lack of artistic integrity in the art exhibitions and the generally more chaotic nature of exhibits, implying a falling off in public taste and aesthetic sensibilities. In a dismal review of London’s May 1897 exhibitions, again taking place during the high London social season and written after the publication of *The Spoils of Poynton* but no less useful in understanding its approach to the integrity of the art exhibit, he is particularly critical of the Academy’s exhibition, of which he asks: “What would become of any individual who should directly charge the British public with the vulgarity and ignorance that it is the effect of so many of the acres of canvas in question to nail upon it with a positive frenzy of the hammer?” His ire is directed at some of the individual pieces as well as the overall effect. Of exhibitions more generally, he opines that they are,

in truth, [...] more and more cruel, and are not more misleading in anything, doubtless, than just in making such an indictment appear so collective. Individual pieces make their finer appeal and seek their finer affinity: the misery is that they are lost in the general loudness and glare. One would like to pick them all out, to remove them, wounded and dying, from the choking battle smoke and carry them into the cool, dim hospital of isolation and independence. (1996d, 510)

Given James's awareness of the consumerist context of the social season and the increasingly chaotic nature of the exhibitions, his comments here suggest that the "general loudness and glare" to which he objects are constituted by not only the exhibition itself and its "acres" of vulgarly placed canvases but also the general commercialism of the age. He uses similar images and language to represent the destruction of Poynton and its spoils near the end of the novel, when Fleda witnesses Poynton's spoils in the smoke of the fire and wishes she had been able to "carry" some of the spoils off "into the cool, dim hospital of [...] independence" (1996d, 510). As the narrator tracks the increasing threats to the integrity of Poynton's art collection, the events leading up to this tragic denouement read like the trends in art exhibitions that James documents in his review essays.

James's interest in this loss of integrity is most pronounced towards the end of the novel. For most of the narrative, Fleda's visual perfectionism allows her to sustain a mental vision of Poynton's artistic completeness, even as it is shuttled between the estate and Ricks. Near the conclusion, however, she jeopardises her loyalty to Poynton's artistic integrity when, at Owen's invitation, she travels to Poynton to claim a keepsake "gem" from the estate. Benjamin's distinction between what he terms the "distracted" and "concentrated" gaze illuminates Fleda's changing relationship to the spoils. According to Benjamin, a person "who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it", whereas "the distracted mass absorbs the work of art" ([1936] 1968, 241). Fleda maintains a complex and conflicted relationship to these two ways of viewing art. Initially, she concentrates on Poynton as a complete work of art, and is thus absorbed by the idea of its wholeness. However, when she receives Owen's letter inviting her to come to Poynton and choose for herself "the gem of the collection" (James 1897, 208), she reacts with religious fervor, regarding herself as a "pilgrim" who might "go to a shrine" (278) and recalling her prior and similarly religious conviction that she could "worship" the spoils even in the "desert" of Ricks. At this point, her gaze changes from one of concentration on the overall vision of Poynton to one of distraction with a particular piece. She now absorbs the work as she mentally surveys the collection to pick out that one relic which will be "up to the height of her privilege". Indeed, though she still has "the whole place [...] in her eyes" (279), she compromises her ability to maintain an appreciative and concentrated gaze by fetishising the single keepsake she will choose and obsessing over what the offer of the gift might mean coming from Owen, in apparent disregard for how removing an item from the collection will affect Poynton's wholeness.

5 Desire and Artistic Unity

How does Fleda reach this point where she is willing to disrupt Poynton's artistic unity? Sandra Corse suggests that Fleda has simply fallen prey to the consumerism that naturally follows from the commodification of art and which has resulted from the movement of the spoils (1994, 123). In this reading, Fleda succumbs to the period's developing consumer gaze, which, as critics have suggested, aligns the novel with the notion of commodity fetishism.⁴ The transactional relation of the Maltese cross to her romantic relationship with Owen also suggests a consumerist mentality. However, Fleda's changed attitude towards the spoils is importantly a function of desire. As I have suggested, Poynton becomes an "appendage" to her relationship with Owen, and her attachment to the Maltese cross, the item she decides to take from the collection, is mostly due to what she imagines her choice will symbolise about this relationship: it must be a small piece so she can keep it close to her and it must be one of the finest "because it was in the finest he saw his symbol" (279-80). Ultimately, she decides on the ornamental cross for the additional reason that Owen is the one who named it. The fact that Fleda is never quite sure what Owen means by his offer to take something from Poynton, and her attempts to convince herself that she would be "content to know nothing more than just what her having it would tell her" (280), reveals her overdetermined relationship to Poynton, her lingering passion for Owen, and the loss of her ability to making coherent meaning of her experiences, all of which become conflated in her pain over the "missing limb" of Poynton. Fleda's predicament again suggests resonances with British aestheticism – in Freedman's terms "a complicated vision, which seeks to explore the experience of fragmentation, loss, and disintegration without necessarily giving up the possibility of reuniting these shards" (1990, 8). Yet elements of romance in the novel, the anguish of taste and emotion that Fleda experiences, distract her from obtaining access to the completeness (and clarity) she desires, and wrap her in that "tangle of life", which she accuses Mrs. Gereth of simplifying "far too much" (240). Indeed, during the emotional intensity of Fleda's discussion with Owen about their relationship, she has to "still" herself in order to "come round again to the real and the thinkable" (201). Fleda might possess both the rarified sensibility and gift of seeing that James so prizes, but her increasing episodes of inner turmoil defer meaning and derail her journey to completeness. Thus, despite the more realistic view she takes of the "tangle of life" (versus Mrs. Gereth), a life of imaginative impression versus real action offers Fleda no truer access to meaning

⁴ See, for example, Armstrong 1983; Brown 2002; Savoy 2001; Sarris 1996.

than the torments of romantic sensibility against which realism reacts so violently. The text's indeterminacy calls into question Fleda's definitions of what constitutes, and indeed how one accesses, the real.

After making this decision to choose the Maltese cross, Fleda arrives at Poynton to find the house and everything in it burned to the ground. She is unable, as James later writes of the London exhibitions, to rescue the individual piece (the Maltese Cross) "wounded and dying, from the choking battle smoke and carry [it] into the cool, dim hospital of isolation and independence" (1996d, 510). James does not allow Fleda to claim her prize and disrupt Poynton's unity, but neither does he allow Poynton's completeness to survive the smoke and heat of the fire, suggesting that there really is "no such complete work of art" (James 1897, 12) as Poynton. The jarring mental picture of Poynton's charred ruins (when the station-master informs her that the estate has burned to the ground) awakens Fleda from her aesthetic reverie to a recognition of the real-life effects of her vision of Poynton, and the ramifications of her participation as an observer of the spoils are suddenly apparent. Fleda's repeated query "Poynton's gone?" (285) to the station-master gives us perhaps the best insight into the nature of Fleda's loss, and the nature of her path to healing. Her question reveals that Owen and the spoils are inextricably linked in her mind. When she arrives at the station and discovers that Poynton has burned, one of her first thoughts is for Owen's safety, and she inquires: "Have they [Owen and Mona] come back?" Then she ask about the spoils: "Were they saving the things?" (284). When the station-master answers no, Fleda says: "I must go there". No sooner does she articulate this desire, however, than she checks herself, for she suddenly "knew in what way she was affected [and] she felt herself give *everything* up" (285; emphasis added). She decides against going to Poynton, covers her face with her hands and says, "I'll go back" (286). Fleda does not need to go to Poynton to process the loss, but, as she has done through the novel, relies on her mental reflections to arrive, out of the "great acrid gust" of what she imagines to be Poynton's smoke (285), at a clear mental vision. Poynton has come to represent her desire for completeness, both aesthetically and romantically, and in order for the phantom pain to subside, Fleda must confront that mental image of its complete destruction (assisted by her previous intense visual engagement with the spoils). Fleda seems to come face to face with her own "self-indulgence" and "creative insufficiency", both features of James's criticism of British aestheticism, according to Freedman (1990, 135). Only when she processes Poynton's demise can she acknowledge this completeness as illusion, come to grips with the amputation, "give everything up", and "go back".

As Fleda considers the loss of the spoils to Mona, she is most touched by the "beauty [...] that, in tons, she had lost" and she thinks of the spoils "hour after hour" (252), and when she finally discovers

that Poynton has burned, her horror is due not to the fact that she will be unable to claim her keepsake, but to the fact that the “great house” and all it represents to her “is *lost*” (284; emphasis in the original). In the last lines of the novel, Fleda experiences in her mind “the raw bitterness of a hope that she might never again in life have to give up so much at such short notice” (285). By experiencing the pain of the absolute loss of Poynton she understands the price of her inability (or refusal) to act: her visual engagement with the illusion of Poynton’s completeness has cost her the physical reality of possessing it, and Owen, for herself. Fleda uses her gaze to facilitate her journey to completeness and meaning; however, in the process of merely gazing rather than acting she gains understanding, but loses the object(s) of her desire.⁵ In perhaps the novel’s most direct critique of realist ideology, Fleda learns that clothing reality in the flesh of the gaze (similar to clothing reality in the flesh of realist narrative) does not necessarily provide access to real experience or lasting satisfaction.⁶

Indeed, we might also view Fleda’s predicament as the failure of humans’ capacity to provide coherent meaning through the sense of sight. Such a conundrum centres on the ineffability of the spoils themselves. Mrs. Gereth’s personal relationship with the antiques are that of the artisan, Peter Betjemann observes (2008, 211), but, in Bill Brown’s terms, “James’s *mise-en-scène* at Poynton is a matter of aura, not artifacts” (2002, 226). Indeed, Brown argues that while the museum and the realist novel both seem to demand visual engagement, *The Spoils of Poynton* does not operate in this way “because an adequate apprehension of Mrs. Gereth’s ‘effort toward completeness and perfection’ could never reside in a visual register”. The intense intimacy that Mrs. Gereth and Fleda establish “with the physical object world could not be rendered by the distancing sense of sight” (227). Fleda seems to understand this when she decides that she does not need to go look at Poynton burned to the ground. The narrative’s relationship to the visual register allows it to become, in Brown’s estimation, “the James novel that most patently challenges realism”, and the fire at the novel’s end thus can “be understood as the conflagration in which realism as such is consumed” (228).⁷ The focus on the spoils becomes ironic because, while James notes in his

⁵ Jonathan Freedman contends that James’s engagement with British aestheticism allowed him to appreciate the notion of *aesthesis*, “the heightening or perfection of sense experience” (1990, 136). In Fleda’s case, however, the heightening of her visual acuity seems to lead away from rather than towards fulfillment.

⁶ Here, we might be reminded of James’s insistence in “The Art of Fiction” that impressions can constitute experience, but he also admonishes the artist to “Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!” ([1884] 1885, 66).

⁷ See Rhoads 2012 for another discussion of how the novel challenges realism and gestures towards modernism in its ironic revisions of the domestic plot.

critical preface that “the ‘things’ themselves would form the very centre” of the novel’s crisis (1996a, 123), in the end they are not, as other critics have pointed out, ever described in any detail (see Brown 2002, 225). Later in his preface, James admits that the real centre will be “the felt beauty and value” of the spoils (1996a, 126); they are “not directly articulate”, and, indeed, what would become of them is eventually “a comparatively vulgar issue”, for “[t]he passions, the faculties, the forces their beauty would [...] set in motion, was what, as a painter, one had really wanted of them” (127). Both Brown and Eric Savoy note the novel’s emphasis on the power of “things” - of the spoils - beyond the things themselves (Brown 2002, 223) in “a more spiritually luminous *expansiveness* in which things point to an ineffable Thing” (Savoy 2001, 274). Yet the spiritual expansiveness of the spoils, which Fleda surely appreciates, is what ultimately prevents her from accessing real experience for herself.

The Spoils of Poynton thus aspires to the characteristics of James’ later fiction, which, according to Lodge, is broadly about “the impossibility of arriving at a single, simple version of the ‘truth’ about any human action or experience” (1987, 6). The novel’s purposeful indeterminacy serves our understanding of literary representation: because the narrative method requires readers to exert an interpretative effort equivalent, Lodge observes, to that of the main character (6), readers function concurrently as spectators and actors in this drama of representation, both observing and participating in its conventions. The novel illustrates how, as Michael Riffaterre observes, verisimilitude is “a system of representations that seems to reflect a reality external to the text only because it conforms to a grammar” (1990, xiii). The novel’s grammar of realism specifically anticipates the self-conscious forms and narrative strategies of early twentieth-century texts. Through their experiences with the novel’s indeterminacies, readers can move from recognising the conventional “grammar” of representation to understanding the ideological baggage accompanying aesthetic and historical categories. Indeed, the novel’s provocative reflections on completeness encourage us to recognise the limits and conventions of language and representation as revealed through literary realism.

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Tableaux and Melodramatic Realism

Carolyn Williams
Rutgers University, USA

Abstract If in many ways its aims are comparable to those of novelistic realism (a focus on ordinary characters and contemporary social issues), melodrama exhibits a form of realism all its own. This essay focuses on several elements of that form, especially on the workings of the tableau. At the moment of tableau, acting bodies suddenly freeze to make a silent and still stage picture whose significance can be interpreted. Though the critical history of the tableau is tightly related to genre painting, its formal operations within melodrama are more complex than the aim to offer verisimilitude in the depiction of ordinary life. Tableaux establish the melodramatic narrative form characterised by intermittent pictorialization. They interrupt the dramatic action, summing up the plot so far and adumbrating action to come; they form 'points' on which the suspense of dramatic unfolding might hang; and these sudden moments of silence and stasis carry affective and intellectual points as well. Using exemplary readings of melodramas across the English 19th century, this essay demonstrates the formal potentialities of the tableau, including the metatheatrical self-consciousness of its role in constructing melodramatic realism.

Keywords Melodrama. Realism. Tableau. Genre painting. Serial discontinuity. Metatheatricality. Douglas Jerrold. Dion Boucicault. Leopold Lewis.

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1 Introduction

“Why did realism come late to the English stage?” This critical question (and the assumptions it reveals) has long been outdated, not least because it takes the novel for its only standard and ignores forms of melodramatic realism. There are many persuasive ways to argue for melodramatic realism. One centres in the fact that, like the novel, melodrama concentrates on representing commonplace, ordinary characters who speak in prose. Unlike the novel, the characters of melodrama are typified rather than individualised, but they are arrayed in a schematic form that models society through the figure of the family (Williams 2018, 214). In the history of drama, the aim to extend sympathy to groups of people in the lower ranks of society overlaps almost exactly with the period of melodrama’s rise; indeed, in this respect bourgeois sentimental drama predates and conditions the rise of melodrama. As Mayer (2004) and Buckley (2009) among others have shown, we can also argue for melodramatic realism due to its almost journalistic attention to social problems of the day, whether specific (naval conscription, alcoholism, the plight of prisoners after release) or general (post-Revolutionary social chaos, empire, the class system itself). In this respect, melodrama provides its audiences with a way to think about real-world issues and events; the messy middle of a melodrama engages these issues in complex ways, even if the happy endings may seem to gloss over the very complexity that has been engaged in the middle.

Yet another way to argue for melodramatic realism focuses on its form, for it is through its formal artifice that melodrama generates its realism. Even the music of melodrama, which might from one point of view be considered its most artificial convention, from another point of view can be regarded as a crucial part of its realism; like film scores today, the music immerses and forcibly engages spectators in the sympathies or horrors that they are meant to feel (Pisani 2014, 42, 171; Williams 2018, 217). But the other primary element of the genre’s form, the tableau, provides us with the most direct and conclusive way to argue for melodramatic realism.

As histories of the English novel (Watt 1957; McKeon 1987) have shown, the novel generates its realism in part through parodically engaging with other genres that it presumes to be less realistic than itself. In the eighteenth century, those ‘others’ of novelistic realism tended to be allegory or romance; but for the nineteenth century, melodrama becomes realism’s most important other genre (Jameson). Fully to imagine melodrama as realism’s dialectical opposite, however, we must think of it not only as internalised within novelistic realism, but also as its having a realism of its own.

For example: Charles Dickens creates the Crummies acting troupe in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838) most obviously in order to parody melodrama

in its several sub-genres, its acting style, and its modes of production. But Dickens's elaborate parody also curiously highlights the realism that the Crummleses attempt in their representations. For example, Mr. Crummles identifies Smike as someone who could "make such an actor for the starved business" (Dickens [1838] 1999, 275). But of course that is what Smike 'really' is, outside Mr. Crummles's imagined use of him, in the novel's main plot. Or, for example, Mr. Crummles boasts that the troupe's next performance will display "a real pump" on stage. He instructs Nicholas, whom he has commissioned to write the new piece: "you must manage to introduce a real pump and two washing tubs". "I bought 'em cheap, at a sale the other day", he explains. "That's the London plan. They look up some [...] properties, and have a piece written to fit them" (278). In this humorous detail, we can see a parodic critique of the strain toward visual verisimilitude in the melodramatic stage set. It is meant to seem both naïve and silly; but Dickens himself, an avid theatre-goer, would have known that productions of melodrama in London had already achieved complex visual verisimilitude, far beyond Crummles's "real pump".

Later on, by the mid-1860s, when T.W. Robertson, with his 'cup and saucer' realism, eschewed the melodramatic acting style, substituting tiny gestural by-play and an understated manner of speech, his style of realism was credited as an innovation. But Robertson's middle-class domestic settings make it clear that his realism only depicted one slice of society. Meanwhile, the mid-1860s also saw other developments of stage realism in the elaborate 'sensation scenes' of melodrama, which used a battery of new stage technologies to shock and impress audiences into feeling that they were experiencing a real railway train headed directly at them, or a real tenement building burning to the ground. In other words, creating a realistic stage picture was a serious work of creativity across the nineteenth century, and it evolved in many forms.

The important larger point here is that the dramaturgy of the English nineteenth century was fundamentally pictorial in every respect (Meisel 1983, 1994). Our current understanding of 'the theatrical' (as opposed to 'the dramatic' or 'the performative') implies this frontal, planar orientation of the stage, with a clear line of separation between the spectacle and its spectators. The term 'stage picture' can refer in a general sense simply to the scene setting in its entirety; but over the course of the English nineteenth century, the stage picture was increasingly and explicitly imagined as a painting, framed by the proscenium arch. Thus, the development of what we now call the 'fourth wall' increases across the period, reaching its formal apotheosis in the gilt picture frame that extended on all four sides of the proscenium of the Haymarket Theatre in 1879-80. The melodramatic tableau is an important part of this history, for it expresses this overall pictorial dramaturgy in microcosmic form.

2 The Tableau

When acting bodies suddenly freeze and compose themselves into a still picture, they form a tableau. These occur at the end of almost every act of a melodrama, and sometimes in the middle of an act. Often called simply 'Picture' in the play texts of the period, the tableau was only the most obvious element of a formal system that also included brief poses of acting bodies in what were called 'attitudes'. For good reason, this pictorial dramaturgy has been called a 'pointed style', for sweeping melodramatic gestures come to rest momentarily in the attitudes, which were also called 'points', while the plot comes to its points in complex entanglements that were called 'situations' (Meisel 1983, 38-51, 351-2, 354-5). The dramatic action comes to its points in the stillness of the tableaux. Punctuating the dramatic action, the tableaux both interrupt and momentarily sum up the action at that point. These punctual and serial moments of pictorialisation also make their intellectual points, first moving their spectators to smiles or tears, screams of shock or terror, and then pausing long enough to let them think about what they see.

Peter Brooks discusses the tableau in his account of the "muteness" of melodrama, which includes the mute figure as well as the formal pauses, silent and still, brought about by the tableau (Brooks 1995, 47-8, 56, 59, 61). While Holmström (1967) and Fried (1980) have given us excellent accounts of other forms of the tableau than the theatrical, Martin Meisel has done more than anyone to develop the important idea of narrative form in nineteenth-century theatre. In *Realizations* (1983), he explores the pictorial dramaturgy of the nineteenth-century stage in relation to illustrated novels and narrative paintings, all examples of intermittent pictorialisation as a narrative form. He calls that narrative form 'serial discontinuity', a term we will frequently employ in this essay (Meisel 1983, 38).

Tableaux could be used for many purposes. A sentimental tableau would render the moment of pathos in a domestic or amorous plot, whereas a 'vision' tableau would disclose, in a sudden visual spectacle, supernatural or psychological phenomena that are by definition not visible at all. The recognition tableau, a staple convention of melodrama, depicts the moment in which two characters 'start back' when they see each other for the first time; they freeze briefly into an attitude of fixation, staring at one another and clearly indicating that their relation to one another will sooner or later be revealed (Shepherd 1994). The tableau 'realisation' would imitate a well-known painting or print onstage (Meisel 1983, 91-5, 11, 115, 132, 285-6, 405, 438). And here we have a seeming paradox: the realism of the theatrical representation seems to be secured by reference to another artform altogether.

The most famous realisations in the history of melodrama are undoubtedly those staged for Douglas Jerrold's *The Rent Day* (1832),

which realises well-known paintings by David Wilkie, *The Rent Day* (1807) and *Distraint for Rent* (1815), at the beginning and end of Act I (respectively). The tableau realisation depends for its force on audience recognition, so it is of great interest in understanding the aptitudes of melodramatic audiences to know that these paintings would have been recognised. In the realisation, the staged illusion of verisimilitude derives from the reproduction not of reality itself, but of another work of art. The particular realism of David Wilkie's new style of genre painting (Meisel 1983, 143-5) is momentarily imported to certify the realism of the action on stage; meanwhile, of course, audience members know full well that the stage picture is composed of living bodies, and that they refer to an inter-art relation outside the theatre. In other words, the tableau realisation represents a moment of metatheatrical self-consciousness and an acknowledgment that melodramatic realism is not immediate and transparent, but mediated and constructed. Meanwhile the tradition of stage verisimilitude continued, not only with the sensation scenes of the 1860s and after, but also with realisations of recognisable scenes from real life. By 1881, for example, when George R. Sims produced *The Lights O'London*, the detailed scene of the Borough Market in Southwark on a Saturday night that opened Act 5 was said by the drama critic Clement Scott to have been an example of "realism out-realised" (cited in Booth 1995, xxiv).

The operations of the tableau had been theorised in the eighteenth century by Denis Diderot, who wrote about tableaux in the context both of painting and drama. He pointed out that the painter must choose a particularly telling moment for his tableau, a moment of dramatic condensation in which both the past and the future might be implied in the represented present. Thus, the suspense that the tableau can create within the context of melodrama had been envisioned by Diderot's comments on painting. Diderot was especially interested in genre paintings of ordinary people in the suspended moments of their everyday lives. He also believed that the tableau worked by fixating the spectator's attention. The successful tableau should call out to the beholder (*appeler*), arrest (*arrêter*) and then enthrall or enthrance the beholder (*attacher*) (Fried 1980, 92). Writing of drama, Diderot formulates a critical distinction between the *coup de théâtre* (a sudden change in the plot) and the tableau, in favor of the latter: "One is almost like a children's game," he writes, while "the other is a stroke of genius" (Diderot 1759, cited in Bremner 1994, 15). Elsewhere I discuss the implications of Diderot's theories of the tableau at greater length (Williams 2004, 111-13). To summarise my argument here: at each moment of sudden arrest and stillness, the register of representation shifts, suddenly appealing to spectators for interpretation even while those same spectators might also be reacting with bodily shock, shrieks, or tears. In other words, bodily

enthralment can also lead to acts of interpretation when, during the still and silent pauses, spectators have time to 'read' the picture for its pointed significance. Accordingly, spectatorship in melodrama exists in an ambiguous realm between affect and contemplation, seeing and knowing. As Ankhi Mukherjee has put it: "In the world of melodrama [...] we are invited to understand with our eyes, see with our heart, and cogitate with our nervous system" (Mukherjee 2007, 33).

When George Eliot theorises her own novelistic realism in Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede* (1859), she too relies on an analogy to genre painting, focusing specifically on "Dutch paintings" of ordinary people in their everyday actions. While she does not use the term 'tableau,' she does emphasise in the chapter's title, "In Which the Story Pauses a Little", the necessity that the forward motion of narrative must stop briefly while we are guided to think about the mode of representation. Within the context of the present essay, we can see that Eliot participates in a long commentary tradition that begins with Diderot. She too refuses to think of her realism as a direct, transparent, or immediate representation of reality. Like Jerrold with his realisations of Wilkie's genre paintings, Eliot uses one realist genre to inform her own. Most important, she acknowledges her own role as mediator of a realism that has been re-created both from other realisms and from her own memory; she claims to give "a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind" (Eliot [1859] 2008, 193). This example suggests the obvious advantages of novelistic realism, for the narrator can offer commentary (and elsewhere can operate free indirect discourse). But melodramatic realism has an array of resources of its own. The nineteenth-century realists, whether novelistic or melodramatic, were never naïve enough to think that their representations were transparent or unmediated (Levine 1983; Williams 2018, 209).

This essay will aim to show not only the various effects that the tableau can achieve, but also the ways they can demonstrate the melodrama's metatheatrical self-consciousness, its awareness of how its realism is constructed. Throughout, we will also follow some of the ways the narrative form of serial discontinuity works, creating its own particular rhythms, which oscillate between discontinuity or interruption and fluidity or continuity. Very simply put: the music starts and stops, marking out passages of dramatic action, while the dramatic action also starts and stops, interrupted and punctuated by the still pictures, the tableaux. Ellen Lockhart describes melodrama's "new syntax [...] a newly fractured kind of time", a "temporality [...] unique to its genre". She argues that it is "perhaps most clearly manifest in those attitudes, which made early and golden-age melodrama alike unfold in a kind of stop-and-go metimeter: a constant stutter in the diegesis" (Lockhart 2018, 39). Hers is perhaps the most extreme view, the view that most emphatically stresses the

stoppages or discontinuities in the temporal unfolding of melodrama's serial discontinuity.

But it is equally important to emphasise the fluidity of the form, for the moments of poised stasis in the attitudes can be very brief indeed, and the sweeping gestures flow into one another with balletic precision, something like the dissolving views of the magic lantern. As David Mayer and Helen Day-Mayer have explained, the attitudes should be understood as “the full extent of a gesture”, and these brief poses are what we would see depicted in the acting manuals. But “a stage gesture is not an isolated moment, unless the end of a scene or a key moment in that scene has been intentionally selected to form a momentary ‘picture’ (the theatrical term for *tableau*)” (Mayer, Day-Mayer 2018, 109). In other words, to do the acting style justice, we must imagine brief still pictures within a general sense of fluid motion. But the tableau marks a definitive moment of stillness and interruption.

Over the years of melodrama's rehabilitation as a topic for serious study (since the 1960s), we have paid more attention to the affect, to the shrieks and the tears, than we have to the form of melodrama. But the form is crucially important, for of course the form orchestrates the affect in the first place. The significant pauses effected by the tableau provide a sudden moment of stimulation, and they are usually strategically supported by the music. Furthermore, we have not been inclined to trust the melodramatic spectator's ability to interpret the tableaux for their significance. Instead, I would like to imagine an audience of spectators who are as curious, intelligent, and able to read the pictures for their significance as any readers of this essay might be. I hope, therefore, by discussing a few melodramatic tableaux across the nineteenth century, to persuade my readers of their intellectual and political force, and of their crucial role in the construction of melodramatic realism.

2.1 Social Realism: *Black-Ey'd Susan*; or, “All in the Downs” by Douglas Jerrold

A uniquely English subgenre, nautical melodrama helped to mediate the chaotic after-effects of the Napoleonic Wars. By far the best-known of these, *Black-Ey'd Susan* (Surrey Theatre, London, 1829) condensed and combined various postwar concerns: the damaged fabric of social relations; the economic and sexual vulnerability of women left at home without protection; the vulnerability of men to naval conscription and the masculine self-division that results, for the common sailor was torn between his public role as servant of the state and his private role as husband; and the rigidity of the law, which can lead to gross miscarriages of justice. The play's tableaux focus attention on these social issues.

The tableau that falls in the middle of Act II, scene 2, provides a great example of melodrama's interruptive form. Accompanied by music, our sailor-hero William fights with the chief villain, a smuggler, while other members of the smuggler's gang stand by, watching. During their combat, a Lieutenant appears with two other Marines. Everyone freezes, while spectators are given time to understand what is happening. The Lieutenant breaks the silence with an order: "Smugglers surrender! [...] you have cheated the king long enough, you shall now serve him - the fleet wants hands, and you shall aboard" (Jerrold 1829, 23). His boisterous bonhomie does not disguise the fact that he is taking prisoners. In other words, and in formal terms, the tableau marks the moment of their arrest - and the moment of their social transformation from outlaws to servants of the state. The double sense of the word 'arrest' is indeed activated in this scene, for the formally arrested stasis of the tableau has been used brilliantly to depict the smugglers' seizure by the law. Thus, this scene mirrors (and reverses) what had happened to William; in the first scene we learn that he had been lured away, conscripted or press-ganged into national service; villainy had made him "turn [...] sailor" (Jerrold 1829, 5). Therefore, this tableau in Act II might be seen as a dramatic form of retribution for what had happened to William before the play began. Buried in the middle of the play, this scene serves also to prefigure the play's conclusion, when William will be released from his own arrest.

But before we can understand that conclusion, a brief plot summary would be helpful: Susan has been left at home while her husband William is away at sea. The quintessentially melodramatic heroine, she is beset from all sides. The chief villain, the smuggler, wants to 'marry' her and 'have' her for his own (a melodramatic euphemism, the desire to 'have' a woman clearly equates sexual predation with property ownership; correlatively, a woman's virtue represents her self-possession). To make matters worse, Susan's uncle, who is also her landlord, threatens to evict her for non-payment of rent unless she submits to the smuggler's desire. In other words, the woman is threatened from within the family as well as from without. Thus, through the figure of the beset woman, villainy within the family is made analogous to villainy against the nation-state and its borders.

This is quite a thematic pile-up. Melodramatic plots are famously overdetermined in this way; and this form of overloaded plot construction emphasises political significance while at the same time obscuring it. By giving so many reasons for Susan's social oppression, the play can foreground first one issue and then another, declining to construct a coherent argument about their relation, yet at the same time creating a sense of overwhelming social oppression.

Into this already complex situation, William comes home on shore leave. He overhears the smuggler propositioning his wife. Not long

afterward, he sees another man attempting to molest her. This man, too, would 'have' Susan for his own. His drunken cries are utterly conventional: "you shall be mine! [...] Your cries are vain! Resistance useless!" (Jerrold 1829, 29-30). William strikes this rapacious drunkard, whose back has been turned. But alas, as spectators know, he is Captain Crosstree, the Captain of William's own ship, who falls. For this tableau the stage direction reads: "*William turns away horror struck - Susan falls on her knees, the Sailors bend over the Captain*" (30). Thus, Act II ends in a sentimental tableau of mourning; yet this is also a moment of terrible suspense, even horror. What if the Captain has been killed?

The tableau concluding Act II is carefully choreographed in relation to the music, so that it unfolds in stages. At first the music (*allegro*) reflects William's heroic attempt to rescue his wife; then an *adagio* ensues to accompany the touching picture of the Captain's body, cradled in the sailors' arms. The music for this second static moment cites Charles Dibdin's "The Sailor's Return" in a key bespeaking "manly vigor" (Pisani 2014, 100-1). Here the music conveys pathos and dignity, as William silently accepts the consequences of his action. In other words, the carefully orchestrated stages of the tableau separate and draw out its several aspects of significance as well as the several phases of feeling inspired by it, while showing that one tableau can, within its own unfolding, incorporate the overall narrative form of serial discontinuity.

At the beginning of Act III, we learn that Captain Crosstree has survived. But the 22nd article of war mandates the execution of any sailor who strikes his superior officer, so William is condemned to death. In the Court Martial scene, he pleads with the court to acknowledge his state-imposed self-division: "your honours, whilst it is your duty to condemn the sailor, may [...] respect the husband" (Jerrold 1829, 37). The stage picture represents the State in all its power, with the Union Jack flying over the proceedings. The Admiral and the other judges do acknowledge and sympathise with William's double bind. But the law must be interpreted strictly, for "a necessary discipline" must be upheld in order to avoid setting a "dangerous precedent" (35). The sentencing of William directly follows: he shall be "hanged at the fore-yard-arm of this his Majesty's ship" (37). William kneels again, as he did at the end of Act II, in response to this pronouncement, once more accepting his fate in a tableau of manly submission to the State.

The play ends with a quick series of tableaux that again enact melodrama's overall form of serial discontinuity, poised between stage picture and dramatic action, interruption and fluidity. A jerky procession toward the gallows halts in a tableau of prayer, then moves forward again before the final scene, which takes place on a platform. In other words, William stands upon a stage-on-the-stage, with

spectators from the full range of naval hierarchy there as witnesses to his execution. Thus, the play makes it clear that William quite specifically *performs* the act of submission to the State (emphasis mine). Music swells. At the *fortissimo* eruption from the orchestra of “True Courage,” whose invocation and defence of manly tears the audience members would have known well, many audience members did indeed burst into tears (Pisani 2014, 102).

The pageantry of the procession culminates in the final tableau, for of course William is saved at the last minute. A document has been discovered on the body of the villain, whose corpse has been pulled up from under the sea. Captain Crosstree rushes on stage with the exonerating document, which certifies that William had been officially discharged from naval service. Captain Crosstree had requested his discharge long before, and thus the papers are “dated back”. In other words, William had already been discharged from the Navy when he struck Captain Crosstree, who explains: “When William struck me he was not the king’s sailor - I was not his officer” (Jerrold 1829, 43). William’s social identity had already changed, and was simply awaiting the revelation of its official writ of transformation to be recognised.

The play quickly concludes with another complex tableau that unfolds in several stages, framed by music. The Admiral proclaims: “He is free!” and *the seamen give three cheers*; then William leaps down from the platform where he had been prepared to hang. Finally, the Captain brings Susan on stage and gives her to William (Jerrold 1829, 43). No longer drunk, the Captain too has been socially transformed. The sudden feeling of relief engendered by this quick and tricky resolution to the plot perhaps obscures its compressed political significance, for the concluding tableau simultaneously represents William’s release from subjection to the State and the restoration of his marriage, itself explicitly mediated by an agent of the State (since the Captain physically hands Susan back to William). Another way to put this would be to say: William’s masculine self-division has been resolved - his duties no longer conflict - and he is returned to his status as a private, domestic citizen. This social transformation is expressed in the final tableau, which shows us exactly how the transition back to civilian life must be performed; it must be officially mediated by the State’s agent, and by an official document. If in the end the Captain is redeemed and William is free, the play’s messy and frightening middle shows that justice easily might not have been done. The pat, sudden, tricky endings of melodrama often work this way, and the stately pausing of the unfolding tableaux allows spectators to feel relief while also pausing to recall the class- and gender-based social dangers that have suddenly been resolved; and yet, the naval hierarchy has been shown to be drunkenly erratic, and the law has been shown to be rigidly unjust.

3 Social Realism: The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana by Dion Boucicault

The Octoroon, first performed in New York (Winter Garden Theater, 1859), was presciently critical of the notion that ‘race’ could be visually registered and recognised. The plot depends on the visual, pictorial conventions of melodrama in order to pursue its critique, and the play’s tableaux should be understood within this context. The central tableau, the famous sensation scene that realistically depicts a slave auction during which the body of the Octoroon is spectacularly displayed for sale, had become generically familiar during this decade, ever since Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) as well as its many theatrical adaptations and parodies. Later in the play, the villain is exposed by a photograph, which serves as an embedded tableau. In other words, this play proposes the still picture as a form of documentary evidence, the new technology of photography updating the older technology of the tableau realisation. The play explicitly considers what kind of realism photography might secure.

A brief introduction to the plot: Zoe, the Octoroon, has been raised as part of the Peyton family, the owners of Plantation Terrebonne. Everyone knows that her father was the late Judge Peyton and her mother was his quadroon slave. Thus, Zoe was born a slave. But neither Zoe’s speech nor her physical appearance suggests that she is anything but the daughter of the house, whom Mrs. Peyton accepts and loves. In this way, the play revisits melodrama’s perennial interest in illegitimacy within the family, but now, dangerously, the issue is raised under the aegis of slavery. George Peyton, the Judge’s nephew, visits Louisiana from Paris and soon falls in love with Zoe. He cannot discern her mixed-race status by any visible means; nor would he be able to understand Louisiana’s anti-miscegenation laws, coming as he does from a European metropolis where such laws would have been inconceivable. This is the logic of his character: to be the cultured outsider who does not know, cannot perceive, and must be told of Zoe’s status. She does eventually confess to him that she is “an unclean thing – forbidden by the laws [...] an Octoroon!” He had not noticed nor could he have interpreted the very slight visible sign that she points out, the “blueish tinge” in her fingernails and eyes (Boucicault [1859] 2014, 42-3).

Her melodramatic revelation of identity does not naturalise “racial distinctions”, as Sarah Meer has claimed (Meer 2009, 88). Rather, it does the opposite, positing blatant racial distinctions and simultaneously denying them, since the audience would see that a cultured outsider finds them inconceivable. Zoe’s language registers her internalised acceptance of the situation, which clearly reaches the point of self-loathing, but her point of view does not represent the point of view of the play as a whole. After all, melodrama as a genre

is devoted to revealing injustice and social oppression, especially injustices brought about by the law itself. And in this case, one visual convention of the genre, physiognomic legibility (the principle that social identity can be discerned immediately by sight) is subjected to harsh critique as a way of challenging the notion that 'race' exists in the register of the visible. Since George cannot interpret Zoe's physiognomic characteristics, the very idea of 'race' is destabilised through this metageneric critique of a melodramatic convention.

The late Judge Peyton represents melodrama's conventionally absent, corrupt, or incompetent authority figure, for, in addition to his sexually transgressive past, he has been financially reckless, driving Terrebonne into debt with the result that the villainous ex-overseer M'Closky now owns a large part of it. Worse, Judge Peyton had intended to free his daughter Zoe, but her "free papers" turn out to be null and void because of the mortgage on the plantation. Zoe's social identity is suddenly transformed by the failure of a document; against everyone's expectations, she reverts to the status of a slave. When the slaves must be auctioned to pay the debt on the plantation, she must be sold as well. Again, as in *Black Ey'd Susan*, a forceful analogy develops between the land and the woman's body as two forms of property; but that analogy is shockingly intensified here within the explicit context of property in persons. Thus, the villain's conventional intent - "Fair or foul, I'll have her [...] she's mine! [...] if I sink every dollar I'm worth in her purchase, I'll own that Octoroon" - represents a horrible literalisation of melodramatic sexual predation (Boucicault [1859] 2014, 37).

In the Act III tableau sensation scene at the centre of the play, the slave auction, Zoe's body is spectacularly posed on a table and she is sold to M'Closky for twenty-five thousand dollars. As in the concluding tableau of *Black Ey'd Susan*, this scene adopts the structure of a play-within-a-play, with Zoe posed upon a stage-upon-the-stage for other slaves and potential buyers alike to see, the audience within the play standing as surrogate for the audience within the theatre. The tableau visually frames the moment of her social transformation from daughter of the house to slave (and sex slave). This tableau of injustice shockingly represents a sensational reality that most audience members would not otherwise have seen. Joseph Roach, writing of "Slave Spectacles and Tragic Octoroons" positions this slave auction scene within its immediate historical context (Roach 1996, 211-14).

The trial scene that follows in Act IV resolves another plot thread: the murder of Paul, a slave boy who had been loved by all, and the only friend to Wahnotee, the native American character. When he was murdered, Paul had been sitting on a mail bag that contained an eagerly-awaited letter from a Liverpool bank, a document that would relieve the debt on Terrebonne. The villain M'Closky killed Paul in

order to seize that letter, preventing it from saving the plantation and, by extension, preventing it from freeing Zoe so that he can buy her. During the trial scene, M'Closky tries to pin the murder on Wahnotee, nearly provoking a scene of mob violence. Out of this lawless scene emerges the exonerating document: a photograph of the crime itself, taken by a camera that had been on the spot and equipped with "a self-developing liquid" when Paul was murdered (Boucicault [1859] 2014, 38). (Photography was still new enough that this premise could be believed.) Paul had been alone, posing for his photograph while sitting on the mail bag, when the camera recorded M'Closky in the very act of killing him. While a tableau grouping of characters look at this photographic tableau in amazement, the attempt to frame the Native American can now be seen for what it was: a racist attempt at scapegoating.

Let us pause to think about the use of a photograph as an embedded formal representation of the melodramatic tableau. Just as the stage-within-a-stage disposition of the slave auction scene in Act III enacts metatheatrical self-consciousness, so, too, this scene presents a meta-generic meditation on the melodramatic technique of interrupting the narrative with a still picture. Since Paul had been posing in stillness for his photograph to be taken, the photograph can be seen as a later tableau of the same scene, a commentary on the serial pictorialisation of melodrama's narrative form. When the photograph is revealed, spectators would remember the tableau of Paul posing for that photograph earlier in the play, a scene now re-presented in documentary form, certifying what had happened in the 'real life' of Act II. Here the sense of realism is underlined retroactively, through visual reiteration. The important role of documentary evidence in melodrama is well-known; and here we have the new idea that a still picture might be technologically recorded, in order to preserve a moment from the past that took place in the absence of human witnesses. Observing the photograph as a new form of still picture reminds us that this convention already existed as one of melodrama's aesthetic techniques; the traditional tableau momentarily sums up the dramatic action as it unfolds, revealing something that cannot be easily discerned during the onward rush of narrative time. This photograph performs that same function in a new key.

At the interface of technology and art, the photograph in *The Octoroon* shows that the melodramatic tableau has developed from its original allusion to painting toward other pictorial technologies. What in the twenty-first century would seem a naïve belief that "the apparatus can't lie" serves in this play to expresses a residual Providentialism, for the explanation given is that "the eye of the Eternal [...] the blessed sun in heaven" struck "upon this plate the image of the deed" (Boucicault [1859] 2014, 65). At the same time, the photograph is shown to M'Closky with language that shows the play's

formal self-consciousness of its pictorial dramaturgy: “Your accuser is that *pictor* of the crime – let that speak”, and: “Here you are, in the very *attitude* of your crime!” (66, 65, italics added). Indeed, this play wittily casts the camera as a *deus ex machina*, between Providence and artifice, with the emphasis more on ‘machine’ than on ‘god’. Documentary evidence now takes the form of a recorded picture, a work of mechanical reproduction in the age of art.¹

Thus, I would say that Boucicault attempts to separate the issue of slavery (on which this play is ambivalent) from its clear critique of ‘race’ as a system of visual markers, and to pursue the latter. The concluding tableau of *The Octoroon* dwells on this political point in the American version of the play. Zoe poisons herself and dies in her lover’s arms, a tragic outcome that realistically focuses attention on the legal prohibition of their marriage in Louisiana at that time. The familiar tableau of mourning closes the American version of the play as Zoe dies: “(*George lowers her head gently. Kneels. Others form picture*)”. Then the flats draw apart to reveal Paul’s grave in the backstage, with M’Closky lying dead upon it and Wahnotee “*standing triumphantly over him*” (Boucicault [1859] 2014, 75). This double tableau represents retributive, vigilante justice for the murder of Paul in the background, but no justice at all for the lovers in the foreground, only the terrible injustice of the contemporary American law.

However, in London, where slavery had been abolished many years before, audiences protested (Adelphi Theatre, 1861). They found the American tragic ending unacceptable, and Boucicault was forced to provide a properly melodramatic happy ending instead. “The Octoroon dies no more!” exulted the reviewer for *The Times* (cited in Boucicault 1859, 94), while Boucicault claimed that the new ending was “composed by the Public, and [merely] edited by the Author” (Playbill for Adelphi Theatre 1861, cited in Boucicault [1859] 2014, 93). In one English version of the concluding tableau, “*George enters, bearing Zoe in his arms – all the [other] Characters rush on*”, forming an array of American races and ethnicities, while, with “*noise increasing*”, a steamship explodes in the background (116). Thus, Boucicault answered his English critics with an over-the-top sensational “*grand Tableau*” in the tradition of the grand allegorical tableaux of earlier stage genres. What is allegorised here is a political point. In view of the play’s original opening date in 1859, four days after John Brown had been executed for his leadership of the anti-slavery raid on Harper’s Ferry, and more or less on the eve of the American Civil War, we might say that Boucicault represents the

¹ My quick allusion to Benjamin’s famous essay is meant to make a serious point about the historical succession in technologies of representation: painting, theatrical tableaux, photography, and film.

political feeling of his precise historical moment, a vision (or fantasy) of cultural democracy in the foreground that is threatened by violence in the background. By 1861, when the play was performed in London, America would have been even further along on this eruptive, violent, and disillusioning historical trajectory.

4 Psychological Realism: *The Bells* by Leopold Lewis

In our discussion of *Black Ey'd Susan*, we have seen one tableau unfolding through several phases, choreographed and orchestrated to the music and mirroring within itself the serial discontinuity of melodrama's overall narrative form; and in our discussion of *The Octoroon*, we have seen the concluding double tableau using forestage and backstage to represent two different and ironically juxtaposed political points. At a late moment in the history of melodrama as a stage genre, *The Bells* (Lyceum Theatre, London, 1871) employs both of these formal techniques in order to express psychological realism – an important dimension of novelistic realism, to say the least, but one that melodrama, too, can depict. Specifically, in the 'vision scene' that concludes Act I, the interaction of forestage and backstage visually represents an intrusion, within present consciousness, of guilty secrets from the past. Those secrets are suddenly disclosed in a tableau – in order to make the point that traumatic memories can appear suddenly, unbidden, and that they have realistic force in the external, material world, even though they are presumed invisible. Since externalised revelation in general is part of the logic of melodramatic form, the notion that the genre would develop ways to visualise psychological interiority makes a good deal of sense, especially since, as Brooks reminds us, melodrama is "the drama of recognition," close in its aims to the psychoanalytic understanding of "the dynamics of repression and the return of the repressed" (Brooks 1995, 201-2). But there is a historical point in the development of the genre to be made here as well, for this technique of representing the invisible derives from Gothic melodrama, a sub-genre in which ghosts and spectres had been realised since the late eighteenth century; in *The Bells* those ghosts and spectres have been succeeded by psychic phenomena, for these are two forms of 'haunting' within a historical process of secularisation and internalisation.

The Bells, an English adaptation of *Le Juif Polonais* (The Polish Jew), a play by Émile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian (Théâtre Cluny, Paris, 1867), starred the young Henry Irving in his first star turn. A bit of plot summary would be helpful before we move directly to the magnificent concluding tableau of Act I. The main character Mathias struggles with a haunting sense of guilt for a crime he committed precisely fifteen years before the action of the play begins.

He murdered a Polish Jew in order to steal the Jew's money, and his wealthy burgomaster's life has been founded on that secret crime. Over the course of Act I, his memory of the crime frequently returns, represented in the music, which imitates the sound of the bells from the murdered Jew's sleigh. Spectators understand that the bells are meant to be understood as a psychological effect, because none of the other characters on stage can hear them. At the end of Act I, alone in his residence, Mathias attempts to stop the sound of the bells, while noting (in true Gothic fashion) that it is "the very night, the very hour" on which he had murdered the Jew fifteen years before (Mayer 1980, 49).

He paces nervously in the forestage, while a tableau in the backstage opens, revealing the scene of the murder and thus externalising Mathias's guilty memory. In the backstage tableau, Mathias in the past (played by a body double) stalks the Jew in his sleigh. At first, Mathias in the present, who is facing the audience, does not see the tableau behind him, but then he turns toward the backstage and is suddenly confronted by a vision of his crime. At first, the tableau he sees is utterly still. But then it suddenly moves, when the Jew turns his head to fix his gaze directly upon Mathias. It is as if the Jew had suddenly come back to life, the return of the repressed figured as the reanimation of the dead. As Mathias gazes inward – both inward toward the backstage and inward in the psychological sense – he arches backward, cries out, and falls, to the crescendo of the bells. The curtain, too, falls as silence descends.

His body in the forestage reflected by the body double playing his past self in the backstage, Mathias experiences his self-division. Thus, in addition to representing interiority, this tableau realises something else that cannot be visually represented: the split subject. When the Jew turns toward Mathias, they enact the melodramatic recognition tableau, fixatedly staring at one another. But importantly, Mathias recognises himself; in the psychological sense as well as the visual, he sees and 'realises' what he has done. The tableau explicitly suggests the relation of sight to understanding, even the relation of vision to Vision. This is a beautiful, mature example of tableau effects in melodrama, with its meaningful use of forestage and backstage; with its unfolding through phases of stillness, movement, and stillness once again, a perfect illustration in miniature of the serial discontinuity of melodrama overall; with the balletic turning of the single figure inward toward the interior of the stage, where his own interiority has been projected; and with the orchestrated correlation between the music of the bells and the revelation of the tableau.²

² This tableau, I believe, could be usefully compared to the workings of free indirect discourse in the novel, but that would be material for another essay.

Mathias's body, poised to fall just inside the curtain, takes a position at the liminal edge of the stage, precisely where the proscenium arch marks the fourth wall. His body, in other words, marks the boundary between spectacle and spectators, so that he functions as a surrogate for the audience's gaze; audience members look at and through Mathias looking at the picture of himself in the past. Thus, spectators are fixed into his subject position, not only by virtue of his bodily position at the edge of the stage, but also, and more importantly, by virtue of the music of the bells that fills the ambient space of the theatre, enjoining spectators to hear what only Mathias can hear, and to feel his guilt and rising anxiety. The by now conventional boundary of the fourth wall becomes in this scene a highly permeable membrane, a membrane through which the music can easily pass.

This is self-division represented from the inside out – not, as in *Black Ey'd Susan* or *The Octoroon*, self-division imposed from without, by a socially-determined role thwarting private inclinations, but instead, self-division imposed from within, in the effort to act the part of the upstanding citizen while hiding a criminal past. Crucially, in *The Bells* the same character plays the roles both of hero and villain. A sub-plot about mesmerism functions in the play to emphasise Mathias's fear of losing control, for he fears that the mesmerist will trick him into betraying his guilty secret. Another sub-plot focuses the issue of his attempt to evade the law, for Mathias plans for his daughter Annette to marry Christian, a Quartermaster of the Gendarmes, and this plan is explicitly represented as an attempt to internalise the law within his family, including his presumption that Christian would defend him, should the secret ever come out (Mayer 1980, 60-1, 66, 70-1, 74-5). However, Christian instead attempts to solve the crime and thus becomes a threatening external figure. As Christian comes close to figuring out the secret, Mathias bursts out with a "*laugh of hysteria*" at the idea that he might be suspected, and Act II ends with his "*hysterical shriek*" as he dances madly to the music of the bells (Mayer 1980, 58).

In a scene that clearly shows metatheatrical awareness of the tableau's power to externalise the truth, toward the end of Act II Sozel, the serving maid, tells the story of a book she is reading, in which a band of robbers had been implicated by a piece of forensic evidence long after their crime had been committed. "Look, Burgomaster, there's the *picture*", says Sozel (Mayer 1980, 55; emphasis added), as she holds the book illustration up for him to see – an allusion to the tableau that functions here very much as the photograph does in *The Octoroon*. Mathias knocks the book out of her hands, refusing to look at the picture, refusing to see or understand. In other words, in Act II the deductions made by an agent of law enforcement, the hypothetical power of forensic evidence and visual illustration, the

idea of mesmerism, and Mathias's own hysterical outbursts join to show that the fabric of his self-control is unravelling.

The dream sequence in Act III, another trial scene, makes these issues clear, and serves as the conclusion to the melodrama. Again, the forestage, Mathias's present-day bedroom, is carefully distinguished from the backstage, where the dream sequence and the trial will take place. Mathias withdraws into his alcove bed-chamber, drawing its curtains and thus enacting his turn inward; once inside his curtained bed, unobserved by spectators, he can use a passageway in the back of the alcove that allows him suddenly to re-appear in the backstage, dressed as he was in the past. A black back-cloth that had served as the back wall of his bedroom is raised, revealing a vision of the courtroom in the backstage behind a gauze, which makes the scene seem eerie and dreamlike.³ In Mathias's dream, the Mesmerist forces him to re-enact his crime. Using the present tense, Mathias describes the murder. Then, still dreaming, he is freed from the Mesmerist's influence and forced to read a document on which the Court Clerk had recorded his coerced confession. Since spectators had already seen, in the Act I tableau, what they have now seen Mathias act out during the time of the trial, we can see that the secret comes out more and more explicitly over the course of the play - first as tableau, then as dramatic action, then as a documentary written record of confession. At the end of the dream, Mathias is sentenced to hang. He returns to present-day reality, emerging from his curtained alcove in the forestage, his "*eyes [...] fixed, and his appearance deathly and haggard*", for he is still feeling the effects of his dream. "Take the rope from my neck!" he gasps, and though the audience can see that there is no rope around his neck, nevertheless he "*struggles and dies*" - at which point the other characters kneel around him, forming the conventional tableau of mourning (Mayer 1980, 76).

Trial scenes have figured prominently in all three melodramas examined in this essay. In this one, the self-divided protagonist has punished himself, psychologically speaking; his harrowing experience of guilt ends by killing him. Speaking formally, however, we could say that he has been punished by the tableau and the music - the melodramatic formal conventions that have externalised his interiority, forcing him to see, hear, realise, and understand. Justice has been administered through the powerful coordination of melodramatic content and form.

3 For details of the stagecraft that made this scene possible, see Mayer 1980, 62, 67, 92.

5 Coda

The Melodramatic Imagination by Peter Brooks (1976) brought melodrama to our attention in several bold new ways. The study of English melodrama had already begun, with important work by Michael Booth (1965), Frank Rahill (1967), and others. Nevertheless, Brooks's study marked a breakthrough. First, he emphasised the post-Revolutionary process of secularisation as the general context within which melodrama should be understood. Melodrama becomes, he argued, "the principal mode for uncovering, demonstrating, and making operative the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era" (Brooks 1995, 15). Furthermore, the semiotic system of melodrama - which he analysed under critical headings that still resonate today, 'the poetics of astonishment', 'the text of muteness', 'the moral occult', 'the mode of excess' - provides the foundation for both psychoanalysis and early film.

Second, Brooks's ultimate aim was to expose the workings of melodrama in realist fiction, especially that of Balzac and James. That is why his title focuses our attention on 'the melodramatic imagination' rather than on 'melodrama': because, though it begins with the stage genre, it moves outward toward historical extensions of melodrama into other modes and genres. In Brooks's view, the realist novels of Balzac and James use melodrama's 'mode of excess' as a resource to accomplish effects that cannot be accomplished in a strictly realist modality. Balzac and James import into the novel a metaphysical drama of good and evil that uses melodramatic conventions to reach beyond language itself in the search for the secularised 'moral occult'. I follow Brooks in seeing melodrama as the "central poetry" of modernity even today (Brooks 1995, 200), though, I fear, very few people these days could still sustain a belief in the occulted moral universe that supposedly - in the view of nineteenth-century melodrama, at least - undergirded civil society as it grew further and further away from the pre-Revolutionary, pre-Enlightenment dependence on absolutism and Providence.

After Brooks, many scholars have undertaken to explore the relation between melodrama and the realist novel, and they have done so in vastly different ways. I will mention briefly only a few. Works by David Marshall (1985), Joseph Litvak (1992), and Emily Allen (2003) focus on how logics and scenes of theatre and theatricality are represented figurally within the novel. J. Jeffrey Franklin (1999) considers the nineteenth-century novel and the popular theatre as competing cultural forms, with the novel rising as theatre is seen to decline; whereas David Kurnick argues for the positive role of the theatre in novels by Thackeray, Eliot, James, and Joyce, all writers who had aspired to write for the theatre and had failed. The realist novel is not so much about interiority as we have thought, Kurnick argues, but

instead is about dissatisfactions with interiority, and about the desire for a collective sociality represented by the theatre. Fredric Jameson, in *The Antinomies of Realism*, examines the relation of melodrama specifically (not of theatricality in general) to novelistic realism in ways that I find impressive, admirable, and congenial, even though his focus is different from mine. His dialectical reasoning brings the two modes of representation together, each as the internalised 'other' of the other. I too see melodrama and the novel developing side by side, and intertwined, two titanic bourgeois genres sharing aims, yet differing in forms, over the course of the nineteenth century. My focus has been on the form of melodrama.

But I do hope that in this essay I have shown something of their shared aims. Melodrama, like the novel, is dedicated to the non-idealised, 'lower' world of common folk who speak in prose. On the most general level, I have illustrated the fact that melodrama has its own ways of representing social history as well as psychological interiority. In the operation of integrating these two different orientations of realism - the social and the psychological - I have suggested the complex differences between dramatic presentation and representation by a narrator. The switch points between outward and inward views are operated in the novel by free indirect discourse, and in melodrama by the tableaux. In both cases, readers or spectators are asked to feel and understand that their orientation to the representation has shifted - subtly in the case of free indirect discourse and flagrantly in the case of melodramatic tableaux. This intriguing idea awaits another occasion for fuller development.

Similarly, the construction of common and middle-class characters should receive further comment as an element of form (and for that, see Williams 2018, 212-5). Melodramatic characters are typified, while characters in the realist novel are individualised; but they are always individualised against the background assumption of the type, whether that type be construed as social class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality (or any other category). Thus, novel and melodrama work together to think through modern sociological categories and the problem of representing a sociological understanding of relations between the individual and social groups. Realism in the eighteenth-century English novel worked against type-formations of allegory and romance, whereas for the nineteenth century, I would argue, melodrama provides the salient types.

As for forms of plot, the two genres share a wide range of interests, which might broadly be called domestic: generational inheritance, marriage, hopes of rising or threats of falling in the social scale, revelations of identity that had hitherto remained hidden or untold, relations between the nation and its internal and external others. While the melodramatic happy ending might seem to offend against realism's principle of probability, it can be defended on several

grounds. I would say that the sense of social urgency represented in melodrama, especially early, is so great that the sudden, contrived happy ending was meant to afford relief from a plot that forcibly showed how impossible it might be to achieve justice in the modern world. Then, too, what might be seen as 'probable' was always changing: orphans, refugees, and other displaced persons abounded after the Napoleonic Wars (Buckley 2009); the hope for justice or the belief in something like Brooks's "essential moral universe" (Brooks 1995, 15) was faltering; and social relations were changing, as the system of status gradually gave way to the system of class. Thus, the novel and melodrama both obsess about who is a 'real' gentleman or lady, and both genres work hard to explore the ways that education, speech patterns, and manners – all forms of 'acting' in the social sense of that word – could determine class position. Through the working of these two genres, nobility becomes a matter of morals and behavior, not a matter of inherited status. The novel and melodrama both reflect and help to create this new social organisation.

The present essay has focused on melodramatic form, and especially on the workings of the tableau. It is of interest in this respect to understand that many of the greatest nineteenth-century English realists made use of the tableau – often, though not always, within situations that any reader would recognise as melodramatic. The novels of Dickens, whose work some scholars would see as merely proto-realist, shows us very clearly the nineteenth-century novel thoroughly absorbed in and separating itself from melodrama. His early novels adhere quite closely to melodramatic form, including typed characters, melodramatic plots, and tableaux. Eliot, too, despite her manifest aversion to melodrama, used its conventions in every one of her novels, frequently deploying the tableau for brilliant suspenseful effects (see Williams 2004). Within ongoing narration, the pause wrought by a tableau can achieve many of the same effects as it does in stage melodrama. This differential between narration and tableau is decidedly different from the narratological distinction between 'narration' and 'description', most famously adumbrated by Georg Lukács (Lukács [1936] 1971). While Lukács reasonably privileges narration as the key to the integrated totality of the realist novel, my point has been that formal elements of melodrama are part of that integration.

Focusing on the tableau can help us to see that melodramatic realism and melodramatic form have influenced a great many other genres and media up to the present time. For example, the narrative form of intermittent pictorialisation continues well after stage melodrama has been supplanted by film. Early film adopts the gestural acting style, the live music, and many of the familiar plots directly from stage melodrama. But the film strip also adopts the form of serial discontinuity, composed as it is of individual still shots

(tableaux), arranged in a sequence, which yield the illusion of motion when projected at a carefully-calibrated speed against a light source. Brooks has suggested that the title cards of silent film replace the tableau moments of stage melodrama, while Flitterman-Lewis has suggested that close ups of a female face fill that function (Brooks 1995, 63; Flitterman-Lewis 1994, 10). In later film, continuity editing obscures the interruptive effect of serial discontinuity, but viewers may be reminded of its history whenever the ‘flicker’ of projected film is represented, or whenever a moving picture freezes the frame (in an imitation of the photographic moment, for example).

Strip books, comic books, and graphic novels participate in this narrative form as well, all relying on pictures arranged in a sequence and separated from one another. Even digital recording, with its pause button, preserves the capacity to stop the dramatic action with a still picture. In other words, media shift notwithstanding, many of our current forms of narrative hark back to the tableau freeze-frames of serial discontinuity, offering readers and viewers the opportunity to pause and observe the construction of melodramatic realism in action.

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Section 2

Miscellany. On 'Adaptation'

Salvaging Patriarchy in the 2018 Film Adaptation of *Tomb Raider*

Andrei Nae
Universitatea din București, România

Abstract This article focuses on the recent film adaptation of the 2013 *Tomb Raider* video game. Its main goal is to show that, despite the significant changes that the plot undergoes when transitioning from video game to feature film, the adaptation remains faithful to the conservative gender politics of its ludic source text, in the sense that in both the game and the film Lara must struggle to maintain patriarchal order. While in the game the female protagonist has to fulfil her late father's unfinished archaeological (in fact colonial) project and redeem his name, in the film she has to compensate for her father's masculinity crisis. The resolution of the plot coincides with a resolution of the crisis of masculinity, which reinstates the gender power relations privileging masculinity. Furthermore, this article shows that Lara's struggle to re-establish patriarchy in the film's storyworld coerces her to adopt a colonial attitude with respect to otherness. By performing phallic masculinity, Lara Croft acts as an agent of colonialism whose intervention in foreign territories and cultures is rendered by the film providential for the emancipation of the native populations.

Keywords Masculinity in crisis. Filmic adaptation of video games. Patriarchy. Colonialism.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Visual Representation of Lara Croft. – 3 Lara Croft as an Agent of Patriarchy. – 4 Lara Croft as an Agent of Colonialism. – 5 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

The *Tomb Raider* video games are a hallmark series of the action-adventure genre which has spanned into a transmedia franchise including films and comics. The release of Core Design's 1996 *Tomb Raider* for Sega Saturn, PlayStation, PC, and other platforms, represents a milestone in gaming history that not only set the standard for future action-adventure games, but was also one of the first games to feature a female protagonist which defies the traditional roles of passive victim or a ludic reward which until that point had dominated the representation of women in video games.¹ In the 1996 *Tomb Raider* and its sequels, Lara Croft, the female protagonist of the games, is a strong, confident and playable character who has the ability to overcome the obstacles ahead, and prevail against all adversities without the providential help of a masculine figure. The cinematic incarnation of Lara Croft in the films *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Simon West, 2001) and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider - The Cradle of Life* (Jan de Bont, 2003) maintains the agency of the video game character who is capable of single-handedly saving the day.

Despite the agentic role fulfilled by Lara Croft in both the games and the films, her visual representation and her actions in the films' and games' storyworlds have been criticised for reinforcing patriarchal and colonial ideologies (Breger 2008; du Preez 2000; Kennedy 2002; Mikula 2003). As a response to this criticism, the new *Tomb Raider* video game series, entitled "Survivor", which debuted with the eponymous release by Crystal Dynamics in 2013 and continued with the sequels *Rise of the Tomb Raider* (2015) and *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* (2018), provides a version of Lara Croft which tones down the oversexualisation characteristic of previous games and films and evinces an attitude towards cultural otherness that is allegedly less Eurocentric. The 2018 film adaptation, *Tomb Raider*, based on the 2013 video game release, is also a reboot of the film series that attempts to recalibrate its approach to gender and racial otherness along the coordinates set up by the video game it adapts.

Notwithstanding that attempt, the present article argues that the film adaptation maintains the patriarchal and colonial ideologies of the previous films and games and highlights the means by which these two ideologies are reinforced. In order to reveal the ideologies

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1 I am referring to single player action-adventure video games that feature a female protagonist. As Esther MacCallum Stewart (2008) argues, female characters had already become common in beat'em up two-player games.

embedded in the film, my argument will be structured as follows. First I elaborate on the representation of femininity in visual media and how the specific representation of Lara Croft relates to this broader context. My next step is to investigate the gender politics of the film adaptation in relation to that of the source. My analysis then focuses on the issue of masculinity in crisis and how the unfolding of the plot is tantamount to a resolution of the identity crisis experienced by Lara Croft's father. By drawing on Kaja Silverman's work on (alternative) masculinities, in this section I argue that Lara has to stand in for her father and fight Trinity, the antagonist organisation of the film, until her father eventually overcomes his own crisis and becomes the main narrative agent dictating the course of action in the storyworld. This sequence of events renders Lara's position as main narrative agent unnatural and reinforces masculinity as the standard. Finally, I show that Lara's attempt to restore patriarchal order dovetails with a colonial attitude towards racial otherness. In a manner similar to the storyworld of the "Survivor" series, the film stages a conflict between modern imperialism, represented by Lara Croft, and neo-imperialism, represented by the antagonist organisation, Trinity. Lara's triumph over Trinity, as well as her moral superiority (as constructed in the film), suggests that modern imperialism is an ethical form of colonialism that is providential for the emancipation of the racial other. Taking all this into consideration, the present article concludes that, like the rebooted video game series, the 2018 film adaptation fails to adequately respond to the criticism of the film series's previous instalment and, in fact, finds new ways to reinforce patriarchy and colonialism.

2 The Visual Representation of Lara Croft

In the past thirty years, video games and cinema have developed a strong intermedial bond. While in the nineteen-eighties and especially the nineteen-nineties video games were very keen on imitating the form and aesthetics of film, the last two decades have witnessed a growing number of films that reshape video games (Larsen 2017). The evolution of the relation between the two media applies not only to the way their aesthetics have changed over the past years, but also to the diegetic content of the two. If earlier video games borrowed their narrative content from film, now it is films that rely on video games in the construction of their storyworlds. Given the relation between the two media, before investigating the representation of Lara Croft in the 2018 *Tomb Raider* film, a brief insight into the history of representing women in video games and film is necessary.

Before the nineteen-eighties, often the representation of women in cinema had been structured by very rigid patriarchal norms. Female

characters were constructed in binary opposition to male ones. Women were usually passive characters and objects of male desire who, should they attempt to reject the gender roles assigned to them, were correspondingly punished. The action films of the nineteen-eighties saw a change in the standards regulating the representation of women on the cinematic screen. Ellen Ripley, the protagonist of the first four *Alien* films, played by Sigourney Weaver, is regarded by many as a milestone in the new agency that female characters were beginning to enact in action films (Carr 2002, 172-3; Clover 1992-2015, 40, 51-2; Tasker 1993, 15). The showcase example was the 1986 film *Aliens*, a sequel to the film *Alien* released in 1979 and directed by Ridley Scott. While in *Alien* Ripley is still vulnerable, though not a passive victim, in *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986) she becomes an agentive self-reliant character who is pro-active in fighting off the alien threat (Tasker 1993, 15). A similar influential character that challenged more traditional standards of filmic representations of women was Sarah Connor, played by Linda Hamilton, in James Cameron's 1991 film *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, the sequel to *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984). In a manner similar to Ellen Ripley in the first two *Alien* films, Sarah Connor undergoes a transition from a weak and helpless female character in need of masculine protection in *The Terminator* to a strong independent self-trained fighter in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*. Although the two female characters play an important part in reshaping the roles of women in film, these agentive roles are still framed within patriarchal discourse. Both Ripley and Connor adopt a tomboy look and feature a Ramboesque body (Tasker 1993, 15) which enable them "[to perform] masculinity through their use of muscles and weapons" (Brown 2011, 13).

However, not all action-film heroines have to adopt a masculine appearance in order to be granted narrative agency. Another strategy by means of which patriarchal discourse regulates female agency in action films is oversexualisation. In other words, cinema, and visual media in general, seem to be driven by a logic of compensation whereby women can enjoy narrative agency only inasmuch as they offer visual pleasure for the male audience in return. This is the case with the digital Lara Croft of the first two *Tomb Raider* video game series and the Lara Croft played by Angelina Jolie in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider - The Cradle of Life*. Drawing on Carol J. Clover (1992-2015), Jeffrey A. Brown claims that, rather than questioning traditional gender roles, overeroticised action heroines such as Lara Croft trigger "an easy oscillation between identifying with Lara Croft's masculine characteristics and objectifying her feminine form" (2011, 111). Brown further elaborates on the issue, claiming that patriarchal discourse is so deeply entrenched in our culture that adventure (fighting, jumping, puzzle solving, etc.) is always rendered masculine, while erotic form is rendered feminine.

While the pleasures of looking at Lara in the first *Tomb Raider* films are afforded by the linearity of cinema and the safe position of spectator as voyeur engulfed in the darkness of the theatre (Metz 2009, 704-5), the video games problematise Lara's role as the object of male erotic phantasies, despite the obvious intention of the game designers to provide a female character offering a wide range of visual pleasure to the player. Firstly, the early *Tomb Raider* games lacked the rendering capacities to simulate a 3D Lara Croft that would match the realism of Angelina Jolie's body on the cinema screen (Carr 2002, 175). By way of consequence, her polygonal over-the-top bodily proportions not only reflected patriarchal fantasies concerning the female body, but also flaunted the artificiality of such fantasies. Moreover, even the character in the games seems to be reluctant towards the player's scopophilia.² For instance, the ending cut-scene of *Tomb Raider II* (Core Design 1997) features Lara Croft about to enter the shower. Before undressing, she turns to the camera and asks the player "Don't you think you've seen enough?" after which she points her gun at the camera and shoots (du Preez 21). However, such moments of visual frustration would soon disappear with the release of further instalments in the two-thousands that offer a more realistic 3D simulation of a Lara that no longer raises awareness with respect to the artificiality of her representation/simulation.

Because of the criticism that the games and films have come under as a result of Lara's oversexualisation, as well as the current drive of mainstream games to adopt traits associated with high art, the rebooted *Tomb Raider* video games series features a Lara Croft whose eroticism is toned down. Instead of the infamous tank top-short trousers outfit that highlight the unnatural size of her breasts and waist, the protagonist's body in the new games has more natural proportions, while the protagonist's standard outfit is less revealing and more appropriate for the types of physical challenges she encounters throughout the games. The cover of the video game *Tomb Raider* (2013), the main source text for the film adaptation, features Lara Croft wearing a sleeveless shirt reminiscent of the earlier cropped tank top, but instead of the short trousers, she now wears cargo pants and mountain boots, and is armed with a climbing axe, a gun and her new signature weapon, the bow. Furthermore, Lara finds herself wounded before a cave entrance whose shadow partially obscures her body. While previous covers focused principally on Lara's overeroticised body, which dominated the picture, now more attention is given to the background which offers important diegetic

² Scopophilia, which literally means pleasure in looking, refers to the visual rhetoric of Hollywood films which imposes upon viewers a male gaze that obtains erotic visual pleasure from looking at the women represented as passive objects of desire (Mulvey 2009).

information about the storyworld of the game. Behind the wounded Lara there is a series of wreckages, which suggest that Lara's experience in *Tomb Raider* is similar to Robinson Crusoe - she is stranded on an island where she must fight for survival.

The theatrical poster of the 2018 *Tomb Raider* film maintains the themes and motifs of the video game cover, but adapts them to the norms of cinema. Since many film viewers choose to see a movie basing on its cast, theatrical posters usually make sure that the identity of the actor playing the leading role is highlighted. Consequently, the poster of *Tomb Raider* disregards the background in order to provide a close shot of Alicia Vikander, the actress playing Lara Croft. In keeping with its source, the visual representation of Lara Croft is far from the one of the previous two films featuring Angelina Jolie in the leading role. The new poster is no longer keen on turning the lead actress's body into an object of fetish, but merely conveys, instead, that the film belongs to the action genre. As in the game, Lara Croft in the film adaptation wears a sleeveless shirt, is wounded and patched, and carries a bow. If the previous two posters showed the entire body of Angelina Jolie in an attempt to capitalise on her status as a sex symbol of the early new millennium, the 2018 film frames only the upper part of Alicia Vikander's body.

Although the new game and film series seem to have renounced the oversexualisation of Lara Croft, the visual representation of the character is still regulated by patriarchal discourse. As already pointed out, typically the representation of action heroines has vacillated between the Ramboesque tomboy and the oversexualised action girl. The new Lara Croft does not challenge or break away from these patriarchal stereotypes, but combines the two: on the one hand, her portrayal links her to the Rambo type (like Rambo, she uses stealth to single-handedly take down entire enemy squads and her standard weapon is the bow, whose main quality is that it is silent), on the other, she is different from Ellen Ripley who, in order to save herself, denies her femininity. At the same time, the visual representation of Lara Croft strays from her earlier ones that can be seen as an embodiment of male fantasies and unnatural patriarchal beauty standards.

The fact Lara Croft is neither a tomboy nor an object of fetish does not prevent patriarchy from being a structuring element of her representation. The protagonist of the rebooted *Tomb Raider* series may not neatly fit into cinematic feminine stereotypes (which have also been borrowed by video games), but these stereotypes are the coordinates in accordance to which the new Lara Croft is shaped. Albeit in a less evident form, the visual representation of the protagonist still pays tribute to patriarchal discourse. In what follows, I try to show that, by the same token, patriarchy frames the diegetic evolution of Lara Croft in the film adaptation of the games too.

3 Lara Croft as an Agent of Patriarchy

Despite her feminine identity, in the third and most recent video game series, *Tomb Raider*, *Rise of Tomb Raider*, and *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*, Lara Croft acts as an agent of patriarchy in the sense that her role is that of a narrative substitute for her late father, Richard Croft. Her trajectory as a character from the beginning of *Tomb Raider* to the end of *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* is tantamount to a gradual submission to her father's will. Although at first she dismisses her father's findings as a myth, Lara eventually concedes that she was wrong and sets out on a quest to prove the validity of his research. This implies travelling all over the world in order to explore virgin territories and find the secret artefacts whose existence had been documented by her father. Lara's narrative agency in the storyworld of the video games' third series is determined by her father's will who, had he not been killed, would have carried on his work. This means that Lara's exploration is, in fact, a form of colonialism in the sense that her experience of otherness is mediated by the colonial knowledge that her father had produced.

In a manner similar to other film adaptations of video games, the events of *Tomb Raider* are only loosely based on those of the video games, yet the film maintains Lara Croft's role as a colonial agent of patriarchy. The fidelity criterion which characterised the adaptation of literary texts into feature films for a long time does not seem to enjoy a similar status when video games are adapted for the cinema. One of the main reasons for this difference is that early popular video games did not feature a strong narrative component, so the writer of the film adaptation had to flesh out a film from a minimal plot line provided by the source. For example, fighting games such as *Mortal Kombat* (Midway Games, 1992) or *Street Fighter II* (Capcom, 1991) were primarily focused on their gameplay and offered little diegetic context for the battles they simulated. Since action films need narrative motivation for their characters, the films *Mortal Kombat* (Paul W.S. Anderson, 1995) and *Street Fighter* (Steven E. de Souza, 1994) made significant additions to the minimal storyworlds of the video games so as to meet the demands of narrative cinema.

If deviation from their sources was a mandatory condition of the adaptation of games with low degrees of narrativity, the adaptation of later games that have a strong narrative component calls for another account that also considers the particularity of each video game that is turned into a feature film. It would seem that the freedom to improvise in adapting the narrative content of video games in these latter cases can be explained by the dominant position that gameplay and game mechanics enjoy to the detriment of narrative. The writers and directors of film adaptations of video games seem to focus on faithfully reproducing the spectacle of gameplay first and foremost,

and only to a lesser extent are they interested in staying true to the narrative of games. For example, the film adaptation of id Software's 2004 first person shooter *Doom 3*, which was simply entitled *Doom* (Andrzej Bartkowiak, 2005), shows little regard for the events of the game, but is consistent with its source's visual aesthetics. The film's climax, featuring the protagonist's fight against the demons that invade the space, is rendered by means of a subjective long shot that shows the diegetic world of the film through the eyes of the protagonist. In this way, the film's visuals imitate the first person perspective of the game.³

In the case of the rebooted *Tomb Raider* franchise, the film maintains the setting of the game, i.e. most of the events take place on the fictional island of Yamatai where Lara seeks the tomb of Himiko, dubbed the Sun Queen, but the main antagonists differ. In the game, the main antagonist is Father Mathias, a former teacher now a castaway on the island. After a failed attempt to leave the island, Father Mathias is contacted by the spirit of Himiko who is trapped in a decaying body and demands that he provide her with a new one in return for his safe passage off the island. When Lara and her team shipwreck on an island, Mathias seizes one of the members, the Japanese-Portuguese Samantha Nishimura, in an attempt to use her body as a vessel for Queen Himiko. The game ends with Lara defeating Mathias and rescuing Samantha before Himiko can take full possession of her body.

In constructing the antagonist of the film adaptation, the screenwriter borrowed elements from the games *Rise of the Tomb Raider* and *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*. In fact, the heroine's antagonist in the film, Mathias Vogel, is now connected to the transnational paramilitary organisation Trinity, which appears in the *Tomb Raider*'s two sequels. Moreover, the film makes it clear that Trinity is responsible for the apparent death of Richard Croft who had managed to hide his findings on Himiko before his demise, lest they should fall in the hands of Trinity. However, the most important difference between the film adaptation and the game is that, while the games are constructed on the assumption that Richard Croft is dead, in the film adaptation Lara's father eventually turns out to have been alive all along. In a plot twist, Richard Croft reveals himself to Lara telling her that he had lived on the island of Yamatai in complete isolation, and

3 The remediation of the first person perspective by the feature film is not unproblematic from the point of view of visual rhetoric (Mizsei Ward 2018). While players of video games are used to seeing the game world through the eyes of the protagonist, filmmakers have often used the subjective long shot for characters who represent deviant subjectivities, such as cyborgs, aliens, or serial killers (Black 2015, 16-17). This makes it difficult for the viewer to have the same positive identification with the protagonist of the film as the player has.

scolding her for disobeying him and refusing to destroy his research, which ended up in Trinity's possession. Lara tries to compel her father to fight Trinity in order to prevent them from reaching Himiko's tomb. Richard Croft refuses by claiming that what had defined him as a man is no longer valid. Frustrated with her father's lack of will to act, Lara decides to leave and face Trinity on her own.

The manner in which Richard Croft's diegetic disability is translated from the game into the film is indicative of how a potential rebellion against male supremacy can be reframed and appropriated to suit patriarchal standards. In opposition to the games that stress how, in exploring foreign territories, Lara obeys her father's will, the film presents Lara's adventures as an act of disobedience. When Lara discovers her father's secret office, she comes across a digital camera which contains a recording of Richard Croft instructing her to burn all his research on the Himiko project. Instead of destroying his research, Lara decides to use his findings to get to the island of Yamatai. What may have been construed as a form of narrative agency based on a defiance of patriarchy is annulled as a result of the scene described in the above paragraph where Lara's father refuses to take arms against Trinity.

In the film, Richard Croft presents himself as a case of masculinity in crisis similar to the ones documented by Kaja Silverman in her book *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992). Silverman claims that our dominant visual culture produces images of artificial white heterosexual masculinity with which men entertain a relation of misrecognition, in a manner similar to the subject of ideology or the child at the mirror stage.⁴ In doing so, western visual culture (which Silverman calls dominant fiction) naturalises the social construct of white heterosexual masculinity and establishes it as the norm. In her comment on the films discussed in Silverman's book, Shohini Chaudhuri claims that the films representing men who fail to embody the dominant social construct of masculinity

depict 'ideal' female subjects who collude in the dominant fiction and refuse to recognize male lack, investing their belief in patently artificial images of male adequacy or the phallus as a signifier of desire. But Silverman also finds other films, both from Hollywood

⁴ Silverman's use of the term misrecognition is indebted to Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan. The former claims that subjectivity is formed by means of interpellation. "A person on the street who instantly turns around upon hearing the police call, 'Hey you there!' (mis)recognises that the hail is 'really' addressed to him and is thereby 'sutured' into ideology" (Chaudhuri 2006, 108). In the Lacanian sense of the term, misrecognition refers to formation of the ego by means of identifying itself with the image in the mirror. Although the image is not the self, it is perceived as such by the subject (Chaudhuri 2006, 108).

and elsewhere, that depict 'deviant' masculinities which both acknowledge and embrace castration, alterity, and specularity. Some of these 'deviant' masculinities say 'no' to power – a stance that implies reconciliation with the terms and conditions of all subjectivity, and therefore also with what has traditionally been designated as 'feminine'. (Chaudhuri 2006, 110)

The behaviour of both Lara and Richard Croft in the *Tomb Raider* film adaptation corresponds to the types of film characters presented in the quotation. Richard Croft represents a case of deviant masculinity which rejects the potency, agency, and privilege of standard masculinity. As Richard Croft's presence on the island is progressively revealed, we see short shots of his body obscured by darkness, hiding behind the trees, observing from a distance, but not interfering with the ongoing events. When Lara finally encounters him in the cave where he had found refuge, he looks weak and delusional, an image contrasting with that provided by Lara's memories and the video recording described above. Confronted with a case of masculinity in crisis, Lara refuses to accept her father's inability to adequately perform his role as an agentive male (or phallic male, to use Silverman's term – 1992, 44). She consequently assumes the phallus herself and compensates for her father's vulnerability by going off to fight Trinity on her own, lest patriarchy should crumble. Lara Croft's disobedience towards her father is, therefore, not a defiance of patriarchy but, rather, a rejection of alternative, i.e. non-phallic, versions of masculinity, such as the one represented by Richard Croft himself.

By the end of the film, Lara's endeavour to reinstate patriarchal order will have succeeded. After a period of hesitation, Richard Croft decides to accept his gender role as agent and protector and sets out to help Lara in her fight against Trinity, but he is quickly caught by Mathias Vogel and his mercenaries. With Richard Croft at the mercy of Vogel, Lara is forced to lay down her weapons and cooperate with Trinity to find Himiko's tomb. After discovering it, they soon realise that Himiko's corpse is infected by a highly contagious virus that turns humans into zombies. In order not to be contaminated, Vogel tries to collect a sample from the corpse that he would send back to Trinity. While the team of mercenaries is concentrated on Vogel's attempt to take the sample, Lara and Richard assault the team. In the ensuing conflict, the two manage to kill all the mercenaries with the exception of Vogel, but Richard Croft is infected with the virus after a struggle with a mercenary-turned-zombie. Given his impending doom, Richard offers to destroy Himiko's tomb with the fire grenades they have taken away from the mercenaries, sacrificing himself in the action. Although Lara tries to dissuade him, he remains steadfast and convinces her to abandon him and to prevent Mathias Vogel from escaping with the virus sample. The tomb scene coincides with the

restoration of the patriarchal norm whereby Richard becomes the phallic male who has the authority to dictate her daughter what to do. From this point onward, Lara's struggle against Trinity is no longer an act of disobedience but, on the contrary, one of obedience, in which her agency is determined and limited by patriarchal authority.

The unequal gender power relations featured in the film are naturalised by its narrative structure. One prototypical trait of this kind of narratives is the sudden appearance of rupture in the equilibrium of the storyworld, which must be resolved by the characters (Herman 2009, 9). In the film, the imbalance is caused by Richard Croft's masculinity crisis, hence the need to bring the storyworld to a 'normal' state of affairs in which Richard Croft returns to be a phallic male. By means of this narrative structure, phallic masculinity, alongside Lara's implicit submission to it, is rendered 'natural'. Conversely, the transitionary state of the storyworld, in which Lara has to adopt the phallus, is rendered 'abnormal' and calls for immediate action so that the *status quo antea* can be reinstated.

4 Lara Croft as an Agent of Colonialism

As already mentioned in the previous section, the "Survivor" series of the *Tomb Raider* games projects Lara Croft's colonial encounter with otherness as an enactment of a patriarchal role. Yet what is interesting about the storyworld of the three most recent games is not only that they are colonial, but that they also present a struggle between contending forms of colonialism. The conflict between Lara Croft and the transnational paramilitary organisation Trinity amounts to a conflict between two versions of colonialism: modern imperialism and neo-imperialism.

According to Hardt and Negri, globalisation has engendered forms of colonialism that differ from the colonialism of the 19th century. The structure of colonial empires such as the British Empire rested on a colonial centre which was a nation-state exerting colonial authority. The *de jure* dismantling of colonial empires in the aftermath of the Second World War paved the way for more insidious forms of colonialism, in which colonial authority no longer has a stable territorial locus but is deterritorialised and functions under the guise of transnational organisations (Hardt, Negri 2000, xii), such as the IMF, the World Bank, Structural Adjustment Programs, and so forth (Lazarus 2011, 8-9). Hardt and other authors call the former modern imperialism and the latter neo-imperialism.

In the third video game series, Lara Croft embodies modern imperialism since she is a character whose English ancestry is stressed throughout the games and whose intervention in foreign territories and cultures is transformed into a kind of civilising

mission. She is the providential explorer-coloniser, whose help is not only accepted but also sought after by the native populations she encounters. At the opposite pole lies Trinity, a transnational organisation, whose intervention is rejected by the native populations who then call for Lara's help to repel the paramilitary organisation. The ethical interpretation of the storyworld cued by the game favours Lara and, indirectly, the modern imperialism she represents, to the detriment of Trinity and neo-imperialism.

In adapting the storyworld of the video games to the screen, the film *Tomb Raider* maintains the conflict between modern imperialism and neo-imperialism. Like the games, the film lays emphasis on Lara Croft's Britishness, which stands in opposition to the multiple ethnicities and ancestries of Trinity's employed mercenaries. The film highlights the antagonistic status of that organisation by depicting how Trinity uses Asians of low income for forced labour in its archaeological search for Himiko's tomb. In this diegetic context, the rebellion of the exploited natives can only occur once Lara Croft, the modern coloniser, has intervened. By stressing the native people's dependence on Lara, the film turns resistance against neo-colonialism into a product of modern colonial discourse.

Taking this into consideration, it is safe to claim that Lara's attempt to restore patriarchy coerces her to adopt a colonial phallus that reinforces the supremacy of *white* heterosexual masculinity. Her attempt to substitute her father and thus contribute to the resolution of his masculinity crisis turns her into a coloniser, a role which seems to be inherent in the dominant western notion of patriarchy. In other words, by saving her father, Lara also saves colonial power relations.

5 Conclusion

In what has by now become a popular formulation concerning the importance of the representation of cultural identities in the media, Adrienne Shaw claims that “[m]edia texts provide us with source material for what might be possible, how identities might be constructed, and what worlds we might live in” (2014, 13). Although video games have been investigated in relation to cinema, game and adaptation studies have been chiefly concerned with the manner in which games borrow from films, while relatively little attention has been paid to the transmedial practice of cinematic adaptations of video games.⁵ If Shaw is right in pointing out the political relevance of media in general for the way in which identity is constructed and

⁵ Although the topic of video game film adaptations is subsidiary to other research interests in game studies and adaptation studies, important studies on the topic can

some identities are rendered normal to the detriment of others, then the field of video game cultural studies, which has been gaining momentum in the past years, should pay more attention to video game film adaptations and how they reshape the aesthetics and politics of their sources. This article has been an attempt to investigate the manner in which the 2018 *Tomb Raider* film reinforces white masculinity as the norm in relation to its source texts, the rebooted *Tomb Raider* video game trilogy. Similar inquiries can and should address the representation of a wide spectrum of cultural identities in other mainstream video game franchises that include film adaptations.

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Convergence and the Beast: A Canonical Crossover Affair

Željka Flegar

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University Of Osijek, Croatia

Abstract In the digital age it has become almost impossible to view children's texts outside the context of the new media. This study will focus on three works of children's fiction, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter, *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak, and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* by Newt Scamander/J.K. Rowling; and their respective adaptations, *Peter Rabbit*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. The article draws on contemporary theories of adaptation and the media, particularly the theory of 'convergence' and its impact on meaning-making in the production and reception of literary texts. It will take into account the cross-media and transmedia approach to analysing children's texts, as well as the crossover effect of adapting children's books into films. Particular attention is paid to the adaptation of still into moving imagery and its shifts in focalisation, providing evidence that the new media have made children's books accessible to a variety of audiences. Such examples display the contemporary complexity of children's storytelling and culture within and beyond the canon. Owing to the developments in digital media and technologies, which enable the realistic depiction of complex visual and fantastic elements that are characteristic of children's texts, in the new millennium children's literature has indeed become "everyone's business".

Keywords Adaptation. Picturebooks. Convergence. Crossover. Transmedia storytelling.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Picturebook to Screen: Focalisation and Meaning-Making. – 3 Case Study 1: Contemporary Intervention. – 4 Case Study 2: Aesthetic Transmutation. – 5 Case Study 3: Transmedia Elaboration. – 6 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

In 2006 Henry Jenkins proposed the term ‘convergence culture’ to characterise media trends in a global culture “where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (2). Although convergence is primarily concerned with and under the influence of media technologies, Jenkins argues that it also changes media industries, markets and audiences (15-16). In her 2009 study “Charlotte’s Website: Media Transformation and the Intertextual Web of Children’s Culture”, Cathlena Martin states that convergence is important for the study of children’s literature and adaptation because it reflects the state of popular contemporary children’s culture and also allows the scholarship “to grow with the expanding digital era” (86-7). Martin suggests that children’s texts have become a franchise that cannot be confined to one medium and that require a cross-media analysis for their cultural significance. At the same time, “children’s texts have increased and become an area of boundary crossing and blurred divisions” (86). Due to technological developments, adaptations and spin-offs of children’s texts are increasingly exhibiting crossover traits. This would mean that all age groups are invited to participate and share in the experience of a well-told children’s story.

According to Sandra Beckett (2017), ‘crossover’ as a literary term has referred to literary texts that “blur the borderline between children’s and adult literature”, which became common after the spectacular success of the Harry Potter series in the late nineties. However, adapting literary works has always had an immense impact on how literary texts were transposed into other formats to accommodate novel contexts and circumstances. In view of this, Máire Messenger Davies notes:

The issue of adaptation and translation from the literary text to the screen raises a number of questions about what is meant by contemporary ‘childhood’ and what is ‘suitable’ for children of different ages. This is in the context of the highly commercialized and expensive modes of production characteristic of film and TV, for which targeting age related audiences very precisely is seen as economically essential. Adaptation means not only translating from one medium to another, as in the case of books to film or television; it also means making stories from the past, or from other cultures, relevant to child readers and viewers. (2010, 139)

While Messenger Davies is concerned with adaptation and the construct of childhood, this study takes into account Robert Stam’s general view of adaptation as a “hybrid form” or a “meeting place of

different species" (2007, 3) and Linda Hutcheon's claim that adaptation is "a derivation that is not derivative - a work that is second without being secondary" (2006, 9). I wish to propose that adaptations in the twenty-first century take children's texts beyond the canon of children's literature and beyond the boundaries of children's culture. By taking a look at three case studies of contemporary adaptations of children's literature, I intend to discuss the process of adapting both the classic and contemporary literary works on screen in relation to their target audience. Although I am not suggesting that works for children have only ever been aimed at child audiences, it is my intent to show that developments in modern technologies have made them more accessible and desirable to a much wider one.

The study will focus on three picture books with beasts in them, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1901-02) by Beatrix Potter, *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) by Maurice Sendak and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2001) by Newt Scamander/J.K. Rowling, and their respective adaptations, *Peter Rabbit* (2018; dir. Will Gluck), *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009; dir. Spike Jonze), and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2016; dir. David Yates). Anthropomorphised animals have always been the staple of children's culture, from fables and fairy tales to modern fantasy. Maria Nikolajeva (2014, 43) claims that fantasy is especially prominent in children's literature, as opposed to that for adults. Likewise, picturebooks are a distinct genre of children's literature, corresponding to the sensory, visual, semiotic and conceptual properties of children's early development. An important aspect of adapting picturebooks is the transposition of still into moving imagery, and how pictures in both cases perform the aesthetic and stylistic function of telling a particular story. In other words, the aesthetic and narrative identity of the original poses a considerable challenge when adapting such a story into a motion picture. In the above-mentioned cases the adaptation has resulted in an entirely new aesthetic and narrative, principally due to the shifts in meaning-making and focalisation. These works have been selected for their significance and complexity of storytelling, both in text and picture, and on screen. The first book, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, is the case of adapting a children's literature classic of the Golden Age to meet the demands of the twenty-first century audience. *Where the Wild Things Are* reflects the radical changes that occurred in children's literature in the mid-twentieth century that are further developed in the modern adaptation as well. Finally, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* as an example of contemporary transmedia storytelling opens up the possibility of discussing cross-media formats and multiple adaptations in the digital era.

2 Picturebook to Screen: Focalisation and Meaning-Making

In her seminal study *American Picturebooks from Noah's Ark to the Beast Within* (1976), Barbara Bader defines picturebooks as “text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and, foremost, an experience for a child. As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the page” (1). Both picturebook and film are a visual medium, with their own particularities in narrative and discourse. In both cases multiple focalisation, defined by Gérard Genette (1980) in the field of narratology as referring to distance, perspective and point of view, applies. This, naturally, changes depending on the medium and the complexity of storytelling. Broadly speaking, Genette (210) distinguished between ‘zero focalisation’ (the omniscient narrator), ‘internal focalisation’ (the narrator knows what the main protagonist knows) and ‘external focalisation’ (the narrator knows less than the main character). Furthermore, in terms of ‘focalisation’ and ‘viewpoint’ Gerald Prince (2003) specifies the omniscient viewpoint (zero focalisation), the first person viewpoint or “homodiegetic narrative with internal focalisation” (102), the third-person subjective viewpoint as a heterodiegetic narrative with internal focalisation, and the third-person objective viewpoint as external focalisation. Depending on the ‘where’ and ‘who’ (the character and the setting) of the story, the narrator can be ‘extradiegetic’ (the narrator is outside the story), ‘intradiegetic’ (the narrator is inside a story), ‘heterodiegetic’ (the narrator is not involved in the story), or ‘homodiegetic’ (the narrator is a character in the story), with some variations (Genette 1980, 228-45). In her study of picturebooks Smiljana Narančić Kovač (2015) discusses the picturebook as a medium that features two narrators: the visual and the verbal. Similarly, Peter Verstraten (2009) observes that film contains a visual and an audio narrator, each of those displaying their own focalisation and point of view. However, Narančić Kovač argues that films and/or comics use one (simultaneous or multiple) discourse to transmit a story, whereas a picturebook transmits the story twice, in parallel (122). On the other hand, reading a picturebook is in most cases a collaborative effort involving a child and an adult (68-70), which is often the case with the so-called ‘family film’¹ as well (Paik 2001, 9). Therefore, when analysing the literary originals and their adaptations, special attention needs to be given to meaning-making processes as well, including “ontology, epistemology, fictionality, referentiality,

¹ A term initially denoting children’s films which due to their unprofitability in the first half of the 20th century needed to change the scope of the audiences.

intentionality, and ideology” (Nikolajeva 2014, 1). Meaning-making is associated with the processes of production and reception of texts as well as the cognitive processes involved in responding to the given material. All of those aspects are closely tied to the context in which a text is being adapted. In present times media convergence provides an array of options for adapting a literary text because meanings and audiences are conflated in an attempt to create an all-inclusive and immersive experience. As Jenkins has observed:

Storytellers now think about storytelling in terms of creating openings for consumer participation [...] creating an interplay between the top-down force of corporate convergence and the bottom-up force of grass-roots convergence that is driving many of the changes we are observing in the media landscape. (2006, 175)

Jenkins’s conclusions about contemporary storytelling can certainly be applied to fantasy for children, which has more recently been transgressing the boundaries of children’s literature canon. It has been encouraging all types of readership participation and appealing to general audiences. Although this article will not take into consideration the direct audience participation, it will focus on the production and reception of products aimed at contemporary media consumers. Moreover, it will reflect on how the industry, markets and audiences change due to the demands of the cross-media landscape.

3 Case Study 1: Contemporary Intervention

The Tale of Peter Rabbit was published privately by Beatrix Potter in 1901 and publically by Frederick Warne & Co. in 1902. At that time, it was the first modern picture storybook in which the illustrations and text complemented one another to tell a unified story (Tunnell, Jacobs 2008, 46). Both written and illustrated by Potter herself, since then it has become a beloved classic of children’s literature as, in the words of Linda Lear, “perfect marriage of word and image” (2007, 154-5). In *The Oxford Companion to Children’s Literature*, Daniel Hahn claims that “Peter Rabbit images have been used for merchandise and spin-offs of every imaginable kind, from children’s plates to a Japanese roller-coaster” (2017, 568). Historically and ideologically the product of the Golden Age of children’s literature, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* is the story of a mischievous, anthropomorphised child-like rabbit who sneaks into Mr. McGregor’s garden to steal his vegetables. The book describes a day-long adventure full of risk, suspense and thrill for the main protagonist. However, although the Golden Age introduced genuine child characters who were allowed to misbehave, granting the authors the permission to “entertain, rather than to patronise and

educate" (Hunt 2012), *Peter Rabbit* retains some of the didacticism of the ages past. As a cautionary tale, it ends with Peter not being "very well during the evening", after which his mother put him to bed and made him some camomile tea (Potter 2002, 67). As a result, the reader gets a distinct impression that such exploits better be avoided so as not to meet the fate of Peter Rabbit's father who ended up being "put in a pie" (11). The combination of text and illustrations in the book produces a dual and mutually complementary effect. The narrator is omniscient and objective with no particular emotional involvement (heterodiegetic narrator with zero focalisation), whereas the illustrations reveal the emotional intensity of internal focalisation. This is particularly evident in the scene in which Peter Rabbit is being trapped under the sieve (38), as reported by Margaret Mackey in *Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit* (2002, 22-3). In other words, the anguish that is omitted in the narration is conveyed through imagery, making the readers infer their own conclusions about Peter's less than light-hearted plight.

The 2018 adaptation *Peter Rabbit* takes on a slightly different approach. The serene countryside idyll is disrupted in the very beginning when the Disneyfied birds singing the introductory song "Small as Your Dreams" are practically flattened by the rumbustious rascal Peter Rabbit (Gluck 2018, 00'00"41"-00'01"10"). The mischief in the film is not only celebrated, but almost glorified, as Peter Rabbit steals the vegetables and overtly mocks Mr. McGregor to amuse his family members (00'05"49"-00'06"25"). The talking animals, interpolated from different Beatrix Potter titles,² are created very realistically through computer generated imagery. As opposed to the picturebook and its gentle Victorian drawings, this story is a live-action feature in every sense of the word: it has action, instant gratification, and is marvellously trendy.³ More importantly, it has people in it. In other words, the director Will Gluck created a feature that may resonate with the generations of 'millennials'. This is most apparent in the decision to introduce the death of Mr. McGregor and, consequently, the brand new protagonists: his nephew Thomas McGregor and the charming neighbour Bea. The arrival of the young trendy control freak McGregor initiates a number of catastrophic conflicts, opportunities for all manner of rebellion, slapstick, but also

2 *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggly-Winkle* (1905), *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* (1906), *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck* (1908), *The Tale of Mr. Tod* (1912), and *The Tale of Pigling Bland* (1913).

3 A definite indicator of this is the soundtrack, featuring contemporary pop music achievements, such as "Feel It Still" (performed by Portugal. The Man), "Steal My Sunshine" (Len), or the latest remix of "We No Speak Americano" (performed by Yolanda Be Cool & DCUP); and much partying and clubbing that accompanies the musical background, generally appealing to young adults.

the promise of romance. Although this film contains the elements of many decades of 'family film' practice, there are segments in it where adults can get truly involved. This is evident in many layers of direct and indirect humour. A number of slapstick situations with objects being blown up, people being electrocuted, tons of surprised screaming, and a heap of Schadenfreude is designed to naturally appeal to younger audiences, but also adults who enjoy childish things. However, there is also a subtler and culturally conditioned indirect humour which appeals to adults only. One such example is when Thomas McGregor complains of his boss "promoting a flagrantly unqualified half-wit to a position of immense importance based purely on nepotism", to which his boss retorts that "[T]his is Great Britain. It's practically written in our charter" (00'16"04"-00'16"13"). Generally, the instances of jokingly referring to psychological trauma, 'finding a voice' and 'following your dreams' are dispersed throughout the movie. Likewise, the quiriness of the antagonists, such as Peter Rabbit's destruction of McGregor's house or the repeated breakdowns of Thomas McGregor, are hardly seen as flaws. The shifts in focalisation and discourse indicate that adults as the audience of this film do not simply fulfil the role of cinema chaperones. Accordingly, the voice-overs indicating zero and internal focalisation (the narrator and the protagonist) are done by adults; Peter Rabbit was voiced by James Corden and the voice of the heterodiegetic omniscient narrator was done by Margot Robbie. Although the narrator is expected to be an adult reader of the original picturebook, Peter and his siblings, Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail, are presented as 'children' in the book. Yet, not a single child voice was retained in the film. For all those reasons, one is left under the impression that the rabbits have grown up, but managed at the same time to retain the patterns of their childhood behaviour.

Beatrix Potter's visual legacy is effectively evident only in the scenes with internal focalisation, in which we witness Bea's drawings of rabbits (i.e. animated Beatrix Potter's illustrations) used to tell the story of how Peter Rabbit lost his father (Gluck 2018, 00'08"01"-00'09"03"). The same technique is at work in the epilogue of the film to depict the happily-ever-after (01'20"50"-01'21"38"). What is apparently an homage to Beatrix Potter is used to primarily illustrate emotion and 'goodness' juxtaposed to the greed and recklessness that deeply affect the picture. In other words, the two picturebook narrators are reflected in the film as well, through the use of different media formats and multiple discourses. Even though this might not be a cautionary tale as Potter had imagined it, like most family films, this one contains a moral and a redemption. Upon Bea and the rabbits losing their homes, Peter Rabbit finally learns a lesson. Not surprisingly, the mischievous rabbit also acts as a matchmaker for Thomas and Bea, which is, in fact, the main focus

of the story (01'15"58"-01'16"03"). In many ways the simple tale of a countryside rabbit who experiences a day's adventure is suitably adapted to modern times. The twenty-first century rabbit overtakes McGregor's house, uses traps and explosives, rides in vehicles, forms relationships and deep bonds with humans, and even visits London. In the end Peter Rabbit is responsible for creating a state of the art, versatile family of modern-day 'hipsters', proving that nowadays the new media are commonly used to realistically depict fantastic concepts for adults, too. The combination of adult and childlike, in the film, supports the construct of 'kidulthood' (Barfield et al. 2010), proposed by sociologists in the first decade of the 21st century, and referring to generations of adults pursuing a childlike lifestyle (e.g. visible in the sale and purchase of toys for grown-up people on the market, the idea of 'perpetual childhood' and the 'kidulthood accessory kit' that denotes a childhood lifestyle). In this sense this adaptation is a contemporary 'intervention' into the original text written at the turn of the 20th century and depicting a dramatically different existence. The omniscient narrator and the mischievous rabbit remain at the heart of the story, yet the context is strikingly different. Interestingly enough, this trend stands in stark contrast to the Golden Age of children's literature when traditional fairy tales, which were initially created for adults (Zipes et al. 2005, 175), were gradually assimilated into children's culture. Nowadays, technology and the convergence of media seem to be injecting fantastic tales for children into modern mainstream culture.

4 Case Study 2: Aesthetic Transmutation

The case of the *Wild Things* takes on a similar approach, but with stark differences in style and reception. When Maurice Sendak's book *Where the Wild Things Are* came out in 1963, it was a radical departure from the representative products of its age. The book is commonly associated with the emergence of New Realism⁴ and problem novels, because "[s]ince its publication, children's books have reflected a much more radical desacralising and opening up of childhood to adult worldliness" (Ball 1997, 167). Likewise, children have been more "exposed to social-realist and problem texts that confront all manner of threats, anxieties and darkneses". The picturebook features a conflict between Max, an everychild who misbehaves, and his mother

⁴ The term was defined by Shelton L. Root, Jr. in "The New Realism - Some Personal Reflections" (1977) as "that fiction for young readers which addresses itself to personal problems and social issues heretofore considered taboo for fictional treatment by the general public" (19).

who sends him to bed “without eating anything” (Sendak 2013, [5]).⁵ What occurs in Max’s room as a result is a psychological fantasy that enables him to confront the feelings of anger and resentment. Sendak’s illustrations in the book accompany the textual story of Max sailing to the land of wild things by colourfully expanding the frame of illustration as Max’s room turns into a fantastic world, followed by the outrageously wild artistic portrayal of the beasts with their “terrible roars” and “terrible teeth” and “terrible eyes” and “terrible claws” ([17-18]). Although it won the 1964 Caldecott Medal for “The Most Distinguished Picture Book of the Year” (cover blurb), the book was met with mixed reception, particularly by parents who were concerned about the inappropriateness of the book, the fear and anxiety it might evoke in children, and the potential harm it may do to its readers (Rhedin 2003). However, the doubts and concerns of the public did not diminish the book’s enduring value and its status as a literary classic.

Spike Jonze’s film adaptation in 2009 was supported by Sendak as one of the producers, but Jonze developed an entirely different aesthetic and narrative technique. The camera which tracks the protagonist in the very beginning of the film becomes a witness and an intradiegetic narrator throughout. Max’s conflict is much deeper; he is a child with behavioural issues who experiences confrontations with his sister and her friends, his mother and her boyfriend, as well as general discomfort and anxiety in his surroundings. This is particularly evident in the scene in which his sister’s friends destroy his igloo (Jonze 2009, 00’03”50”-00’04”04”), or when his teacher discusses the detrimental extinction of the sun (00’09”22”-00’10”17”). Spike Jonze and Dave Eggers expanded Sendak’s ten-sentence story, which was reportedly based on his own experiences and perceptions of childhood, to create a detailed psychological account of a young boy’s inner struggle. As opposed to Sendak’s book in which Max is a younger child, in the film he is considerably older, of the age when tantrums and biting are no longer common or acceptable. To accommodate this intervention, Jonze also renounced the colourful animation that would have fit Sendak’s illustrations. Instead, he created a live-action feature that combines puppets, animatronics and computer-generated imagery. The beasts that are in fact large, heavy, bulging products of Jim Henson’s Creature Shop, dominate, shake and alter the landscape. Their presence is at the same time endearing and frightening, echoing Sendak’s “we’ll eat you up - we love you so!” (2013, [31]). However, as opposed to the collective character of the wild things in the book, in the film Jonze

⁵ In the 2013 edition the pages are not numbered, so the page numbers will be indicated according to manual count. The above quote is on page 5 from where the story begins.

and Eggers give each of them a personality and a name: Carol, KW, Ira, Judith, Alexander, Douglas, and the Bull. Soon enough, we begin to notice the parallels between the beasts and the people in Max's life, with Carol actually posing as Max's counterpart in the land of the wild things. Accordingly, one of the most memorable reviews of the movie reads:

Jonze unleashes his considerable creativity. The beasts are recognizable from Sendak's pages, but Jonze gives them names and distinct personalities that connect to aspects of Max's psyche and to the people he loves. Freud would adore this movie. They are vast, feathered, horned, clawed, beaked and definitely wild - irrational and dangerous, even when showing affection - and Jonze uses their threatening bulk as well as their capacity for cruelty to remind us that Max's taming of them is only temporary. For any child, it is near impossible to stay king of anything, even in fantasy. (Pols 2009)

Although Mary Pols manages to convincingly make relevant observations about the film, the final remark in the above-quoted review is oversimplified. The somber mood, as well as the indie soundtrack by Karen O and Carter Burwell create an atmosphere more suitable for a young adult picture than a children's movie. Finally, one gets the impression not of escape, but of maturation. In other words, it is possible to conclude that Max has reconciled his conflicting emotions and is ready to return and recognise the benefits of childhood, but not for long. Whereas the picturebook presents an episode from a younger child's life in which Max "achieves a healthy identity" after imagining himself into "an older state, a state of supposed maturity in which he will not be subject to an older person's arbitrary power" (Jones 1989, 122-3), the movie represents this developmental transition with all its imperfections.

Both the book and the movie depict Max transforming "his room (the scene of his punishment) into the land of wild things (the scene of his power)" (Paul 1990, 151). However, in the book Max never encounters his mother in person when he returns, whilst in the movie she is there waiting for him, showing all the anguish of losing a child, albeit temporarily. In the book Max escapes figuratively, whereas in the movie he is "physically" gone, exploring and taking risks on the brink of adolescence. The fact that the aesthetic and narrative approach to the movie at the script level significantly affected the story has caused very mixed responses, much like the book in its early stages. The reviews from both professionals and parents reveal that although everyone expected a children's movie, the adaptation in many cases did not appeal to children at all. The director himself, however, claims that the main goal "wasn't to make a children's

movie”, but a movie “about childhood” (Thompson 2009). Therefore, after the movie’s release Eggers wrote a full-length novel called *The Wild Things* (2009), based on the screenplay and reportedly at Sendak’s request (Eggers 2010, 284), which was specifically marketed as an “all-ages novel” (“The Wild Things”). Therefore, Max’s story has over the decades evolved into a complex narrative of childhood and growing up, delivered in multiple formats and from various points of view. Such approaches are in accordance with the converging media environments where authorship and reception are frequently subject to change. Considering the fact that Sendak’s original was a children’s book, yet one of the forerunners of the young adult literature era, its adaptation has appropriately altered the original, making it an aesthetic and ideological ‘transmutation’ of Sendak’s picturebook. In other words, the adaptation has remained true to its predecessor in content and intentionality, but dramatically different in its scope, depth and format. Although the adaptation of *Where the Wild Things Are* has not generated much success with general audiences (like *Peter Rabbit*), it polarised both the critics and the viewers as an intriguing and powerful achievement in cinematography and a unique crossover depiction of Sendak’s tale for children.

5 Case Study 3: Transmedia Elaboration

Although the first two examples are of children’s books crossing over into the realm of adulthood, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* is a work of children’s literature and an artefact which had already crossed over. A prime example of convergence, *Fantastic Beasts* was originally a Hogwarts textbook which made its first appearance in the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling. Essentially, it is defined as “Newt Scamander’s compendium of magical creatures” (Rowling 2019), and is a required reading for Hogwarts students and a guide for wizarding households. In its structure it resembles Medieval bestiaries, or the first picture/textbook for children, *Orbis Pictus* (1658) by John Amos Comenius. After being repeatedly mentioned in the series (first time in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, 1997), the book was published independently in 2001, along with the textbook *Quidditch Through the Ages*, and so became part of the transmedia Harry Potter inter- and hypertextual ‘web’ of products (Flegar 2015, 177). Since then, the textbook with short and often humorous descriptions of fantastic beasts, accompanied by Rowling’s illustrations, has undergone several transformations. The entries in the textbook (with illustrations of individual creatures) appear as follows:

GNOME

M.O.M. Classification: XX

The gnome is a common garden pest found throughout northern Europe and North America. It may reach a foot in height, with a disproportionately large head, and hard, bony feet. The gnome can be expelled from the garden by swinging it in circles until dizzy and then dropping it over the garden wall. Alternatively a Jarvey may be used, though many wizards nowadays find this method of gnome-control too brutal. (Scamander, Rowling 2017, 34)

Initially, the textbook evolved from the fictional artefact in the Harry Potter series to the metafictional first edition, accompanied by doodles of Harry Potter and Ron Weasley. It is currently included in the Hogwarts Library Boxed Set (2017), and is a lavishly illustrated picturebook edition with artwork by Olivia Lomenech Gill (2017). This is all owing to the fact that, in 2016, J.K. Rowling wrote the original screenplay for the film adaptation of the same name, drawing on the textbook. The adaptation is a prequel to the Harry Potter series and is set in 1926 in New York City. The wizarding world in the U.S. is the extension of its British counterpart, with terms such as No-Maj to British Muggle, the Magical Congress of the United States of America (MACUSA) to the Ministry of Magic (M.O.M.), or the Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to the British Hogwarts. The magizoologist Newt Scamander, signed as the author of the first edition (and its narrator) becomes the main protagonist in the film adaptation. The film is about fantastic beasts, and “writing a book about magical creatures [...] a guide to help people understand why we should be protecting these creatures instead of killing them” (Yates 2016, 00’16”47”-00’16”56”). Even more so, however, it is about adult wizards fighting evil forces, such as the dark wizard Gellert Grindelwald or the warped creature and parasite, the Obscurus. The various versions of *Fantastic Beasts* as a fictional guide in the context of the Harry Potter narrative and as a growing universe of its own are what Jenkins (2011) defines as “transmedia storytelling” where “integral elements of fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (“Transmedia Storytelling 101”).

In this way, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* developed over time as a *mise en abyme* text,⁶ a spin-off, an adaptation, a prequel and a sequel. The shift in not only focalisation, but genre and format

⁶ Signifying “a representation or narrative segment, which is embedded within a larger narrative, and which reflects, reproduces, or mirrors an aspect of the larger primary narrative” (McCallum 1996, 404-5).

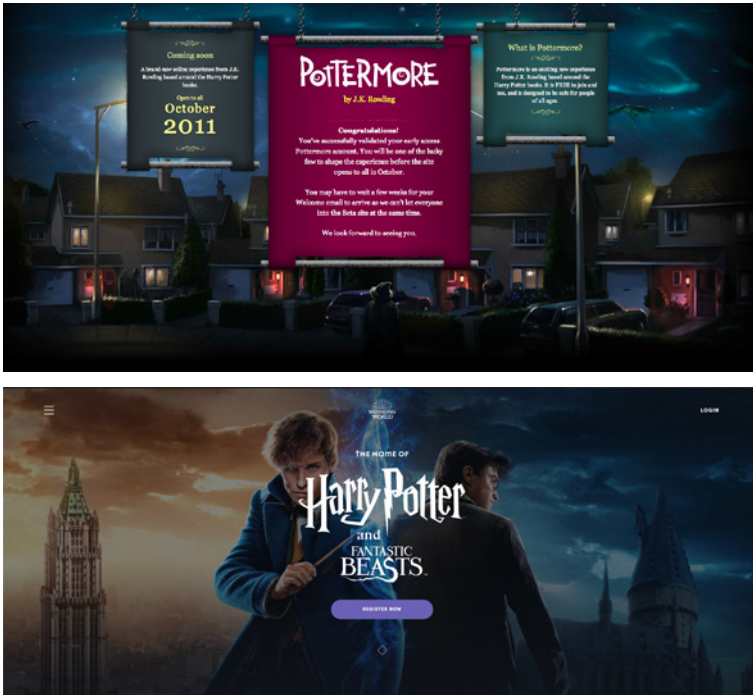


Figure 1 Rowling, *Pottermore / Wizarding World*. 2011/2012-2019. Screenshot of the first *Pottermore* interface in 2011/2012 and the *Wizarding World* (formerly *Pottermore*) user interface at <https://www.wizardingworld.com/> in October 2019, the first using illustrations and animated design generally more appealing to a younger audience, and the latest featuring Newt Scamander and Harry Potter as portrayed in the film adaptations. Wizarding World Digital, 2019 (available in the public domain)

as well, has taken the story from a children's library textbook to a culturally diverse adaptation for adults (presumably those who grew up reading Harry Potter). In view of this, the adaptation of *Fantastic Beasts* is a transmedia 'elaboration' of the fantastic universe; it expands the secondary story of the imaginary world and makes it the primary one, within a different era, continent and age. Whereas the third person omniscient narrator of the textbook is used to introduce generations of wizarding children to their own world's fantastic beasts, in the film the camera eye it is used for the purpose of external focalisation of an astounded observer, or an 'outsider' to the magical secondary world. The viewer may identify with the character of Jacob Kowalski, who accidentally finds himself with/in Scamander's suitcase, proclaiming, "Newt. I don't think I'm dreaming [...] I ain't got the brains to make this up" (00'41"04"-00'41"10"). Like Kowalski, we are allowed inside the 'insider' culture of the wizarding world in which people ('Muggles' and 'No-Majs', readers and fans) of all ages

are invited. This example has solidified the crossover label already attached to the Harry Potter universe. Hahn claims that “Rowling’s UK publisher, Bloomsbury, capitalised on this crossover interest by releasing the series in adult-friendly jacket designs in parallel with the children’s editions” (2017, 266). Similarly, the *Pottermore* and more recently *Wizarding World* interface has since its public launch in 2012 become progressively more adult oriented [fig. 1].

In *Fantastic Beasts* the opulent use of computer generated imagery enables the beasts to exist beyond the pages of a reference book as a narrative segment with illustrations in it. The magical creatures such as the Niffler, Occamy or Thunderbird appear as supporting characters in the movie with as much humour as in the descriptions, allowing the adult viewer to step outside their mundane existence, their dead-end job, or the bleakness of their landscape. Newt Scamander, his sidekicks, and his suitcase packed with an enchanted world from which occasionally a creature escapes to disrupt the everyday No-Maj existence represent much slapstick and mischief, but also serious grown-up magic and the pursuit of justice that often is missing in today’s modern world. Although the fantastic secondary world of Harry Potter has from the beginning appealed to diverse readership, the film adaptation of *Fantastic Beasts* is very specifically targeted towards (young) adults. Such practices are apparently affected by media convergence which blurs the boundaries of genre, audience, and canon.

6 Conclusion

Based on the three popular examples of picturebook adaptation to film, it is evident that media convergence has taken children’s picturebooks with beasts in them beyond the intended readership. Although adults are generally involved in the process of reading picturebooks and are often present when children watch family movies (one of the reasons why the narrative levels are so readily apparent, and especially the levels of humour), the twenty-first century adaptations frequently take children’s stories beyond the canon of children’s literature. Within the convergence culture of the new millennium, children’s culture has exhibited tendencies to cross over into mainstream culture where it is received by diverse audiences. Some of the conclusions might be that we have come to view, ponder, own and accept childhood beyond the marginalised tag of children’s products because convergence is an all-inclusive and encompassing practice (except when high production and copyright

are concerned).⁷ Other possibilities are escapism, as fantasy is often favoured by the audiences during times of crisis,⁸ or radical creativity, given the fact that fantastic concepts pose a challenge to film-makers. The shifts in narrative and focalisation, genre, and even format, point to different levels of meaning-making that take place in the processing of the visual and verbal material in contemporary media practices. Twenty-first century film adaptations often engage with fantastic content and exhibit crossover tendencies, much like their scientific counterparts in nature, ‘mutation’ or ‘crossover adaptation’. As such they are similar to the talking, fantastic, bulging beasts that one cannot contain in a suitcase or the confines of a category, genre or a historical era. As we continue to participate in the convergence of the media, it is not necessarily children’s culture that may undergo significant changes, but the ‘high culture’ of adulthood. Apparently, the “wild rumpus” of children’s culture has already begun.

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⁷ See Jenkins 2006, ch. “Why Heather Can Read”.

⁸ There is evidence, for example, that fantasy and science fiction genres flourished after World War II (see Hollindale, Sutherland 1995).

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