

TURNING IN THE GRAVE:  
AMBIVALENCE, QUEER LOSS, AND THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

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“Turning in the Grave: Ambivalence, Queer Loss, and the Victorian Novel” details how nineteenth-century mourning culture complicated the development of the novel. I contend that Victorian mourning culture—characterized by the display of objects meant to signify both emotional states and social allegiances in response to the death of an individual—challenged authors’ ability to maintain the narrative conventions of the marriage plot. In my reckoning, the marriage plot—for all its ability to organize narrative desires and fictional communities—only ever succeeds alongside the production of a set of queer losses, figured by parents who lose a child, widows and widowers, the heartbroken, and spinsters. Even as Victorian fiction played a role in the idealization of domestic life, figures of queer loss afforded authors an opportunity to adapt modes of plotting, narration, and literary feeling that wrestled against the marriage plot’s end.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kaelin Alexander lives in Ithaca, New York.

For all the guys I could have loved and all the guys who could have loved me.

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## INTRODUCTION

### READING MOURNING

Near the beginning of Anne Brontë's 1848 novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the protagonist and narrator Gilbert Markham—a plucky, earnest, and often presumptuous farmer—finds himself captivated by the appearance of a new neighbor amongst the congregation of his parish church. Turning away from his hymnal, Gilbert finds himself transfixed by the appearance of a “tall, lady-like figure, clad in black” (Brontë 16). He is utterly powerless to turn his gaze away from the mysterious stranger:

Her face was towards me, and there was something in it, which, once seen, invited me to look again. Her hair was raven black and disposed in long glossy ringlets, a style of coiffure, rather unusual in those days, but always graceful and becoming; her complexion was clear and pale; her eyes I could not see, for being bent upon her prayer-book they were concealed by their drooping lids and long black lashes, but the brows above were expressive and well defined, the forehead was lofty and intellectual, the nose, a perfect aquiline, and the features in general, unexceptionable—only there was a slight hollowness about the cheeks and eyes, and the lips, though finely formed, were a little too thin, a little too firmly compressed, and had something about them that betokened, I thought, no very soft or amiable temper; and I said in my heart—‘I would rather admire you from this distance, fair lady, than be the partner of your home.’ (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, 16)

This stranger is Helen Huntingdon, the titular resident of Wildfell Hall. Part of what is most jarring about this scene is its easy juxtaposition between the austerity of the church setting and the nearly lurid, painterly details of Helen's comportment. Even more striking, however, is the way that the exchange suggests that something about the blackness of Helen's attire not only presents a pleasing image, but in fact invites and even encourages a distinctly erotic spectatorship. Even as Helen's mourning signifies her sexual *unavailability* by suggesting emotional allegiance to her deceased husband through a public display grief, Gilbert's inquisitive gaze lays bare a spectacular, if uncomfortable truth: in putting on mourning, death *becomes* Helen; it suits her. Helen is not attractive to Gilbert *despite* his perception of her as a widow; rather, she is attractive precisely *because* of how he perceives her as a widow. Indeed, widow's mourning is not just a set of garments with which Helen clothes her body; rather, mourning is a style of embodiment for her. The black of Helen's mourning garb bleeds into the "raven black... glossy ringlets" of her hair, as well as her "long black" eyelashes. From Gilbert's vantage point, Helen's widowhood is all-consuming: it is simultaneously all he knows about her, and a filter that colors everything he comes to know about her over the course of the novel. Mourning is a habit of dress, but also a form of habitus. Mourning is, ironically enough, a way of life for Helen.

Of course, this is only part of the story. In truth, Helen is not a widow at all. Instead, she comes to Gilbert's rural village in order to escape her abusive, alcoholic, and very much living husband, Arthur Huntingdon. Helen merely *adopts* the persona of a widow as part of her plan; she puts on mourning as a put-on. Lacking divorce as a viable option, and divested from her own fortune, Helen has no choice but to cut, run, and hope that she will be left alone. Posing as a widow, Helen reckons, will free her and her young son from raising the suspicions of the villagers, and thus grant her the privacy she needs in order to avoid being tracked by Arthur. In

part, then, *Tenant* is a complex indictment of the corners into which Victorian women were backed under laws of coverture, which stipulated that upon marriage, a woman's property and legal rights were ceded to her husband<sup>1</sup>. That Helen's plan backfires spectacularly, but happily—Helen relents to Gilbert's advances, and eventually marries him after finally Arthur dies a broken, but forgiven man—tells us a lot about Gilbert's tenacity and Helen's need for loving companionship despite the disasters of her first marriage. For better or worse, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* at once exposes the hardships facing women under laws of coverture, and seemingly falls back on the novelistic logic whereby Helen—hardened, but not hardhearted—finds redemption and happiness only by offering her hand to Gilbert. And yet, the remarriage that concludes *Tenant* is not a form of bowing to rote convention on Brontë's part so much as it is a knowing act of trust, love, and hope on Helen's: Helen does not marry Gilbert out of romantic naïveté, but rather *because of* the lessons she learns through her marriage to Arthur. On the other side of widowhood—"real" widowhood, this time—marriage feels like a fundamentally different matter for Helen, for Gilbert, and indeed for the novel's readers.

And yet, for all the novel's assured positioning of Helen so that she can remarry in a way that is savvy, volitional, and serves her own needs, the impetus for her relationship with Gilbert—as cited above—hinges on a moment of meaningful ambivalence. In order for Gilbert to take an active interest in Helen, her mourning must utterly fail to signify in any straightforward way. The plot of the novel, meanwhile, needs Helen to get *out* of mourning (so that she will be available to Gilbert), then *back into* mourning once the ruse is up (in response to Arthur's death), and then *back out* of mourning (to signify her readiness to finally marry Gilbert). This ambivalence stands in marked contrast not only to Helen's meticulously thought-out plans, but

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<sup>1</sup> See Talley's comprehensive introduction to the Broadview edition of *Tenant*, p. 20.

also to the logics of Victorian mourning culture, upon which those plans depends. Especially because she is patently *not* an “actual” widow during the passage cited above, the treatment of Helen’s widowhood has a lot to tell us about how mourning practices mattered (or failed to matter) as a social practice in the Victorian era.

In the early chapters of the novel, Helen supposes that adopting the guise of a widow will free her from any and all questions. The critical, if unstated assumption on Helen’s part is that wearing mourning bespeaks a widow’s grief, which in turn stands in for her enduring attachment to a husband beyond his death. In this reckoning, the mourning that a Victorian widow wears effectively “stands in” for the absent husband; it covers the widow as the status of marriage would “cover” her as a wife under laws of coverture. This logic is, in some senses, flatly Freudian<sup>2</sup>: as fetish object, mourning “covers”—and so disguises—the widow’s supposed “lack” of a husband; thus, the widow’s “renewed” sexual singleness is effectively disavowed. And yet, this too is only part of the story. For Gilbert, the stark blackness of Helen’s mourning is nothing more than a dramatic advertisement that his new neighbor is, to the side of any attachment to her deceased husband, definitively single. Mourning bifurcates the erotics of vision. From a mere shift of perspective, Helen’s mourning either prohibits her as an object of desire, or makes her the most fitting object of desire. Moreover, because the scene above takes place in public, *Tenant* suggests that not only Gilbert, but also his gossip-prone neighbors will view Helen’s mourning as a similarly undecided fashion.

The ambivalence of Helen’s mourning as a matter of public viewing is compounded by the ambivalence of her mourning as it relates (or not) to her experience of grief. Helen’s “putting on” widowhood, however justifiable as an escape tactic, places her in awkward contradiction to

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<sup>2</sup> See Freud’s 1927 essay simply titled “Fetishism.”

the novel's more general condemnation of affectation as a form of emotional manipulation. Indeed, throughout *Tenant*, characters register their unease with mourning as a practice whose compulsions betray mourners into a position of emotional dishonesty. To wit, Arthur almost forbids Helen to go into mourning following the death of her estranged father, complaining, "Oh, I hate black! But, however, I suppose you must wear it awhile, for form's sake" (227). Recognizing the wearing of mourning only as a "form," Arthur excuses it as a social obligation; he patently *cannot* accept that mourning might ever bespeak actual feelings of grief on the part of those who wear it. "I hope, Helen," Arthur suggests accordingly, "you won't think it your bounden duty to compose your face and manners into conformity with your funereal garb. Why should you sigh and groan, and I be made uncomfortable, because an old gentleman [...] a perfect stranger to us both, has thought proper to drink himself to death?" (227). When this less-than-generous description of her father moves Helen to tears, Arthur refuses to accept the emotion as bespeaking anything genuine. "Well, it must be affectation," he concludes. All too easily, then, mourning at once establishes a social premium on showing grief, and—for Arthur at least—turns all expressions of grief into a kind of counterfeit.

*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* thus raises a series of uncomfortable questions about the uses and abuses of mourning practices in Victorian social life, as well as in the Victorian novel. Mourning is at once what *Tenant* must "get past" in order to set up and revolve its remarriage plot, and that which sets its erotics into motion. Similarly, mourning is at once held as a social guarantee of feeling through its embodiment, and that which throws the "truth" of feeling into question by virtue of its embodiment. Rather than dissolving these tensions, through, *Tenant* depends upon them: for better or worse, mourning must be performed in the world of the novel, and its performance must be summarily read. In the context of Victorian mourning practices,

*Tenant* suggests, “inward” feeling is unintelligible—and thus unreadable—without its public dimension. Under the onus of such a social optic, then, what must it have felt like to lose a loved one in the Victorian era? How did one carve out a space for the nuance and particularity of one’s own feelings of loss—or not—despite the imperative to embody grief in accordance with an increasingly standardized set of fashions, time tables, and practices? How did one negotiate the ambivalent readings (or misreadings) of mourning? How did one feel losses outside the purview of those attachments whose losses were deemed “worthy” of, at least fashionable for, mourning? How could one assert those feelings *besides* grief that one might feel towards those who had been lost, particularly when losses—such as Arthur’s death—might also be the occasion feelings of relief, happiness, anxiety, envy, resentment, or sheer ambivalence?

These questions mattered differently in Victorian Britain. Victorian mourning practices constituted a highly visible, embodied practice that ordered subjects (and especially female subjects), social relations, and the boundaries of the social itself. Victorian Britain’s culture of mourning hinged on the manufacture, proliferation, and use of material objects—collectively referred to simply as “mourning”—that signified both emotional states and social allegiances in response to the death of an individual. While the practice of wearing mourning was not particular to the Victorians, nineteenth-century Britain’s booming industries facilitated the manufacture of the textiles that came to be deemed proper for mourning<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, the rise of industry contributed to the expansion of a middle class eager to prove its upward mobility and social ties through the display of increasingly stylized mourning accoutrements. Fashion magazines and etiquette manuals thus scrambled to codify and classify who should wear what sort of mourning, for whom, and for how long. Collectively, the materials of mourning organized subjects, social

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<sup>3</sup> For excellent histories of mourning and mourning fashions, see Morley’s *Death, Heaven and The Victorians*, Jalland’s *Death in the Victorian Family*, and Taylor’s *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History*.

life, and economies around the emotional lives of individuals; concomitantly, these materials presumed upon the emotional states and forms of affective performance best suited to the forms of subjectivity and social life they engendered. The display and interplay of mourning textiles located subjects along the axes of gender, class, kinship, nationality, and race, all the while staging such aspects of subjectivity as intimately related to the experience of grief.

*Turning in the Grave* examines the relationship between Victorian Britain's culture of mourning and the development of realist fiction. Scholars of Victorian fiction have underscored nineteenth-century realist fiction as giving rise to forms of subjectivity, modes of relation, and structures of feeling conducive to the establishment and perpetuation of a binary-gendered, heteronormative "intimate public sphere" whose hollow ideals continually fail to deliver "the good life" they promise. I contend that Victorian mourning culture posed a problem for the novel's ability to sustain such ideals, even as it necessitated alternatives for depicting the often painful realities of erotic life. I argue that the marriage plot—for all of its ability to organize narrative desires and social tableaux, as well as the intelligibility of narrative itself—only ever "succeeds" alongside the production of a corollary set of "queer losses" whose persistence mark the marriage plot's ideological, narrative, and symbolic ends as contingent, rather than inevitable. Texts of queer loss thus offer us the means by which to consider how authors of realist fiction grappled with the surprisingly lively objects undergirding the novel's more overt social projects. Queer losses call attention to the conflicted modes of feeling that accompanied the loss of a spouse or other family member, troubling the fetishization of domesticity through intimate knowledge of its particulars. Thus, even as Victorian fiction played a role in the idealization of the marital bond and domestic life, figures of queer loss afforded authors an opportunity to give voice to forms of life felt in relation to such ideals' loss or unattainability.

Faced with the demands of queer losses, authors adapted modes of plotting, narration, and literary feeling that wrestled against the marriage plot's end.

Victorian Britain's culture of mourning comprised what I will be calling an ideology of compulsory mourning. Compulsory mourning established a series of norms prescribing who was to mourn for whom, in what fashion, and for how long, and in so doing it organized subjects across space and time in ways that bolstered and perpetuated the bifurcation between highly gendered social spheres. Compulsory mourning valorized the married, monogamous, heterosexual couple form as the supreme social bond and, in so doing, acted as an affective extension for the development of Victorian ideals of domesticity. Compulsory mourning thus acted as an emotional extension of compulsory heterosexuality, as formulated classically by Adrienne Rich. Compulsory mourning subsisted as a cultural paradigm in part through a renegotiation of the terms of mourning not as an individual, affective experience, but rather as a practice that defined the terms of the social itself.

As Lou Taylor surmises, the public decorum occasioned by death became something of a mania for the Victorians. "In Britain by the middle of the nineteenth century," Taylor writes, "the overriding worry in the minds of the bereaved, particularly amongst the women, was the terror of being publicly shamed by their failure to carry through the etiquette of death correctly" (36). Importantly, though, mourning "correctly" and "publicly" in this context was not necessarily opposed to the feeling grief. Thus, Dana Luciano argues that, whereas in previous eras mourning bespoke "a sign of disobedience to the divine will," for Victorians and their North American contemporaries "the pain of grief was ... the body's spontaneous and natural testimony to the importance of interpersonal attachment; indeed, its persistence helped keep alive attachment even in the absence of the beloved object" (AG 2). The display of highly visible, material

signifiers of mourning worked not just to mark the *end* of an attachment, but also to establish and maintain social ties both between and among the living and the dead. Victorian mourning practices were not narcissistic or antisocial; they were downright promiscuous.

To the side of Luciano's emphasis on the "natural" and "spontaneous" nature of grief, however, mourning practices in Victorian Britain's revolved around ordered, codified, and commodified symbolic objects. In this regard, critics are right to characterize Victorian mourning practices as "fetishistic." As fetish objects, the trappings of Victorian mourning presumed a correspondence between the display of mourning and its emotional experience. For some critics, this fetishism betrays the threat that a personal, intimate, and often painful experience—grief—could be exploited or represented as a forgery through the worst sorts of disingenuousness, affectation, or social obligation. In this line of thinking, the fetishism of Victorian mourning profanes the memory of those lost by reducing them to the status of "things" that could be circulated in public as a matter of propriety or opportunism, rather than reverence. Schor's comments are characteristic of this perspective. "By the accession of Victoria," she notes, "emphasis had begun to shift away from the mourner's participation, through sympathy, in the social fabric, toward the social recognition and patronizing of the individual mourner" (11). "A culture of mourning," she laments, "became a cult of mourning."

Contemporary critics' anxieties about the fetishism of Victorian mourning are emblematic of what Phillipe Ariès has identified as a historical shift towards "the denial of death." In this vein, critics' insistence that mourning should be experienced inwardly—and thus, presumably, "genuinely"—rather than outwardly and socially—in an indeterminate, and therefore fraught manner—is not only a plea for affective "authenticity" in the face of unwieldy social mediation, but also an implicit injunction that mourning has no "genuine" place in public

life. Clearly, such an approach is presentist insofar as it simply refuses to engage Victorian mourning's public dimension on its own terms. Ironically, this approach to mourning merely fetishizes grief in a different fashion, placing a premium on inward experiences of affect while downplaying the extent to which practices of mourning continue to structure the social, particularly through discourses of national loss and trauma<sup>4</sup>.

Critical dismissiveness towards the fetishism of Victorian mourning practices also presumes that the Victorians were naïve about the extent to which their practices were fraught. Although Foucault's *History of Sexuality, Vol. I* has done much to discount tired lines about "those repressed Victorians," much influential criticism of the Victorian novel continues to presume that Victorian fiction reflects the desires and fantasies of a populace that lacked the self-consciousness necessary to wrestle with the mores of their own society. Whether staged as the result of psychological compulsion, processes of surveillance and discipline, or simply milquetoast conservatism, such criticism presupposes that Victorian people, and so authors, and so novels, and so fictive characters were, more or less, complicit with Victorian conservatism. In this schema, the fetishism of Victorian mourning practices spoke to the earnestness with which the Victorians, influenced by Evangelical perspectives on the afterlife, related to the dead and dying and engaged in practices of grief, oblivious to the darker implications of what happens when things—clothes, photos, funeral processions—come to stand for people.

The question of how one should read Victorian mourning thus acquires particularly complex dimensions in Victorian realist fiction. In representing contemporary mourning practices on the page, authors of Victorian novels found themselves faced with a number of potentially uncomfortable dilemmas. As will be discussed more fully in Chapter Two, the

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<sup>4</sup> See Butler, *Precarious Life*.

heterosexual, monogamous, married bond has often been posited by historians of the novel as the linchpin by which novels “make sense” of the social worlds they describe. For example, in his foundational study *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt proposes that the novel took shape in the eighteenth century as part of a larger cultural effort to represent, and so make sense of, liberal individual subjectivity. Central to this liberal individual subjectivity, for Watt, is the female protagonist’s unquestioned right to consent to marriage in Richardson’s *Pamela* without fear that her suitor, Mr. B, will simply ignore her continual protestations. Mr. B can appreciate Pamela’s worth as an individual, despite her lack of material wealth, and this recognition is socially valorized through the couple’s marriage. Marriage, in Watt’s influential reading, thus becomes central not only to the development of the novel, but also to novelistic conceptions of modern subjectivity and individuality. The novel, he submits, thus tracks shifts in the understanding of gender and sexuality that occurred as post-Industrial Revolution British society underwent a rapid reorganization from notions of large, “patriarchal” kinship networks, to more localized, “conjugal” families formed on the basis of the desires of man and wife, and constituted by their immediate relatives (and especially their children) (96). The novel, in other words, developed hand-in-hand with the rise of Victorian culture’s vaunted domestic ideals.

Victorian mourning culture at once affirmed and troubled the novel’s valorization of the married, monogamous, heterosexual couple as a social, erotic, and narrative ideal. On the one hand, compulsory mourning enshrined Watt’s “conjugal family,” prizing close familial relations as the forms of relation whose loss was most worthy of grief and social recognition. On the other hand, Victorian mourning culture made an open spectacle of the fact that the conjugal family could not last forever: spouses die, children die, and those who survive such losses somehow find a way to go on living. Thus, Victorian mourning culture leaned heavily upon the notion that

the conjugal family was at once incredibly valuable and troublingly fragile. Compulsory mourning hierarchized human relations such that the ends of some forms of relation could not be admitted as losses, even as the ends of other forms of relation could not be experienced as anything *but* losses; Helen *must* go into mourning for Arthur despite her feelings of anger, resentment, and fear towards him. In pointing out this presumption, in no way do I mean to discount that a family member's loss—and especially the loss of a spouse—*might indeed* be felt as a form of profound loss. Rather, I mean to point out that grieving such losses was made more complicated, rather than more transparent, by the ideology of compulsory mourning. My contention is that compulsory mourning's *demand* to mourn inflected many representations of grief in the Victorian context with a self-reflexive, critical component, even when such grieving was represented as deeply heartfelt.

In turning to Victorian mourning practices for what they tell us about Victorian sexuality, *Turning in the Grave* questions the ends to which Victorian fiction worked, particularly as such ends grappled with figures of queer loss that stood as uncomfortable remainders of both marriage and the marriage plot. In part, this project is an argument with theories of narrative that take marriage as the “end” of the story, and so ignore the extent to which fiction—and *especially* Victorian fiction—is equally interested in addressing and representing forms of fictional life defined by their placement “after” or “instead of” marriage. The notion that marriage is an “end” has been nearly institutionalized by narrative theorists. In *Narrative and Its Discontents*, for example, D.A. Miller argues that plot is best represented as an opposition between middling “narratable” elements (usually characters) and the novel's general project of working towards the “nonnarratable” homogeneity of an ending that can quell such characters' disruptive, interminable actions into complicity with a pre-existing ideological formation. Miller

understands plot as fundamentally conservative. “Narratable” plot elements are figural rebels against the status quo of a novel’s social landscape, and their struggles supply novelistic plots with a sense of productive tension. The “nonnarratable,” by contrast, refers to all those elements of a text that are in one sense utterly mundane but also powerfully capable of satiating the narratable’s desires or resolving its conflicts. Crucially, Miller’s nonnarratable ends more often than not hinge on bringing to the heteronormative table a heroine whose relationship to courtship, monogamy, and marriage is, initially at least, profoundly ambivalent. In Miller’s equation, romantic singleness poses a recurrent problem for the novel insofar as it signals a form of erotic subjectivity that cannot be brought into quiet community through the conventionally easy resolution of the marriage plot and its attending assurances of kinship ties, reproductive futurity, and a supposedly satisfied (and therefore blunted) desire. Even romances that don’t come to pass ultimately only underscore this point for Miller, who conceives of such instances as “failure,” a “counterfinality” that still “preserves the ‘happy ending,’ as the only interpretative perspective able to make final sense of the actual, unhappy outcome” (144-5).

In *Reading for the Plot*, by contrast, Peter Brooks argues that plot arises from the nothingness of the beginning and is “stimulated into the condition of narratability, to enter a state of deviance and detour ... in which it is maintained for a certain time, through an at least minimally complex extravagance, before returning to the quiescence of the nonnarratable” (108). Brooks posits the narrative “middle” as a metonymic chain that finds its terminal fulfillment in narrative’s metaphorical ends. Narrative is thus paradoxical for Brooks. On the one hand, he aligns narrative middles with the expansion of desire towards discrete objects. In this sense, the momentum of plot can be aligned with the desire Freud attributes to the life drive (*eros*) as the effort to build towards ever greater unities in a signifying chain. On the other hand, this building

towards unity is also a building towards the oblivion of an ending. Thus, narrative moves towards not just metaphor, but also figural death. In this aspect narrative dynamics can be aligned with the death drive (*thanatos*). It is curious, then, that among the other definitions which he highlights in the etymology of “plot,” Brooks does not emphasize his model’s suggestion of “funeral plots.” Indeed, the figure of the headstone epitaph seems particularly well suited to his description of narrative’s “anticipation of retrospection” by which we “read in a spirit of confidence, and also a state of dependence, that what remains to be read will restructure the provisional meanings of the already read” (23). In this way, a sense of loss (and not just death) both undergirds and undermines Brooks’ thesis. He attempts to account for this phenomenon, but can only do so through a prescriptive rhetoric of “bad endings”—and even these are really just more middling flirtation in disguise; a virtual threat of “premature discharge, of short-circuit” (109). What of the end that is properly an end, but that refuses to give up a properly satisfying, orgasmic end? To return to Miller, what of narratable elements which cannot be properly quelled or expelled from the text, but instead leave nagging doubts about the efficacy of the name’s power to signify accurately and exhaustively?

In *Come as You Are*, Judith Roof literalizes the stakes of the sexual metaphors upon which Miller and Brooks’ theories of narrative desire depend, arguing that narrative is fundamentally reproductive. Roof finds in narrative the very cultural form through which heteronormative ideology is reproduced and stabilized. Roof maintains that our “very understanding of narrative as a primary means to sense and satisfaction depends upon a metaphorically heterosexual dynamic within a reproductive aegis” (xii). It is no coincidence, for Roof, that the “happy” or “comedic” endings of the nineteenth-century novel are signaled by marriage and a shoring up of kinship ties. Rather, Roof views this pattern as only the most

blatant literalization of what narrative is always up to anyway. For Roof, the sexualization of narrative sets up a dynamic of plot in which narrative's "apparent rendition of life experience... is already an ideological version of (re)production produced by the figurative cooperation of a naturalized capitalism and heterosexuality ... as if it were simply a fact of life and sense itself" (xvii). Unlike Miller or Brooks, Roof underscores the extent to which narrative ends depend fundamentally upon loss. Roof insists that the end can never supply a metaphor whose coherence leaves no remainder. Instead, what the end offers us is merely the "phantom of a whole," a metaphor whose "shift from term to term always leaves something behind, an ideological detritus precipitated and lost during each substitution" (xv, 24). More suggestively, then, Roof's emphasis on issuing grievances for that which has been lost in the service of generating narrative suggests that the metaphorical operations of mourning are as necessary for narrative as are those of reproduction. Risking an optimistic gesture from Roof's otherwise gloomily paranoid (which is not to say inaccurate) model, I would suggest that underscoring the uneasy afterlife of metaphorical endings has the potential to assure a critical futurity which would resist the monumentalizing of Brooks' and Miller's dead metaphorical ends.

Both Miller and Roof, however, over-emphasize marriage's ability to quell narrative desires. While married characters tend to serve as secondary characters rather than protagonists in Victorian fiction, their ubiquity is a testament to the fact that in fiction, as in life, marriage is not really an, much less *the*, end. Moreover, these models of narrative ignore that many novels are founded not upon desire in its "active" stage, but upon forms of loss and lack facilitated by and felt only when the very forms of reproduction that Roof cites as pinnacle to the heteronormativity of narrative fall outside the realm of narrative possibility. As Jonathan Dollimore's work highlights powerfully, reproduction (and the beginnings it implies) and death

(as ending) are contiguous parts of the same story, rather than opposed terms. Novels offer us not just deathly *endings*, but deathly *beginnings* as well—beginnings that anchor the stories that follow within the penumbra of loss, inflecting all desire with a melancholic tinge. This point is relevant less as a matter of ideology critique than as a matter of empirical fact: life goes on after marriage. To wit, marriages themselves end, and life goes on after that, too. What we need, then, is a theory of plot's empty sheets: of narrative's morning after, and more distantly the *mourning* after risked by all social attachments. We can better understand how narrative works by considering those instances in which loss is not that which is repressed, but is in fact the motivating force for narrative itself.

*Turning in the Grave* is an effort to do justice to variegated, conflicted, and ambivalent experiences of loss that were not *repressed* by Victorian mourning culture, but were in fact *necessitated* and made possible by it. In this context, “queer loss” refers to forms of narrative feeling represented in direct relation to the marriage plot's promise of domestic bliss, but which are narrated “after” or “instead” of it. Queer losers—characters like widows and widowers, parents who lose children, the heartbroken, and the single—all have a great deal to tell us about the extent to which the marriage plot, and marriage itself, can only ever tell part of the story of social life. Thus, far from presenting a narrative or ideological “problem” for Victorian novelists, figures of queer loss are surprisingly generative; queer losses and queer losers engender a number of important innovations in the Victorian novel. If, as Sara Ahmed notes in *The Promise of Happiness*, marriage serves powerfully as a fetish object around which life narratives and cultural values are oriented, then narratives of queer loss are important in part for the way they make palpable the costs of maintaining the useful fiction that marriage is either *an end* or *the*

end. Queer losses call attention to how the marriage plot, and critical considerations of the marriage plot, register value in some forms of relation, feeling, and fictional life, but not others.

Queer losses are “queer” in the sense that they render the ideological, social, and fictional ends of marriage ambivalent; they “turn” our perspectives on marriage. Queer losses call into question the “good” that marriage promises, both in and out of fiction, and offer a critical angle on forms of life, fiction, and feeling that brush uncomfortably against marriage’s idealization by compulsory mourning and the marriage plot. In contrast to emotionally “flat” ways of grieving the ends of marriage and domestic life, queer losses are shiftier; often, the queer losers examined in this study evince a profound awareness of how they “should” feel in response to the death of a spouse or child, and yet their experiences of mourning entail many feelings besides grief. Such self-reflexivity also turns, retroactively, a queer loser’s attachment to spouses, children, and lovers who have been lost. Where “queer” often refers to modes of gender or sexual performance that are non-normative, subversive, or transgressive, the queerness of queer losses is less a matter of resistance than contingency. Indeed, many of the queer losers examined in this study are anything *but* resistant to marriage and the marriage plot. Rather, queer loss offers a queer perspective on marriage through intimate, ambivalent knowledge of its particulars. Queer losers occupy a knowing relation to marriage and domestic life in their “aftermath,” or knowledge of social life *to the side* of marriage and conjugal kinship.

In considering the relationship between sexuality and mourning, *Turning in the Grave* reconsiders the stakes of queer theory’s sustained interest in melancholia as a powerful, but often problematic form of grief<sup>5</sup>. In the Freudian account, melancholia arises from the subject’s

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<sup>5</sup> See Butler, “Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification” (1995); Love, *Feeling Backward* (2007); Freeman, *Time Binds* (2010).

ambivalent feelings toward a beloved other who has been lost; it thus entails a sustained psychic refusal to “let go” of that other<sup>6</sup>. Understanding this ambivalence primarily as a liability, Freud pathologizes melancholia as characterized by manic-depressive episodes, as well as an inability for the subject to form new loving attachments. Over the past two decades, however, feminist and queer theorists have powerfully demonstrated that melancholic attachments are far from politically neutral, pointing us towards forms of loss that have been publicly disavowed<sup>7</sup> and psychically repressed<sup>8</sup> within the context of a heteronormative society. Queer theorists have thus insisted that, far from constituting antisocial detachment, melancholic forms of loss can serve as the groundwork for a great deal of political and relational work, insisting on the public recognition of queer losses as such<sup>9</sup>.

Without denying the extent to which melancholia can indeed feel painful for some of those held in its thrall, *Turning in the Grave* seeks a reparative return to melancholia with this queer difference in mind. In this venture, *Turning in the Grave* complicates recent queer discourses on emotion that have—for all of their nuance and insight—tended to depend on easy distinctions between “negative” and “positive” affects<sup>10</sup> alongside alternately anti-futural or utopian political projects<sup>11</sup>. In response to these positions, I offer ambivalence as an emotional fulcrum crucial for fostering attachments that are as critical as they are thick. Embracing ambivalence as a critical method, *Turning in the Grave* at once embraces and holds at arm’s length the prerogatives associated with literary criticism’s various “turns,” eschewing ideological

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<sup>6</sup> Freud, Sigmund. “Mourning and Melancholia.” *Collected Papers vol. 4*. Ed. E. Jones., trans. J. Riviere. London: The Hogarth Press, 1934. Print.

<sup>7</sup> See Ahmed, Sara. “Queer Feelings.” In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

<sup>8</sup> See Butler, Judith. “Critically Queer.” *GLQ* 1.1 (1993): 17-32.

<sup>9</sup> See Cvetkovich, Ann. “AIDS Activism and Public Feelings.” In *An Archive of Feeling*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003

<sup>10</sup> See Sedgwick & Frank, *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (1995); Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2004); Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings* (2003).

<sup>11</sup> See Edelman, *No Future* (2004); Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* (2009).

or methodological purity in favor of a promiscuous, conflicted, and recursive reading practice. In this way, ambivalence underscores the contingency with which one might differently encounter—and *re-encounter*—lovers, losses, and texts.

*Turning in the Grave* takes up novels whose characters, narrators, or styles assume a reflective, critical, or even outright cynical stance towards the conventional marriage plot, as well as Victorian marital and domestic ideology. This study thus grapples with the implications of feminist and queer touchstones of Victorian studies by examining fictive locales in which notions of Victorian sexual propriety and morality failed to anticipate, or contain exhaustively, the various forms of bonding available to subjects whose lives and loves took place in direct relation to, but outside of, marriage. To be clear, my goal is *not* to re-hash queer criticism of marriage or engage in ideology critique; rather, this project aims to explore the richness of what happens in anticipation of, instead of, and in the afterwards of marriage in Victorian fiction. This project thus grapples with historicist notions of what “counts” as notable within a given paradigm and what falls to the wayside as a contingent outlier. *Turning in the Grave* thus explores the queer bonds of kinship, belonging, and eroticism that are made possible, desirable, or necessary only through some prior form of erotic loss.

Each chapter of *Turning in the Grave* considers a different figure of queer loss, first explaining how that figure poses a problem for a certain function of Victorian fiction, and then theorizing how Victorian authors took up that figure as an opportunity for narrative innovation. Anthony Trollope is an important figure for this project insofar as critics continually posit his works as embodying the least common denominator ideals of middle-brow Victorian social life. By contrast, I argue that Trollope’s sustained interest in female desire and subjectivity as motivating forces for his novels and their social milieu underscores his commitment to a

nuanced, ambivalent consideration of the marriage plot in its various permutations. In Chapter 1, “Turning Mourning,” I turn to the figuration of widows in Trollope’s novels. As discussed above, norms governing widowhood in Victorian England tended to rely upon an all too easy semiotic equivalence between widows’ wearing of mourning, their experience of their husband’s loss as such, and their acceptance of contemporary prescriptions of social isolation. Historical accounts of widowhood have thus underscored the extent to which such norms worked to erode widows’ rights both to inherit property and enjoy any form of social life following marriage. Both with and against these accounts of Victorian mourning practices, I suggest that Trollope’s widows wear mourning as the means by which to keep their losses ironically lively. Rather than wearing mourning as a monumentalizing testament to the presumed sorrow they experiences at the end of their marriages, Trollope’s widows deploy mourning as a contingent fashion with multiple social uses. Trollope’s widows mourn their losses—or not—with a queer difference, demystifying and particularizing marriage. I suggest that Trollope’s widow characters experience and perform loss in a way that renders marriage an ambivalent object whose narrative specificities and emotional textures mark the advent of realist fiction’s ability to grapple with marriage as a lived experience, rather than as an ideological end goal or formal abstraction.

In Chapter 2, “Alone, Together,” I consider histories of the novel that posit the fulfillment of female desire, signaled through the “success” of the marriage plot, as the basis for the novel form’s modeling of modern liberal subjectivity. Such theories of the novel ironically posit the individual as based in the heterosexual, monogamous, married couple form, and summarily consign single women to a form of non-subjectivity and narrative oblivion. Being single thus feels like “losing out” in the novel. In this light, Trollope’s “Chronicles of Barset” self-consciously thematize female singleness as a narrative problem and social crisis. Thus, the

final two “Chronicles”—*The Small House at Allington* and *The Last Chronicle of Barset*—offer that, in the case of single women, the marriage plot utterly depends on undermining the notions of female autonomy and desire sacred to political histories of the novel. Determinedly single, the novels’ protagonist Lily Dale figures communal pressures to marry as a form of narrative compulsion, and thus she is able to stage her own singleness as a form of masochistic play. Through Lily, Trollope lays bare the stakes of compulsory heterosexuality’s positing of marriage as the ultimate social and narrative good.

In Chapter 3, “Bearing Children,” I explore the complicated ties between domesticity, sympathy, and the act of reading Victorian domestic fiction. Representations of child loss in mid-nineteenth-century fiction, I argue, underscore that sympathy can, for all its moral and ethical possibilities, come to be felt as a costly form of emotional expenditure. In this light, Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* and Charles Dickens’ *Dombey and Son* complicate critics’ assertions that the reading of familial fictions helped to idealize the private sphere as a realm that fostered sympathetic feeling. In Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*, for example, the work of caring and feeling for children comes to be felt as onerous and draining in the context of an emotional “bear market” in which poverty disrupts narratives of generational progress, and hopes of domestic improvement are continually disappointed. *Dombey and Son*, meanwhile, suggests that both domestic isolationism and diffuse, ad hoc networks of social attachment are equally prone to emotional bankruptcy. Both Gaskell and Dickens thus call attention to the risks attending various forms of feeling in community. At the same time, both *Mary Barton* and *Dombey and Son* offer alternative, if ambivalent modes of sympathetic feeling towards kin and kinship.

In Chapter 4, “Going Through the Motions,” I consider how a form of heartbreak aligned with melancholia complicates the notions of narrative desire theorized by Brooks, Miller, and

Roof. This suggests that heartbreak demands theories of narrative desire capable of reaching beyond the end. Adapting and working through Freud's seminal essay "Mourning and Melancholia," I argue that novels centered on heartbroken protagonists suggest an alternative form of plotting in which uncanny doubles offer the opportunity for narrative "reparation," rather than "closure." This melancholic plotting is exemplified by Thomas Hardy's early novel *Desperate Remedies*, in which the heartbroken Cytherea Aldclyffe's deft manipulations of her young, equally lovesick ward allow her to renegotiate and work through the terms by which her own story is told. For all of heartbreak's associations with "negative" emotions, then, I argue that heartbreak also supplies the means with which to form surprising attachments between the survivors of romantic loss.

The final chapter of *Turning in the Grave*, "Losers' History," explores the marriage plot as it is taken up by evolutionary theory as a model for natural history. In the context of the "discovery" of extinction, I contend that sexual singleness and non-reproductivity—and especially *male* singleness—took on a tone of cataclysmic failure such that bachelors were understood to "lose out" on a place in evolutionary history. Thus, I theorize that the figure of the bachelor points towards an alternative, queer history of extinct losers that undergirds the "success" stories of evolutionary history. At the same time, Victorian geologists and paleoartists leaned on literary logics, and especially analogy, in order to reconstruct and restore prehistoric worlds that they could never witness. This suggests that Victorian paleontologists innovated a mode of historiography that was deeply erotic, and wrestled with problems of historical representation similar to those underscored by recent work on queer history. In this context, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*—an anachronistic tale of colonial adventure in which a group of scientists come face to face with dinosaurs on a remote South American plateau—

fantasizes a mode of witnessing history that can account for the queer gaps in geological history. At the same time, the exploits of *The Lost World's* bachelor narrator suggest a powerful mode of historical feeling that both supplements and unsettles evolutionary theory's over-emphasis on sexual reproduction as the means to assure one's place in the grand récit of geohistory.

By embracing, rather than dismissing, the ambivalence inherent to forms of loss, *Turning in the Grave* aims to answer Eve Sedgwick's call for a flexibly descriptive account of emotion as a "textured" experience. In Sedgwick's reckoning, affect is a matter of contingency; of how objects come into contact, touching upon each other in ways that are more surprising than determined, more promiscuous than suspicious. To explore affect as "textured" is thus to suppose that nothing is inherently felt in only one way the exclusion of all others. As Sedgwick proposes, "To perceive texture is never only to ask or know What is it like? nor even just How does it impinge on me?"<sup>12</sup> "Textural perception," she maintains, "always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What could I do with it?" By forcing us to confront such questions with regard to the affective textures of marriage, love, kinship, and narrative, figures of queer loss afford us an opportunity to consider how such objects might be encountered *differently* and indeed might be felt *in other ways*. In this respect, the ambivalence of queer loss does not reflect a lack of feeling towards perceived losses; instead, it suggests that the organized practice of mourning in Victorian Britain at once made possible, but also failed to anticipate or contain, the variety of conflicted and contradictory emotional stances one might take *simultaneously* towards a lost other, as well as the possibilities for a life that survives loss.

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<sup>12</sup> Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003. Print: 13.

# CHAPTER 1

## TURNING MOURNING

### TROLLOPE'S AMBIVALENT WIDOWS

Near the end of Trollope's *The Small House at Allington*, the protagonist Lily Dale disagrees with her mother about the prospect of marrying Johnny Eames, an earnest, but perhaps too ardent graduate of hobbledehoyhood whom Lily finds herself both unwilling and unable to love. Having been jilted by Adolphus Crosbie, a social climber as naïve as he is disingenuous, Lily protests that marrying Johnny Eames would constitute a form of adultery. "In my heart I am married to that other man," Lily contends, "I gave myself to him, and loved him, and rejoiced in his love" (*The Small House at Allington* 630). Noting that the situation may have changed—Crosbie has since (miserably) married a noble's daughter and run through her fortune—Lily nevertheless maintains that there "are things that will not have themselves buried and put out of sight, as though they had never been" (631).

Continuing her line of explanation, Lily marks an identification that seems to say in one word what the previous four-hundred pages could not: "I am as you are, mamma—widowed" (631). Despite the general reluctance of Bassetshire residents to accept Lily's refusal of Eames, in attempting to justify her convictions to Mrs. Dale, Lily makes an appeal that, apparently, cannot be refused (at least until the novel's sequel). Left at a loss for words, Mrs. Dale, focalized through the narrator, admits that "no rejoinder on her part was possible" (631). Indeed, Mrs. Dale herself *telegraphs* the figuration when she overhears Lily's first denial of Eames—"I should be disgraced in my own eyes if I admitted the love of another man!"—and notes that Lily's are "terrible words, speaking of a perpetual widowhood, and telling of an amount of suffering

greater even than that which she had anticipated” (595-6). However unhappily, Mrs. Dale thus accepts and even invites Lily as a fellow widow, and so she can only accede to Lily’s proclamation, murmuring, “It shall be as you will” (631).

Certainly Lily finds other, perhaps more “accurate” identifications to characterize her situation. In *The Last Chronicle* she opts to sign her name followed by “O.M.” for “Old Maid” in place of the college graduate’s “B.A.,” signaling that she will “take [her] degree” in spinsterhood (*The Last Chronicle of Barset* 817). The fact of the matter is that Lily has *not* been married and indeed she will never *become* married—and there would usually be the rub. The man who would have been her husband—Lily’s story, like her widowhood, unfolds profoundly in the virtual of the past subjunctive—is far from dead, and even attempts to woo Lily again once he is himself left a widower in *The Last Chronicle*. Why, then, is Lily’s “appeal” to widowhood one to which “no reasoning could be of avail?” (*TSHA* 631). What in Lily’s romantic history *suggests* her alignment with Mrs. Dale *as a widow*? Why does Mrs. Dale accept Lily’s figuration of herself as a widow as an end to the argument, and not instead view Lily’s identification as precociously fanciful or even caustically insensitive? Most urgently, what does Lily seek to accomplish by identifying as a widow?

Given the ubiquity of widows throughout Trollope’s oeuvre and Victorian fiction at large, Lily’s identification seems, for all of its rhetorical efficacy, remarkably non-specific. Is Lily akin to *Can You Forgive Her*’s flirtatiously avunculate Mrs. Greenow? Or is she more in line with *The Way We Live Now*’s begrudgingly independent Winifred Hurtle? Keeping things local, is Lily fearlessly devoted to her “deceased” “husband,” like Eleanor Bold in the early chapters of *Barchester Towers*? Lily offers no clarifications other than the association of “widowed” with her mother, but even the link there remains unclear. If Lily’s “as you are,

mamma” shows her devotion to Mrs. Dale, who perpetually worries about the prospect of being left alone when her daughters marry, then why would Lily figure herself in a similarly precarious social state, particularly if that identification ironically assures both women a sense of continued familial community, however precarious?

Writing on Trollope’s many widowed characters, Christopher Noble suggests that widowhood’s figural flexibility leaves its terms open, even as it accomplishes a great deal of work for the social imaginary of realist fiction. Pointing to Plath’s notion of widowhood as “vacancy,” Noble notes that “Victorian widows’ vacancy was a vocation, requiring bodily entombment in crape and prolonged social seclusion” and that the Victorian widow thus “continued to be married to her husband long after his demise, her identity subsumed in his absence; loss was her occupation” (178). Thus, even as “vacancy” suggests an openness of signification—an utter lack of content—Noble immediately *fills* this vacancy, reducing widows’ experiences to a perpetual performance of loss not *as* loss, but rather as social ritual. Although Noble’s readings of Trollope’s widows are insightful, detailed, and nuanced on a case-by-case basis, his formulation of widowhood as a figure moves too quickly to substitute material loss and semiotic lack with consolatory content. This move is characteristic not of the figure of the widow in Victorian fiction, but rather of the tension between the figure and her historical analogues.

As Gervitz details of widows in eighteenth-century fiction, the figure of the Victorian widow “can be understood not simply as one of the ciphers of the age,” but also for understanding the relationship between fiction and history (168). But where Gervitz sees the eighteenth-century widow as registering “the period’s anxieties about its own cultural developments”—namely, a nascent market-based economy in which women were, initially at least, involved—the figure of the widow in Victorian fiction bore no easy, determined

relationship to her historical counterparts. The fictional widow's relationship to history is not "anxious" in the Victorian era—and really, when *aren't* ideologies "anxious" about the success or failure of their operations?—so much as it is profoundly *ambivalent*, diverging from, playing upon, and calling into question, contemporary cultural assumptions about the links between affective experience and the fabric of the social.

This chapter thus proceeds from the claim that the widow is not necessarily a figure for mourning, but rather for a radical and pervasive form of ambivalence. In some senses, the basis for this thesis is purely materialist. Stated bluntly, besides the fact that widows are women whose husbands have passed away—although, as Lily's case demonstrates, there are also "virtual widows"—there is literally *nothing* that one could or indeed *should* assume about the ties connecting one widow's experiences to those of another. While the noun "widow" names a category of subjects, the term operates a profoundly volatile signifier. As much, then, as the figure of the widow seems most emblematic of the Victorian era's fetishistic mourning practices—practices that circulated material goods as guarantors of grief's experience—it is already too much to assume that a widow "mourns" a husband whose death may not necessarily be felt as a loss, even if the implications of this assumption are crucial. To the contrary of her grim trappings, however, when she is deployed in realist fiction the figure of the widow remains ironically lively, resisting reduction.

The ambivalence of Trollope's widow characters offers an important vantage point from which to reframe discussions about the place of ideology, agency, and desire in the larger scope of Trollope's oeuvre. Trollope's critics have long pointed to tensions in his fiction between fixed, compulsive characters and disciplinary social frameworks. In one camp, critics have argued that Trollope essentially writes the least common denominator of Victorian society. Summarizing this

perspective, Kucich offers that “condemnations of Trollope’s one-dimensionality” have led to the author’s “enshrinement” as “the supreme literary embodiment of middle-class stodginess” (593). In this reckoning, Trollope’s characters are irretrievably the rubes of bourgeois Victorian ideology. Thus, Trollope offers “self-enclosed worlds peopled by inhabitants largely unconscious of the rules that govern their surroundings” (Michie 163). Even at the level of form, Levine contends that Trollope merely “accepted the terms of the realistic technique he adopted” making no attempt to “test out [their] limits” and writing “comforting, conservative documents, easy in the ways of the middle class, admiring of the ways of the aristocracy, worldly wise in their acceptance of the inevitabilities of compromise” (5, 7).

A markedly different reception posits Trollope’s characters as relentlessly individualistic. In J. Hillis Miller’s estimation, Trollope’s fiction centers on a “conflict of wills” such that “each novel is a kind of game in which each character plays with all his energy the role in which he finds himself cast” (114-5). In this view, Trollope’s characters are powerfully narratable in their single-minded desires, but predictable because their defining traits over-determine their actions. Amanda Anderson accounts for the “wackiness” of Trollope’s compulsive characters as manifesting “not exactly integrity but rather a kind of stubbornness or obsession that often shades into perversity” (511). Anderson argues that these characters’ “recalcitrant psychologies” are ultimately “impossible to isolate ... from their social circulation” and so conflicts in Trollope “become sites where the limits or constraints of the social are sometimes registered and reflected upon” (514-5). Similarly, Overton contends that Trollope offers a “double perspective” that “allows him to see and to dramatize not only the arbitrariness of conventions, but their necessity; not only the dangers of the individual will, but its motive power” (300). For Trollope’s

characters, Overton asserts, “identity is not simply the expression of an inner being that precedes existence, but is assimilated in part to the relations that envelop it” (295).

Trollope’s “double perspective” matters differently with regards to his widowed characters insofar as those widows continually wrestle with erotic desires not only as the expression of self-evident, “personal” aspirations, but also in their complicated relations to social demands. The ambivalence of the widow as figure thus points to tensions and points of convergence between competing, but interdependent systems of norms meant to control the autonomy of women in nineteenth century Britain. Specifically, the figure of the widow demonstrates the extent to which compulsory heterosexuality—a system of norms and “demands” that keep “women within a male sexual purlieu,” as explicated famously by Adrienne Rich—at once undergirded, depended upon, and was utterly at odds with what I will be calling a system of compulsory mourning (12, 26). In accordance with the logic of compulsory mourning, a Victorian widow was expected to perform the work of mourning her husband—publicly, rigorously, and formally—irrespective of whether or not she experienced the death of her husband *as a loss*. Because compulsory mourning underscored the married, monogamous, heterosexual couple form as the social bond whose loss was most worth mourning, it tells us a lot about the extent to which marriage has been idealized as a social good.

Widows’ experiences of, and knowledge about, marriage posed a problem for compulsory mourning’s ability to keep up the veneer of its promises. Concomitantly, realist fiction’s innovations in depicting “inward,” often unstated epistemologies made it possible for Victorian fiction to give voice to the ambivalence already suggested by compulsory mourning’s inability to “flatten” marriage through affective fetishism. Free-indirect discourse, narratorial omniscience, direct narratee address, and other narrative features of Victorian fiction thus made

it possible—and perhaps even necessary—to express figural widows’ reflections on marriage that might otherwise have been regarded as improper or even monstrous by the standards of compulsory mourning. Even when such widows were painted in a decidedly moralistic light, their presence still unsettled the idealization of marriage demanded by their structural position in historical Britain. This suggests that the figural widow is—regardless of her complicity with, or dissent from, the standards of compulsory mourning, and whether expressed or not—in some senses always a problem for the idealizations of compulsory mourning, in part because her first-hand knowledge of marriage necessitated, in the rigor of realist fiction, that marriage—in all its contingent particulars—be made public.

This thesis implies ambivalence on a few different levels. First, the ambivalence of the widow *as figure* establishes an ideological ambivalence that sets it in opposition to normative assumptions about mourning in the Victorian context. These norms reflected a larger effort to control the autonomy of women through the establishment of a system of compulsory mourning. Quite to the contrary, however, widows in fiction wrestle with the presumptions this system made on their behalf, rendering palpable an often indeterminate or slyly manipulated discrepancy between widows’ experience of loss and her performance of mourning, and the uses to which such ambiguities might be deployed.

Second, figural widows’ affective ambivalence troubles the distinction between “affect”—the “genuine,” more-or-less spontaneous experience of emotion in response to an affective object—and affectation—the performance of affect, often in “excess” or discrepancy from affective experience. The point here is not to posit or substantiate any of the mind/body, real/counterfeit, or signifier/signified binaries presupposed by this reckoning (however inaccurate) of affect. Rather, my effort is to highlight that such oppositions depend upon a

method of fetishizing affect while discounting—often as morally dubious—affectation. The figure of the widow demystifies the fetishism of affect, and concomitantly highlights the extent to which the fetishism of affect is wholly incommensurate with the object-based affective economies of Victorian England’s culture of mourning. The perception that a widow might manipulate her mourning for personal erotic or economic benefit thus reflects tensions between competing systems of fetishism. In this way, figural widows’ affective ambivalence acts a fulcrum between and among various affective orientations towards a given affective object. As a critical faculty, affective ambivalence suggests the way in which objects whose affective valences are predetermined by a system of compulsory mourning might instead be encountered *differently*. If the fetishism of affect works to encode social goods through prescription—“You will mourn your dead husband because his death *is* a loss *for you* because marriage *is* good, regardless of *your* particulars”—then affective ambivalence instead insists upon the radical contingency with which we encounter objects. This critical faculty is not, however, about deducing how one might privilege one affective orientation as “correct” to the exclusion of all others. Instead, ambivalence works to hold together several affective orientations at once.

In this reckoning ambivalence is not a qualitative affective experience so much as an insistence upon a form of relation that is, for any of its provisionally describable arrangements, wholly contingent. The narrator’s reflection upon Mrs. Hurtle’s widowed existence in *The Way We Live Now* offers a nice “definition” of the widow capable of giving voice to this versatility: “Circumstances had made her what she was” (1: 450). Indeed, that novel’s title offers a suggestion for approaching representations of widowhood in Victorian fiction, contending that widows’ ways of fictional life unfold insistently in the present tense. Widowhood is thus a figure after the Barthesian fashion, “understood, not in its rhetorical sense, but rather in its gymnastic or

choreographic acceptance” (3-4). As “fragments of discourse,” Barthesian figures stand not for monolithic paradigms or “schema,” but operate instead “in a much livelier way,” necessitating neither structuralist nor formalist rigor so much as a notion of “linguistic feeling” that entails critical gropes and prods, but never attempts to hold things in place (4). Ascertaining these ironically lively widows, then, is a matter—to follow Barthes’ example—of comparative anatomy that seeks to describe “what in the straining body can be immobilized” (4).

Widows’ culturally-imposed social isolation was characteristic of larger-scale efforts to deny women participation in the public sphere and market economies, and Curran emphasizes that shifts in inheritance law worked to disenfranchise widows (14). As laws of coverture worked to subsume women into the category of non-subjects when they became wives, the Dower Act of 1833 ensured that the end of marriage by no means entailed the end of patriarchal control over capital. While coverture laws entailed the legal fiction that wives were impossible to distinguish from their husbands, marriage’s ambivalence with regards to the legal status of the female subject was complicated by a widow’s survival beyond the death of her husband. The magical thinking undergirding coverture’s disappearance of the married female—Now you see her, now you don’t!—could not account for the widow as a conspicuous remainder. While they presented a visually arresting image, widow’s weeds were nonetheless emblematic of a spectacular form of erasure, working to maintain coverture’s subjective *trompe-l’oeil*. The fetishism of Victorian mourning kept the dead husband symbolically alive as much as it marked his literal death.

While widowhood points us to chiefly materialist or juridical concerns, commentary on the subject often veers into affective prescription. With a sense of dire finality, Patricia Jalland offers that “Widowhood... was a devastating experience, entailing the loss of the central role of wife, which defined the identity and sense of worth of so many women” (230). “Widowhood,”

she extrapolates, “was a final destiny, an involuntary commitment to a form of social exile” and thus “Victorian and Edwardian widows usually suffered a greater sense of the total disintegration of their lives” (231, 235). Without downplaying the extent to which a husband’s death might indeed be felt as a heartbreaking loss, it is worth emphasizing that Jalland’s conclusions are misleading. The presumptions of compulsory mourning are what made the fetishism of Victorian mourning practices possible as a social enterprise. Only by shutting down the possible range of affective responses to the loss of one’s husband—you *will* feel “devastated,” you *will* experience your husband’s death as cause for grief—could the presumed correspondence between mourning and its symbolic representation through textiles be maintained.

What seems interesting to me about mourning materials, then, is not that they are fetish objects—this much is, well, obvious—but that they allow us to conceive of fetishism in its relation both to market economies *and* the emotional lives of individuals. Rather than simply demystifying these fetishes, then, I want to hold on to what is most unwieldy and uncomfortable about them as, following Anne McClintock’s formulation, “the historical enactment of ambiguity itself” (184). Touching on and against the body, the materials of mourning demonstrate how emotional life intimately brushes up against the life of things. In so doing, they collapse easy binarisms between emotional experience and its performance; ethereality and materiality; selflessness and interest; and—of course—public and private.

Synthesizing theories of fetishism ranging from its early colonial contexts, through Marx, and up to Freud, William Pietz has offered that in all of its operations “the fetish remains specific to ... the problematic of the social value of material objects as revealed in situations formed by the encounter of radically heterogeneous social systems” (7). Fetishes, in other words, establish value amongst things that are seemingly incommensurate; they enable forms of unlikely

relation. Insofar as mourning textiles operated according to the logic of the fetish, then, they worked to assure a form of affective exchange whereby radically different responses to the loss of an individual might be homogenized, and so easily understood in relation to one another. In a Victorian social market in which sympathy formed the sentimental glue that bonded individuals together, mourning textiles presented the fantasy of an easily legible means by which one might readily recognize the emotional state of another.

Contrary to this presumption of, or wish for, affective transparency, Sara Ahmed suggests a radically queer form of affective relation that is profoundly “contingent” in the sense that it is a matter of contact between and among affective objects that take surprising orientations to one another. Emotions are not inherent to an object, Ahmed suggests; rather, emotional objects are subject to models of circulation, and thus they often come to us as already “stuck” to certain emotions. Drawing on Marx’s model of fetishism, Ahmed maintains that “emotions accumulate over time” around affective objects “as a form of affective value” (11). “‘Feelings’ become ‘fetishes’, qualities that seem to reside in objects,” Ahmed suggests, “only through an erasure of the history of their production and circulation” (11). The fetishistic logic of compulsory mourning thus operates by disavowing that the loss of, for example, an abusive husband might not in fact be felt *as a loss*, and might in fact be met by any number of emotional responses.

Compulsory mourning thus tells us a lot about the extent to which marriage has been idealized as a social good. Ahmed has powerfully argued that the rhetoric of happiness works to fetishize certain forms of relation, but not others, as always-already “promising” happiness as a futural goal, as a kind of “reward” for following certain life trajectories, whereas happiness’ etymology suggests that it had previously understood as an ephemeral, almost accidental affective experience. “The history of happiness can be thought of as a history of associations,”

Ahmed writes (2). “In wishing for happiness we wish to be associated with happiness, which means to be associated with its associations.” Ahmed argues that happiness has functioned as a powerfully regulatory discourse by rendering unimaginable the contingency with which “happy” objects—and, in particular, marriage—might be experienced differently.

The emotional conventions of Victorian realist fiction were one of the means through which this rhetoric of marital happiness was bolstered during the nineteenth century. Hetta Carbury’s remark that “that there could be no other chance of happiness for her in this world than that of becoming Paul’s wife” is in some senses paradigmatic, rather than exceptional (*The Way We Live Now* 2: 403). Marriage’s seeming inevitability as the one and only “happy ending” of narrative is not, however, symptomatic of narrative’s always-already “heteronarrativity,” as Roof suggests in *Come As You Are*. Indeed, there are myriad narrative situations in which such inevitability is challenged, marked, or simply avoided. To extend Ahmed’s line of thinking, then, the ideology of compulsory mourning confirms marriage’s status as an indelible, fetishized social good by rendering impossible the notion that a spouse’s death might *not* be experienced as a loss. Teasing out moments of ambivalence—particularly as they gather around ambivalent figures, such as the widow—makes it possible to track an archive of ambivalence not in opposition to, but already within the fictions that seem most in bed with the fetishism of marriage as a “happy” affective object and social good.

Trollope’s introduction of Lady Carbury in *The Way We Live Now* exemplifies the particularizing faculty of the widow in realist fiction. Although Lady Carbury never openly speaks about her marriage to the deceased Lord Carbury, who passes away before the events of the novel picks up, the narrator’s access to her thoughts about that marriage *immediately* renders marriage an ambivalent object in the novel:

Now Lady Carbury, when she was released from her thralldom at the age of forty, had no idea at all of passing her future life amidst the ordinary penances of widowhood. She had hitherto endeavoured to do her duty, knowing that in accepting her position she was bound to take the good and the bad together. She had certainly encountered hitherto much that was bad. To be scolded, watched, beaten, and sworn at by a choleric old man till she was at last driven out of her house by the violence of his ill-usage; to be taken back as a favour with the assurance that her name would for the remainder of her life be unjustly tarnished; to have her flight constantly thrown in her face; and then at last to become for a year or two the nurse of a dying debauchee, was a high price to pay for such good things as she had hitherto enjoyed. (*The Way We Live Now* 1: 14)

Throughout this passage, the narrator employs a number of ambiguities in order to suggest a series of multifaceted conflicts for Lady Carbury not as she reconciles her widowhood with the demands of society, but rather as she makes sense of her widowhood for herself. Thus, while she is aware that widowhood is a vocation that she “accepts” with many “duties,” her ambivalence towards “the ordinary penances of widowhood” is framed not as positive resistance, but rather as a kind of ineptitude; that she has “no idea at all” of how to perform widowhood “well” suggests that her dissent from widowhood is informed less by a political stance than by a slouch. And indeed, who could blame her, given the particulars of the abusive marriage in question? In Trollope’s novelistic modernity, gone is the promising—if queerly composed—family form that redeems *Oliver Twist*’s abuses. In its stead, *The Way We Live Now* continually highlights marriage as facilitating gendered violence of which Melmotte’s abuse of his wife and daughter is only the most blunt example. Rather than insulating individuals from the cold and exploitative

economics of the public world, the family form in *The Way We Live Now* simply replicates it. To speak here of a bifurcation between Lady Carbury's "private" feelings and their "public" dimensions is thus already to miss the point; Carbury feels her husband's physical violence doubled in her social rejection. Her case highlights, powerfully, the extent to which the disappointment of marriage's "promises" comes to be felt as a form of "failure," and not just disappointment. As self-conscious as Lady Carbury is that her mistreatment is, on both counts, "unjust," she feels it just as pointedly all the same.

Accordingly, Lady Carbury laments in a note to the reviewers of *Criminal Queens* "how few women there are who can raise themselves above the quagmire of what we call love, and make themselves anything but playthings for men" (1: 2). As one such former "plaything," Lady Carbury repeatedly cautions her daughter Henrietta against marrying for love, and instead encourages her to marry her middle-aged, but honest and dependable cousin Roger. Hetta understandably questions her mother's wishes, asking, "Shall I marry him, mamma, without loving him?" to which her mother vociferously replies, "Love! Have I been able to love? Do you see much of what you call love around you?" (2: 15). Lady Carbury's unhappy marriage turns her affective orientation to her children as the unhappy products *of* that marriage. She outright states (to Hetta, no less), "I wish I were childless," and while she coddles Felix because he can potentially marry the family out of impending financial ruin, by novel's end he too feels like little more than a burden. Certainly, Lady Carbury's treatment of Hetta is cold to the extreme, but she is also fundamentally "unselfish," the narrator notes, "in her wish to see her daughter comfortably settled" (2: 324). Lady Carbury thus at once partakes in the desire for a future-oriented narrative of progress, but also refuses to believe that any such future is

inevitably a *happy one* insofar as such an end, for a daughter at least, seems ultimately to depend on marriage.

Lady Carbury's experiences with marriage turn it for her as an affective object. This suggests that one's contingent experiences of a social object can irrevocably influence how we encounter that object. So, if marriage is associated with "happiness" in Ahmed's reckoning, then in Lady Carbury's case that same object comes to be associated with a palpable sense of dread. The tragedy of Lady Carbury's story is that the tenaciousness of this association prevents her from acknowledging the contingency which made it possible in the first place. Thus, confronted with a proposal of remarriage from the gentle, patient, and helpful Mr. Broune, Lady Carbury recoils at the very word "wife," which comes "upon her like a thunder-clap" and changes "all her feelings" towards him, assuring her instantly that "she never could love him" despite their close friendship, and her warmth towards him (1: 288). And yet, for all of these apprehensions, something remains of Carbury's old hopes. Even as she chides Broune's naïveté—she has knowingly "used" him "because he knew the world"—she also acknowledges, via free-indirect discourse, that "mixed with her other feelings there was a tenderness which brought back some memory of her distant youth, and almost made her weep" (1: 289).

This "mixedness" of affect indicates the ambivalence of Lady Carbury's widowhood. Possessing knowledge of both marriage's promises, but also its bitter disappointments, Lady Carbury does not regard the latter as merely "cancelling out" the former. Stylistically, contingency is reflected in the passage's qualifying parentheticals and exasperated declaratives. Lady Carbury—vis-à-vis the narrator—is flabbergasted "That a man,—such a man,—should offer to take half her burdens, and to confer upon her half his blessings!" But, crucially, as much as this willingness to bestow a gift through marriage leads her to chide him ("What an idiot!"), it

also deifies him (“But what a god!”). Ambivalence, as a sort of affective fulcrum, entails the ability to hold multiple affective and critical perspectives alongside one another in productive tension. Ambivalence makes it possible to regard one’s suitors as idiot gods, and indeed makes it possible for a marriage proposal to feel both “wonderfully sweet” and “impossibly small.” As much as this scene ends in the “failure” of remarriage, then, it nevertheless succeeds in jostling marriage into an ambivalent term, initiating a series of sharp affective turns that pave the way for Lady Carbury and Broune to marry later in the novel.

The figural widow’s association with knowledge presented both an opportunity and a challenge for writers of realist fiction. Widows’ knowledge allowed writers of realist fiction to present intimate, detailed, and perhaps even slightly damning portraits of the intricacies and difficulties that particularized married life in the Victorian era. In this relentless speciation, the deployment of the widow in realist fiction functioned as a form of demystification for the ideal of marriage regardless of whether or not a given fictional widow’s reflections upon her marriage ever arrived at explicit marriage critique. At the same time, however, widows’ claims to knowledge—particularly sexual knowledge—presumed to rival those of a novel’s narrator. Instances of professing—and repeating—knowledge of and about the explicitly sexual aspects of a marriage are remarkably rare in mainstream Victorian fiction, but the widow’s positioning in the aftermath of marriage rendered her an alluring figure of desire and temptation. Whereas sexual knowledge procured out of wedlock was illicit—“fucking” in the sense of that word’s acronymic origin, “for unlawful carnal knowledge”—and married couples experienced sexual relations with one another—indeed, if at all, unless either party engaged in adultery—widows presumably possessed sexual knowledge without any present object. Working along the lines of the epistemology of the closet, widows in Victorian fiction represented a kind of discursive black

hole, figuring a pernicious form of grave sexual knowledge whose gravity both organized and disfigured the thin veil of respectability conspicuously surrounding (or uncovering) the facts of carnal sexuality in Victorian fiction.

In this regard, widows in Victorian fiction are often given a patently erotic charge. While, in accordance with the ideology of compulsory mourning, widow's weeds signified grief in the present, they also signified sexual availability in the future in a fairly overt and even spectacular fashion, as well as (potentially) the possibility of a get-rich-quick scheme for unscrupulous suitors. Although historians are quick to note the difficulty (and sometimes reluctance) with which widows faced the issue of remarriage, in many novels these historical considerations failed to diffuse the widow's eroticism. These issues are brought to a head in Trollope's 1864-5 novel *Can You Forgive Her?*. Though the novel centers primarily on Alice Vavasor, a young woman of means who jilts a worthy suitor early in the novel so that she can enjoy a vicarious political career through a planned marriage to her cousin George, Alice's Aunt Greenow—a wealthy widow—becomes the heroine of an important, if comedic subplot that serves as a counterpoint to the novel's ongoing project of getting Alice to regret her romantic missteps.

In a crucial church scene, *Can You Forgive Her?* aligns Mrs. Greenow's knack for affective performance with her status as an erotic vision. Mrs. Greenow arrives to church "in all the glory of widowhood" and assumes a centrally visible seat in the church, where she indulges in displaying "all her wardrobe of mourning, showing the richness of each article, the stiffness of the crape, the fineness of the cambric, the breadth of the frills,—telling the price of each to a shilling, while she explained how the whole had been amassed without any consideration of expense" (1: 70-71). By presenting this profoundly fetishistic image of mourning as conflated with the delights of *commodity* fetishism, Mrs. Greenow dazzles her onlookers by conducting her

“performance” with “all the pride of a young bride when she shows the glories of her trousseau to the friend of her bosom.” Is this a fashion show, a striptease, a debutante ball, or a church service? Mrs. Greenow authorizes what might otherwise be an ostentatious and thoroughly sacrilege eroticization of her body at church by sublimating the base eroticism of her physical body through “address[ing] the shade of the departed one in terms of most endearing affection” (1:71). Mourning *authorizes* eroticism in several different registers here, and thus Mrs. Greenow’s image is equally indulgent for onlooking husbands (as erotic), their avaricious wives (as material), and even the curate (perhaps because of the seeming earnestness of Greenow’s professions of mourning, or simply because she’s hot).

Cognizant of the extent to which Victorian mourning practices depend upon a widow’s ability to present a pleasing image of grieving devotion regardless of that outward image’s affective referent, Greenow self-consciously performs her grief according to the demands of compulsory mourning, but is able to do so in order to further her own interests. Aware of the social conventions preventing her appearance in public, Greenow continually calls attention to these obligations. “All that social intercourse could ever do for me lies buried in my darling’s grave,” she tells her niece Kate (1: 73). “My heart is desolate, and must remain so.” At the same time, however, these professions do nothing to change the fact that Greenow *does* appear in public under the auspices of socializing with her nieces, including the novel’s protagonist Alice Vavasor. It would be easy to read Greenow’s professions that “I’m not going to immolate [Alice] on the altars of my grief” and “I shall force myself to go out for [Alice’s] sake” cynically as a disingenuous manipulation of the terms at hand, and thus a form of bad faith towards the husband whom Greenow supposedly mourns.

At the same time, however, Mrs. Greenow's interest in both Kate and Alice seems genuine, if not entirely selfless. Indeed, Mrs. Greenow is one of several avunculate figures in *Can You Forgive Her?* who perform the work of raising and guiding Alice as her mother *might* have (the narrator is oddly mum about the particulars of Alice's mom) had she survived. In contrast to the ideals of self-abnegation associated with Victorian motherhood, which are central for *The Small House at Allington's* treatment of motherhood, Greenow's avunculate work allows for the possibility of inter-generational kinship ties that work to the benefit of all parties involved. In Greenow, Kate and Alice find a canny advisor who can help them—particularly Alice—to navigate the politics of marriage. In Kate and Alice, Greenow finds younger companions who authorize her to appear in public, and to whom she can give the benefit of her wisdom, articulating her expertise *as* a form of crucial knowledge.

Similarly, Mrs. Greenow's awareness of the demands for dressing in full- and half-mourning allow her to elide the actual time since Mr. Greenow's death. Thus, she is able to pursue flirtations with Cheeseacre and Bellfield. No one patently *calls* Mrs. Greenow on these manipulations of mourning—as both material dress and public performance—because her exhortations of his memory are so frequent and ardent that no one could possibly accuse her of having forgotten her deceased husband. Indeed, the invocation of Mr. Greenow's memory allows Mrs. Greenow to maintain not only a veneer of propriety but also the means to avoid unwanted advances from Cheeseacre. When Cheeseacre insists that she must *forget* Greenow as her “sitting here all alone, morning, noon, and night, won't bring him back ... what more can I do?” Greenow coolly replies, “I can do more... I can mourn for him in solitude and in silence” before telling him plainly, “It cannot be, Mr. Cheesacre” (1: 213). At the same time, she is able to *extend* her flirtation with Bellfield by chiding, “I won't have you call me Arabella. I am the

widow of Samuel Greenow, than whom no man was more respected where he was known, and it is not fitting that I should be addressed in that way” (1: 209). In this way, Mrs. Greenow’s professions of mourning serve multiple erotic ends, suggesting that, when armed with *savoir-faire*, widows might make spectacular fetishes of themselves without ever reducing themselves to the status of objects. Knowing the rules of the mourning game, Mrs. Greenow dresses like a pawn but moves like a queen.

Given the novel’s sustained interest in the social politics—or, more cynically, the social and narrative “problem”—of women with financial means, Mrs. Greenow offers an important counterpoint to the various maneuverings of the novel’s male characters, whose half-hearted, reactionary, and subterfuge investments in Alice’s inherited fortune range from condescending disinterest (John Gray) to inept detachment (Alice’s father) to seething avariciousness (George). *Can You Forgive Her?* continually stages Alice’s right to choose her husband—a sexual selectivity granted *only* by boon of her inheritance—as a form of authority in need of diffusion and disavowal. While Adolphus Crosbie, a male Trollopian jilt, breaks things off with relatively few social repercussions—to say nothing of interpersonal ones, as we shall see in the next chapter—Alice’s indecisiveness warrants reprobation so severe that it requires several instances of direct address. Even if the title’s question is only ever rhetorical—the narrator is very clear that we, as thoughtful, forgiving readers *should* indeed forgive Alice, as he has graciously already done so himself—it nevertheless interpolates readers as always already holding Alice in contempt. Amid the affective presumptions at play in the text, Greenow flatly tells Alice that she has nothing for which she needs to apologize: “A young woman, with six hundred a year, my dear, may do pretty nearly what she pleases” (2: 175). In Greenow’s wealthy widowed reckoning, Alice holds the purse strings (symbolically, if not pragmatically) and therefore she

also holds the cards. As much as she stages herself as an object, then, Greenow is perhaps the most thoroughgoing subject—female or otherwise—in the novel.

The novel's conclusion suggests that married pragmatism is the "sensible" solution to female fancies that are posed as irrationally flighty, if well-intentioned—Alice ultimately marries John Gray, ceding her fortune to him; Lady Glencora remains faithful to the grandly boring Plantagenet Palliser—but the bold matter-of-factness of Greenow's pronouncement cuts through Alice's (and the novel's) repeated efforts at convoluted rationalization and internal reconciliation. The phrase's pronouncedly memorable interior rhyme strikes an oddly resonant chord. Although Trollope is given neither to lyricism nor to epigrams, with Greenow he offers us both—nearly. Moreover, in Greenow Trollope offers an intimacy with the particulars of married life that unsettles the ease of the other romantic plots' endings. Indeed, the sharpness of Greenow's critique stems not from her status as a marriage dissident—she actively stages her own remarriage—but rather from her awareness of the contingencies that particularize every marriage as unique, despite the fact that social conventions work towards conformity: "Marriage with me, if I should marry again," Greenow tells Kate, "would be a very different thing to your marriage, or that of any other young person" (2: 240). For all of the narrator's reluctance to ascribe transparent motivations or interiorities to Greenow in her performance of mourning, he is perhaps nowhere as precise about her character as when he notes that "There was a thoughtfulness about her ... She foresaw all necessities, and made provision for all emergencies" (1: 71). This ability to prepare for the future, I contend, is gleaned from Greenow's status as a woman who has already experienced much in the past as Mr. Greenow's wife. Greenow's ability to *translate* such knowledge to others depends utterly on her ability to profess allegiance to

Greenow through mourning, which in turn affords opportunities to prepare for the future contingencies of her own remarriage on her own terms.

Characters in the text are canny enough to call attention to Greenow's mourning as potentially disingenuous, while noting that compulsory mourning requires her performance of mourning all the same. Initially, Kate laments that she must go to visit her aunt, and considers the prospect akin to social contagion. "Fancy a month at Yarmouth with no companion but such a woman as that!" she protests to Alice, noting that "I must say I think she's of a bad sort" and quickly calling attention to the fact that Greenow's deceased husband was "thirty years older than herself" (1: 55-6). Alice is characteristically more generous in reply, perhaps identifying with Greenow as a woman whose marital choices have thrust her into the social spotlight. "But still he was her husband," Alice retorts, "And even if her tears are assumed, what of that? What's a woman to do? ... According to all accounts she made him a very good wife, and now that she's got all his money, you wouldn't have her go about laughing within three months of his death" (1: 56). Alice supposes that, whether or not Greenow is indeed affected in her mourning, that mourning is nevertheless *necessary* as an act of social propriety and, outwardly at least, a matter of reverence.

Kate disagrees. "No; I wouldn't have her laugh; but neither would I have her cry," Kate replies. "And she's quite right to wear weeds; but she needn't be so very outrageous in the depth of her hems, or so very careful that her caps are becoming." The "out" of "outrageousness" here suggests a problem of exteriorization. In Kate's reckoning, the affective performance of grief should be a matter of giving social, visible testimony to the preexisting truth of an inner emotional life such that one corresponds to the other in degree and, in both senses of the word, fashion. The problem with Greenow, then, is that Kate figures that, because Greenow and her

husband were of dramatically different ages, Mrs. Greenow could only have married him for pragmatic (figured as selfish) reasons. So, while she doesn't begrudge Greenow for being in mourning—or for having made an advantageous match—she suggests that Greenow puts on her mourning to such an ostentatious degree that it becomes legible *as* a put on. In so doing, Greenow inadvertently calls attention to the absurdity of the obligation that she overshoots, as well as the loss she overshadows. The open secret of compulsory mourning, for Kate, is that it already makes grief into a counterfeit because its exteriorization is always a matter of excess; its exchange value as social commodity exceeds its use value as cathartic emotional response. The problem with Greenow is that she makes this fetishism explicit because her performances involve a process of artful aestheticization that always shows its hand.

At the same time, the narrator's epistemological ellipticism suggests that only reverence for the deceased Greenow, and a stylistic penchant for searing irony, ever stop him short of calling his widow a Victorian gold digger. On the one hand, his lack of willingness to intervene on Greenow's behalf in order to clear her name—as opposed to his *numerous* direct addresses to the narratee regarding Alice's wrongness, but also her ultimate innocence—is a damning silence. On the other, though, this vagary also suggests that Greenow's case might be the only one in which the titular question is not merely rhetorical, but in fact open to interpretation. To be sure, there is much about Greenow that seems suspect. Throughout the novel, Greenow's knack for affective performance is aligned with sexual promiscuity. "She had a wondrous power of smiling," the narrator informs us, "and could, upon occasion, give signs of peculiar favour to half a dozen different gentlemen in as many minutes" (1: 80). Indeed, all we are told of Mrs. Greenow's life *prior* to her first marriage is that she "acquired the character of being a flirt" and thus became the object of some gossip, "though doubtless more than half false," suggesting that

she has long been engaged in intrigues that skirt acceptability, but never quite go so far beyond the pale that she might be held in earnest contempt.

By staging Greenow's mourning as a potential sexual crisis unfolding in the public eye, the novel maintains that the fidelity of marriage—through life and beyond—gives rise to a form of mourning that *cannot* be excessive because it cannot be counterfeit; Greenow, therefore, must have married purely for money, and therefore must be completely a matter of affectation, rather than affect. The narrator thus depicts Mrs. Greenow's apostrophe of Mr. Greenow's *carte de visite* with a faux-Shakespearean maudlinism: "Dear Greenow; dear husband! When my spirit is false to thee, let thine forget to visit me softly in my dreams. Thou wast unmatched among husbands. Whose tender kindness was ever equal to thine? whose sweet temper was ever so constant? whose manly care so all-sufficient?" (1: 419). The absurdity of Greenow's anachronistic diction betrays the scene as a performance, and insofar as "Charlie Fairstairs and Mr. Cheesacre were watching her narrowly, and she knew that they were watching her," it is quite clear that her spirit is indeed, at least in mourning, definitely "false" (1: 419).

The narrator *reveals* the charade, however, and so even if the performance passes as the real thing for Charlie and Cheeseacre, the curtain falls between Greenow and the novel's readers. It is extremely difficult, then, to find a definite sense of condemnation in the narrator's concluding remarks that "She was certainly a woman of great genius and of great courage" (1: 419). To the contrary, such ironic remarks might also bespeak a sense of astonishment (which is not to say admiration) for the fearlessness with which Greenow attempts to pull the wool over her audience's eyes, particularly since that performance is clearly made legible as such for us. Similarly, the narrator presents an equally mixed or open message when Greenow later attends the banquet. Feigning that "there she was, a widow, declared by herself to be of four months'

standing, with a buried heart, making ready a dainty banquet with skill and liberality,” the narrator also ironically suggests that he “by no means intend[s] to insinuate that there was anything wrong in this” even as he makes absolutely clear that the entire expedition results in an “intimacy” between Greenow and Bellfield, whom she eventually marries (1: 80-1, 1: 88).

Elsewhere, though, Mrs. Greenow seems entirely sincere in her devotions to her “sainted lamb,” particularly in her gratefulness towards him. Indeed, Greenow ascribes her brazen attitude as hinging precisely on her earlier marriage. “What can the world do to me?” she boasts when Kate questions her choice to attend the picnic as her nieces’ escort (1: 73). “I’m not dependent on the world,—thanks to the care of that sainted lamb,” she offers. “I can hold my own; and as long as I can do that the world won’t hurt me. No, Kate, if I think a thing’s right I shall do it. I mean to make the place pleasant for you if I can, and the world may object if it likes.” While on the surface, Greenow’s perspective on marriage might seem shrewdly pragmatic in its materialism, readers would be remiss to disqualify such concerns as indicating that Greenow is a heartless opportunist. Later, advising Charlie Fairstairs to woo Cheeseacre, but never to deceive herself about her reasons for doing so, Greenow is blunt in saying, “Of course it’s his money, more or less. You don’t mean to tell me you’d go and fall in love with him if he was like Bellfield, and hadn’t got a rap? I can afford that sort of thing; you can’t” (2: 393). Ever aware of the privileges that widowhood affords her, Greenow understands full well that romantic love in marriage is a luxury. Indeed, this is the lesson that Lady Glencora learns painfully and perilously over the course of the novel. But as much as this phrase sounds like mere avarice, Greenow is careful to qualify that Charlie *should* learn to love Cheeseacre, as indeed she probably will.

Ultimately, the text figures Greenow’s worldview as emblematic of the same forms of compromise that it validates in the other romantic plots. “I always think that worldliness and

sentimentality are like brandy-and-water,” Greenow opines. “I don't like either of them separately, but taken together they make a very nice drink” (2: 393). As one who has “seen too much both of the world’s rough side and of its smooth side,” Greenow is, whether genuine or disaffected, at least consistent in that she scorns “to make any compromise between the world of pleasure and the world of woe” (1: 80-1). Moreover, in mixing the worldly and the emotional, Greenow develops a keen taste for emotion not as a natural, pre-social given around which one ought to build altars. Instead, she suggests that it is precisely in holding affect and affectation in an awkward *mélange* that one can deduce their values. That one might turn these values into one’s own fortune goes without saying. But through Mrs. Greenow, *Can You Forgive Her?* nevertheless manages a more nuanced moralism than either its title or conclusion would suggest. It does so by maintaining a critical space in which polyvalent readings allow for an ambivalent suspension from moralistic judgment in a novel that is otherwise drunk with it.

*The Way We Live Now* similarly figures affect as a precious commodity and affectation as a swindle parallel to the monetary deceptions carried out by Melmotte. But where *Can You Forgive Her?* posits such equations as a matter of moral import, Trollope’s natural history of the present portrays them as a matter of changing style. Thus, Trollope suggests that critical modes of reading and writing offer resources for giving realist voice to forms of attachment and experiences of loss that are contingent and complicated, rather than fetishistically determined. While this theme plays across several of the novel’s panoramic plotlines, perhaps the most intriguing variation concerns Mrs. Hurtle, an American widow who tracks Paul Montague back to London in order to pressure him to honor the notion that the two are affianced. Unlike Felix Carbury, whose flirtatious escapades with Marie Melmotte and Ruby Ruggles are motivated by social climbing and sexual greed—socially sanctioned and necessitated forms of exploitation

according to the novel's cynical view of British society in decline—Mrs. Hurtle's particular brand of erotic legerdemain depends upon her status as a woman out of time. In a characteristically nostalgic passage the narrator remarks, "In these days men regard the form and outward lines of a woman's face and figure more than either the colour or the expression, and women fit themselves to men's eyes" (*TWWLN* 1: 240).

But while the narrator has no particular objection to the fact of such embellishments of the female figure, he nevertheless resents the turn that contemporary trends have taken, lamenting that "Colours indeed are added, but not the colours which we used to love. The taste for flesh and blood has for the day given place to an appetite for horsehair and pearl powder" (1: 240). Mrs. Hurtle, by contrast, is "not a beauty after the present fashion," and her glamour consists instead in her anachronism; she possesses an Old World charm given New World flair. While she works herself up with the benefit of a fine frame, Hurtle's adroitness with aesthetics makes her appeal look all too easy and all too natural; she dresses "simply" and "as though she were oblivious," augmenting and aware of her beauty "only after that fashion in which a woman ought to know it" (1: 241). For all of the potential dubiousness of her adornment, then, Mrs. Hurtle's style is at the very least an emulation of the real—"flesh and blood"—rather than an appropriation of the alien—"horsehair and pearl powder." Hurtle's adoption of vintage is, on the face of it at least, thoroughly without irony. The beauty of Hurtle is thus, as it were, a fake of what the narrator takes to be genuine, and in this regard she at least half passes muster with his fancies for the decidedly passé.

Accordingly, in her intercourse with Paul, Hurtle manipulates not through a method of affective fabrication so much as artificial inflation, opting to accentuate and articulate rather than simply invent, and working primarily through writing in lieu of embodied performance.

Although her letters to Paul possess “much art,” they work primarily through her presenting only an image which Paul will find alluring, leaving “negative” affects “suppressed” rather than denied or discounted (1: 254). Thus, while she is repeatedly figured as a “wild cat,” the narrator insists that in one letter she writes to Paul “as to make him feel that if he would come he need not fear the claws of an offended lioness:—and yet she was angry as a lioness who had lost her cub” (1: 254). That the narrator has fairly free access to Hurtle’s inner life, and patently tells us how she feels with at least some degree of transparency, suggests that she has nothing either to hide or fake. Hurtle is not outright “false” so much as she is a careful manager of her moods, and she is therefore capable of translating her emotional life—however unpleasant—into words, phrases, and performances that are enticing. She never loses her claws, but she certainly knows when to retract them.

Readers of *The Way We Live* would be forgiven for feeling optimistic about Hurtle’s chances with Paul insofar as he has a similarly fraught knack for saying only what needs to be said. The narrator assures us that though “he was half false to his widow” in his romantic meanderings to his cousin Hetta, Paul “was half true to her. He had pledged his word, and that he said ought to bind him” (1: 243). In this regard the pair seems like a perfect match. It is probably true that if one were to take away the love and the anger, very little would be left of the relationship between Hurtle and Paul. To wit, their love plot ends with a fizzle rather than a bang. What is most compelling about Hurtle and Paul’s relationship, then, is the sense that while a great deal of what passes between them amounts to obstinacy and indignation in place of love, Hurtle’s acts of deception are *also* acts of devotion. If *The Way We Live Now* is a searing indictment of what happens when word veers too far from deed, then Hurtle’s case for Paul to

honor *his* word is completely in accordance with the novel's nostalgia for a gentlemanly ethos that is presumed passé.

While Hurtle's name suggest that she is only a temporary "hurdle" over which the plot needs to leap before the successful marriage of Paul to Hetta by novel's conclusion, the intensity with which Hurtle feels the sheer *wrongness* of her situation continually threatens to send the plot hurtling over an ethical cliff. On the one hand, a match between Hurtle and Paul would either guarantee the Carbury family's ruin *or* necessitate that Hetta contradict her morals and marry her cousin Roger in order to assure their security. Such a match would also allow Paul to keep his word to Roger, who resents that the younger Paul has successfully wooed Hetta, whom Roger also loves. The novel hinges uneasily on an ambivalent love plot: should Paul stay true to Hurtle then he keeps his word on two counts—but he also forces marriages without love on two counts as well. In this way, the sexual ethics of *The Way We Live Now* are utterly incommensurate with its larger social critique, and Hurtle's eventual relinquishing of Paul is the only thing that can put the novel's ethical conflict at ease. Because she is a wildly ambivalent figure, Hurtle's acquiescent, selfless exit from the novel is the only thing that can put it to rest.

Mrs. Hurtle is especially notable as a widow insofar as—like Lily Dale—her status as a widow is more-or-less virtual. While he might possess unmitigated access to Hurtle's interior life, the narrator is nevertheless continually non-committal about the simple facts of her back story, and thus she comes to be "regarded as a mystery" in the novel (1: 243-4). At various points in the *The Way We Live Now* it is unclear if Hurtle's husband is still alive (or not), if the two are divorced (or not), and if she shot him to death (or not). If Greenow's widowhood necessitates critical interpretation as a matter of resolving the ambivalence between affect and its performance, then Hurtle's widowhood necessitates a critical operation closer akin to the

detective's inquest: readers are tasked with accumulating enough evidence to make a definitive case with regards to the status of Hurtle's widowhood, and the particulars behind it. But even if the novel provides us with some answers, pinning down "the truth" about Hurtle is utterly beside the point. Indeed, the only confirmation we receive is a matter of second-hand news, and is therefore suspect. As in all respects, Hurtle's widowhood is only conceivable as a matter of emphasis and perspective. For Hurtle, widowhood is always a matter of contingency and contradiction, and so she capitalizes upon the figure of the widow, rather than the fact of it. But where Melmotte's stocks and bonds are ultimately revealed as a worthless sham, Hurtle's widowhood remains a valuable semiotic currency in the novel whether it is counterfeit or not.

Although Hurtle's deft management of her affective performance is consistently tied to her methods of embodiment, her true art is her ability to selectively communicate her moods and desires through writing a series of three letters. Indeed, even when Paul reflects upon his doubts about Hurtle's transparency with him, he worries that "Perhaps he was unable to read correctly the inner character of a woman whose experience of the world had been much wider than his own" (1: 257-8). For Paul, knowledge about Hurtle's character plays out as an apprehension about how he is to make sense of the love story in which he finds himself. Wrestling with the suddenness of Hurtle's appearance in London, Paul notes that "Hitherto she always seemed to him to be open, candid, and free from intrigue" so that while "he thought that he knew she was not treacherous," he nevertheless questions, "did not her present acts justify him in thinking that she was carrying on a plot against him?" (1: 257-8). Hurtle's ambivalence both occasions and facilitates critical reading as the primary means of understanding character. Although Paul is probably correct in thinking that he is not a careful reader—he's fairly milquetoast as far as Trollope's heroes go—he nevertheless possesses a knack for imagining his life (rightly, it turns

out) in textual terms. Hurtle's literary arts, then, hold a specific power over Paul, and in this regard the two seem like a perfect match for each other, albeit with some dubious implications.

Those implications come to a head once it becomes clear that Hurtle has the upper hand with Paul as a result of her careful writing, while Paul is as careless with his words as he is with his word. When he writes to Hurtle in order to break things off finally, his letter reveals its hand and unintentionally contradicts itself. Full of condolences and excuses, Paul accepts that "the fault was mine; but it is better to own that fault, and to take all the blame,—and the evil consequences, let them be what they may" (*TWWLN* 2: 2). While Paul's letter is conciliatory, and plainly states the case at hand—Paul met Hetta after he had felt himself to have broken off his engagement to Hurtle—it also lacks any sense of diplomacy. Stylistically, Paul's prose is rife with parentheticals that emphasize rather than downplay, offering that he "cannot—dare not" blame Hurtle, and offering "to compensate the injury [he has] done her—or even to undergo retribution for it" (2: 2). Paul's qualifications only underscore his guilt, and in this regards he seems more—and not less—liable for his word. Moreover, because his letter begins with the phrase "I promised" and then ends with "I have promised," Paul's letter unintentionally restates and redoubles the ties of engagement binding him to Hurtle.

True to form, Hurtle's response to Paul's letter is both multivalent and plural. The narrator underscores the ambivalence of her position, telling us, "Mrs. Hurtle, as she read this, was torn in two ways." (2: 3). Accordingly, in reply Hurtle considers giving Paul one of two letters. Hurtle writes the first response letter earlier in the novel after she and Paul suffer an argument that leaves Hurtle feeling livid and Paul worrying about where Hurtle keeps her pistol. "I shall come to you," Hurtle charges, "and you may be assured that I shall not be too timid to show myself and to tell my story" (1: 448). Hurtle's threat is to reveal the couple's history, and

so damn Paul by giving their story a definitive narrative voice and shape. But rather than make good on this intimidation, Hurtle instead composes a letter that fully concedes his point. Aware that she has wronged Paul in her conduct throughout the novel, Hurtle plaintively admits:

You are right and I am wrong. Our marriage would not have been fitting. I do not blame you. I attracted you when we were together; but you have learned and have learned truly that you should not give up your life for such attractions. If I have been violent with you, forgive me. You will acknowledge that I have suffered. Always know that there is one woman who will love you better than anyone else. I think too that you will love me even when some other woman is by your side. God bless you, and make you happy. Write me the shortest, shortest word of adieu. Not to do so would make you think yourself heartless. But do not come to me. (*The Way We Live Now*: 451-2)

This first letter remains unsent. Instead, Hurtle remains ambivalent about the possibility of mailing it, telling herself “that she would never surrender this last hope till every stone had been turned. It might still be possible to shame him into a marriage” (1: 458). As much as this reflection suggests that Hurtle’s first letter is merely another disingenuous ploy, though, the fact that Hurtle *keeps* it suggests that there is nothing particularly incorrect about it; instead, Hurtle would prefer to exhaust all options—however sadistic—before admitting defeat.

With the second letter, Hurtle gives voice only to her anguish. “I have suffered many injuries,” Hurtle charges, “but of all injuries this is the worst and most unpardonable,—and the most unmanly” (2: 4-5). She notes that at least her husband was drunk when he abused her, and promises that she will in fact seek the retribution Paul offers, imagining a sadistic scenario. “You

shall suffer retribution,” she promises in return, commanding, “I desire you to come to me,—according to your promise,—and you will find me with a horsewhip in my hand. I will whip you till I have not a breath in my body.” (2: 4-5). “And then I will see what you will dare to do,” she boasts, “whether you will drag me into a court of law for the assault.” Claws out, Hurtle is full-on castrating, mocking Paul that “surely there never was such a coward, never so false a liar” and pledging that “should you be afraid and break your promise, I will come to you” (2: 5). In a dramatic refashioning of the dynamic between the two lovers read cynically, Paul’s word becomes the whip with which Hurtle plans to flog him, and the ties of love between the two are perverted into sadistic bondage. Given the centrality of agony to both letters—in the first Hurtle suffers it, in the second she inflicts it on Paul—it is fitting that Hurtle’s fantasy of her dedication to Paul is not without its pains. “Had she found him ruined and penniless she would have delighted to share with him all that she possessed,” the narrator tells us (2: 3). “Had she found him a cripple, or blind, or miserably struck with some disease, she would have stayed by him and have nursed him and given him comfort.” Idealizing their relationship as hinging on “sacrifice” allows Hurtle to preserve her agony, but in a way that figures it as a gift of love, rather than selfishness or sadism.

The consolation and palpable sense of defeat in Hurtle’s first letter speaks to the fact that, for all of the contradictory, controlled, or concealed feelings that Hurtle has towards Paul, “the strongest feeling which raged within her bosom was that of disappointed love” (1: 449-450). Like Lady Carbury, Hurtle suffers violence at the hands of her first husband. But whereas domestic abuse so taints marriage for Lady Carbury that she cannot contemplate a second chance at it, Hurtle seeks remarriage with Paul as a form of recompense. Even this effort, though, comes to feel like what Berlant has cannily termed “cruel optimism” once it becomes clear that Paul

cannot love her. Questioning whether or not this is to be “the end of it,” Hurtle thus finds herself frightfully aware that her life has been lacking. “Should she never know rest” she ponders through the narrator, “never have one draught of cool water between her lips? Was there to be no end to the storms and turmoils and misery of her life?” (1: 449). For Hurtle, marriage to Paul figures neither as happy achievement nor a promise fulfilled; instead it offers only the barest respite from a life that has been fraught with the unease of reciprocation gone awry. In one of the few bluntly revealing statements about Hurtle’s past, the narrator tells us that Hurtle “had endured violence, and had been violent. She had been schemed against, and had schemed. She had fitted herself to the life which had befallen her” (1: 449). Wrong marriage has made Hurtle a victim, but it has also made her capable of exactly the same “treachery” of which Paul won’t allow himself to suspect her. By “fitting” herself to such a life, though, Hurtle merely reacts, rather than acts; she becomes *completely* subject to contingency, and so for all of her forthrightness she has no real agency. On the one hand, this seems like a painful prospect; after all, it seems to render Hurtle into a creature of compulsion and instinct. On the other, though, the guiding principle here also suggests that the experience of being wronged and doing wrong grants Hurtle the wholly fortunate ability to see life from both sides now.

Accordingly, the two letters are “both sides” of a dynamic reaction to the end of love. The first letter works to give testament to Hurtle’s loss of Paul *as such*; the second engages only in wound fetishism. But held together, the two letters establish an equivalent exchange between the two affective postures as equally potent forms of retribution that depend upon agony as fulfilling some portion of Hurtle’s desire. The first letter speaks to the brokenness of the relationship, mourning its end. The second letter can only spout obscenities at a love that has continually failed to meet Hurtle’s expectations. The former is a violent act of love; the latter is

an equally violent act of revenge. While these two letters seem diametrically opposed, however, I want instead to hold open the possibility that both letters are instead equally true.

Indeed, both letters are not just alternate writings, but also readings of the same situation. When Hurtle finally confronts Paul, she tellingly reveals to him both letters, beginning with the second. Although Paul clearly rejects the premise, stating, “I do not think that under any provocation a woman should use a horsewhip,” Hurtle makes clear that she “meant it,” asking, “Shall a woman be flayed alive because it is unfeminine in her to fight for her own skin?” (2: 8). Like Greenow, Lady Carbury, and Lily Dale (as we shall see), Hurtle allows Trollope—for all of his supposed conservatism—to perform fairly dramatic gender critique. As much as critics underscore Trollope’s ethos as organized centrally around gentlemanliness, Hurtle’s central question to Paul—“What is the good of being—feminine, as you call it?”—is an equally recurrent issue throughout Trollope’s oeuvre. Hurtle’s dissent from the “feminine” is a straightforward rejection of gender norms that, in her reckoning, require her subjection to violence at the hands of men. While it seems therefore dismissive for Hurtle to write off the first letter as betraying “the charm of womanly weakness,” it is important to underscore that the first letter is in fact the one that does the most damage (2: 8). “It hurts me more than the other,” he tells Hurtle, and he is hardly able to “finish it, because of the tears which filled his eyes” (2:8).

Despite her dismissals of the first letter as betraying a form of weakness, Hurtle quickly tells Paul that it is equally genuine; if she “means” the second letter, then the first shows “how [her] mind has been at work,” suggesting that both letters are the result of thoughtful intentionality, rather than simple reaction—a clear reversal from her relationship with her husband (2: 8). This tension of radically different, but nevertheless reconciled writings and readings suggests that Hurtle’s dominatrix bravado is not at all incommensurate with her demure

acquiescence; one form of relation to Paul is unknowable and perhaps even meaningless without the other. Although Hurtle fits the bill for the contemporary “strong female protagonist,” Trollope suggests that her utter weakness is equally important. The two qualities do not cancel each other out. Instead, Hurtle—reconciled that Paul is an object of love, and prepared to accept his loss *out of that love*—destroys the second letter, freeing him from her claim to his hand; merely erasing her words frees him from honoring his own. Because she keeps the first letter and restores it “to her pocket-book,” readers are left with the distinct impression that Hurtle has decided which relational perspective holds the most value for her. This confirms what Hurtle, for all of her oscillations, has known all along: “her love was no counterfeit” (1: 449-450).

Against a sexist rhetoric of “mood swings” and “hysteria,” I want instead to suggest that in the case of Lady Carbury, Mrs. Greenow, Mrs. Hurtle, and other literary widows, ambivalence does not figure as an undecidability or confusion of affect. Instead, these widows maintain affective orientations in relation to husbands, marriages, and indeed loves that are both discrete and distinct, but also simultaneous. These widows’ moods do not “swing.” Rather, these widows engage in inquisitive, prescient, and sometimes politic processes of affective “turning” that keeps their erotic relationships in an active state of renegotiation. Looking at love and life “from both sides now,” these widows establish a form of ambivalent affective play that might at time read as tense, contradictory, or even outright disingenuous. But by holding various affective positions at the same time, the figure of the widow suggests that we must look on love from multiple angles, exploring and exposing the contingent, unpredictable ways in which we encounter those objects, rather than falling back on the ease of fetishism.

## CHAPTER 2

# ALONE, TOGETHER

## SINGLENESS AND THE COMMUNITY OF THE NOVEL

Alice Vavasor's trepidations in *Can You Forgive Her?* are paradigmatic for Trollope's work, and indeed for a large swathe of Victorian novels. "What should a woman do with her life?" Alice wonders, and Victorian fiction often supplies a hasty answer: a woman is to marry (1: 109-110). Crucially, though, Alice's ultimate reasons for marrying are not entirely out of love, even if the narrator assures readers "a girl should really love the man she intends to marry" (1: 109). Sara Ahmed has theorized that part of what makes marriage so compelling as a social institution is that it acts as a "promise" (2). In other words, marriage holds out the possibility that, through our association with it, we will also be more closely associated with whatever things—abstract or concrete, conscious or unconscious—we think will make us most happy (2). Indeed, marriage promises a great many things to Alice *besides* companionship with the man she loves. Most prominently, it offers her a pathway to the political realm from which she would otherwise be barred (in the nineteenth century) by virtue of her sex. Alice fantasizes that marriage would allow her to engage in "second-hand" progressivism as "the wife of the leader of a Radical opposition, in the time when such men were put into prison, and to have kept up for him his seditious correspondence while he lay in the Tower" (1: 110-111). Such desires are tinged with notions of self-abnegation and sacrifice that figure prominently in conservative Victorian marital ideology. And yet, Alice's daydreaming gives such forms of wifely conduct a decidedly novel twist: Alice longs to become the Angel of the Big House, bridging her political desires with domestic utility. As much as such a posture seems like nothing more than an

adaptation and displacement of prevailing ideology, then, Alice's vision of a profoundly and powerfully *public* marriage is deeply suggestive, and bespeaks an incipient radicalism that is not entirely quelled by novel's end.

*Can You Forgive Her?* points to an awkwardness of fit between Alice's desire for marriage as a means of social expansion, and Victorian ideals of marriage as a form of domestic seclusion, juridical erasure (for women), and coupled plentitude. Connubial bliss, in Alice's fantasy, *is not enough on its own*; a married couple needs to live—or at least rightly *should live*—in active engagement with a larger community and a parallel set of aspirations. Marriage, in other words, should not function as a sexualized, secularized convent. Such a notion of marriage throws into relief the fact that the marriage plot's married end consistently fails to render forms of narrative and social closure in Victorian fiction. In effect, *Can You Forgive Her?* testifies to a turning point in the history of the novel as the formal laws according to which the courtship novel operated began to show their age. In particular, Alice's fantasy of public marriage suggests that notions of female desire as the direct extension of *individual* will rang utterly hollow at a time when marriage was everywhere *publicized* as a social, narrative, and emotional good. Such a development left mid-century authors of Victorian fiction in a narrative double-bind between breaking with narrative conventions, and flying in the face of social ones. This ambivalence registers in the mid-century realist novel as an insistent, if often implicit, question: What—and *who*—is marriage good for?

If a certain historical genealogy is to be believed, then the novel gives only one answer: Marriage is good for everybody! From a certain critical vantage point, the history of the novel is inextricably connected to the history of marriage, always for better and never for worse. Ian Watt's foundational *Rise of the Novel* (1957), for example, argues that the the consolidation of

the novel's distinctive qualities is concomitant with a paradigm shift in cultural understandings of the individual, psychic interiority, and relations between the sexes *specifically as they are expressed in and through marriage*. Reflecting upon an earlier tradition of literary romance utterly alienated from the realities of married life, Watt suggests that "The values of courtly love could not be combined with those of marriage until marriage was primarily the result of a free choice by the individuals concerned" (95). "The rise of the novel," he continues, "would seem to be connected with the much greater freedom of women in modern society, a freedom which, especially as regards marriage, was achieved earlier and more completely in England than elsewhere." Watt thus argues that, post-Enlightenment and post-Industrial Revolution, the dissolution of larger, "patriarchal" kinship networks that "stood in the way of individualism" gave way to a "conjugal" family, "formed by the voluntary union of two individuals" (96). In other words, *social* desires—particularly as they restricted or directed a daughter's choice of suitor—ceded to *individual* desires. Under this onus, a woman's right to choose her husband is understood as the ultimate litmus test for the arrival of liberal individualism.

At the same time, though, socio-economic factors resulted in what Watt calls an eighteenth-century "crisis in marriage" (isn't it *always* in one crisis or another?) whereby women's newly individualized "future[s] depended much more completely than before on their being able to marry and on the kind of marriage they made, while at the same time it was more and more difficult for them to find a husband" (Watt 101). Into this conflicted and often contradictory sexual landscape, Watt offers, Richardson's seminal novel *Pamela* gave newfound voice to the "concept[s] of courtship, marriage and the feminine role that [have] obtained most widely in the last two centuries" (110). In what is now a critical commonplace, Watt argues that, because *Pamela*'s eponymous heroine is able to marry her wealthy employer despite their vast

differences in class, the novel suggests that female desire—and *not* wealth or kin—is inherently valuable. Thus, the rise of the novel—in all its permutations—serves as a testament to the discursive rise of the liberal individual. By extension, the courtship plot serves as proof of its ideological felicity.

Watt’s account is continually compelling, especially for feminist critics, insofar as it powerfully underscores the importance of female agency to modern notions of subjectivity, attachment, and narrative. Moreover, Watt’s historical framework for *The Rise of the Novel* seems to account for the rise of marriage as Ahmed’s “promising” cultural enterprise, and the marriage plot as a recurrent schematic. As Kelly Hager helpfully surmises:

Because he connects the triumph of the courtship plot (i.e. marriage) with free choice, the rights of women, and with a Puritanism that imbued marriage with a ‘spiritual and social meaning,’ Watt ties up our subscription to his theory of the novel with our investment in the rights of the individual, a nascent feminism and a view of marriage that rejects the conventions of courtly love for a more mutual and a more spiritual relation. (*Dickens and the Rise of Divorce* 20)

Faced with such a resplendent cornucopia of critical delights—*especially* in contrast to the Boy’s Club criticism<sup>1</sup> that persisted well into the era during which Watt was writing—who could argue with such a forward-thinking theory of the novel? Katherine Sobba Green’s 1991 study *The Courtship Novel, 1740-1820* goes so far as to suggest that the popularization of the courtship plot resulted in the novel’s cultivation as a distinctly “feminized genre” and “an ideal medium for expressing middle-class women’s values and issues” (13).

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<sup>1</sup> For one especially bleak example, see Skinner’s (1949) remarks on Lily Dale below.

To be sure, Green is equally careful to note the courtship plot posed as many quandaries about women's roles in real-world married life as it seemed to resolve on the page. And yet, even as she gives voice to these tensions, Green nevertheless begins with an affirmation of marriage's value as the liberal individualist enterprise par excellence, offering what reads like a glowing endorsement. "Marriage mediates the patterns according to which heterosexual women and men—real and fictional—live," Green writes (1). "It harmonizes the natural, the familial, the social, and the transcendental," she continues, "[and it] accommodates the diverse reagents of life: nature's coupling and breeding, existing interfamilial patterns, society's contracts, and the church's ministerial function." Marriage, for all its failings, is good for everything and everyone in this decidedly rose-colored vision. At once harmonious, transcendent, naturalized, individualized, socialized, and even sanctified, there's simply *nothing* and *no one* that marriage cannot bring together. And if marriage is idealized as the ultimate semiotic adhesive, then is it any wonder that the marriage *plot* is continually imbued with narrative superpowers of cohesion, completion, and satisfaction?

Not all critics are quite so eager to tie the knot between the courtship plot and liberal individualism. In *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce*, for example, Hager aptly points out that critical applause for the marriage plot as emblematic of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century marriage culture may overstate the case. "While no one would argue that there are no unhappy marriages in English novels," Hager charges, "critics of the British novel tend to abstract as a norm a version of union that the texts themselves everywhere put in jeopardy" (13). "When critics do notice the conservative basis of our theory of the novel," she writes, "they attribute the conservatism to the novels they are reading rather than to our theoretical conclusions about them" (17). Offering a theory of the "failed-marriage plot" as a sobering counter to critics'

adulations of the courtship/marriage plot, Hager details how the nineteenth-century novel was equally dedicated to “showing how a marriage unravels, to uncovering the myth of matrimonial bliss, to revealing how many husbands and wives were trying to escape or miserably enduring the wedlock they had so eagerly sought, as it is to plotting courtship” (5). And yet, by terming such plots “failed,” Hager reaffirms the inherent social value of marriage by positing the inverse novels with which she engages as negative examples. “Failed marriage plots” detail how the unquestioned “good” of marriage goes bad.

To be fair, this is certainly the sort of moralistic thinking that Hager’s archive often bears out. Moreover, I find an incredible degree of sympathy between her work and my own. However, it seems to me that there are a number of novels that manage to circumvent the “failure/success” paradigm for the marriage plot, and instead offer a more thoroughgoing exploration of how marriage “got good” to begin with. We can see such a project in the transition that Trollope’s marriage plots undergo over the course of “The Chronicles of Barsetshire,” and especially in contrasts between the widowed Eleanor Bold’s remarriage plot in *Barchester Towers* (1857) and the delayed-and-then-never-realized, non-marriage plot that straddles *The Small House at Allington* (1862-4) and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1866-7). In these novels, Trollope’s “double perspective”—discussed in the previous chapter—lends his novels the ability to consider characters’ compulsions as deeply impersonal. His continual revisions of the marriage plot thus underscore that marriage’s narrative utility and moral idealization are a profoundly sociological phenomenon.

In this light, sexual singleness emerges as a figure that poses a profound problem for the novel, but simultaneously offers Trollope an opportunity to register his unease with a vision of the novel that too easily equates marriage with an unquestioned narrative, communal, and

personal good. Eleanor Bold's accidental singleness is a problem to be fixed; Lily Dale's determined singleness, by contrast, is a masochistically pleasurable response to the demands of Barset, as a community, and "The Chronicles of Barsetshire" as a narrative enterprise. "The Chronicles" suggest that the novel form's adoption of marriage as its most prized formal and sexual institution is a contingent matter utterly dependent on the manner in which marriage is imbued as promising certain ends. It would be an act of willful misreading to characterize Trollope as a sex radical. More often than not, his novels culminate in marriages that render narratable, inquisitive heroines such as Alice tractable and passive. And yet, by staging marriage's goods—and wrongs, for that matter—as an open question worthy of elaboration, Trollope posits marriage as a pluralized, and indeed polyvalent emotional object that in no way always makes good on Ahmed's "promise of happiness."

"Singleness" is interesting as a figure of queer loss for a few reasons. For one thing, the sense that singleness implies a form of loss is, quite unlike that of the heartbroken, wholly contingent. As with the figure of the widow, the single woman's non-marriedness (I will not say "lack" of a husband or marriage) is by no means necessarily painful. Indeed, for the single woman in Victorian fiction, what might feel most painful about her position—if anything does—might be her awareness of the disparity between the path her fictional life has taken and the path led for her *by* Victorian fiction's writing of sexual life. Indeed, the over-determinedness of the marriage plot appears in the later "Chronicles" through Lily's savvy feeling that her life has deviated from a "best case scenario" laid out for her not just by the community around her (which continually roots for her marriage to a suitor whom she does not want), but also by the story in which she finds herself plotted.

Ironically, singleness implies not *one* subject, but a *non*-subject by certain reckonings of the novel. In contrast to a figure like the spinster, which has generated modes of powerfully utopic and feminist community in novels like Gaskell's *Cranford*<sup>2</sup>, no such narrative elsewhere is available for singleness. For the courtship plot, singleness—*unlike* spinsterdom or more recent discourses on asexuality—is a temporary setback, rather than a way of life. Singleness questions how marriage creates (or not) a sense of autonomy in the service of realist fiction, given that the courtship plot—and many critical understandings of the courtship plot—stages marriage as continually promising *and delivering* a common, rather than personal, good. Singleness is not inherently “anti-social” in the sense of Bersani or Edelman's *jouissance*-laden, self-shattering queer erotics<sup>3</sup>; rather, singleness *becomes* anti-social when fiction—and the readers and critics *who encounter* fiction—makes female sexual choice a communal and narrative *necessity*, rather than an erotic *contingency*. Being single means being alone by the measure of the courtship plot, although it certainly does not mean one feels lonely.

Singleness' “non-marriage plot”—to coin a neologism of self-consciously limited scope—underscores the deep irony at the heart of the notion that marriage is the novelistic watchword for “individualism.” Watt's “conjugal” family is definitively at odds with larger, extant communities insofar as he insists that “on marriage the [conjugal] couple immediately sets up as a new family, wholly separate from their own parents and often far away from them” (96). For Watt, this transition is ultimately for the liberal good insofar as it acts in the service of gender egalitarianism. However, such a model nevertheless implies a form of social isolationism as “once set up, the conjugal family typically becomes an autonomous unit in economic as well

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<sup>2</sup> For a fuller discussion of spinsterdom *as* community, see Nina Auerbach's classic *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction*.

<sup>3</sup> See Bersani's *Homos* and Edelman's *No Future*.

as in social affairs” (96). But legal (coverture) and philosophical (*The Symposium*) fictions aside, the fact remains that marriage *does not* make two become one: the two halves of a singular married couple nevertheless remain indelibly two individuals. Marriage may “separate” or isolate couples—especially when it is tethered to the domestic sphere, as in the Victorian era—but it nevertheless fundamentally depends on (at least) two people. Nor does marriage wholly insulate the conjugal couple from the demands of the outside world. Indeed, considering the socially expansive landscapes of many nineteenth-century novels, the idea of the married couple as a conjugal country unto itself seems utterly bizarre. Why, then, does the couple form become the basis for Watt’s lauded novelistic individual? Why, by extension, cannot the novel leave Pamela and her progeny well enough *alone*?

In accordance with the courtship plot under Watt’s aegis, being single means being nobody. Partially, Watt explains this curt dismissal of singleness by pointing to the financial realities of the eighteenth century. As “unmarried women were no longer positive economic assets to the household because there was less need for their labor in spinning, weaving and other economic tasks,” Watt intuits that they were left “with the unpleasant choice between working for very low wages, or becoming largely superfluous dependents on someone else” (99). At the same time, though, Shirley Foster points out that, given the legal restrictions facing women even when they *did* marry, “singleness was in many ways a more attractive proposition than the married state” (7). Spinsterdom, in particular, may have seemed a cozy alternative to marriage given that “spinsters could own and acquire possessions, be bound by contract, be responsible for their own finances, and run their own lives” (8). Moreover, Foster remarks that marriage simply became more *difficult* in the nineteenth century due to a sheer numbers game resulting from the fact that “many men were marrying later or not at all” and many “eligible bachelors ... emigrated

to the colonies” (7). In contrast to Watt’s idealization of marriage in the eighteenth century, Foster supposes that by the nineteenth century, women’s fiction demonstrates that although many women “believed that wifhood and motherhood represented the apotheosis of womanly fulfillment,” female writers also recognized that “spinsterhood had its own rewards” (15). If anything, marriage posed an ambivalent ideal *at best* for nineteenth-century women, and this may go some way to accounting for the popularity of novels like Gaskell’s *Cranford*, in which a group of spinsters and widows effectively form the entire population of a fictional town.

Female sexual singleness poses a problem for the courtship plot. Crucially, then, the project of plot involves convincing younger widows to consent to a remarriage that may be neither necessary, nor even desirable for them. In contrast to morally ambivalent widows, or older widows with children, the figure of the eligible, single widow acts as the junction point at which competing, contradictory ideologies—compulsory mourning and compulsory heterosexuality—wrestle for control of narrative ends. The tension between these two imperatives is resolved most expediently—made “nonnarratable,” in Miller’s reckoning—if the widow’s ambivalence about the prospect of her own remarriage can be put definitively to rest. To walk the fine line between moral and narrative imperatives, the widow must, on the one hand, mourn her first husband as a loss and, on the other, forget him in order to facilitate the remarriage that will signify the closure of her loose narrative ends. She must ideally make the transition from one injunction to the other without raising alarms about affectation; otherwise, she risks becoming morally suspect. Because such a marriage—even if it *is* for love—is not necessarily for the widow’s “own good,” it can more openly be posited as performing good done for the sake of others. In this fashion, the widow’s remarriage plot is imbricated with a set of desires for marriage as a social good, rather than a “merely” personal one.

Eleanor Bold's remarriage plot in *Barchester Towers* highlights many of the difficulties that singleness poses for narrative. Trollope's decision to kill off John Bold unceremoniously between *The Warden* and the second installment in "The Chronicles of Barsetshire" suggests that a married Eleanor Bold could be of limited narrative utility. Only by making Eleanor a widow could Trollope destabilize the nonnarratable status conferred upon her through her marriage at the end of *The Warden*. But in setting his heroine back into the marriage market of Barset, Trollope is left with a problem: widowed with money, Eleanor is *too* bold. In this regard she, like Greenow, requires "incentives" to lure her "back into the bonds of matrimony" (Bredesen 113). This situation makes Eleanor "perilous" in Christopher Noble's estimation (Noble 180). "Her widowhood effectively makes her a bachelor," Noble contends, and so the "masculine potential of her widowhood therefore threatens, however briefly, to destabilize the comfortable predictability of the courtship plot" (180). The plot of *Barchester Towers* therefore works not to *fulfill* Eleanor's desires so much as to give her entirely new desires through a careful act of narrative coercion. Although both Noble and Dagni Bredesen frame the widow's remarriage plot in response to an assumption—a widow of means has no need for remarriage, except for want of genuine love or title—it is worth underscoring that Trollope's novel continually underscores exactly this point. Indeed, it is only *because* she has means that Trollope can remarry Eleanor; otherwise, Barset (and readers) might suspect her of doing so out of financial desperation.

Thus, the narrator of *Barchester Towers* must assure us that Eleanor earnestly mourns John Bold, even if her mourning sets her at odds with the novel's need for a "renewed" courtship plot. She must, in accordance with the demands of compulsory mourning, suffer her loss, but only so long as such an activity is publicly required, ethically necessary, and narratively useful. Thankfully, the narrator is happy to step in to get things sorted out. Though elsewhere in "The

Chronicles” the narrator serves as a character-witness, in *Barchester Towers* he claims unmitigated access to Eleanor’s interior life. In contrast to the ironic distance he evinces in *Can You Forgive Her?*—Trollope’s two major series occupy the same narrative universe, and so they arguably share a narrator as well—the narrator here reintroduces Eleanor Bold with a series of lamentations and assurances offset by brazenly personal opinions. The narrator confesses, “I cannot say that with me John Bold was ever a favorite,” but he concedes that in Eleanor’s “estimation he was most worthy”; “John Bold was a man to be loved by a woman,” and by no woman more wholeheartedly than Eleanor, who “wept as for the loss of the most perfect treasure with which mortal woman had ever been endowed” (1: 14-15). In contrast to the narrator’s untimely honesty about John Bold’s “arrogance of thought,” Eleanor’s loss is earth-shattering and all-consuming. “For weeks after he was gone the idea of future happiness in this world was hateful to her,” the narrator tells us (1: 14-15). “Consolation, as it is called, was insupportable,” he continues, “and tears and sleep were her only relief.” By carefully balancing his own callousness with Eleanor’s earnestness, the narrator assures us that although he might speak ill of the dead, Eleanor would never dream of it.

The narrator accomplishes another feat of narrative *trompe l’oeil* in assuaging Eleanor’s grief through the birth of her child, who is (of course) also named John. In John Bold the Younger, the narrator finds a convenient excuse for which the “widow’s deep grief [is] softened” (1: 16). Accordingly, the infant serves as a redemptive “sweet balm . . . poured into the wound which [Eleanor] had thought nothing but death could heal” (1: 16). Eleanor is “saved” from melancholic heartbreak by her infant, and so she avoids the kinds of narrative compulsion and repetition common to *Desperate Remedies* and its ilk. Because she has a reason to go on living, she cannot simply abandon herself to grieving the loss of her husband. The baby assures Eleanor

a narrative future, and he also establishes a sense of narrative perpetuation between the titles comprising the larger series. Kinship ties—established by, but also tested through, marriage—figure narrative continuity among the titles comprising “The Chronicles of Barsetshire.” Thus, in order to remain active in the textual landscape, Eleanor must re-enter the marriage market. Or, as we shall see in the case of *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, she must either facilitate, or make demands upon, the marriages of others in order to find a place in Barset’s fictional community.

The narrator’s stance in *Barchester Towers* is that of the detached deity. If he postures his “favoritism” as that of an implied author for his creations, then he risks showing a sadistic hand when the weakest narrative links are simply killed off for the good of the story. Eleanor’s closeness to the realm of Barset, by contrast, redeems it as valuable enough to be worthy of love, and therefore worthy of mourning as well. Thus what could be read as meta-fictional implosion—the kind of narrative “suicide” for which Henry James derided Trollope—instead serves to underscore and guarantee the affective intensity of the realist text (116-7). In a cunning act of legerdemain, Eleanor’s mourning swiftly moves from that which the narrator must prove as “right” to that which—by sheer dint of its earnestness—proves the narrator right. The genuineness of Eleanor’s mourning cannot be doubted because it is the very thing that establishes the novel’s integrity as a realist enterprise. *Barchester Towers* is remarkable for its ability to handily establish mourning as the gold standard not only of sentiment, but also of social life in general. Centered on the problem of replacing Bishop Grantly—who suffers a distinctly “bad death” by Victorian standards—the novel uses “correct” mourning as the litmus test by which one knows Barset’s social climbers from its upstanding citizens. At the same time, however, the simple fraughtness of mourning as an enterprise suggests, time and time again, that as a social exercise it is potentially as burdensome or inconvenient as it might be cathartic.

With the introduction of the Stanhope family in *Barchester Towers*, Trollope emphasizes the potentially alienating nature of Victorian Britain's mourning culture, even as he suggests that one's ability to perform the rituals of mourning is a matter of the utmost import. Decrying Eleanor as "that vapid, swarthy creature in the widow's cap, who looked as though her clothes had been stuck on her back with a pitchfork," the bombastic Signora Madeline Neroni is rebuked by her sister Charlotte, who rejoins that Eleanor's widow's cap is simply a matter "of course" (*Barchester Towers* 1: 140-1). The Signora, however, cannot imagine mourning "the death of twenty husbands," and calls the practice of wearing widow's weeds "as much a relic of paganism as the sacrifice of a Hindu woman at the burning of her husband's body. If not so bloody, it is quite as barbarous, and quite as useless" (1: 140-1). While the novel makes much of Indian mourning practices—wrongly exemplified through the practice of sati alluded to here—the Signora offers a twist on the exoticism of Orientalist thought. The Signora suggests that Eleanor's observance of mourning rituals means that the supposed excesses of the colonies have come home to roost under the aegis of mourning practices. For the cosmopolitan Signora Madeline, Britain is the other, and British practices are a matter of primitive "ritual" without utility. Calling Eleanor an "English nonentity," the Signora supposes that Eleanor's mourning entails an ideological complicity that reduces her to the status of an agency-less nobody; she is all national compliance and nothing more. While Bertie—like Greenow's church-going audience—at least finds sexual allure in Eleanor's attire, his sister can view it as nothing but a cultural fetish in which she places no stock. The Stanhope family's continual inability to meet (or at least show reverence for) the standards of mourning marks them not just as social outsiders, but as narrative and cultural interlopers whose continental influence threatens to unsettle the comfortable, but rigid hierarchies of expectation for quotidian English life.

Importantly, though, the Stanhopes also inadvertently set the standard for the novel's sexualization of the politics of mourning. As Eleanor's prospects—inferred through gossip, rather than any statement of her own—become central to resolving the problem of finding a replacement for the Bishop, her marriage comes to signify less as a matter of “fulfilling” personal desires than as the means through which the political maneuverings of Barset's various factions can be accomplished. Eleanor need not marry for money, nor for love, so she can simply be positioned to marry for the sake of others as an act of selfless devotion to her relations, the Grantlys. Eleanor's potential marriage to Slope is only possible because she is a widow, but the novel continually elides the fact that her widowhood is the cause for public alarm by showing its hand. Only Eleanor's father, the ever-sincere Mr. Harding, fears the marriage out of personal concern for his daughter, and yet, the very suggestion that Eleanor might remarry—regardless of her reasons for doing so—is enough to require several clarifications by the narrator.

Eleanor's virtue is thus presented as almost willful naïveté. “To give Eleanor her due,” the narrator assures us, “any suspicion as to the slightest inclination on her part towards Mr. Slope was a wrong to her... and the idea that Mr. Slope would present himself as a suitor had never occurred to her” and indeed “she had never thought about suitors since her husband's death” (124). Above all, this intervention works to assure readers that Eleanor's sexuality is nothing to worry about; she will only marry at the right time and for the right reasons. So, the narrator must shut down the possibility that the virtue of his heroine will fall victim to the seedy underbelly of subtext that continually renders a widow like Greenow perennially suspect. Elsewhere, the narrator reiterates, with more explicit reference to compulsory mourning, that “No thought of love-making or love-receiving had yet found its way to her heart since the death of poor John Bold” (1: 169).

In the most dramatic instance of managing Eleanor's necessary-but-fraught narratability, the narrator patently gives away the novel's conclusion, assuring the "gentle-hearted reader" that she or he need "be under no apprehension whatsoever" as "It is not destined that Eleanor shall marry Mr. Slope or Bertie Stanhope" (1: 143-4). So fraught is the prospect of Eleanor's falling from widowed reverence into wrong remarriage that the narrator wholeheartedly defies the logics of narrative desire's epistemological erotics, short-circuiting his story in order to make sure it cannot be interpreted as sexually supercharged. While these protests and "spoilers" have the ironic effect of suggesting quite the opposite through refutation—that Eleanor might indeed have thought a *great deal* about Slope—their more overt function is to shut down the potential that the text could be misread. The narrator will tolerate no second-guessing or ambiguity with regards to his heroine; in order to shut down Eleanor's sexual volatility, he must leave room for no alternative readings of the text, and in this way he exorcises the ambivalence inherent to the figure of the widow. This sets up the narrator's voice as the word of God in stark contrast to the text's flighty gossip, which is founded wholly on suspicion and self-interest.

Instilling Eleanor with new desires is less a matter of granting her positive attraction than it is a procedure of dodging Slope's negative example. Indeed, part of what is so utterly unconvincing about Eleanor's remarriage to Arabin is that Arabin exists very little apart from his posturing as a virtuous foil to Slope. In line with the text's larger conflation of sexual ethics and the ethics of mourning, the fitness of each man as a companion to Eleanor is figured straightforwardly in their opposing treatment—or mistreatment—of Eleanor's widowhood. Unsurprisingly, Eleanor definitively denies Slope by making a claim upon her married name. Chiding Slope for having used her Christian name, Eleanor corrects him by saying "My name, Mr. Slope, is Mrs. Bold" before full-on slapping him "like a miniature thunderclap" when he

fails to relent, and gropes inappropriately towards physical intimacy by attempting “to pass his arm around her waist” (2: 144). In a reversal of this scene of impropriety, Eleanor’s relenting to Arabin—following a series of not-so-comic misunderstandings—entails his cautious shift to calling Eleanor by her Christian name. At first he insists on calling Eleanor “Mrs. Bold,” but when this betrays the coldness “that any merest stranger would have used,” Arabin shifts gently to “Eleanor” in his “softest” tone, before declaring “Eleanor!” more confidently.

The magic of the name is immediately marriage. In this simple transition of appellation, all is apparently settled between the two. In a flurry of confusion between romantic subject and object, the narrator gushes that “There was now that sympathy between them which hardly admitted of individual motion. They were one and the same—one flesh—one spirit—one life” (2: 235). In this blissful understanding of connubial conflation, Arabin gasps repeatedly, “Eleanor, my own Eleanor, my own, my wife!” (2: 235). The logic of the name in *Barchester Towers* is, in accordance with Miller, the power to pronounce an end. In this case, Eleanor’s widowhood ends as soon as Arabin is able to supplant her dead husband’s name with his own. *Barchester Towers* at once discounts the dangers of the *femme découverte*, and disavows that Eleanor has ever been out of marriage to begin with. Instead, she successfully transitions from female subject, to female subject subsumed (or erased) by coverture through marriage to John Bold, to widow covered (symbolically) by her weeds, to remarried woman again consigned under the name of her new husband. In Bredesen’s generous estimation, then, Eleanor Bold serves as “living proof of the fictional status of marital unity” (103). Bredesen thus contends that the figure of the unwed widow ultimately “exposes an impossible paradox of a legal system and cultural identity: on the one hand, the ideological imperative that insists a woman’s life goal

should be to submerge her legal identity and yield her material assets in marriage; on the other, the possibility, indeed, inevitability of female agency that exceeds this ‘oneness’” (115).

In this reckoning widowhood renders endings—however comfortably married—contingent. The logic of novelistic seriality seems to demand as much. Indeed, the narrator of *Barchester Towers* is unique in owning up to something unsettling about endings, offering an apologia-cum-explanation that “leave-takings in novels are as disagreeable as they are in real life; not so sad, indeed, for they want the reality of sadness; but quite as perplexing, and generally less satisfactory” (2: 252). Showing his hand, as always, the narrator confesses that the “end of a novel, like the end of a children's dinner party, must be made up of sweetmeats and sugar-plum” (2: 266). This comment suggests that the concluding wedding is not a triumph, but rather an indulgence after which there is “nothing else to be told” simply because it has spoiled readers’ appetites in lieu of something more substantial, satisfying, and complex (2: 267). The simple, childlike pleasures of *Barchester Towers*’ ending are, for all of their sweetness, insubstantial and unfulfilling. Thus, the narrator implies that the individual novels making up the series—however unplanned—are courses in a banquet, rather than a meal unto themselves. Ultimate narrative “satisfaction” in this schema is part of a long, sociological view.

For all of their differences, the doubled scenes between Slope and Arabin are alike in that, while one ends in a slap and the other in an engagement, they both pointedly lack any sign of consent from Eleanor. The stinging on Slope’s cheek stands in for as forceful a refusal as Eleanor can manage, and the narrator goes to the usual lengths in order to assure us that she is not to be chided for resorting to such drastic measures in order to register her disgust. But no corollary, jubilant affirmation is supplied when Eleanor accepts Arabin. Instead, the narrator tells us quizzically that Eleanor “had been told that her yea must be yea, or her nay, nay, but she was

called on for neither the one nor the other” (2: 235). Eleanor’s engagement is a matter of course: “She told Miss Thorne that she was engaged to Mr. Arabin, but no such words had passed between them, no promises had been asked or given” (2: 235). The fantasy of remarriage in *Barchester Towers* is thus one in which a woman shifts from widow to wife without a word in between. The mutual understanding between Arabin and Eleanor is instantaneous and immaculate, and therefore incapable of misunderstanding. It is also, for all its ability to resolve various plot lines, free of the premeditation that might mark it as just another political plot or get-rich-quick scheme.

*Barchester Towers*’ fantasy of marriage without words is important for a few reasons. For one thing, Trollope’s coy suspension of marital consent complicates understandings of how the novel worked in relationship to the ideals of subjectivity prized by historians of the novel. Like Watt, Nancy Armstrong claims in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* that “the reading of fiction came to play an indispensable role in directing desire at certain objects in the world,” and that these desires in turn “helped to produce a subject who understood herself in the psychological terms that had shaped fiction” (16, 23-4). This new novelistic subject, gendered female from the outset, represented a crucial shift insofar as she signaled “that language, which once represented the history of the individual as well as the history of the state in terms of kinship relations, was dismantled to form the masculine and feminine spheres that characterize modern culture” (14). For Armstrong, domestic fiction proved a potently didactic ideological apparatus by holding out the promise that “despite the vast inequities of the age virtually anyone could find gratification within this private framework” through marriage and the attending promise of domestic bliss (48). Basically, Armstrong credits fiction with the formation of not only the “separate spheres” model of society upon which liberal feminist theories have long depended, but also the

implementation of that schema into historical reality through the presentation of novelistic characters who offered an emulative basis for the liberal-individualist subject.

The linchpin for Armstrong's model is also the right of the female subject to consent to marriage. Turning, like Watt, to *Pamela*, Armstrong argues that because the titular heroine refuses money from her rich employer in exchange for sex, she "makes the integrity of the female body ... worth more than money and defines that body within a system of values that cannot be translated into economic value per se" (114). Armstrong argues that Richardson introduces the novelty of a novel female subject who "exists prior to becoming [an] object of desire and who can therefore claim the right of first property to herself" (116). In this schema, the threat of rape at the hands of Mr. B offers only the threat of anachronism, figuring "an earlier class sexuality" whose violence is ultimately nil because the attempted rape ironically "identified a self that could not be violated" (134). In Armstrong's reckoning, the integrity and autonomy of female desire and subjectivity are never in question. Pamela's wishes are respected, and—more importantly—her desires are identifiable as the extension of her own "individuated, sexual, and internalized" will, fully conscious to her, and capable of expression through words (114). No danger of unsettled individuality awaits Pamela or any other heroines in Armstrong's study, even as they enter the subjective gray zone of coverture.

In order for *Desire and Domestic Fiction* to portray the institution of marriage as the novelistic foundation for liberal subjectivity, though, it must ignore a broad array of texts in which marriage's means do not render up the ends posited by Armstrong. Further, as Green puts it, Armstrong does not "sufficiently credit and explain the more or less conscious resistances so many women authors expressed through their domestic novels" (19). In this light, Trollope's absence from Armstrong's study seems conspicuous. Indeed, throughout Trollope's oeuvre,

female consent to marriage is continually examined as a fraught basis for determining either female subjectivity or desire. In place of Armstrong's model—where marriage implies female consent, which in turn realizes the fulfillment of female desires that are doggedly “individual”—Trollope's later “Chronicles” posit marriage as the junction point between the individual and social such that one refracts the concerns, demands, values, and desires of the other.

Trollope's later Barset novels demonstrate that there is no real place for female singleness—and so individuality—in the novel form if the cost of admission to subjectivity and social life is compliance with the unreconstructed marriage plot championed by Watt, Armstrong, and others. Trollope's novels thus suggest that female singleness comes to be felt as resistance independent of any direct action or posturing on the part of the single. *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, in particular, is an incredibly self-critical, even meta-fictional work that suggests a stark set of stakes for singleness in the novel. In *The Last Chronicle*, the single woman either falls into lockstep with a communal project aligned with the courtship plot, or she faces narrative and social oblivion. In navigating the non-choices offered to her by the courtship plot, the novel's protagonist Lily Dale nevertheless ekes out small pleasures by positing the conscriptions of the marriage plot as rife with masochistic potential. In order to do this, Lily continually conceives of her singleness *as a story*.

The “problem” of female singleness becomes a communal crisis in the final two “Chronicles of Barsetshire.” In *The Small House at Allington* and its sequel, *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, Lily—like Eleanor Bold—must deal with the implications not only of her own desires, but also with those of her community and kin. Lily Dale thus feels her jilting at the hands of Adolphus Crosbie in and through its public mediation. Reflecting upon her ambivalence towards marriage late in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, Lily notes plaintively, “Things have gone wrong

with me” (553-4). But while the simplicity of Lily’s pronouncement sounds like self-pity for a broken heart, Lily makes sense of her “wrongness” as a matter of public record. Whereas at “home she had schooled herself down into quiescence, and made herself think that she believed that she was satisfied with the prospects of her life” as a self-professed “Old Maid,” once *out* of Basset on vacation, Lily ponders the alternative of taking Johnny Eames up on his multiple offers of marriage (553). “Coming up to London, and riding in the Park, and going to the theatres, seemed to unsettle her,” the narrator tells us (554). Lily’s “unsettling” is a matter of movement in public, rather than the result of a heart that has warmed towards her suitor. Thus, the narrator makes very clear that Lily “was softening her heart to John Eames because John Eames was spoken well of in the world” (554-5). Indeed, Lily’s “softening” reflects the narrator’s more *general* conviction that attraction and admiration are matters of taste and influence as “with *all* of us, in the opinion which we form of those around us, we take unconsciously the opinion of others” (554-5, my emphasis).

Unlike in earlier Trollope novels, communal claims made upon female desire in *The Last Chronicle of Basset* serve no discernibly communal goal, at least insofar as plot is concerned. Where Eleanor’s marriage in *The Warden* signals the dissolution of a political conflict, and her choice of husband in *Barchester Towers* accomplishes (or finally upsets) the goals for any number of other characters, Lily Dale’s obstinacy about marrying Johnny Eames seems fraught with no stakes beyond the personal. Indeed, Lily’s “non-marriage plot”—to coin a neologism of necessarily limited scope and utility—is secondary in *The Last Chronicle of Basset*; her non-romance plays second fiddle to that of her best friend, Grace. Communal interest in female interest seems profoundly *uninterested* in *The Last Chronicle*, and yet the community can never leave Lily’s unwed hand unconsidered. Lily’s marriage is everyone’s business, but no one’s

concern. From a certain vantage point, the matter of Lily's singleness is perhaps the most deeply personal romance throughout the entirety of "The Chronicles."

Lily's singleness results not from the lack of suitors, or Lily's rejection from a love triangle, but rather from the impact that her own story has upon her desires. When, for example, Lily entertains visions of accepting Johnny Eames, she does so not for any *positive* quality that Eames actually possesses, but rather because—like Arabin for Eleanor—he serves as an erotic panacea, one that can make good on the "wrong" that has befallen her at the hands of Crosbie. Tellingly, she considers marriage to Eames in narrative terms, wondering, "If that other one had never come! If it could be that she might begin again, and that she might be spared that *episode* in her life which had brought him and her together!" (554-5, my emphasis). Lily's desires for marriage with Eames, when they are present at all, are utterly contingent. At the same time, then, they are deeply alienated from her, facilitated by Eames' being "praised by all around her," and hinging ultimately on her sense that by that same public standard, her story is "wrong"—a bad scene in a poorly cut movie that needs a rewrite and an alternate ending (554-5).

Lily's sense of her life's "wrongness" tethers her desires to what Andrew Miller has helpfully termed the "optative": a deeply narrative mode of registering aspiration alongside regret through a consideration of the alternative paths our lives could have taken in lieu of the ones that they did. Such optative desires, Miller argues, persist "in the forming of our emotional response to the lives we are not leading, on whether those possibilities were shaped by our own agency or by the circumstances in which we found ourselves" (121). Trollope suspends and exacerbates such optative longings by continually holding open the possibility for Lily to find a form of emotional—and narrative—redemption through marrying Eames. Characters' efforts to tend to Lily's broken heart thus breach sympathy and veer towards romantic prescription. Thus,

over the course of the last two “Chronicles,” nearly every character who isn’t Lily—friends, family, servants, and even distant gossips—expresses an opinion that Lily should make good on her jilting by marrying the erstwhile Johnny Eames.

In Trollope, optative desires are a communal form of feeling, rather than just introspective ponderings. Lily’s ongoing singleness poses a kind of moral panic for the sexual ethos set in motion through the previous “Chronicles.” Accordingly, when Lily’s marriage plot is reintroduced in *The Last Chronicle*, it is a matter of intimate gossip. Grace Crawley, heroine of the sequel novel’s primary marriage plot, is apparently bosom buddies with Lily, and thus feels herself at liberty to press the issue of Lily’s hand. The oddness of the first exchange between Grace and Lily stems from the fact that the reader has heretofore had no knowledge of the women’s friendship. Thus, it seems peculiar that a new character has bonds with a pre-existing one, as well as knowledge about what has befallen her, and the gumption to comment upon her situation. In this way, Grace is situated epistemologically alongside the reader; Lily’s romantic history becomes present in the story as a very public cautionary tale. But where readers cannot directly advise Lily about marrying Eames (or not), Grace is perfectly at liberty to do so. Lily, however, is reluctant to introduce the topic, and simply dodges it when Grace brings it up in a letter, replying, “About that other subject I had rather say nothing” (50). She clarifies obligatorily, “When I think of my friends, he is always one of the dearest. But when one thinks of going beyond friendship, even if one tries to do so, there are so many barriers!” (50).

Throughout the final two Basset novels, characters invoke the sake of Lily’s happiness as the means through which to discipline her into compliance with their own wishes, completely ignoring that she is outwardly clear and consistent in expressing her wishes to remain single. Importantly, her oscillations—as above—are never voiced to anyone; in conduct she is as

stalwart in saying “no” as her neighbors are insistent in pushing her to say “yes.” However, other characters continually paint Lily’s objections to marrying Eames as a form of social deviance. Even characters who never directly interact with Lily nevertheless feel that it is their place to comment upon the rightness of her marrying Eames. For example, when the Earl de Guest becomes Eames’ patron-of-sorts following a comedic incident involving an escaped bull, he ponders whimsically that Eames could easily force Lily’s hand in merely “a fortnight’s time” (*SH* 570). After Eames’ first failed proposal—he makes three in total—de Guest dryly remarks, “Well, my boy... the young lady has been perverse,” suggesting with a hint of contempt that “As far as I know, not half of them [women] accept their lovers the first time of asking” (639). He immediately begins to plot plans for Eames’ return trip for additional proposals. Here, the queerness of singleness is laid bare: Lily’s “no” is “perverse” because it sets her at odds with the *modus operandi* of the marriage plot, and Basset’s emotional investment *in that plot*.

Designs on Lily’s marriage extend beyond personal interest in Eames’ emotional welfare, and become something of a local obsession. Mrs. Thorne summarizes what she presumptuously terms the “common sense” view of the inhabitants of Basset with regards to Lily’s contingent consent. The local pastime seems to be needling. “Of course I would not ask any young woman to marry a man whom she did not love,” Mrs. Thorne confides to Lily in a bit of unsolicited advice (*LC* 641-2). “Such marriages are abominable to me,” she continues unabated, “But I think that a young woman ought to get married if the thing fairly comes in her way, and if her friends approve, and if she is fond of the man who is fond of her.” Lily resents the assertion that she suffers from “morbid sentiment” in Mrs. Thorne’s estimation, and she inwardly expresses her exasperation at the public’s interest in her love affairs (642-3):

As if there was anything new in this counsel which Mrs. Thorne had given her! She had received the same advice from her mother, from her sister, from her uncle, and from Lady Julia, till she was sick of it. How had it come to pass that matters which with others are so private, should with her have become the public property of so large a circle? Any other girl would receive advice on such a subject from her mother alone, and there the secret would rest. But her secret had been published, as it were, by the town-crier in the High Street! Everybody knew that she had been jilted by Adolphus Crosbie, and that it was intended that she should be consoled by John Eames. And people seemed to think that they had a right to rebuke her if she expressed an unwillingness to carry out this intention which the public had so kindly arranged for her. (*The Last Chronicle of Barset* 641-2)

Here, the sarcasm with which Lily regards the good intentions of others—“so kindly arranged for her”—highlights the extent to which the kindness of strangers barely conceals a form of emotional violence in *Barset*. More pointedly, the notion that “publishing” Lily’s “secret” constitutes a form of violation further aligns communal cares with presumed readerly desires. In another meta-fictional gesture, Trollope here suggests that Lily’s resentment might rightly be aimed not only at her fictional community, but also at the community of readers who regard her tale with equally “common sense” notions of happy endings in their heads. To extend the metaphor, Lily’s inward disgust registers singleness as a hiccup in the course of Trollope’s serial banquet. If readers of Trollope’s other fictions have grown accustomed to consuming consummated marriages, then *The Last Chronicle of Barset* suggests that the marriage plot may be little more than a form of decadent over-indulgence enabled by presumptuous entitlement.

The idea that Eames is a “decent man” is continually highlighted as a justification for characters’ interventions on his behalf with Lily. In the most dramatic instance of this phenomenon, Eames travels to the continent in order to find Eleanor Bold (now Eleanor *Arabin*), who makes a triumphant return to the series in order to resolve *The Last Chronicle of Barset*’s central marriage plot, which is waylaid by a purloined charity check. Shortly thereafter, Eleanor pays a visit to Lily. This meeting is remarkable on a number of levels. Lily is very much Eleanor’s narrative double: both women serve as the heroines of singular *Barset* novels, only to recur in succeeding novels as figures of queer loss; both women’s prospective marriages are tied to the resolution of a novel’s central political plot; both women are courted by men structurally positioned as the foils to unscrupulous swindlers; both women’s marital prospects are the subject of community gossip and intrigue. But where all their likenesses seem to promise the possibility of mutual understanding, or at least common sympathy, Mrs. Arabin instead steps in to persuade Lily to “reward” Eames for his good deeds, as she has grown “very fond of Johnny, and felt that he deserved the prize which he had been so long trying to win” (811). While the narrator entertains the notion that Eames’ romantic inconstancy suggests that he “was very unheroic in many phases of his life,” Mrs. Arabin subscribes to a form of fairytale logic in which Eames, having saved the Kingdom of Barset from the perils of *yet another* overblown and obstinate misunderstanding, deserves the happily ever after that a marriage with Lily promises him.

Lily is, understandably, incredulous of the notion that her love follows as a naturalized narrative consequence of Eames’ exploits. “His reward, Mrs. Arabin?” Lily questions with a twinge of offense (813). The exchange that follows is tense, and proceeds as a series of passive-aggressive remarks (““May I not say a word of comfort to him?” said Mrs. Arabin. ‘He will be very comfortable without any such word,’ said Lily, laughing”) (815-6). While Lily just barely

keeps up the veneer of civility, she clearly resents that a complete stranger has taken an interest in her marriage to a man whom she has rejected twice, and who has clearly been carrying on some manner of affair. Though Lily notes that she neither “doubts” nor “credits” Eames’ affection with a sense of wry politic, even this polite brush off is apparently too much an affront for Eleanor’s sainted hero, and so Eleanor replies, “I think you wrong him” (815). The problem is that, in being forced to make yet another direct declarative, Lily comes to feel herself as taking part in a form of melodrama. So, for all the truth and conviction in her counter-claim that she “shall never become any man’s wife,” Lily immediately regrets her words for their “maudlin, missish, namby-mamby sentimentality” (816). Lily’s feelings towards Eames become a kind of self-perpetuating resentment towards efforts at her emplotment towards one end or another.

J. Hillis Miller has posited that Trollope continually underscores a woman’s right to choose her husband as an unquestioned and unequivocal moral good. “In Trollope’s novels,” Miller argues, “a woman’s absolute right to say no to a proposal of marriage is a fixed and unchallenged convention” (43). “This privilege,” he contends, “was an essential part of what was a temporary, unstable, and somewhat contradictory Victorian bourgeois and upper-class ideology governing courtship and marriage” (43). While Trollope does indeed uphold the truth of this conviction in concluding the Basset series—no entity overrules Lily’s objections and forces her hand—he also underscores the extent to which female consent is by no means a settled or self-evident matter in novels. In Trollope, a single woman can certainly always say “no” to a suitor; but that “no” by no means frees her from repeated proposals, well-intentioned harassment, or petty gossip.

That a single woman’s objection to marriage actually counts for much is thus a continual matter of debate in *The Small House at Allington*. Tensions pointedly arise between Mrs. Dale

and her brother-in-law, Squire Dale, when the latter seems to presume that the trade-off for his generosity to his nieces is their compliance with his designs for their marriages. When Lily's sister Bell turns down Bernard—the Squire's preferred nephew—the Squire makes quite clear that he thinks part of a daughter's obedience entails her pliability to the marital advice of her kin. Begrudgingly accepting Watt's historical arc from "patriarchal" to "conjugal" marriage, the Squire notes, "Of course I know that in these days a young lady is not to be compelled into marrying anybody" (*SH* 205). He is also well aware that Bernard must be the one to "persuade" Bell. But Squire Dale nevertheless insists to Mrs. Dale that "a word from you would go a long way with [Bell]," hedging that "it is [Bell's] duty to give such a proposal much thought before it is absolutely refused" (205-6). In this way, Squire Dale's rhetoric makes a slow but sure metonymic slide from acknowledging female agency to dismissing it as irrelevant in the face of a daughter's generalized "duty" to her family, and especially to his particular awareness of what is "best" for his nieces. We are led to know that Mrs. Dale is a "good mother" in that she wishes to maintain the autonomy of her daughters in their decisions regarding marriage. Mrs. Dale underscores that she "never would take upon myself to ask a child to marry any man," and she refutes Squire Dale's assertion that Lily and Bell "would soon learn to love" the suitors he prefers (206). "That lesson, if it be learned at all," she says, "must be learned without any tutor" (206-7).

Mrs. Dale's identification with her daughters functions primarily through her understanding of Lily's sense of heartbreak when she is jilted by Crosbie. Though Mrs. Dale is less vocal about her wish that Lily marry Eames, she clearly conceives of the match as one which "would be a healing of wounds most desirable and salutary; an arrangement advantageous to them all; a destiny for Lily most devoutly to be desired" (*SH* 545). The problem for Mrs. Dale is

that such a match is simply “too soon”; being herself a widow, Mrs. Dale is well aware that the pains of loss are not those to which one willingly consents (546). Bridging the positions of both mother and daughter, the narrator remarks with a palpable sense of regret that “If the heart were always malleable and the feelings could be controlled, who would permit himself to be tormented by any of the reverses which affection meets?” (545-6). Despite her awareness of grief’s ineluctability, though, Mrs. Dale seeks to free her daughter from the heartbreak she has herself experienced, and so she continually tries to position Eames and Lily together—often alone—despite Lily’s clear discomfort. Like Squire Dale, Mrs. Dale ultimately comes to regard her daughter’s consent as irrelevant; she wants what is “best” for her. Mrs. Dale seeks not to override her daughter’s intentions, but merely to sway them; coercively, she “endeavour[s] to make Lily see as she saw and think as she thought” (626). Mrs. Dale thus experiences sympathy as a form of presumption; seeing the likeness between herself and her daughter, she—like Hardy’s Aldclyffe—sees Lily as the reparative sequel to her own tale that can finally make good on heartbreak. As an added bonus, the match would assure Mrs. Dale that she need not feel she has “failed” as a mother in letting her daughter fall into romantic ruin at the hands of an unworthy man. In this reckoning, Lily’s marriage would work not only—or even primarily—for Lily’s benefit; it would work for that of her mother.

Critics, too, have needed much from Lily Dale. In the misogynistic corner, Lily Dale’s standoffishness towards the deserving “nice guy” Johnny Eames is proof of Trollope’s ability to craft uppity dames in need of a good talking to. In this vein, Skinner presents a remarkable example of old school, ivory tower lady-hating when he snarks that “Trollope had a remarkable faculty for depicting girls whose imbecile behavior inflames one with a burning impulse to slap them hard and fast, though it is fair to say that they never seem to lack young men pining to take

the risk of marriage with them” (197). Under this onus, Lily Dale is Trollope’s most easily condemned creation. “It is her insufferable self-conceit which is so infuriating,” Skinner opines; “she is so smugly and complacently satisfied with herself; all her emotions are exaggerated and dramatized” (202). For some feminist perspectives too, though, Lily Dale poses a problem. For all of McMaster’s even-handedness, she too finds Lily at fault. “I think that in Eames, despite his temporary entanglements with Amelia and Madalina, Trollope has given us an essentially healthy man,” McMaster offers. “Lily for him is happiness, and he does all he can to attain her; Johnny for her is happiness, too, but she spends her youth rejecting him” (139). Although she seemingly admires the many Trollopian women who reject their suitors, and celebrates that Lily’s “prolonged and determined spinsterhood gives her a license to say and do many things which would not have been allowed to her as a young girl,” McMaster still bemoans Lily’s ultimate ability to turn down Johnny Eames.

Lily’s commitment to her own emotional subjugation also poses a form of ambivalence for feminist critics as deep as misogynist critics’ snarling contempt at her stubborn singleness. By contrast, Robert Polhemus has admiringly noted that “Trollope was fascinated by the drive for female agency, voice, and authority in his changing world,” suggesting that Trollope “offers a provocative, highly nuanced, complex, and telling engagement with gender in his fiction and life, no matter how disturbingly ambivalent and even wrong-headed that wide-ranging engagement can sometimes appear” (11). Given that she idealizes marriage as a form of subjugation, and spends much of her page time pledging never-ending love for a man who has maltreated her, it is indeed hard to imagine Lily Dale as the poster child for strong female protagonists. And yet, Lily’s earnestness rivals that of the most belligerent characters in

Trollope's oeuvre. Thus, Trollope suggests an important double-bind for female subjectivity in Victorian realist fiction.

Trollope is by no means subtle about positioning recognition of female consent to marriage, too, as a moveable feast contingent upon the desires of a social landscape. Lily makes several attempts in *The Small House* to release Crosbie from their engagement as an act of sacrifice for the man she loves, but because he cannot "take her at her word," Crosbie refuses to honor these wishes even if they would prove advantageous for him (159). As much as the novels demonstrate Lily's clear capability in representing herself in words—a skill honed by the sheer number of times she is called upon to debate both suitors and interested parties—her words are never worth much in Basset, in part because characters so consistently go against them, often in writing. It is with no small irony, then, that Johnny Eames' final proposal to Lily is premised by the Eames' profession that "One word from you, yes or no, spoken now is to be everything to me for always" (LC 821). Not only is Eames a hypocrite here—he has "always" interpreted Lily's "no" as nothing more than an invitation to try to again—but even as he professes to leave things up to Lily, he immediately attempts to direct her, sputtering, "Lily, cannot you say yes?" (821). Lady Desmolines highlights the novels' presumptions about female consent when she asks Eames if he will marry Lily and he neglects to reply. "Silence gives consent," Desmolines remark (468). While Lily is certainly *anything* but silent in her objections, the difficulty is that she struggles to convince anyone that her "no" is not merely a "yes" deferred by the erotics of the marriage plot.

To be sure, Trollope cannily demonstrates that women, too, are capable of coercing men into marriages against their consent. Both Lady Desmolines and Amelia Roper attempt to "rope" in Eames and other unsuspecting gentlemen. But where Eames is free simply to break things off

with Amelia and substitute himself with a surrogate bachelor, Lily's objecting words are never taken as the inhibition of her bond. Part of Lily's consternation stems from her keen awareness of this double-standard, even as she has to languish under it over the course of nearly a thousand pages. Talking with Grace Crawley—whose martial prospects are completely subject to a petty political intrigue over which she has utterly no control—Lily laments that “Some man comes in a girl's way, and she gets to be fond of him, just because he does come in her way” (*LC* 305).

Noting the universality of women's dilemma in the Basset marriage market through the use of indefinite articles and a generalized “she,” Lily underscores that “she has no alternative but to be taken if he chooses to take her; or to be left, if he chooses to leave her” (305). For Lily, the marriage market is never a matter of consent—as volition—so much as it is a matter of accident, followed by the obligation of eventual female assent.

Lily's plight in *The Small House at Allington* and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* details how Adrienne Rich's classic formulation of compulsory heterosexuality comes to be felt as a form of narrative compulsion. In these novels, the injunction to marry stages marriage as a matter of first enduring, and then learning to take pleasure in, alternating masochistic and sadistic impulses. While men and women are both equally subject to the compulsions of marriage, they experience the pains of social obligation differently, and with drastically uneven consequences. This differential is dramatized in Lily's jilting by Crosbie, which is figured as the violent “blow” of someone “worse than a murderer” (*SH* 321, 326). Importantly, though, the novels do not oppose the pain of being jilted with an idealized, redemptive vision of marriage. Instead, being jilted, being courted, and being married are equally miserable prospects. Thus it becomes clear that in the late Basset novels, the compulsion to marry—for all of its narrative utility—by no means guarantees the happy ending to which it might be tethered elsewhere in fiction. Although

the novel's marriage critique leads Carolyn Dever to the bizarre conclusion that *The Small House at Allington* is "heterophobic"<sup>4</sup> (147). I offer instead that the novel serves as an important, self-critical counterpoint to Trollope's too-easy figuration of marriage elsewhere as that which is capable of performing a great deal of magical thinking in solving Basset's social problems (147). In bringing the Basset novels to an ambivalent close, Trollope suggests that the figuration of marriage as a narrative end—happy, or otherwise—is, for all of its signficatory efficaciousness and expediency, a contrivance, a plot device, a useful fiction.

Importantly, the last two "Chronicles of Bassetshire" also suggest that, in order to cope with a marriage market whose compulsions work in part to make desires even more agonizing than they already are, one of the best sexual survival tactics in Victorian realist fiction is to become a masochist. To be clear, I do not want to collapse Lily's heartbreak at being jilted with the form of theatricalized play common to S&M practices. I do, however, mean to suggest that part of Trollope's point is that compulsory heterosexuality's conscription of women into a sexual system in which their consent does not *really* matter makes masochistic pleasure a particularly easy vocation for Lily to undertake. Even prior to being jilted, Lily continually fantasizes about her marriage to Crosbie as a kind of servitude. "To be of use to you,—to work for you,—to do something for you that may have in it some sober, earnest purport of usefulness;—that is what I want above all things," Lily professes (*SH* 161). "Would that you and I were alone together," she continues, "I might do everything for you." Lily's association of marriage with subjugation is, in fact, systemic. Thus, she advises both Bell and Grace Crawley that they should follow suit in pursuing husbands. "Oh, Bell, what a tyrant [Crofts] would be if he were married!" Lily fancies,

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<sup>4</sup> If such a thing as "heterophobia" existed—and were manifest in Victorian fiction, of all things—then I would hazard that it is probably a bit "heterophobic" to reduce heterosexuality to a flat idealization of marriage. I would also venture that it is probably slightly tone-deaf to equate a novel's denial of one marriage plot (among a host of "realized" ones) with a neologistic form of bigotry against a dominant social group.

"And how submissive you would be, if you were his wife!" (457). She further notes, almost wryly, "It's a thousand pities that you are not in love with each other." Because marriage, by mid-Victorian legal standards, could never be about the meeting of equals, Lily simply takes up that inequity as an erotic ideal. As Dever offers, "*The Small House* empties out the very domestic ideals that its title seems to promise" (140). In this mode, Lily both adopts the most conservative variation of Victorian gender ideology and pushes it to the point that it starts to look, to borrow Anderson's helpful term, full-on "wacky."

Lily dramatically recasts her presumed dependency and subjugation as a wife into a form of erotic play. Thus, she suggests that being an angel in the house is not all that dissimilar from being the sadomasochistic bottom of the boudoir. While one could be forgiven for reading Lily's compulsively "loving" attachment to Crosbie beyond the end of their engagement as a form of melancholia, Crosbie's loss is actually more useful to Lily as an imaginative reservoir from which to envision a number of masochistic fantasies with which she is able to navigate the pains and pleasures of compulsory heterosexuality *on her own terms*. As McMaster provocatively suggests, "perhaps suffering is just as great a benefit to [Lily] as [her] well-being" (143). By continually re-staging her complete and utter subjugation to Crosbie, Lily drives towards masochistic mastery. The narrator, summarizing Lily's outlook on life after the jilt, repeatedly calls attention to Lily's love of Crosbie as a "duty": "Morning and night she prayed for him, and daily, almost hour by hour, she assured herself that it was still her duty to love him. It was hard, this duty of loving, without any power of expressing such love. But still she would do her duty." (SH 334). In persisting in her love for Crosbie *beyond* their engagement's untimely demise, Lily actually finds a replacement occupation for the form of servitude she has lost. Blumberg offers that "Trollope's novels hardly do away with the demand for generous, selfless, or self-forgetful

behavior” (507). “Instead,” he argues, “they take on perhaps the more radical task of reconfiguring that behavior as entirely ordinary: normative rather than exemplary; hardly worthy of remark, thus deeply worthy of esteem” (507). In *The Small House* and *The Last Chronicle*, however, the ideology of female subservience in marriage is so pervasive that it not only works *before* and *outside* of marriage, it actually becomes the overt ideal of marriage itself. Masochism and devotion are not so very different, and marriage—even in its “failure”—is good at courting both in Barset.

Eames makes a similarly masochistic career out of continually proposing to Lily. To be sure, even before Lily shoots him down, there is more than a little bit of delicious self-shaming in Eames’ relationship with Lily. In fact, Eames’ boyish “hobbledyhood” results in repeated attempts to woo Lily that are so embarrassing that the narrator patently has to step in to assure readers that Lily does not encourage them as a form of passive aggression (*SH* 100). Even as he pointedly matures over the course of *Small House*, though, Eames’ attachment to Lily continues to persist in a “pride of futile love” that erects hopeless castles in the sky whose pointlessness renders them into “black” abodes with “cruel dungeons” (99, 110). Eames is, to adopt Lauren Berlant’s schema, a preeminent “cruel optimist,” and his aptitude with erotic ineptitude becomes a kind of masochist’s dream: a negative feedback loop of pure disappointment through which Eames can endlessly charge himself with “bitter reproaches” (597). Lily is perhaps the most fitting masochistic object on which Eames can set his sights because she is so utterly *wrong* for him in every other way. Immediately upon being denied by Lily he promises, “Do not suppose that I will trouble you again,—at any rate not for a while. In five years time perhaps—” and in this manner, Eames makes the failure of marriage to materialize into a masochistic futurity unto itself (362). This doubles Lily’s determined ties to Crosbie, whom Lily fantasizes as going

“nowhere into society without recalling to mind the fact that he was bound by the chains of a solemn engagement” (362, 363).

But where Lily’s masochistic, virtual marriage to Crosbie has no bearing on Crosbie—Lily makes no attempts at contact once he marries for money, and she shoots down his attempts to get back in touch once he is left a widower early in *The Last Chronicle*—Eames’ status as Barset’s resident Stand-Up Gent entitles him to hound Lily for her hand. From Lily’s perspective, then, Eames’ proposals figure as threats against not only her way of love—for Crosbie—but also her way of single life as a “virtual” widow and self-professed “Old Maid.” The problem is that while Eames enacts his first proposal as a masochistic fantasy of violent rejection (“Oh you are so unkind to me!”) to which Lily in no way contributes (“No, no; oh, I would wish to be so kind to you!”), Lily cannot convince Eames that the marriage proposal is a matter that actually has very real consequences for her because he—like Crosbie—can never take her at her word (*SH* 595). While Lily tells Eames quite plainly, “You may not come again—not in this way,” and pleads, “John, if you understand what it is to love, you will say nothing more of it,” Eames makes a further two proposals (595). During the second, Eames chides himself for “telling the same whining story” and getting the same old masochistic kicks from feeling “ashamed” (*LC* 358-9). No stranger to the ironic pleasures of shame, and yet clearly at wit’s end, Lily advises him simply, “Do not be ashamed of yourself; but yet do it no more” (358). In the final proposal, even Eames is aware that his insistence has become something more insidious, and thus he explains, “I’ve come for the last time. It sounds as though I meant to threaten you” (821). Lily is ultimately able to break off from Eames only through a profession that she will never marry another man, even if she won’t marry Eames.

Even an actualized, financially successful marriage is no guarantee of a happy ending in the final Basset novels. Crosbie's miserable marriage to a young heiress, Alexandrina de Courcy, becomes the just desserts by which he is punished for having jilted Lily. Shortly after his engagement to Alexandrina, Crosbie comes to realize that the match has actually resulted in a palpable sense of not only fiscal, but also emotional loss. Thus, he is left with very little aside from regret. Where he dreaded marriage to Lily as a form of masculine impoverishment for which he "must give up his clubs, and his fashion, and all that he had hitherto gained, and be content to live a plain, humdrum, domestic life," the reality of marriage to Alexandrina proves just as tedious, but far more costly (*SH* 73). Subjected to the whims of Alexandrina's powerful relations, who dictate everything from the couple's social engagements to their wallpapers, Crosbie fancies a reversal of Lily's masochistic fantasy, in which he comes crawling back to her in order to beg forgiveness. "In this castle in the air," the narrator relates, "he saw himself kneeling again at Lily's feet, asking her pardon, and begging that he might once more be taken to her heart" (378). But even this comeuppance is only a cover. Pining for Lily's simpler love, Crosbie finally recognizes that the pleasures she would have provided were those of the servitude she herself coveted. Too late, Crosbie realizes that "She would have knelt at his feet on the floor of the carriage, and, looking up into his face, would have promised him to do her best,—her best,—her very best" (496). The irony is that, scoundrel though he might be, Crosbie's need for masculine assurance through domination, coupled with and Lily's need to feel usefully deferential, made them a perfect match from the start—if only Crosbie might have realized it.

Lily struggles across two novels to negotiate the means to an end that is not marriage. Lily's avowed profession of "spinsterdom"—unlike her imaginative profession of widowhood, as mentioned above—is able to assure her such an end. Fittingly, Lily's efforts to write her own

ending are figured through acts of inscription that indicate her awareness that “happy” endings are essentially a kind of narrative sham. Finishing a novel near the halfway point of *The Small House at Allington*, Lily remarks to her sister that the novel’s heroine was “right in accepting her suitor” (459). Bell cynically replies—echoing the narrator at the conclusion of *Barchester Towers*—that “It was a matter of course... It always is right in the novels. That’s why I don’t like them. They are too sweet” (459). But this sense of narrative sentimentality is, ironically enough, exactly what Lily admires about reading fiction. “That’s why I do like them, because they are so sweet,” Lily replies. “A sermon is not to tell you what you are, but what you ought to be, and a novel should tell you not what you are to get, but what you’d like to get” (459). At first this statement seems to telegraph that Lily will also be “right” in eventually accepting Johnny Eames. And yet, while Lily acknowledges the deliciousness of a novel’s propensity for wish-fulfillment, she also offsets that this is precisely what demarcates the fiction she reads from her own reality. Bell decries the falseness of this fiction, bemoaning “We’ve got tired of that; or else the people who write can’t do it now-a-days. But if we are to have real life, let it be real.” “No, Bell, no!” Lily objects. “Real life sometimes is so painful.” For Lily, the delights of novel-reading, however shallow, are a break from the monotonous agony of real life. In this scene, Trollope bluntly distinguishes the realist project of the final “Chronicles” from their more fanciful forerunners. Through Lily, Trollope stages a narrative gambit by which he seeks to differentiate Lily’s ending from those of more romantic heroines in lesser novels. Lily is a more concerted realist heroine, and so she need not meet the blissfully marital ends of her forerunner, Eleanor.

Given all of his emphasis on the emotional and epistemological bankruptcy of narrative endings, Trollope is careful to place Lily into a singular position in which she can author her own. Finally left “settled” at the end of *The Last Chronicle of Barset* following her bout of

romantic ambivalence, Lily makes her case for singleness in the bluntest manner possible. “I have settled it rightly,” Lily opines, “and I would not for worlds have it unsettled again” (824). Expressing her doubts about Lily’s future—and indeed Lily really *has* none, shortly thereafter passing “out of our sight” to “live and die as Lily Dale”—Emily Dunstable, Bernard’s wife, remarks plainly and impatiently, “I think a girl who is going to be married has the best of it” (*LC* 824-5). For perhaps the first time in the novels, Lily’s rebuttal requires no expressions of ardency, no hedging, and no line of articulate argument: “And I think a girl who isn’t going to be married has the best of it;—that’s all” (825). As much as Lily struggles to convince Eames, her mother, and the rest of Basset that her “no” does in fact mean “no,” the narrator suspects that her ongoing polemic has also been an effort to convince readers. Left with a “last word” on Lily Dale, the narrator simply asks his reader “to believe that she was in earnest” (825). Although Emily’s consternation—“I cannot understand you, Lily; I can’t indeed”—might be shared by readers across ideological divides, the narrator’s insistence on Lily’s “earnestness” assures us that while we might, alongside Basset denizens, think we know what is best for Lily Dale, our narrative designs, reflections, and desires are not nearly so important as Lily’s desires for herself.

Lily’s avowed singleness is figured as a narrative, social, and emotional “failure” by her neighbors and relations. But at the level of the text, her identifications with spinsterdom and widowhood are figured as offering Lily the profoundly personal achievement of a single ending as “the best of it” (*LC* 825). By “settling” her marital ambivalence into her profession as an “Old Maid,” Lily finds a prospect to the side of a compulsory heterosexuality that does her no favors as an individual, and still fewer as a member of Basset’s fictional community. Even as Lily languishes under her love for Crosbie, that loss affords her the narrative space for a prolonged narrative “afterwards” in which she can carefully manage her own time, energies, and

relationships—even if those energies are still often expended on her love for Crosbie. Lily’s imaginative experience of marriage’s pleasures *and* pains open her to a critical relationship with it as an object of contingency, rather than as a self-evident “matter of course.” More than this, though, Lily’s singular ambivalence towards marriage makes her aware of all that happens in Barset *to the side* of marriage. “I could not have that one thing, and I was nearer to my heart’s longings than you have ever been,” Lily remarks (*SH* 595). But what sounds like the regret that marks the ending, the “too late” of Lily’s tale, is also the impetus for a new narrative beginning. “I cannot have that one thing,” Lily recognizes, “but I know that there are other things, and I will not allow myself to be broken-hearted.” Indeed, for all of the pains she suffers, Lily Dale is never ultimately broken hearted. To the contrary, Lily continually fights for the recognition that, even single, she does “not mean to be unhappy” (629). “Of course I have been unhappy,—very unhappy,” Lily says. “I did think that my heart would break. But that has passed away, and I believe I can be as happy as my neighbours.” In carving out a narrative space for single happiness, however small, Lily Dale suggests a turn in the form of the novel where being left alone by the marriage plot need no longer mean feeling one has been left lonely.

## CHAPTER 3

# BEARING CHILDREN

## ONEROUS ATTACHMENTS IN *MARY BARTON* AND *DOMBEY AND SON*

Caring about babies is one of those sentiments that can rightly be assumed in any civilized human being. The abuse of babies rightly provokes an emotional reaction. There is nothing distorting about that, or about stories that capitalize on that. Nevertheless, such stories ... may be false.  
—Robert Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality*

Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capitals *ls* and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.  
—Lee Edelman, *No Future*

In a playful indictment of perceived nineteenth-century double-standards, sketch comedian David Mitchell—portraying a non-specific “Prime Minister” opposite Robert Webb in drag as a squat, middle-aged Queen Victoria—laments, “I can hardly move at home for little vases on stands or portraits of ill children praying.” Indeed, the trope of the suffering, dying, and dead child has become something of a cliché of Victorian culture. Between the Little Nells and the Helen Burnses and the Linton Heathcliffs, the domestic interiors of nineteenth-century British literature are seemingly so littered with the corpses of dead children that contemporary purveyors of Victorian culture might feel themselves tripping into children’s deathbed scenes at nearly every turn of the page. Emotionally intense, morally fraught, intricately telegraphed, and simply lengthy by design, scenes of dying children are among the most aesthetically charged in all of Victorian literature. They are also, frequently, exhausting. But at some point, faced with the sheer ubiquity of such scenes, a certain sort of contemporary reader might begin to recognize the rhetorical devices such scenes seemingly require—hand-clasped exhortations to angels, otherworldly visions, teary-eyed leave-takings, and the like. Rather than responding to such

scenes with misty eyes and open hearts, such a reader might experience a potentially uncomfortable sense of déjà vu and detachment, wondering, “Hasn’t this kid died already?”

As the epigraphs above suggest, such a response—hypothetical, perhaps—is freighted with the gravest moral, political, and aesthetic implications. At one extreme, Robert Solomon posits “caring for babies” as the rubric by which one can discern the “civilized human being” from, well, something quite else (17). For Solomon, whose argument sits comfortably alongside a number of recent reconsiderations of sentimentality in both its contemporary and Victorian contexts, it is right to care not only for fictional babies, but also for patently unreal ones. Thus, even in the instance of “World War I propaganda” that depicted Germans soldiers “bayoneting Belgian babies,” Solomon finds “nothing distorting”; such strategic invocations of children may “presuppose the tender sentiments we all have for babies,” but such sentiments can never be considered excessive insofar as their object always “rightly provokes an emotional reaction” (17). At the other extreme, Lee Edelman’s famous (or “infamous,” depending on the queer company one keeps) polemic *No Future* posits queerness as the anti-social force that eschews sentimentalism. Edelman’s children, too, run the gamut from the fictional to the fantasmatic, and so while he is clear that his capital-c “Child” is “not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children,” such a figurative entity nevertheless remains tenaciously compelling in part *because* of its “coercive universalization,” forming the “perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics” under the aegis of “reproductive futurism” (3, 11). Crucially for the discussion at hand, Edelman argues that the myopia of such a political scheme gains traction in part because it “organizes and administers an apparently self-regulating economy of sentimentality in which futurity comes to signify access to the realization of meaning” (134). Thus, for all of the disparities between the recommendations of their projects, Solomon and

Edelman nevertheless concur that the efficaciousness of children as guarantors of the social good—for civilized better or queer worse—gains traction through formalized feeling.

As pioneering work by James Kincaid, Ellis Hanson, and others emphasizes, however, the invention and enshrinement of the child was—as the historical stereotype might have it—a peculiarly Victorian novelty that required a great deal of discursive heavy lifting given the relative disregard for children in previous eras, to say nothing of the continued mistreatment of many of those “historical children” about whom Edelman is decidedly mum. As Kincaid has it, the idealization of the child is less a moral imperative at the cornerstone of civilization, and more the result of historical contingency. By inventing the child as an imaginative field of arrestment and innocence, the Victorians (following Wordsworth’s Romantic lead) crafted an “affective tableau,” a cure-all for what ailed modernity that offered a “retreat from the cold world of getting and spending” and “imperialist plundering” (Kincaid *Child-Loving* 67). Inasmuch as the figure of the child circulated a powerful sense of nostalgia for an amorously pre-modern past, then, industrial economies were nevertheless at its heart.

Unsurprisingly, then, as much as positive affirmations of the child consistently figure it as that which requires an obsessive expenditure of care, sympathy, and concern, such attention is often figured as a form of investment with immediate and unlimited dividends: “Give a little love to a child and you get a great deal back,” Ruskin assures us (qtd. Kilroy 13). Here, then, is yet another paradox in the long list of contradictions, hypocrisies, and doublespeak surrounding kids: figured as a quaint panacea for the brutalities of the market, the figure of the child in Victorian literature and culture was nevertheless circulated and idealized according to market logic. As the child was newly fashioned into a wellspring of feeling, feeling came to be understood as a form of value unto itself. The proliferation of textual representations of children thus amounted to a

particularly lucrative trade in feeling. The crisis of the dead child represented the cataclysmic image of such an emotional enterprise gone bankrupt.

Of course, this is only part of the story. As much as sentimentalized images of the Romantic child persisted throughout nineteenth century Britain (and continue into our own era, it is well worth remembering), their particular purchase as affective currency was far from standardized. Wilde famously neglected to weep alongside readers of Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop*, quipping with a queerly contemporary resonance that "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing" (qtd. Eaton 269). Unlike Solomon and Edelman's alternating fawning and fucking over the child—though, as Kincaid reminds us, the difference between such postures might be less dramatic than we'd like to think—Wilde's witticism isn't a rhetorical stance so much as a practiced slouch. More than this, though, Wilde's "laughing" at the dying child does not mark cruelly ironic irreverence as much as a form of reverence for children once removed. Elliptically suggestive instead of prescriptively shrill, Wilde posits that the immovable and unbending "heart of stone" is not a *problem* for sentimental culture as much as its symptom. Sentimental feeling takes shape precisely by refusing to take *new* shapes; its formal edicts do not circulate feeling, they merely dictate it. Wilde does not devalue the image of the child as much as he regrets its aesthetic fall into rote requisite. For Wilde, Dickens' dead child only feels like emotional dead weight.

Lest we mistake Wilde's sidestepping around Little Nell's body for a singular exception to the rule of Victorian sentimentality, the decidedly less iconoclastic Elizabeth Gaskell records a similar affective disjunction when confronted with an image of a dead child. Touring the home of a Bishop considered for employment as her daughter Florence's tutor, Gaskell was flabbergasted to discover "an exquisitely painted picture of a dead child" hanging over the

library door, its depiction “deathly livid, and with the most woeful expression of pain on its little wan face” (*Letters* 112). While Gaskell reports recoiling from the portrait, noting “it looked too deeply stamped to be lost even in Heaven,” the Bishop dryly recounted that it had elicited the admiration of an anatomist, and noted the painter’s personal connection to the family of the deceased (112). While the Bishop apparently got on swimmingly with Florence, making easy, “pleasant tattle,” the author nevertheless decided, “I would not send my child to be educated by the man who could hang up such a picture ... for it was not the quiet lovely expression of angelic rest, but the look of despairing agony” (112-3) The Bishop, Gaskell concluded, had “got something wrong with his heart” (113). Here again, the question of how one should respond to, circulate, and depict images of dead children is haunted by the threat of hearts gone awry.

Elisabeth Bronfen has proposed that the problematics of representation are both literalized and troubled anew when we consider representations of death. “Placed beyond the register of images that the living body can know,” Bronfen writes, “‘Death’ can only be read as a trope, as a signifier with an incessantly receding, ungraspable signified, invariably always pointing back self-reflexively to other signifiers” (54). Gaskell’s account highlights the extent to which images of dead children further complicate the logics of representation. Gaskell expects that the subject matter necessitates a certain formal horizon in terms of something very much like genre conventions. Thus, she cannot even recognize the portrait as representing a dead child; “deathly livid,” the portrait is too bereft of “angelic rest” to correspond to her expectations (*Letters* 113). It is as if, informed by the saintly specter of Little Nell and her fictive kin, Gaskell cannot come to terms with any representation of a child’s death that would contradict such rapt idealization. Thus, she finds herself rhetorically rescuing the figurative child, “lost even in Heaven” through the denial of death. Oddly, though, in the process Gaskell does not fantasize

bringing the child back to life, per se; rather, she wrestles death away from itself. In no way does Gaskell object to Mitchell and Webb's parodic "portraits of ill children"; indeed, she seems to take a form of comfort and pleasure in such images so long as they are limned in the appropriate style. Gaskell is fine with dead children, but she wants them dead *in the right way*.

What these episodes from Wilde and Gaskell demonstrate is that while representations of dead, dying, and imperiled children were circulated as a form of emotional currency in the Victorian era, the emotions elicited by such images were far from uniform, predictable, or above question. As often as such images did and do elicit Solomon's "tender sentiments," they also prompt immanent, if uneasy questions about aesthetic judgment, morality, and the politics of representation. Although Solomon and Edelman trade in universalities that speak a degree of truth to the child's pull upon our emotions in the abstract, their schemas run into problems as soon as that figural entity is actualized and particularized, even in fiction. Indeed, for Wilde and Gaskell, (mis)representing the dead child *must* raise questions about the tensions between figuration and lived (dying?) experience. "The idea of the child can hardly put up with actual children," Kincaid notes ("Dickens and the Construction of the Child" 30). Like widowhood, child death was an evocative figure of queer loss in Victorian fiction in part because it perennially called attention to the schism between emotional prescription and experience. What needs further exploration, then, is how the idealization of children in Victorian England took place across a differential field in which all children were felt as valuable objects of sympathy, but some were nevertheless prized as more worthy of sympathy than others. This calls for a reconsideration of how the act of feeling with and for others comes to be felt as valuable in the first place, an examination into the discursive labor required to establish and maintain

sympathy's value, and an exploration of the uses to which such sympathetic value might be put in both fictional and literal markets.

The idea that all children, everywhere, call for emotional response was a useful fiction for establishing links between fiction, feeling, and sympathy. These ties were especially crucial in the fallout of the Industrial Revolution as the rapid reorganization of social life led to new understandings of kinship ties based not upon aristocratic relation, but rather upon domestic attachment and socioeconomic investment. Over the last two decades, critics, historians, and social theorists have tended to deconstruct the supposed opposition between the public and private spheres as they emerged in the Victorian era, noting the extent to which the domestic sphere and its accompanying ideology were enshrined as the means to foster sympathetic, warm attachments meant to protect—or insulate—subjects against the harsh economics of public life. At the same time, critics have increasingly argued that sentimentalism, melodrama, and sensation were particularly marketable—and therefore profitable—affective modes during the Victorian era, calling our attention to emotion's status as a nineteenth-century economic force unto itself. Such accounts have neglected, however, to consider adequately the extent to which the recuperative rhetoric of sympathy, sentimentalism, and attachment actually operates according, rather than counter, to the logics and language of the market.

In this context, child loss is an especially charged issue because it necessitates a reconsideration of the contingent logics of relation whereby domestic comforts compensate for market cruelties. Unsurprisingly, the uncomfortable implications of grieving child loss are explored in several domestic novels published during the “Hungry Forties.” In Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) widowers' aspirations on, in, and for the market are undercut by the deaths of children—and, in a different register, wives—whose losses require a radical reconfiguration of

the stakes of attachment as a form of affective investment. In Dickens' *Dombey and Son* (1848), the loss of Paul Dombey—heir-apparent to a shipping firm—throws his father's total emotional investment in his future into complete and utter chaos. In both novels, bearing children all too often means bearing the dead, and in this way sympathetic attachment to children is as materially costly and emotionally taxing as it is potentially sustaining. *Mary Barton* and *Dombey and Son* thus underscore the extent to which domestic ties came to be felt as onerous, impoverishing, and simply unbearable. While *Mary Barton* is optimistic about the restorative possibilities of sympathy, sentimentalism, and domesticity—in part through arguing for wider, more flexible understandings of kinship relations—it is ultimately unable to render its critiques of domesticity cozily inert. At the same time, *Mary Barton* reassesses the temporal logics of sentimentality and melodrama, as well as the formal techniques such affective modes elicit. In a different vein, *Dombey and Son* at once suggests that investing in one's children to the exclusion of all other social bonds begets financial and domestic disaster. At the same time, the novel's redemptive vision of a diffuse, broadly sympathetic social is equally fraught because it risks emotional disinterest and illicit association. Thus, while the tropes of dead, dying, and mourning children speak to the textual premium paid on sentimental investment in the figural child, Gaskell and Dickens at once explore how such idealizations distract from the plight of actual children and their families, and suggest that the temporalities of childhood and familial attachment are hardly ever so straightforward.

## I. Bearing Sympathy

Over the past decades of scholarship, literary critics, historians, and social theorists have deconstructed the opposition between the public and private spheres that supposedly developed in the nineteenth century, offering a more nuanced vision of Victorian society in which the market and the home were not opposed, but rather flourished simultaneously and in ways that were mutually enabling. In his careful study of Victorian men's relationships to the ideologies and realities of home life, John Tosh offers that "The home was supposed to be inward-looking, focused on the most intimate and compelling of human needs" (47). Yet, for all of the home's myopia, Tosh supposes that "for the bourgeoisie [it] was also the prime means of affirming social status - a medium of display intended to impress visitors and neighbors" (47). An open house of sorts, the middle-class Victorian home—populated not just with family members, but also domestic servants—at once perpetuated and embodied the forms of consumption, labor, and economy against which it was "meant to represent a complete antithesis" (47). It is impossible to discuss Victorian domesticity without positing the emerging middle-class as its primary condition of possibility, and in this way home life in nineteenth-century Britain is inseparable from the processes of urbanization, industrialization, and imperialism.

Homey coziness was itself useful. Chiefly, historians and historicist literary critics have argued that domestic ideology developed as a way to balance and bolster the newly stringent, austere demands of a free market that was felt to be alienating, overly rational, and concerned with self-interest to an almost sociopathic degree. Charles Hatten argues that "What is most distinctive about Victorian domesticity is how, in the context of the increased power of market-dominated social relations, the new degree of separation of workplace and home, the alienating character of workplaces and urban environments, and the harsh divisions of the social classes,

the need for the creation of an imagined or actual domestic space resistant to the coercions and pressures of the marketplace was stronger than ever” (23-4). Victorian domesticity, Hatten explains, was thus “an understandable response to harsh and divisive social conditions and was influenced by anxieties about the powers of markets, the negative social effects of industrialization, and the disquieting divisions of social class” (25).

While from a contemporary perspective—and especially from certain feminist or queer vantage points—one might resent the Victorian’s idealization of the home as restrictive, privileged, and patriarchal, much contemporary and critical literature on the topic evinces a profound sense of compassion for individuals grappling with an emerging market whose demands they could neither wholly understand, nor reconcile with their own needs. In this vein, Tosh points out, “The nineteenth century was the first in which significant numbers of men of education and means experienced work as alienating” due to the shifts in labor brought about by industrialization (6). The disorienting novelty of this rearrangement of society, routine, and emotional life (or its impoverishment) thus required domesticity as a counterbalance that “provided not only the rest and refreshment which any breadwinner needs, but the emotional and psychological supports which made working life tolerable” (6). We can see, then, how domesticity, for all its problems, may have *felt* incredibly necessary, and better comprehend the sometimes tenacious attachments to domestic life evinced in fiction, as well as firsthand historical accounts.

In this reckoning, the restorative nature of domesticity operated principally through a new understanding of sympathy and sentiment as the means through which to forge sustaining interpersonal attachments. Divested from public life, sentiment acquired new value as a commodity that stood for home life. At the same time, though, as the means by which

individuals understood themselves to feel together, for, and with others, sympathy allowed for individual experiences of emotion to take on a promiscuously social dimension. As Michael Bell surmises, the Victorian appreciation of sympathy took its cues from Adam Smith's influential *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in which "sympathy was the capacity to reconstruct imaginatively the inner state of another person," an "exercise of the imagination" by which one achieved awareness and consideration not only of others, but also of "oneself as the object of such observation" in kind (43-4). Bell thus argues that Smithian sympathy, although felt as intensely interiorized and intimate, constitutes "less a movement of individual feeling and rather an imagined arena in which the subjectivities of all human others, and of the self, are reconstructed in a manner which has to be both emotional and judgmental at once" (44).

The language of sympathetic "attachments" is important in part because it allows us to conceive of Victorian sympathy in graphical terms, as a web of thickly intertwined individuals. To speak of emotions as forging attachments pushes us away from a Romantic understanding of emotion as deeply personal, spontaneous, and inherently "true," and towards an understanding of emotion as relational, durational, and contingent. Sympathetic attachments testify to the thickness of the social life they engender, while also maintaining a sense of flexibility for emotional life in both form and content. Where Freudian cathexes are understood as psychosexual orientations—the spindly tentacles tenaciously grasping onto the melancholic object, for example—the interconnections of sympathetic attachment are more dynamic in some senses, vibrating not just through the logic of desire and/or identification, but tuned to any range of emotional experiences. Moreover, thinking through sympathy as emotional attachment offers emotional experience a decidedly capacious phenomenological valence such that one might conceive of emotions as pointing us not only towards relations between individuals, but also

towards the objects to which emotions are directed. As we shall see, however, the seemingly felicitous ability of sympathetic attachments to linger and proliferate needs to be tempered with several remarks of caution. Similarly, while sympathy offers the utopian promise of emotional connections that might bridge across continents, social differences, and even the gap between fiction and reality, nowhere were sympathetic attachments meant to be thicker or more resonant than in the Victorian home. So, while sympathetic attachments might tether subjects across vast, potentially global networks, the valorization of home life positioned domesticity as both the ideal source of sympathy and its most convenient place of expenditure.

More than a bit of optimism colors much of the writing on sympathy and sentimentality in both its Victorian and contemporary variations. Solomon's tellingly titled *In Defense of Sentimentality* is part of recent critical correctives that attempt to rescue sentimentality from its perennial naysayers. Sentimentality, Solomon admits, is "prone to pathological distortions," but he nevertheless insists that "there is *nothing* wrong with sentimentality," contending that "the prejudice against sentimentality... is an extension of that all-too-familiar contempt for the passions in Western literature and philosophy" (4). Those who might deride sentimentality are, in Solomon's estimation, utterly contemptible in turn, evincing only "the rationalist's discomfort with any display of emotion, warranted as well as unwarranted, appropriate or inappropriate" (4). Where some critics have argued that Victorian sentimentality must be contextualized in order to be fully appreciated—and so felt "correctly"—by those who might callously disparage it out of such "discomfort," Nicola Bown argues that sentimentality is in fact a sort of transtemporal force, working across, and perhaps even outside of history. "Sentimental emotion works across time," she argues, "collapsing the distance between reader or viewer, text or object or image, and the past worlds of thought, emotion, people and things she or he inhabited" (3-4). For Bown, "the

pull of sentimental art... brings us physically and mentally close to long-dead readers and viewers in the past,” and thus sentimental emotion “invites us sympathetically to share the emotional world of those distant from us in time and circumstance” (3-4). While the issue of transtemporal emotion is one to which I will return more centrally in Chapter 5, what is most striking about Bown’s theory of sentimentality for our purposes here is that it emphasizes that sympathetic attachments exert a certain force, a “pull” on the emotions that resonates independent of, but also through, their own emotive frequency. This pull itself might come to be felt as having emotional valences, communicating a sense of insistent intimacy, moral forthrightness, de rigueur complicity, or any other range of second-order affective modes.

In more skeptical approaches to theories of sentimentality and sympathy, critics have emphasized the political dimensions inherent to sympathetic attachments, paying special attention to the deployment of sentimental scenes in nineteenth century fiction. In her particularly thoroughgoing study *Feeling for the Poor*, Carolyn Betensky questions sympathy’s ability to bridge across social divides, contending that sympathy’s promise of “shared” emotion is premised upon a denial of the unevenness of its attachments. In particular, Betensky points to the sentimental projects of social problem novels, a group of texts—including *Mary Barton*—that attempted to engage the inequities facing the laboring classes during the so-called “hungry forties.” While, as we shall see, the perceived over-emphasis on sympathy in the social problem novel has led to the genre’s problematic dismissal by Marxist critics invested in more bluntly materialist approaches to thinking through class conflict, Lenard observes that it addressed the urgently “perceived need to construct bonds” between the rich and poor, who were conceived as “two opposing camps” or, in Disraeli’s formulation, wholly separate nations within Britain (53-4). For her part, Betensky offers that while social problem novels explicitly sought to establish a

form of sympathy for the working classes among a middle-class readership that was potentially fearful of Chartist reform, those novels instead offered such readers the means by which engage in a form of emotional appropriation and narcissism. The notion that middle-class readers “shared” in the suffering of working-class characters gave social problem novels a disingenuous sense of altruism because the more sentimental scenes in such novels fostered a form of sympathy that offered readers “the opportunity to experience themselves in the subject position of both benefactor and beneficiary” (4). Because social problem novels both capitalized upon, and perpetuated the Victorian notion that feeling sympathetic emotion was a valuable, moral act unto itself, they effectively diffused any insistence that reform, rather than reading, might offer the best remedies for the social ills facing laborers. Accordingly, Amit Rai contends that sympathy, rather than simply spreading fellowship through fellow feeling, was in fact a “civilizing mission” part and parcel with imperialist expansion because it “facilitated the elaboration of various forms of power-relations” (xii). In Rai’s estimation, sympathy never achieves its lauded goal of allowing subjects to form emotional bridges; instead, sympathy simply reaffirms the forms of difference upon which its operations depend and “without which sympathy itself would be impossible” (xiii, xix).

Sentimentality and sympathy function as a helpful index for considering the difficulties that industrialism, imperialism, and modernity writ large posed for individuals’ relationship to larger social bodies. Thus, literary critics have highlighted that Victorian popular fiction, so often oriented around the imaginative emotional experiences of fictional others, served a pedagogic purpose in helping to expand upon the forms of feeling, fellowship, and public action necessary to foster sympathetic attachments between and among disparate populations. Trollope’s pointed, perhaps envious parody of Dickens as “Mr. Popular Sentiment” in *The Warden* is a testament not

just to Dickens' ability to present his reading public with non-confrontational opinions, or pleasing images of its own powerful feeling, but also to Dickens' consistent thematizing—especially in the early novels—of sympathy as the proper developmental course for a novel's characters *alongside* its readers. Indeed, in Dickens' contemporary reception and continual reappraisals we see something of a pantomime for critical debates about the place of feeling in popular fiction and public life.

Though Dickens was, as today, an immensely popular author in the Victorian era, Ledger points out that from the 1850s onward a group of critics continually derided his work. These critics believed Dickens' "representations of pathos to be overdone, inauthentic or insincere," and charged that his emphasis on emotional life betrayed his lack of education and his concomitant possession of qualities "frequently associated with femininity, childishness, and lower-class behavior" (Ledger 3). If anything, though, such critical backlash against Dickens does nothing to deny the power with which he forged sympathetic attachments between himself, his characters, and his readers, and so oftentimes such critics' "rhetoric elides the differences between them" (3). Try as they might to condemn Dickens based on his association with the lower orders of Victorian society, the fact was that through Dickens' works, "Disempowered groups, including the poor, women, and children, were thus reading... pathetic scenes that represented people like themselves in pitiful situations" (10). Kaplan concurs, describing Dickens' larger project as an effort to "awaken" readers' desires to "repossess" their "natural sentiments" (41). While Dickens regularly relied upon sentimental scenes, Kaplan and Ledger underscore that we might read the perceived excesses of such appeals to emotion less as opportunistic sap, and more as a concerted effort to ascribe a sense of value for the emotional lives of those who were *dispossessed* from public life in Victorian England.

As problematic or short-sighted as Victorian authors' novelistic approaches to socio-political reform may have been, when considered in concert with other contemporary media—conduct manuals, genre paintings, and tenets of moral philosophy—mid-century fiction underscores that in many ways the “popular sentiment” of Victorian culture was in fact sentiment itself. Importantly, then, as much as domestic ideology figured sentiment and sympathy as checks upon the market, Victorian fiction exemplifies the commodification of sentiment as a much more literal market force unto itself. Indeed, Catherine Gallagher has argued that nineteenth-century political economy was founded around a notion of “somaeconomics” which figured “emotional and sensual feelings [as] both causes and consequences of economic exertions” (*The Body Economic* 3). In this way, Victorian sentimentality comprised what Lauren Berlant has termed “an intimate public”; that is, the variegated texts comprising Victorian popular media offered individuals access to a “culture of circulation” in which their “participation [seemed] to confirm the sense that even before there was a market addressed to them, there existed a world of strangers who would be emotionally literate in each other's experience of power, intimacy, desire, and discontent, with all that entails” (5). While one would be mistaken to take the novel as the sole arbiter of such a feeling public, the genre's proliferation, popularization, and specialization is certainly no accident.

Sympathetic value was often equated with monetary value in the Victorian context, albeit according to rather idiosyncratic logic. The rise of the social problem novel coincided with the fallout of the New Poor Laws, which increasingly made necessary the privatized, but highly organized charity leagues by which the upwardly mobile at once distinguished themselves from the poor and offered sympathetic coin meant to alleviate poverty. Confronting this double bind, Jonathan Loesberg concedes that while “affection may better connect people than cash,” the

“problem” nevertheless remains that “for affection to act as an alternative to economic exchange, it has to become a form of economic exchange” (459). Fiscal resources continually translated into emotional resources; the middle- and upper-classes were capable of investing time, care, and sympathy as charity precisely because they occupied a privileged financial position. Crucially, though, one’s value as a sympathetic object was inversely related to one’s financial and social means; this was equally true of the poor as it was for women, children, and people of color, so long as they could be represented through properly formalized sentimental appeals.

Those individuals most worthy of sympathy were those least guaranteed juridical rights and benefits, and in this regard those who most demanded sympathetic expenditure from the middle-class were also those who were capable of providing the most emotional payoff to that same middle-class, particularly as they acquired representational interest within socially-invested fiction. Audrey Jaffe thus notes that while it is difficult to think about sentiment in quantifiable terms of production, supply, and demand, Victorian sympathy nevertheless operated according to “an economy of self-regulation” in which those who were charitable with their feelings understood those feelings as a seemingly limited commodity (16). Should one sympathize with an undeserving or improper object, then the project of fellow feeling faced the potential for semiotic crisis whereby that feeling could be wasted, lost, or revealed as a sham. Insuring that one could make a “safe investment” in a sympathetic object thus required, in Solicari’s words, “a successful navigation of social codes, signs and symbols” within the context of a sentimental “commercialism” whose pleasures persisted in their “self-referential appeal” (1).

To expand upon these various strands of thought, then, I would offer that among their other functions and forms, sympathetic attachments are forms of emotional investment; they not only *register* value, they ascribe, establish, and work towards circulating it. This strand of

thinking about emotion stretches back, appropriately enough, to Adam Smith himself. From the outset, Smith's optimism about the possibilities of sympathy and sentiment in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is framed through his assumption of innate mutual human interest. In this regard, Smith writes patently *against* a rhetoric of idealized "disinterest"—code in the nineteenth-century for not only psychological, but also financial uninvolvedness—as the basis for moral human interaction. In a clear divergence, though, Smith's preferred "interest" is the sort in which all parties involved can benefit by definition. Thus, Smith writes that "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it" (13). In other words, Smith suggests that sympathy opens up an alternative, more wholesome market *to the side* of the monetary kind.

Despite their radically different logics, though, these two markets continually intersect, and so Smith underscores that sympathetic attachments vibrate in part through, rather than despite, one's knowledge of financial disparities. Faced with "the sores and ulcers which are exposed by beggars in the streets," individuals "of delicate fibres and a weak constitution of body complain" not *just* at the thought of another's physical pain, but more acutely for the thought of the destitution that such "wretches" face (14). The "delicate" sympathizer is pained "because that horror arises from conceiving what they themselves would suffer, if they really were the wretches whom they are looking upon" (14). Importantly, then, Smithian sympathy is never *just* about the "pleasure" of witnessing the emotions of another in order to share his or her "fortunes." Sympathy equally risks engaging with, and experiencing the pain of another by proxy, and this in turn entails a threat of undesirable counterfactual identification: I feel your pain because I know how pained I would be had I lived your life instead of my own. Sympathy

makes one acutely aware of one's subject position while simultaneously calling the stability of that subjectivity into question by positing it as limitlessly contingent.

By merely witnessing the emotions of another, Smith argues, we must—or at least rightly *should*—experience sympathetic emotions in a manner that is alike both in kind and degree. Emotional disparity is thus the litmus test by which “the propriety or impropriety” and “the decency or ungracefulness” of emotion is deduced in its transfer from one person to another. Smith envisions sympathy as ideally facilitating a kind of emotional entropy such that when “the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotions of the spectator, they necessarily appear to this last just and proper, and suitable to their objects” (21-2). But this does not imply that sympathy does away with difference. In such a case, while the sympathetic emotion actively receives “a quite different modification,” it nevertheless resonates with “such a correspondence . . . as is sufficient for the harmony of society” (28). Smith's use of “harmony” is rather pointed, implying that sympathetic attachment ideally forges networks of feeling that don't sound as a cacophonous drone, but are instead pleasingly polyvalent in tune. The sympathizer must thus strive towards a “correspondence of sentiments” with the other, and thus “adopt the whole case of his [sic] companion with all its minutest incidents” in order “to render” his or her own situation in as analogous a case as possible (27-8).

According to Smith's model, emotion must by necessity remain in a constant state of exchange. But where the financial market is impersonal, stultifying in its complexity, and geared towards individual profit, sympathetic emotions can make transfers through personal intercourse, and without regard for the sense that the value of the “principal” emotion should remain as such. Importantly, though, even this ideal equivalency cannot account for the seemingly infinite—if undesirable—variations in emotion that occur when two people engage with the same emotional

object. Where the same object produces different emotions, Smith carefully surmises that such discrepancies arise from “different degrees of attention, which our different habits of life allow us to give easily to the several parts of those complex objects, or from the different degrees of natural acuteness in the faculty of the mind to which they are addressed” (25). Try as we might to invest in emotional objects without competing interest, those objects are seemingly always already attached to associations that we cannot help but “give easily” to them.

Idealized as a gift, emotions are—troublingly, for Smith’s laws of proportion—gifts that keep on giving; sympathetic attachments linger, and thus they shape (or perhaps misshape) new attachments by pulling us one way or another. Crucially, Smith’s model of sympathy does not promise “authenticity.” Smith wants us to experience emotions not as automatic, mechanical responses, but as profoundly nuanced and densely textured. Temporally freighted but forward moving, sympathetic emotions entail narrative insofar as they take shape through precedents and antecedents. Smith’s repeated use of the term “case” suggests that sympathy is both juridical (critical/evaluative) and investigative (accumulative/constructive). Sympathy requires that we closely consider the story of another, and then construct our own counterfactual tales accordingly. As the case may be, sympathy is also a matter of how the case is not; sympathy allows us to envision alternate realities. Difference rests at its heart. Sympathetic emotion both has *and* tells a story; it is at once quietly receptive and intrepidly generative. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* comes to read very much like an impassioned plea for close reading coupled with a form of equally intimate storytelling.

Most importantly for the discussion at hand, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* repeatedly takes up metaphors of domesticity in order to describe successful acts of sympathetic emotion. I would suggest that, as with other slippery forms of Smithian representation, these invocations of

home life are, in the context of Victorian domestic ideology, both figural *and* literal. Returning to the question of equivalency and emotional “concord,” Smith suggests that the disparity between “unjust and improper” sympathetic emotions and those which are “suitable to their objects” may be deduced by “bringing the case home” to oneself (21-2). In this way, Smith posits the home as the proper space not *just* for feeling, but also for careful contemplation *about* feeling. The metaphor seems cozy enough at first glance: one might well envision one of Dickens’ avuncular benefactors, sitting by the fireside to mull things over. At the same time, “bringing the case home” equally suggests that such self-reflection is a form of continued labor, as though one has hastily, haggardly arrived from the office, only to prop open their briefcase on the dining room table. This grants such an act a precariously public dimension, despite its privacy and introspection, and thus it raises uneasy questions. If producing proper feeling is the work one does at home instead, but also *because* of the work one performs outside the home, then when does one’s work ever end? What happens if one neglects or outright refuses to perform the work of sympathy? Clearly, Smith’s optimism about sympathetic emotion as the basis for morality posits fellow feeling as an unqualified ethical good. At the same time, though, Smith continually underscores that for all its innate goodness, sympathy requires a great deal of work. Why, then are its supposed ends—“such a correspondence . . . as is sufficient for the harmony of society”—much more about getting by and getting along than about flourishing as a reward for a mutually sympathetic job well done? What happens when performing the labor of sympathetic attachment stops feeling sustaining and start feeling simply, well, laborious?

The act of sympathy itself is figured as a form of kinship such that the “agonies” of the sympathetic other only “begin at last to affect us” when they are “brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our own” (14). Smith figures sympathy as a form of

“conception” such that those emotions which are outside the sacred circle of our own familiarity come to feel like family (13). Smith thus suggests that “home” facilitates sympathy by fostering feelings like lost children. Here, too, emotional experience is granted a temporally expansive, narrative dimension: sympathetic feeling takes on a life of its own. This is apparently *not* Derrida’s more radical hospitality, hinging as it does on the *Oliver Twist*-like “adoption” that transforms the foundling into family, and so discounts that figure’s founding difference. And yet, in Smith’s formulation the adopted child gives no guarantee of the pleasing delights one might suppose to trail about sentimental scenes of orphans finally given bed and board. Instead, the adopted child brings home only “agonies.” So, courting sympathetic kinship means inviting in even unpleasant forms of feeling, and then letting them take up residence in our emotional lives. As much as the domestic offers the sympathetic economy its most efficacious resources and modes of circulation, sympathetic attachment itself can turn out to feel oddly taxing. Taken in as an act of charity, such an adoptee turns out to be little more than a problem child.

Smith’s uneasy equation of sympathy with over-worked domesticity, and children with potentially compromising forms of sympathetic attachment, is no accident. Sentiment and sympathy promise increasingly thick attachments to others, and so they both recognize and invest value into the things and people they tether together. At the same time, though, the more one invests in others through sympathetic attachment, the more one risks experiencing potentially cataclysmic forms of loss should those attachments be lost or broken. Even more disconcerting is the notion that, because sympathetic attachments require a kind of affective maintenance in order to persevere, even when sympathetic attachments *don’t* break, their perpetuation itself might come to feel less like tenacious persistence or depth of relation, and more like slow degradation or compromise.

To speak to the dual problematic posed by sympathetic attachments—their ability to denote and establish both value *and* cost—I will be using the term “unbearable attachment.” In the context of Victorian fiction, unbearable attachments are most bluntly and brutally limned through narratives in which either the impoverishing loss or tenacity of attachments is depicted through stories of financial deprivation or ruin. As we have explored, this is hardly surprising given the close ties between sentiment and the market. As unbearable attachments stretch across the domestic realm, they underscore that those forms of relation most deeply prized by some Victorians as the remedy to, and escape from, the dangers of market economies were in fact all the more open to the threat of financial failure because they drew upon correspondent logics of investment, value, commodity fetishization, and exchange. Familial ties become ties that bind (sometimes violently) in novels of unbearable attachment, and this is equally true of novels about the nightmarish negative example of “broken families” as it is of those in which the family unit, faced with financial crisis, perseveres and permutates. In these novels, domestic attachments are sometimes indeed felt as mutually beneficial, moral, and enabling; more often than not, though, they tend to feel onerous, disabling, or depressing.

I have opted to pair Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* with Charles Dickens’ *Dombey and Son* as examples of novels of unbearable attachment because while they both explore the relationship between sympathy and class, they depict dramatically different populations, conceptions of social life, and emotional economies. As a social problem novel—perhaps the work most discussed *as* a social problem novel—*Mary Barton* focuses on a group of Manchester laborers and their relatively small social circle as they face the cruel caprices of a shifting industrial economy that perennially keeps them in a state of deprivation, even as their familial attachments both broaden and intensify. In *Dombey and Son*, by contrast, Florence Dombey

faces emotional and not financial destitution as the unwanted daughter of a shipping magnate who wholly invests in his son Paul as the rightful heir to the family fortune. When Paul dies a mere third of the way through the novel, the family economy is thrown into utter disarray, and Florence's survival comes to figure for her father as a conspicuous, miserable remainder.

I do not mean to pigeonhole either Gaskell or Dickens as “sentimental” authors; both are notable in part for the range and depth of their formal developments and experimentations. At the same time, though, critics have long considered the two authors together because their working relationship coincided with a shared commitment to social reform through fiction. Moreover, because their shared vision of social change was often accomplished through what Lenard calls their penchant for “resolving [social] conflicts through feminized conventions such as religious conversion and emotional reconciliation,” both Gaskell and Dickens have fared poorly among (mostly Marxist) critics who would prefer a more robust form of fictional revolution (109). But, because both novels pointedly engage the inextricability of sympathetic feeling, dysfunctional family, and faulty markets, it is precisely in the uncomfortable privacy of *Mary Barton* and *Dombey and Son* that Gaskell and Dickens accomplish their most thoroughgoing social critique. In these novels, it is impossible to distinguish between the economics of sympathetic emotion and those of the market. To disregard this link through demystification, or dismiss the novels for offering “private solutions” to “public problems,” utterly misses this point.

In both novels, child death features prominently as a motif rife with sentimental possibilities. However, where Paul Dombey's death is utterly transformative for *Dombey and Son*'s plot, child death in *Mary Barton* is a quotidian fact of life. These novels thus reflect an important tension between child death as trope and child death as a material, political reality, suggesting uncomfortably that for all of the Victorians' fawning over children, many of those

children were simply fucked over. While the loss of the child might seem flatly to connote various forms of dramatic, even traumatic social failure, because children are consistently figured as both subject and objects of unbearable attachment in these novels, their losses pose deeply ambivalent questions about the values and costs of children both in and out of Victorian fiction. In these novels, bearing children all too often means bearing the dead. In this way, Gaskell and Dickens both take up, and radically re-deploy the trope of the sentimental child, figuring children not as forward-leaning, flat promissory notes for the future, but as potentially detrimental, backwards, and freighted with loss. Moreover, the losses of children are redoubled in the losses of wives and mothers, and so Gaskell and Dickens offer important explorations of domestic life organized around relationships between father and child, at once assuming the mother's foundational loss—as has been ably considered by Margaret Homans and other feminist critics—and offering a vision of family which takes that loss only as a starting point, rather than a fetishistic origin.

## **II. Bearing the Dead: *Mary Barton***

*Mary Barton* is a novel of misery. From start to finish, Elizabeth Gaskell details mid-nineteenth century life in the industrial North of England as an endless series of slow deaths, ineffectual mercies, acts of sheer desperation, and collapses from exhaustion. At best, the novel offers begrudging acceptance, paternalist compromise, or escapist fantasies as the only feasible remedies for the problems facing the working classes of Manchester. And yet, for all of the novel's sustained agonies and pessimism—even in its resolutions—critics have continually read the novel as inconsistent in terms of its plot and tone. Such critics contrast the novel's first half—

which couples John Barton's continual failed efforts at Chartist reform with scenes of quotidian loss in the laboring community—with its second, in which John's daughter, Mary, seeks to exonerate her husband-to-be, Jem Wilson, when he is wrongfully accused of jealously murdering the rich mill owner's son, Harry Carson, whom John Barton himself has murdered as part of a Chartist conspiracy. Sentimental melodrama eclipses political engagement, such critics charge, and thus the novel's reform fails because its two plots, “only circumstantially connected,” eventually serve only “to entertain the reading public,” rather than foster political debate (Bodenheimer 196). Such readings oppose politics to romance, public to private, and import to entertainment, bemoaning “Mary's courtship plot, for digressing from, diluting, or directly counterpointing John's political plot with a conservative politics” (Elliott 21). It is de rigueur for critics to note that the novel was originally titled *John Barton*, and fantasize about what the novel might have been had Gaskell not, apparently, lost both her nerve and her protagonist.

While the novel's most famous shoulder-shruger, Raymond Williams, does not exactly throw Mary's marriage plot under the critical bus, he certainly sets the tone for such readings in *Culture and Society*. Williams at once admires *Mary Barton*'s “effort to record, in its own terms, the feel of everyday life” through a method of “documentary record,” while utterly dismissing the novel's eventual “diversion to Mary” as an unfortunate case of “publishers' influence” that results only in “a kind of writing-off, when the misery of the situation can no longer be endured,” presumably as Jem and Mary emigrate to Canada following John Barton's execution for the murder (98). Williams praises Gaskell for her novel act of sympathy, noting that, for all of the potential problems sympathy poses as it works across class lines, Gaskell's “response to the suffering is deep and genuine,” stemming from first-hand knowledge rather than from “report or occasional visit” (98). “But pity cannot stand alone,” Williams laments, and thus he reasons that

Gaskell's narrative and juridical abandonment of John Barton in the novel's second half resulted from her inability to comprehend the act of murder to which Barton resorts. Barton is given no trial, no courtroom scene in which his guilt is, if not exonerated, then at least explained as a result of slow-burn indignities at the hands of a cruelly indifferent bourgeoisie. *Mary Barton* is not Victorian England's *Native Son*. Instead, Williams argues, the novel's otherwise potentially sympathetic readers are left only with a sense of "confusing violence and fear of violence," and thus, "Sympathy was transformed [by the novel], not into action, but into withdrawal" (98, 118). Williams essentially charges *Mary Barton*'s author with a kind of naïveté. Having given shape to a text whose moral, emotional, and political implications she could neither understand nor rein in, Gaskell—in Williams' reading—could not endure the uncomfortable contradictions of her protagonist, and so she simply let him die at the hands of the novel's executioners.

Williams and others' efforts to bifurcate *Mary Barton* into two coextensive, but very different novels miss out, however, on the novel's sustained misery as an organizing principle that tethers together its constituent plots, milieu, and emotional registers. Thus, charges that Gaskell could not come to terms with her own creation *as a political* novel, and that she wrote a *domestic* novel instead, ignore the extent to which the novel's private scenes and plots are in no way an escape from the miseries of industrial markets. Carolyn Lesjak argues that *Mary Barton* follows the larger schema of the Victorian novel, rendering labor "invisible by producing aesthetic and domestic pleasures that distract from the issues of labor"; she further contends that Gaskell's "use of melodrama and the notion of pleasure it encompasses vitiates the problems her representations of labor and the productive sphere pose for the novel" (Lesjak 7, 15). To the contrary, what might be cruelest about *Mary Barton* is the way in which it figures working-class domesticity as every bit as laborious, exhausting, and obligatory as factory work. Thus, while the

novel offers sentimental tableaux as respites that stave off the coldness of material deprivation, the problem is that *because* such comforts are meant to offset poverty, sympathetic emotion becomes a form of subsistence unto itself. More importantly, because the novel's working-class characters perennially face the deaths of loved as the inevitable, iterative, quotidian outcome of material want, the novel makes no guarantee that the feelings that family fosters will be pleasurable. Produced at home as a matter of sympathetic attachment, domestic emotion doesn't turn a profit in *Mary Barton* nearly as often as it is yet another form of costly expenditure.

In this way, *Mary Barton* explores the literal and figurative cost of domesticity's idealization in the nineteenth century, highlighting the extent to which it was unattainable for, and even outright detrimental to, working-class families. As Ying S. Lee puts it succinctly, "Within the logic of [*Mary Barton*], the full expression of thriving, bourgeois-style domesticity is only available through fantasy" (130). In this regard, critical assessments, such as those of Williams, which rely on hard-and-fast distinctions between leisure and labor, or political life and private retreat, mark oppositions that are specious at best in the novel. To speak of "public" and "private" spheres, or spheres of production and consumption, presupposes that one has access to a home life that is not fully consumed by the logics of labor. Labor is everywhere in *Mary Barton*, and it is felt nowhere more pointedly than at home. This point is underscored bluntly when Mary's Aunt Esther—exiled from the Barton household due to the avariciousness that eventually leads her to become a prostitute—testifies that "Decent, good people have homes. We have none. No; if you want me, come at night and look at the corners of the streets about here" (219). While Esther's street-walking is in some senses the novel's disastrously emphatic "worst case scenario," her interpellative "we" by no means overstates the case: all of the novel's families are, in some sense or another, barred from domesticity. It is no small comfort that the

novel's "writing-off" sees Mary and Jem's self-imposed exile as the only tactic by which the couple can afford access to a hearth and home (however foreign). While it should come as no surprise that the domestic ideal was (and indeed is) available only to families of means, or that the lofty inaccessibility of such an ideal was part of what made it so desirable in a time of rapid social mobility, I want to suspend the idea that *Mary Barton*'s working-class characters' homes are broken merely so that the value of the ideal might be reaffirmed. So too do I want to table the notion that Mary Barton's working class characters suffer throughout the novel simply because pitiful characters best enable "correct" liberal sympathy from working-class readers. While both conclusions are more or less correct, they also keep us from fully engaging with the novel's particularly nuanced and difficult economics of sympathetic emotion.

Sympathetic emotion is figured as a form of labor most often in *Mary Barton* when it is aligned with the work of mourning. In some senses, this is quite literal; throughout the novel, female characters perform part-time work by crafting the materials of mourning, as when Margaret Jennings notes that she cannot go out with Mary because she has "a job of work to finish tonight; mourning, as must be in time for the funeral tomorrow" (80). Historically, the novel engages in contemporary debates about the perceived extravagance of Victorian funeral customs, especially as they unevenly impacted those who were already impoverished and left without means following the death of a male breadwinner, as are the Wilson and Davenport families. Ironically, while mourning provides perennial wage labor for Margaret, she and Mary nevertheless argue over the merits of funerary practices when a neighbor who is "but badly off," pays for a burial so extravagant that it seems to Margaret "more like a wedding nor a funeral" (81). Urged on by undertakers, the newly widowed Mrs. Odgen purchases mourning gowns and a feast on credit, despite the fact that her deceased husband's alcoholism left the family without a

farthing. This leaves Mary perplexed as to “what good comes out o’ wearing mourning” as “it’s not pretty or becoming; and it costs a deal of money just when folks can spare it least” (81). In response, Margaret assures Mary that mourning “does do good, though not as much as it costs... in setting people ... something to do” (82). In Margaret’s reckoning, the emotions of grief themselves are so disabling that they come to feel costly, and so concerns over the commodities associated with mourning offer the Ogdens and other mourners “something to talk over and fix about” instead. Here, grief is not an ephemeral, cathartic process so much as an extravagant, indulgent luxury compared to which commodity fetishism seems nearly abstemious. Feeling grief requires emotional work from a subject who is already spent; conversely, wearing mourning makes material labor for another in need of some extra cash.

The link between mourning, labor, and domesticity is articulated differently when John Barton mourns for his wife—also named Mary—after her death early in the novel. Bereft in what ironically feels like a very crowded home, Barton’s thoughts run not just to memories of happier times with his wife, but also linger longingly over the literal mess of things left in her wake:

He thought of their courtship; of his first seeing her, an awkward beautiful rustic, far too shiftless for the delicate factory work to which she was apprenticed; of his first gift to her, a bead necklace, which had long ago been put by, in one of the deep drawers of the dresser, to be kept for Mary. He wondered if it was there yet, and with a strange curiosity he got up to feel for it; for the fire by this time was well nigh out, and candle he had none. His groping hand fell on the piled-up tea-things, which at his desire she had left unwashed till morning—they were all so tired. He was reminded of one of the daily little actions, which acquire such power when they have been performed for the last time by one we love. He began

to think over his wife's daily round of duties: and something in the remembrance that these would never more be done by her, touched the source of tears, and he cried aloud. (*Mary Barton* 52)

Throughout the novel, grief responds not to pure absence, but rather to a sense of wrongness about what stays around in lieu of that which has passed away. Mourning takes up lodging with resentment. A cruel twist comes when readers realize that commodities—however cozy—are by no means assured things in the working-class economy of the novel; characters regularly take objects to the pawnbroker's when times are hardest. Here, though, for the moment at least, the domestic ephemera of Victorian fiction—so often derided as mere set pieces in service of bourgeois realism—has a rich afterlife of its own as the sympathetic and sentimental tether between widower and wife. In contrast to the singularly totemic, plainly decorative “bead necklace,” buried in a drawer and left discarded by Barton's shifty thoughts, the everyday objects of the Barton household simply linger, calling up the “little actions” of affectionate care that Mary, the mother, performed. John Barton feels his loss not through the spectacle of grand love passed away, but through a “daily round of duties” that has simply gone undone. This response seems oddly pragmatic, and indeed it throws into relief John Barton's unfitness for domestic life; it is not surprise that his life as a widower takes place largely out of doors and in the company of other men. But, in a precociously feminist twist, *Mary Barton's* ruined domestic continually articulates domestic labor *as* labor, even as the value of such work is only resonates through its loss. Moreover, this labor is felt as a labor of love; it is not just a mechanical necessity when it is “performed ... by one we love” (52). In mourning duties undone, John Barton ascribes a sense of profound emotional value to his wife's domestic work, and in that way her work is felt as equally functional and sentimental. Work and sympathy are linked enterprises in *Mary Barton*.

Feminist critics have underscored the death of the mother as a particularly pernicious event in Victorian fiction. For many critics, the trope of the dead mother is troubling because it does not embody maternity in fully realized, if fictional subjects, but instead *disembodies* the maternal as an ideological, narrative, and psychosexual lack. Carolyn Dever argues that the frequent absence of mothers in Victorian fiction is both conspicuous and ironic, suggesting that “Rigidly idealized categories of identity—the Victorian ideal of maternity, for example—depend precisely on the absence and ineffability of the original model, and thus the trope of maternal absence is one of the most powerful tools in the maintenance of the nineteenth-century maternal ideal” (6). From a different angle, Natalie McKnight suggests that the nineteenth-century shift to domesticity entailed an over-emphasis on motherhood that made it particularly fraught. Because “Mothers are often missing in [Victorian] works,” she offers that “the complex of emotions surrounding the idea of the mother, and the contradictory and impossible expectations of mothers, make these creatures something better left out of the story because of the confusion and antipathy they inspire” (18). With particular relevance to *Mary Barton*, Barbara Thaden argues that the mother’s death is crucial so that the novel’s narrative of female desire can take shape; Mary’s lack of a maternal influence leads her into a love triangle with Jem and the deceitful Harry Carson. Importantly, though, the loss of Mary the mother is far from an end to domesticity—or domestic care—in the novel. Maternal loss in *Mary Barton* does not foundationally disfigure the fabric of the social or indeed the narrative in any traumatic way; rather, it is an everyday, economic principle under the aegis of emotional and bodily starvation—and there, precisely, is the rub. To consider *Mary Barton*’s social life as nothing more than a “compensatory structure” for the death of Mary’s mother, to use Dever’s phrase, is to grant mothers a foundational status that they are denied outside the purview of bourgeois domesticity.

Mary Barton's take on mothering is thus, as McKnight suggests, ambivalent. In keeping with Dever's model, *Mary Barton* establishes mothering as the gold standard by which good sympathy is judged. This is evident in John Barton's accusation against the factory owners, in which he questions his fellow Chartists, "And what good have [the mill owners] ever done me that I should like them? ... If I am sick do they come and nurse me? If my child lies dying ... does the rich man bring the wine or brother that might save his life?" Essentially, John Barton charges the bourgeoisie of Manchester not with being immoral or exploitative employers, but with being un-motherly. What the mother's death leaves us in *Mary Barton*, then, is an intense appreciation for the value of the emotional and material labor performed by mothers, coupled with a complete dissociation of that labor from one's status as a literal mother. Indeed, the novel's most tender depiction of mothering is performed not by Mary Barton, Sr., but by Job Legh as he nurses Margaret, his granddaughter, in drag (152). The loss of literal mothers necessitates a reorganization of mothering as a communal practice. In this way, then, even if the novel does to some extent take the death of the mother as formative for its plot—left widowed, John Barton's grief moves him into more overtly public life as a leader of Chartist reform—it more emphatically underwrites a broader ethics of care whereby the sympathetic labor most often associated with motherhood comes to be a communal practice performed by any number of characters, regardless of their sex, gender, or kinship relation to individuals in need of care.

Such a potentially capacious form of sympathetic attachment and emotional care seems particularly well suited to deal with the novel's diminishing emotional returns and early deaths. Faced with the possibility that any singular attachment may be lost, the broader forms of attachment characterized by the novel's working-class characters seem like a good scheme for sustainable, if not profitable, emotional investment. Accordingly, this broader form of

attachment and care is continually connected with the socialization of grief; mourning signals immediate, urgent emotional need, and so it becomes the basis for the novel's entire network of sympathetic attachment. Immediately following the above passage detailing John Barton's mourning for his wife's undone duties, Mary is depicted as stepping in to pick up the slack, "mechanically" helping her "neighbor in all the last attentions to the dead" before she is "kissed and spoken to soothingly," sobbing slightly, but reserving "the luxury of a full burst of grief till she should be alone" (52). Again, grieving is a costly "luxury" in *Mary Barton*; but where John Barton gives himself leave to mourn over domesticity, Mary must first get the widower's house in order by making the proper arrangements. In the first of many instances wherein Mary—for all her supposed romantic flightiness—serves as a sympathetic machine for both characters and readers alike, this scene highlights the extent to which Mary's first care is care itself. Indeed, throughout the novel, characters' profound senses of bewildered loss are temporarily suspended in the service of coming to the aid of another, as does Mary here, and as she perennially looks after her father throughout his home presence in the novel.

Betensky argues that the major flaw in *Mary Barton*'s reformist project is that it inadvertently demonstrates that the bases for working-class political concerns are "erroneous... unnecessarily angry, and wrong," and so "while it details and bemoans the suffering of the working classes in Manchester, *Mary Barton* arranges for the worker to do the owing and the owner to accumulate the right to punish him for his debt" (96). John Barton, as a murderer, must ask for forgiveness from Carson, effectively exonerating the latter of the many slower deaths that his competitive business choices have facilitated, and which the novel has made clear to its potentially complicit middle-class readers. Part of what is deeply unsatisfying about the novel's conclusion, then, is that its paternalist remedies seem so much at odds with its underwriting of

maternalist ethics. On the one hand, the novel continually emphasizes that maternalist care and interdependence characterize working-class Manchester life. In turn, this suggests that the breadth and flexibility of such social responsibility should serve as a model for middle-class readers' sympathies when they confront the non-fictional poor. In this way, the novel powerfully and subversively suggests that one should not merely sympathize *with* the poor or—worse yet—take the poor as sympathetic objects worthy of charity, but rather that one should adopt the modes of sympathetic attachment that poverty makes necessary. On the other hand, what is most crucial, difficult, and important about mothering in *Mary Barton* is that it is not an endless reservoir of free, sympathetic plentitude; it costs. In the novel, mothering risks opening oneself to an uneven form of sympathetic attachment in which the needs of another come before those of oneself; it registers emotional value as a form of willful, contingent self-abnegation.

While a number of characters emulate a maternalist model of care readily and without question, the novel continually highlights that such an attachment may not be bearable in the context of an emotional bear market, as forms of sympathetic attachment continually yield bad investments when they lose their objects. Why this should be so is less a matter of the semiotic “unfitness” of female maternity as a model for the organization and maintenance of labor in the masculine public sphere, and more a sign of the novel’s muted pessimism about the place of both figural and literal children within the larger contexts of an economy of diminishing returns. No fewer than nine children’s deaths are either detailed or mentioned over the course of the novel. Shortly after the death of his mother, John Barton’s son, “the apple of his eye, the cynosure of all his strong power of love” dies from Scarlet Fever (55-6). The novel directly blames the death of the child on a lack of proper nourishment; left without a mother, the child’s life hangs “on a gossamer thread” that cannot bear the weight of Barton’s ever more pointed poverty. The value

of the child's life is weighed cruelly against shop windows in which Barton, himself starving, begrudgingly finds "edible luxuries" instead of simple nourishment (55-6). The litany of delicacies—"haunches of venison, Stilton cheeses, moulds of jelly"—stand in marked contrast to the barren cupboards at home; unable to procure even meager victuals, Barton can only return "home with a bitter spirit of wrath in his heart to see his only boy a corpse!" (55-6). The final exclamation point is, for all intents and purposes, the only gesture towards sentimentalism that Gaskell offers.

Instead of Little Nell's exhortations, Barton's son is left nameless and mute, dying elliptically and off-page in the same way that Job Legh's daughter and son-in-law die before he and Jennings can visit them. The sense throughout the scene is that while Barton's son is indeed felt as a loss, such a loss is both abstracted and compounded; the same passage begins by telling us that "his parents had suffered; his mother died from absolute want of the necessaries of life," and thus the death of the son is held against the death of not only his mother, but his grandmother as well (55). The passage also pointedly tells us about Barton's wages and work habits, noting that the son's death coincides with the failure of Hunter's mill and a general "depression of trade" that leaves Barton without any other options except "living on credit" (55). In a similar fashion, the death of Esther's daughter is juxtaposed with, and more or less explained by, her inability to manage her already limited financial means, which are stretched to the breaking point when her daughter falls ill. Like his credit, Barton is simply "worn out," and thus the novel's muted presentation of the child's death is hardly surprising: fiscal loss, personal loss, and emotional loss are figured together, and in this way *Mary Barton* re-emphasizes that because the work of mourning requires a laborious expense of energy, feeling powerfully for the dead is a luxury that—like the *bonnes bouches* in the shop windows—Barton cannot afford.

*Mary Barton* continually suggests that babies are an emotional and material burden. Thus for all of the novel's optimism about maternalism, it becomes increasingly clear that caring for children—even those who survive—may feel like an unbearable attachment. This is emphasized throughout the novel by the impression that children have a literal weight when held; as the novel opens, John Barton and the (not yet deceased) George Wilson take over maternal duties, carrying the Wilson twins during a journey to the countryside outside Manchester until Barton calls for help from Mary and Jem, noting that “if Wilson's arms be like mine they are heartily tired” (42). Far from arguing, Wilson—“half-proud, half-weary father”—simply concurs noting that “Twins is a great trial to a poor man, bless 'em” (42). Such a burden is, simply put, too much for some families to bear, and thus child neglect results less from callousness than from sheer exhaustion. When Barton and Wilson arrive at the Davenports, they discover a hellish domestic counter-image in which there are “four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up” while their mother can do nothing but look after her dying husband. Such episodes offer a form of negative political currency, as with the charges of the bourgeoisie's un-motherly conduct—Barton bitterly asks if the factory owner “han...ever seen a child o' their own die for want o' food”—but more than this, they continually underscore that the futures market of *Mary Barton*'s working-class characters is one in perpetual decline (105). Struggling to maintain his optimism against all odds, Barton ultimately finds himself in a crisis of faith, proposing, “I sometimes think the Lord is against planning. Whene'er I plan overmuch, He is sure to send and mar all my plans” (118).

Given the embodied (because laborious) nature of sympathetic, maternal care in the novel, *Mary Barton* ironically posits working-class masculinity as fostering the forms of emotional and bodily strength necessary to mother in a bear market. In part, this association is

wholly contingent, given the frequent death of mothers in the novel. However, Lisa Surridge points out that *Mary Barton*'s "exemplary manliness" is typified by "largeness, strength, and tenderness," a melding of bodies idealized as perfectly suited for both manual labor and domestic care (334). As Patsy Stoneman contends, the result is a "feminization" of the novel's working-class characters that, it bears emphasizing, in no way suggests the threat of castration; instead, such a maternal masculinity only comes into conflict when it is compromised as working-class men are driven to acts of violence by a system of economic exploitation that perverts men's "essentially nurturing motives" (543). So too does the novel underscore that the struggles that working-class men face throughout the novel act as a mode of sympathetic strength training, as when John Barton shrugs off the family's deprivations. "He knew he could bear hunger," the narrator informs us, "for that power of endurance had been called forth when he was a little child, and had seen his mother hide her daily morsel to share it among her children and when he, being the eldest, had told the noble lie, that 'he was not hungry, could not eat a bit more,' in order to imitate his mother's bravery" (161). Barton learns to "bear hunger" precisely as a mode of bearing children; in the process, he effectively abdicates his own claim upon the status of child. Mothering is not a function presumed by birth in *Mary Barton*, but rather a form of sympathetic attachment one forges through imitative labor.

More troublingly, *Mary Barton* continually suggests that insofar as sympathetic attachment to children registers a form of emotional investment, child loss continually threatens to render those attachments emotionally bankrupt. In this way, children are not the bearers of sentimental, happy futurity, or the insurers of comfortably expansive kinship ties, so much as they are an emotional and financial gamble that can potentially undo any plans for a better future. The Wilson twins—whose duplicity leaves them "but one life divided between them"—

are a drag not just in their deaths, but in their lives as well, “late on their feet, late in talking, late every way,” which makes them a literal drain on their mother because they have “to be nursed and cared for when other lads of their age were tumbling about in the street, and losing themselves, and being taken the police-office miles away from home” (115). Pointedly, the Wilson twins’ immaturity is not opposed to a positive form of development in which they would “grow up” into independent individuals; instead, their “lateness” requires a form of latent maternal care in place of “tumbling” lads’ need for paternal punishment as recompense (presumably) for misdemeanor mischief. When the last of the twins is dying, Alice Wilson struggles to get him away from his mother, Jane, for fear that she is “wishing him,” because “none can die in the arms of those who are wishing them sore to stay on earth” which “won’t let the dying soul go free; so it has a hard struggle for the quiet of death” (117). Hoping, wishing, and “longing to keep” her son, Jane Wilson has no desires for the future, and instead experiences her twins only as a kind of ongoing present that requires her perpetual presence and care (117). The death scene is described with an agonizing deadpan offset only by a single outpouring exclamation mark—“She bent down, and fondly, oh! with what passionate fondness kissed her child and then gave him up to Alice”—underscoring that while Gaskell is fully aware of the sentimentalized conventions for describing child death, she knows they are out of place in the working-class homes of her novel (117). The death of working-class children is not traumatic in *Mary Barton*; instead, it is an everyday occurrence, and in this way children become emblematic for a form of negative futurity characterized by a long series of losses. The counterpoint death of a child, Harry Carson, is traumatic precisely because it is felt as exceptional among the bourgeoisie into which he was born. *Mary Barton* thus emphasizes the uneven investment in

some children, but not others, as semiotic bearers of a political futurity founded on sentimental culture. For the laboring classes, Gaskell suggests, bearing children means bearing the dead.

Elisabeth Bronfen argues that the conventions of the deathbed scene serve “to close the gap in social relations produced by death,” forging a sense of “reassuring closure” by organizing “kinship succession” (77). In some sense, this is true of *Mary Barton* insofar as deathbed scenes do indeed gather community members together and necessitate ad hoc forms of labor, as when Mary continually helps to lay out the dead. Mary Elizabeth Hotz argues that, by keeping death within the domestic, Gaskell demonstrates that she “favors increased direct exposure to the bodies of the dead of all classes and by all classes, as a means of improving the ability of middle-class individuals to meet the challenges of personal loss and of compassionate social reform” (38). In other words, Hotz suggests that as part of the novel’s political gambit, *Mary Barton*’s many deaths serve to foster—through loss—greater sympathies between and among readers of different classes. Such is definitely the case when Job Legh and Jennings seek shelter with the infant Margaret and a stranger refuses to accept payment for their lodgings, immediately sympathizing with Legh’s male mothering because she has herself lost a child. When the lodger’s husband appears put-off by the act of charity, she gently protests, putting her hand on his shoulder and pleading, “For poor little Johnnie’s sake” (155-6). This adds a reassuring humanism to the notion of death; as the universal constant, its losses and epistemological opacity, however terrifying, bind us all together in a kind of existential subjugation. In the terms of emotional investment, the suggestion here is that losses of attachment are recouped because the work of mourning makes necessary contingent, maternalist forms of social attachment that might otherwise be deemed improper in a Victorian society obsessed with showing and maintaining one’s social standing. With relevance to children’s deaths, this would suggest that

the dead child's lost future cedes to a kind of broader social present that, because strengthened through communal experiences of loss, offers a greater form of sustainability, and thus the hope that, if not now, then *someday* things might get better if one can just grin and bear it.

However, the notion that lower-class losses are made good by their call for community is suspect in *Mary Barton* insofar as the emotional and literal work of mourning is experienced in the novel as costly. The reassuring Christianity of Ben Davenport's more conventionally sentimental deathbed scene—dying, Ben prays, “O Lord God! I thank thee, that the hard struggle of living is over”—is immediately undercut by his widow's resentment of his deathly escape from misery. “O Ben! Ben! ... have you no thought for me?” she implores, “do say one word to help me through life” (112). Even if the laboriousness of mourning is offset by communal care—a form of sympathetic pall bearing that shares the burden of bearing the dead—the unfortunate consequence is that the misery of losing the dead is nevertheless proliferated by its socialization, while death itself comes to seem like a more pleasurable alternative to a life of unending emotional toil and precarious labor. Moreover, under the aegis of the novel's emotional bear market, the formation of new attachments risks forms of interdependency such that mutual care for a deceased third-party gives way to lopsided dependencies. If characters in *Mary Barton* evince a form of the death drive, it is in no way tethered to the queerly subversive *jouissance* with which Edelman continually associates it.

*Mary Barton* darkly implies that because babies are burdensome to the poor, their deaths might actually be felt as a boon, rather than a loss. In this regard, *Mary Barton* speaks to contemporary concerns regarding the poor's treatment of their children, as well as their dead and dying, in some senses confirming the worst fears of a Victorian middle-class that, as Julie-Marie Strange notes, continually took the poor's “expressions of fatalism ... at face value,” and thus

confused the pragmatism of “soothing the dying rather than pursuing medical aid which would ultimately prove fruitless” with callousness and coldness (28). “Many of those who surveyed the working classes,” Strange summarizes, “approached their subject from the preconceived notion that poverty and high mortality rates dulled the capacity for grief and that the expression of loss was rooted in the purchase of a respectable funeral” (65). In particular, Strange notes that the perception that infant mortality rates were disproportionately high among the poor led to the middle-class belief that the poor therefore undervalued their children and simply let them die. “At best, working-class parents were [considered] fatalistic and ignorant,” Strange proposes; “at worst, they were mercenaries who perceived the lives of their offspring exclusively in material terms” (231). Where *Mary Barton* turns this set of middle-class beliefs about the poor, rather than simply representing the stereotype, is in its thick exploration of how the demands of poverty might indeed lead to the feeling that social attachments—even to children—might come to feel onerous, while emphasizing that the demands for social attachment necessarily persisted as the means through which life—however burdensome—might nevertheless feel temporarily bearable.

Insofar as mothering fosters sympathetic attachments that easily turn unbearable, however, *Mary Barton* is in no way utopian about mothering. In place of mothering’s capacious, ad hoc modes of sympathetic labor, the novel continually emphasizes characters’ effective retreat from the social. This isolationism is displayed less by characters’ anti-social tendencies (which tend to refigure, radically, the social landscape of the novel), than by characters’ turning towards singular attachments in which they invest wholeheartedly. This tactic is first evident in John Barton’s total reinvestment in Mary, the daughter, following the death of her mother. “Child, we must be all to one another now *she* is gone,” Barton confides in his daughter, who readily assents, “Oh, father, what can I do for you? Do tell me! I’ll do anything” (53). Certainly such

transference resonates powerfully with an Oedipal dynamic; however, the novel quickly emphasizes that such a dynamic of emotional redirection is by no means particular to the domestic scene. Barton immediately takes on a more immediate obsession when he joins up with the Chartist movement, and grows increasingly distant from his daughter, who “had not her father’s confidence in the matters which . . . began to occupy his heart and soul” (54). In this light, Barton’s rough conviction that he “would bear it all”—even as the family faces ever greater destitution and the Chartists are increasingly ignored—reads more like a rejection of any and all attachments which might take on an uneven sense of dependence. Though he abandons Mary as a dependent—and indeed, she increasingly serves the needs of her father before herself—he takes up the Chartist cause as a “darling child,” and this seems at first to offer him the perfect progeny by proxy; causes may fail, but unlike children, they can never die. Given the Chartists’ emphasis on mothering as the proper relationship between factory owners and their financially dependent workers, it is with a fitting—if cruel—sense of justice that their plot entails murdering Harry Carson, the factory owner’s son, as recompense. In a dark reading of the laws of economic competition, *Mary Barton* pits the children of the poor against the children of the rich. Again, it is not that the novel gives up on the sentimental ethics of investing in children so much as it suggests a more nuanced and dynamic ethics of care.

Moreover, *Mary Barton* continually skirts the awkward link between emotional and financial investment. While for working-class characters this is a matter of weighing one’s hunger against that of another, for John Carson this entails assigning a literal value to the life of his murdered son. Immediately following the revelation of his son’s death, Carson charges investigators with offering a reward for information leading to the arrest of the murderer. Here, too, Carson is ever business-minded. At first he attempts to undercut costs, hedging to the

superintendent, “Well, sir, half—nay, if necessary, the whole of my fortune I will give to have the murderer brought to the gallows” (273). Immediately, though, he turns the discussion to a bit of haggling before going all-in to hedge his bets, offering a thousand pound reward when the superintendent offers that at most five-hundred pounds will suffice as reward. More poignantly, as Gaskell attempts to humanize Carson in the novel’s later chapters, it becomes clear that Carson’s fiscal estimations are not *just* fetishistic; rather, they are Carson’s effort to value his son’s life in the only imaginary available to him: the economic. Having regarded his son as the rightful heir, and therefore the sole hope for the family’s future, Carson feels his loss as a lack that renders all that remains utterly worthless. “What were all the living—wife or daughters—what were they,” Carson ponders, “in comparison with the dead, the murdered son who lay unburied still, in compliance with his father’s earnest wish, and almost vowed purpose, of having the slayer of his child sentenced to death, before he committed the body to the rest of the grave?” (396). Emotionally bankrupted, Carson feels his only option is to make sure that the broken social nevertheless breaks even according to the justice of an eye for an eye.

But it is not the eye for an eye that makes the world of *Mary Barton* go blind; rather, it is the social itself, and a world of unbearable attachments, that breaks characters’ senses. The novel’s frequent reference to characters going blind, comatose, or mad does not reflect the moral fallout for Carson’s vengeful thinking; rather, like Barton’s monomania, characters’ loss of their senses serves as a coping mechanism that allows them to pass out of the everyday misery of their lives and, more importantly, the lives of others. It is only fitting, then, that Mary notices that a newly-blinded Margaret is “the only one... who seems free from care,” reasoning that “Her blindness almost appears a blessing sometimes” (254). If death is earlier figured as a release from the cares of a worn-out world, then being unable to witness that world is a lesser, but

similarly merciful leaving-off. In more extreme variations, both Mary and Jane Wilson fall into comas in order to escape grappling with the perceived guilt of John Barton and Jem, respectively, and Harry Carson's mother briefly goes mad with denial, believing that her son is still alive—only sleeping—rather than facing the reality of his death. It is as though, confronted with too many obligations to care for others, and too much costly emotion when those others pass away, characters drop unbearable attachments and become, almost magically, dependent upon others, calling for the forms of mothering that they can no longer themselves offer.

This is most obvious in the case of Old Alice, who essentially reverts to a child-like state midway through the novel. “Without pain, or at least any outward expression of it,” Alice merely lays in bed, “absorbed in the recollection of the days of her girlhood,” and escaping to the anachronistic pastoral scenery of a pre-Industrial past in which she finds communion with her “long-dead mother and sister” (322). Ironically, then, Alice's death is the novel's only instance of a sentimentalized childhood death, as well as the only instance of a “good death” by Victorian Evangelical standards. The novel's characters gather around Alice's deathbed in order to see her off en masse, and because “a child of a very few months old [would have] more consciousness of what was passing before [Alice],” she is saved from any fear of her impending death, spending her final moments “alive, and without pain” (420). Though Alice's nephew Will initially weeps at the sight of his aunt, he cannot begrudge her the impending peace of the afterlife, and thus “loud passionate feeling [does not] endure in the calm of her presence”; Alice's death releases her relations from the burden of overbearing emotions in the same way that less happy children's deaths release their parents from material expenditure elsewhere in the novel (420). Still delirious, but none the less happy for it, Alice does her best invocation of Little Nell's angelic farewell, singing the *Nunc Dimittis* as a lullaby before professing, “Mother, good-night! Dear

mother! Bless me once more! I'm very tired, and would fain go to sleep" (421). It is only by dint of her *not* being a child that Alice can afford to offer her family—and readers—the sentimental child's death denied to the novel's literal children.

Alice's regression highlights that, in the context of precarious lives, straight-forward generational understandings of dependency fall apart; children come to bear the burden of caring for their parents, and in this way reproductive futurity fails to account for the backwards pull of sympathetic attachments, to say nothing of the uneven personal development that coincides with wage and wealth inequality. When Jem—cleared of all charges by Mary's testimony, which hinges on the revelation that she loves him—suggests that he would like to take Mary as a wife to his mother, Jane immediately protests, jealously arguing that such a marriage would leave her alone as a widow whose other children have passed away. When Jem broaches the question of his prospective marriage to Mary a second time, Jane can only regret the passing of her deceased husband, lamenting that the "happy days" of her marriage are "Such days as will never again come to me at any rate" (425). While Jane grudgingly assents to the marriage once Jem pledges that he will emulate his parents' marriage, the conflict makes clear that, left a widow, Jane's status as mother has been revoked; instead, the novel's various crises have left her dependent upon her own child to the extent that his marriage does not suggest a happy, continued futurity for the Wilson family, but only a profound sense of loneliness and loss.

Against the backdrop of sympathetic attachments that continually slide from nurturing to dependent and back again, Mary's pluck at adopting the singular attachment to her father as a form of obligation and task-performing is incredibly telling. Throughout the novel, Mary is exceptional as a kind of sympathetic machine. Like Dickens' Amy Dorrit, Mary is a "little mother" who is at once idealized as a child and a mother for far less capable characters, and in

this regard she is capable of serving as the perfect object of care (as when she faints after the trial) who never demands of individuals any more than they can offer, and who offers immediate, literally life-giving rewards (sympathy, exoneration, marriage, children). When Barton and Wilson's efforts to aid Mrs. Davenport utterly fail, Barton calls in Mary as, more or less, sympathetic reinforcements, charging her, "Try if thou canst comfort yon poor, poor woman" (112). Despite not knowing "what to say, or how to comfort," Mary miraculously offers Mrs. Davenport sentimental support, "and in a little while fell to crying herself so bitterly that the source of tears was opened by sympathy in the window, and her full heart was, for a time, relieved" (112). Like an emotional safety valve, Mary's crying enables her to feel *for* Mrs. Davenport; to share the burden of her grief so that Mrs. Davenport can in turn bear the dead herself. So too can Mary transform emotions, as when she renders Jem's grief at the loss of his family members into a "strange leap of joy in his heart" that the loss brings her near in order to comfort him (119). Essentially abandoned when her father goes into hiding, Mary is left to forge her own attachments, and the novel's melodramatic mode—in which Mary ventures to Liverpool in order to clear Jem's name, making an increasingly broad and intimate set of friends along the way—provides her with an all-too-ready set of sympathetic attachments, as well as the perfect sentimental alibi, for forging such emotional links across England.

In the most dramatic instance of her sympathetic magic, Mary cannot bear a grudge against her father—sullenly widowed, and frustrated at the lack of work available to him—when he beats her and throws her out of the house. In a dramatic series of emotional reversals, Mary turns her resentment into admiration, at first "bitterly thinking on the days that were gone; angry with her hastiness, and believing that her father did not love her," but quickly "her heart turn[s] round, and she remember[s] with self-reproach how provokingly she had looked and spoken,"

and at the “remembrance of one little instance of his fatherly love,” she instead turns the blame on herself (164-5). In the process of such a self-abnegating exchange, an important question about Mary’s ties—“Who cared for her?”—falls to the wayside (164). Except in the most dramatic instances, *no one* need care for Mary because Mary is capable of caring for everyone. Even in her utter dependency, Mary nurtures and restores Jem’s bruised male ego, granting him the courage to propose and, in turn, turn her into a mother every bit as literal as figurative. It is Mary, and not her father, who is best fit to bear the emotional weight of the world because she has a penchant for masochism that makes mothering, even at its most painful, pleurably profitable. Here, too, however, the novel’s conclusion is less jarring than one might suppose. In removing her heroine to Canada, Gaskell restricts her social life to the confines of a conjugal family on the frontier, and so she opts not to test Mary’s limits too harshly. Bypassing the social, Gaskell saves mothering as a sympathetic ideal, and keeps it more comfortably localized in the loving labors of a literal mother.

As cozy as this resolution seems, and as uncomfortable as it has appeared to critics, the novel underscores such tensions not through Mary’s narrative desire, but rather through Jem’s awkward invocations of the rhetoric of bearing in order to name his romantic subjugation to Mary. Contrasted with the novel’s more pressing concerns about the difficulty of building and maintaining sympathetic attachments and literal sustenance, Jem’s worries that “Mary loved another! Oh! how should he bear it!” is more than a little precious (220). More pointedly, Jem’s fanciful notion of murdering Harry Carson as a melodramatic fantasy strikes an odd chord once Carson’s murder has, ironically, come to pass. It is as though, somehow insulated from the cares of those around him, Jem maintains a solely figurative relation to the burdens that others bear. Abstracted and hypothetical, his feeling that he “cannot well bear think on [Mary] living through

a long life, and hating the thought of me as the murderer of him she loved” is utterly at odds with the realities of the novel, and insofar as he can patently invent, and even find a form of pleasure in, imagining Mary’s hatred towards him—all the while as she toils to clear his name out of love. Jem is the only working-class character in the novel who affords himself the emotional luxury of patently inventing his own emotional hardships, rather than simply suffering from the very real miseries of deprivation and death. Like Jem’s guilt, his anxieties are purely virtual.

Ultimately, the tensions between labor and sympathetic attachment in *Mary Barton* are resolved *not only* by offering marriage as a convenient, private fix, but also by positing loss itself as the basis for a politics of sympathy. This is certainly true of the famous scene where Job Legh meets with Carson and, for all of their opposition, Job nevertheless feels for the man as “Rich and poor, masters and men, were then brothers in the deep suffering of the heart” (450). As much as this scene is undoubtedly wrong for eliding Carson’s complicity in the very deaths upon which Job’s sympathy is founded, the notion that loss provides the foundation for cross-class sympathy is nevertheless heartening insofar as it facilitates surprising attachments. Less climactically, as Carson confronts the Barton family following John’s confession, the narrator is clear that Carson “felt an additional beat at his heart at the thought of seeing the fatal Helen [Mary], the cause of all” (402). But even as the allusion envisions Mary’s desire as classically destructive, Carson is torn two ways. Against such an antagonistic orientation, Carson nevertheless feels “a kind of interest and yet repugnance, for was not she beloved by the dead; nay, perhaps, in her way, loving and mourning for the same being that he himself was so bitterly grieving over?” (402). It goes without saying that Mr. Carson has got it wrong; Mary did *not* love his son, his son did *not* love Mary. It goes more conspicuously without saying that Mr. Carson is indirectly responsible for the very children’s deaths that form the basis for the

sympathy between himself and Job Legh when the latter reflects, “was not [Carson’s] the very anguish he had felt for [his son] little Tom, in years so long gone by.” And yet, in the errors of both its political solutions and its characters, *Mary Barton* offers the possibility that, against all the burdens they require us to bear, we cannot help but forge sympathetic attachments because it is only through them that we can make things feel alright, however wrong they might actually be.

### **III. Bearing Relations: *Dombey and Son***

Where *Mary Barton*’s deals primarily with emotional and market economies defined by scarcity and overwork, Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* (1846-1848) details the emotional travails of a bourgeois family who, despite the financial comforts that their fortune affords, nevertheless suffers through domestic arrangements characterized by the coldness of competition and the precariousness of circulation. Thus, while the novel’s interest in labor is much more muted than in Gaskell’s roughly contemporary novel, *Dombey and Son* nevertheless explores the psychological and social ramifications of a system of emotional deprivation that leaves a sense of longing so pointed it feels like a pit in the stomach, followed by a punch to the gut. In contrast to characters’ pronounced feelings of alienation and loneliness, though, *Dombey and Son*’s social milieu—as in most Dickens novels—is a great deal wider and more varied than in Gaskell’s novel. The novel centers on the plight of Florence Dombey, sole surviving daughter of a widower shipping magnate who continually fails to recognize his daughter’s love, having placed all his hopes in a son, Paul, who dies a mere third of the way through the novel. While Dombey’s coldness continually threatens to freeze the novel’s plot, and isolate its heroine within a domestic prison, Florence’s pathetic lot—as that of Gaskell’s heroine—continually lends her a broad

sympathetic appeal that connects her to a much more diffuse network of characters, most of whom are members of London's upwardly mobile working and mercantile classes.

As Laura Berry puts it, the central principle of *Dombey and Son* is that “people and things must circulate,” even if “the more they do the greater risk undertaken” (13). Because the novel's domestic losses—Little Paul, and his mother, Frances, who dies giving birth to him—render the Dombey's kinship relations contingent, open, and fraught, characters in *Dombey and Son* face the necessity of incorporating outsiders into their extant communities, or seeking wholly new families outside the confines of those into which they were born. In Theresa Magnum's reading, *Dombey and Son* is, from the start, a thorough deconstruction of the Victorian ideal of the family as an “enclosed, exclusive, middle-class retreat from the world” that posits in its place the promise of “unprecedented cross-class, cross-generational ‘families’ expansive enough to avoid obsessive, inverted, exploitative abuse and porous enough to include the orphaned, the widowed, the well, the ill, the poor, the rich, the falling as well as the rising, the young as well as the old” (95). In a similar vein, Holly Furneaux's *Queer Dickens* offers a wholehearted celebration of Dickens for writing families whose “composition . . . is diverse and capacious, encompassing relationships beyond those usually seen to structure and generate a narrowly conceived model of family based on heterosexuality and reproduction” (23). Similarly, Christopher Hatten contends that Dickens' oeuvre pits domesticity against the market, and that Dickens offers the family as an unproblematic panacea for what ailed an industrializing England. Because “Bourgeois society's damage to the microcosmic community of the family, and indeed to all forms of community, was one of its most glaring flaws,” Hatten supposes, Dickens “deploys domestic ideals as an antidote to social ills because he sees the values inherent in the Victorian family as antithetical to those of laissez-faire capitalism” (59).

Such critics offer a vision of Dickens as a proto-queer kinship pluralist who continually emphasizes the importance of families of need and—as per Kath Weston’s decidedly market-inflected phrase—families of choice. Such optimism regarding Dickens’ optimism about the potential for familial flexibility needs to be tempered, however. More reservedly, Elsie Michie notes that, with *Dombey and Son*, “Dickens is confronted at all times with the problem of definition, particularly as it effects relationships between men and women living in the same extended household” (357). In other words, as family relations accumulate ever-more attachments, emotional textures, and significances, at some point those attachments will cross, contradict, or simply mystify each other. More than a crisis in definition, though, *Dombey and Son* is a scathing indictment of the fact that domesticity outright enables violence, isolation, and cruelty. Even the novel’s conclusion—in which Florence finds and forges a new family as a refuge from her father, who is finally wracked with guilt, only so that the two can reconcile—cannot completely contain the novel’s negative critique. As Robert Clark persuasively argues, “Dickens’ text has revealed the secular image of the bourgeois family to be no more than an ideological inversion: the haven from greed and competition has turned out to be the most crucial site of exploitation, and the traditional explanation of the Victorian economy—that it was all ‘for the sake of the family’—risks being exposed as the alibi of individualist, patriarchal accumulation” (81). As in *Mary Barton*, the problems the text poses cannot be simply “made good” on through the marriage plot because the novel makes clear that marriage instantiates yet another version of kinship relations that operate according to the logics of value and competition inherent to the market.

The prospect of attachment throughout the novel, then, is incredibly guarded. While some characters perennially forge broadly sympathetic attachments as the means to foster a sense of

family among strangers, such kinship arrangements themselves pose a crisis of relation that makes those attachments unbearable. The project of the novel is thus two-fold. First, Florence must find a way to reconcile her sentimental surplus to those *outside* the family with her father's utter disregard for her as "merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested—a bad Boy—nothing more" (*Dombey* 5). As in *Mary Barton*, *Dombey and Son* is cannily insistent regarding the extent to which emotions register value in economic terms. Second, then, the novel must square two drastically different systems of attachment—which I term determined attachment and diversified attachment—each with their own costs, benefits, and risks, and thus offer a form of sympathetic compromise that does not simply turn compromising. By aligning the novel's modes of attachment with economic systems, the methods by which characters foster family come to seem like investment schemes. The novel's domestic rearrangements hinge fundamentally on Paul Dombey's death. Therefore, its modes of attachment are inextricably linked to an economy of personal loss; they are required, tested, and felt through the politics of mourning. Moreover, because they deal fundamentally with the question of how to make a life feel livable in the aftermath of child death, these modes present alternative perspectives on the dynamics of emotional investment by which children are made—and unmade—to figure futurity.

*Dombey and Son* posits the crisis of relation between widower father and cast-off daughter as one of misrecognized value across competing, but coextensive sympathetic economies, which in turn entail competing reproductive temporalities. The first of these economies might be termed determined attachment. In accordance with an emotional economy of determined attachment, Dombey figures reproduction as the means to achieve a future not of narrative progress and social cohesion, but rather of anti-social repetition via singular investment in patriarchal succession. Determined attachment is a form of total emotional investment; it

places all the hopes for one's future in one attachment. Thus, those who foster determined attachments cannot grapple with the loss of their singular object, which is felt as traumatic, and therefore utterly disfiguring of the (already extremely limited) social forged by such a mode of attachment. So, even as Paul's sentimentalized death restages tropes of the romantic child, his loss necessitates the formation of contingent relations that offer sustaining attachments against and to the side of Dombey's inflexible, impoverished domesticity. Optimistically, then, the novel posits sympathy as the best means to foster an alternative economics of diversified attachment. Diversified attachment is typified by opportunistic caretaking, transference exchanges, and an openness to uneven emotional and futural dividends. Even while diversified attachment is valorized by the novel's pluralistic conclusion, though, the novel also explores how diversified attachment continually opens characters to re-doubled forms of loss, unbearable attachments, and illicit associations. In this way, *Dombey and Son* posits that both determined and diversified modes of attachment entail crises of relation, albeit in markedly different ways.

Determined modes of attachment in *Dombey and Son* are characterized principally by Dombey's and—in the first third of the novel, at least—Florence's complete and utter emotional investment in Paul. In a twist, however, the Dombey monomania for children does not assure the family and firm any manner of reproductive futurity as part of a broader social; rather, Dombey hopes that through his attachment to Paul “the House... will be able to hold its own, and maintain its own, and hand down its own of itself” (47). In this last remark, Dombey makes clear that his futurity is not reproductive, but repetitive; handing down “its own of itself,” the Dombey firm has no need to adapt in response to its environment because such an environment is utterly incorporated into the family's operations through a form of market imperialism. In this way, Dombey reckons that “The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and

moon were made to give them light... planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre” (4). Patriarchy is a kind of narcissism; therefore, Dombey’s preferred mode of reproduction is a kind of mechanical monotony. And when the future is nothing but more of the same, what results is a sense of temporal flatness.

Dombey’s determined attachment to Paul patently subordinates all other attachments, which become mere supplements for the perpetuation and maintenance of the family line. Accordingly, Frances herself is given very little in the way of personality or compassion, despite the narrator’s presumed omniscience. Dombey’s worldview is so pervasive in the first half of the novel, that what little we learn of her is filtered through his consciousness, in which their marriage figures as nothing more than an affirmation of his own power, and a means to Paul’s end. Accordingly, Frances has no hopes for the future, despite the birth of her son; her happiness “was in the past, and [she] was content to bind her broken spirit to the dutiful and meek endurance of the present” (4). That this perpetual present is patently *not* so—Frances and Paul both pass away—eventually sets Dombey at odds with a world over which he cannot serve as sovereign. Thus, his efforts to enclose the Dombey house by literally shuttering it up and covering the furniture are desperate efforts to stave off an outside world that does not bend to his will. Dombey’s homely arrestment, too, is eventually revealed as a farce because, as Clark writes, “Dickens has shown that the house/home is subject to decay brought about by time and thereby negatively demonstrated the need for repeated acts of care to maintain it” (71). Without a care for the world, Dombey can in no way keep up the veneer of a home front, however isolationist. As a result, the world of the novel simply moves past him, as figured most prominently by the railway’s violent encroachments. Bound to the seductive image of the sovereign, Dombey—despite his professed trade—is very much an aristocratic anachronism in

Industrial England. In a world that moves so fast, Dombey's dogged repetitive reproduction renders only atavism, and thus Paul is doomed from the start.

The strength of Dombey's determined attachment to Paul operates through its singularity. Dombey can bear no attachments besides Paul, and no alternate claims of attachment to Paul can be borne—really, tolerated—except as competition. Determined attachment breeds contempt. “The secret feelings [Dombey's] breast,” then, are “an indescribable distrust of anybody stepping in between himself and his son; a haughty dread of having any rival or partner in the boy's respect and deference” and, as noted above, “a sharp misgiving... that he was not infallible in his power of bending and binding human wills” (48). As Jeff Nunokawa puts it succinctly, “In *Dombey and Son*, to own is to own alone” (139). Thus, Dombey gloats, “The kind of foreign help which people usually seek for their children, I can afford to despise” (47). Pointedly, this does not mean Dombey can go wholly *without* help, and Frances Dombey's death in the novel's first chapter immediately requires Dombey to hire Polly Toodles (re-Christened “Richards” by her employer's domineering whims) to serve as Paul's wet-nurse. Unfortunate necessities aside, though, Dombey has no need of friends, nor family, so long as Paul remains alive, and thus he refutes his sister Louisa's suggestion that he appoint a godfather to Paul, remarking, “I am enough for [Paul], perhaps, and all in all” (48). That Paul needs a nurse at all is felt as a “sore humiliation” to Dombey; greater, indeed, than any agonies he might feel at Frances' death, whose passing induces only cruelly virtual feelings suspended by the potential.

At Frances' passing, although Dombey sheds no tears—“Dombey and Son had often dealt in hides, but never in hearts,” after all—he nevertheless “certainly had a sense within him, that if his wife should sicken and decay, he would be very sorry, and that he would find a something gone from among his plate and furniture, and other household possessions, which was

well worth the having, and could not be lost without sincere regret” (4, 7). Left a widower, Dombey’s only feelings are “so much bitterness” at “the thought of being dependent... on a serving-woman” (17). Thus, he worries to his sister Louisa, “But my God to think of their [the Toodles’] someday claiming a sort of relationship to Paul!” (17) When Louisa questions, “But what relationship is there?” Dombey intimidates her into rephrasing such a relationship into the more comfortable remove of the potential: “Can there be, I mean,” she corrects herself. “Why none,” Dombey assures his sister, “The whole world knows that, I presume. Grief has not made me idiotic, Louisa” (17<sup>1</sup>). Dombey bluntly tells “Richards,” “It is not at all in this bargain that you need become attached to my child, or that my child need become attached to you. I don’t expect or desire anything of the kind. Quite the reverse” (18). Dombey envisions Polly’s employment as a purely financial benefit to her, a “bargain,” and thus he advises her to foster a relationship that involves offering Paul sustenance without extending the wholehearted care that might mark sympathy for the child’s motherlessness.

At the frozen heart of *Dombey and Son* rests Dombey’s indignant jealousy towards his own daughter, who—like many Dickensian children—only becomes more sympathetic as her woes are felt more ever more stringently over the course of the novel. Dombey’s resentment for Florence is voiced early and often, beginning with Florence’s embrace of her dead mother near the close of the novel’s opening chapter. The image—sentimental in its appeal—strikes Dombey with none of the compassion we might expect of a father and widower; instead, the image serves only as “a revelation and a reproach to him” because he is “quite shut out” from the embrace (31). Such extraneous familial attachments may be borne by Dombey, however naggingly, insofar as he feels “no part” in them (31). By contrast, Florence’s attachments to Paul, and later

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation comes from the alternate version of text collected and presented by *Project Gutenberg*.

to Dombey's second wife, Edith, are utterly reprehensible to him, and so he continually seeks ways to break them. Wrecked and wracked following Paul's death, and distraught that Edith is—for the ease of her purchase—a great deal less diffident than Frances, Dombey dawns upon the realization that Florence has been his nemesis all along, wondering in a fit:

Who? Who was it who could win his wife as she had won his boy? Who was it who had shown him that new victory, as he sat in the dark corner? Who was it whose least word did what his utmost means could not? Who was it who, unaided by his love, regard or notice, thrived and grew beautiful when those so aided died? Who could it be, but the same child at whom he had often glanced uneasily in her motherless infancy, with a kind of dread, lest he might come to hate her; and of whom his foreboding was fulfilled, for he DID hate her in his heart. (534)

Because Dombey's child-hating potentially places him beyond the pale of pity, the narrator is at pains to explain such vehemence as a sad result of Dombey's emotional "armour," which serves as "proof against conciliation, love, and confidence; against all gentle sympathy from without, all trust, all tenderness," but nevertheless leaves its wearer "vulnerable" to "deep stabs in the self-love... as the bare breast to steel" (534). Dombey is, of course, oblivious that it is precisely his own neglect of Florence that has made her so fit an object of sympathy for others, and in this he utterly misses his complicity. Misery marks the sentimental heroine par excellence, and thus Dombey has made his own worst enemy: a daughter capable of forging, effortlessly almost, the attachments he means to eschew.

In the novel's first half, the Dombey children tend to foster voraciously determined attachments as well. Left motherless, Paul insistently craves the attention of his sister to

incestuous extremes, ironically reinscribing his father's isolationism into a form of coupledness when he proposes to his sister, "We don't want any others, do we?" (106). Even as his education thrusts him into an ever-larger social circle, Paul neglects to form any lasting attachments with his schoolmates at Blimber's, and lives only for the Sundays when he can meet with Florence, who is "all he thought of" (158). When questioned about his desires for the future, Paul's plans are decidedly backwards, and thus he tells Mrs. Pipchin, "I mean... to put all my money together in one Bank, never try to get any more, go away into the country with my darling Florence, have a beautiful garden, fields, and woods, and live there with her all my life" (184). Here, the conflation of determined attachment as emotional principle is bluntly figured as an economic principle as well. "Old-fashioned," Paul's fantasy of pastoral escapism sets him firmly in the financial retrograde validated by his father. Brought up under the fantasy that money can do "anything—almost," in his father's words, Paul makes clear that his anything and everything is, in fact, Florence (91).

Paul's fantasy depends on over-burdening Florence, but she gladly labors to make up for her dependent's shortcomings, learning the lessons he cannot comprehend at school in order to serve as his tutor. Indeed, Paul's needs are so subsuming that they require Florence to become literally selfless, working only "to be a substitute for one small Dombey," "her fortitude and perseverance might have almost won her a free right to bear the name herself" (160). Left motherless, Paul nominates Florence his only relation, and thus Florence must serve her brother in all of the dimensions he might require as infant and heir. Accordingly, Florence acts simultaneously and equally as his mother, sister, and future wife. "Nurse me!" Paul pleads, and in her alacrity to meet such immediate needs, Florence—like Mary Barton—is figured as a

sympathetic well, a font of care that, in contrast to Paul's literal mother, or the dismissed Richards, will never be borne away (191).

Florence, too, bears a determined attachment, largely to her father, although sometimes this is re-routed through her brother. That such an attachment is cruel, masochistic, and baffling goes without saying and without real explanation, except insofar as the novel continually posits determined attachments as born; they are "determined" not only given their tenacity, but also given their taken-for-grantedness in their ties to kinship arrangements assured by birth or marriage. Here, too, *Dombey and Son* depicts family as the problem. Because it is "given," family perennially puts individuals into determined relations with others whom they find abhorrent, reprehensible, or simply abusive (as is certainly the case with the Marwoods and the Carkers). Florence's determined attachment to her father is also decidedly lopsided; he cares nothing for her, least of all after her brother's death, and so she is left kissing the doors to his rooms, and then—in his absence—stealing into his office, "render[ing] such little tokens of her duty and service, as putting everything in order for him with her own hands, binding little nosegays for the table, changing them as one by one they withered and he did not come back, preparing something for him every day, and leaving some timid mark of her presence near his usual seat" (307).

Such scenes are among the most gut-wrenching in the novel because, for all of the Dombey's dysfunction, they speak to a fundamental fatherly absence at the heart of the nineteenth-century home. Like John Barton's longing for his wife through the discarded tea things, Florence caresses Dombey's office supplies out of a love for her father's labor. In a clear distinction, though, such objective admiration takes the place of, rather than supplements, affection between the two; Dombey's business-mindedness not only keeps him away from home,

it also keeps Florence out of his heart. Florence's fetishistic fumbling thus figures as part of her larger aim—"the purpose of her life"—to learn "how to express to [her father] that she loved him" (3087). Any other attachments Florence might forge—to Paul, to Edith—ultimately serve such a goal by extension. If Florence cannot be attached to her father through displays of affection that go unnoticed, then she can at least be part of the network (however restricted) of those he holds in esteem (however meager).

Insofar as determined attachments do not deal well with contingency or contingent relations, they are absolutely undone by the loss of their object. For determined attachments, loss is cataclysmic insofar as it entails losing one's temporal, identificatory, and emotional bearings. As Hatten remarks, pointing first to the earthquake in Staggs's Garden, and later to the railroad that takes its place, this framing of loss as disaster is part and parcel of Dombey's outmoded inability to grapple with the issue of technological development, and in this way the "narrative of the progress of industrialization is figured as a catastrophe, or at least an unimaginably abrupt break with the past" (61-2). Paul's death is a far more disastrous loss for Dombey. Like the tremulous pit at the center of Staggs's head, Paul's death "makes a void" in Dombey's "heart, so wide and deep that nothing but the breadth of vast eternity can fill it up" (233). While this suggestion is oddly comforting—Dombey, the narrator slyly tells us, has a heart to break after all—it confirms that the monomaniacal emotional investment of determined attachment is not just heartbreaking, but also world-breaking when its object is lost.

Left without Paul, Dombey simply has no other invested relation, as when he wrongly monumentalizes Paul as his "beloved and only child" when he orders a statuary inscription. Monumentalized, Paul serves as the ultimate testament to the shrine of the child. But while he might have a nice sepulcher, Paul's death is highly problematic for *Dombey and Son*, as well as

Dickens' larger oeuvre. If Dickens has a penchant for writing Bildungsromane from a critical, self-conscious angle—*Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* all toy with the central conceit of a young man's aspirations as he sets out in the world—then *Dombey and Son* is something of a fluke, killing off its up-and-coming protagonist and taking up the daughter's desires instead, as Kristina Aikens persuasively argues. Dombey's reluctance to reinvest his emotional energies—and familial hopes—in Florence is thus also a problem for the narrative, throwing the novel's entire plot “back across the chessboard,” in Andrew Miller's poignant phrase, and leaving readers as disoriented as Dombey (125). Paul's death, however, is rigorously telegraphed. This is most evident in a series of puns whereby characters' designs on Paul, or descriptions of him, take on a deathly air. Even as Dombey proudly trumpets his child's future (if repetitive) achievements, there is “something melancholy in the triumphant air” with which he does so, showing “how long Paul's childish life had been to [Dombey], and how his hopes were set up *a later stage of his existence*” (135, my emphasis). That later stage of existence is, it turns out, beyond the mortal coil, and in this way Dickens figures Dombey's hopes for Paul as commensurate with a death wish. Futurity is deadly by the Dombey clock.

In a different vein, Paul cannot conceive of Florence's (highly imaginative) prospect of moving to India as anything but a form of loss that he could not possibly survive. “If you were in India, Floy,” Paul tells his sister, “I should—what is it Mama did? I forget” (106). Florence, having some conception that attachments can indeed last beyond the grave, somewhat desperately extols, “Loved me!” (106). Little Paul, however, myopic in his determined attachment to his sister—who very much allows him to disavow the loss of his mother—exasperatedly responds, “No, no. Don't I love you now, Floy? What is it?—Died. If you were in

India, I should die, Floy” (107). Throughout his short life, Paul’s “old-fashionedness” is equal parts darkly precious and deeply morbid. As this passage illustrates, being “old-fashioned” is not just a matter of style. Though initially it seems as though the term is ironic code for “precocious”—Paul speaks a great deal of otherworldly abstractions, and has the odd mark of a gentleman about him despite his age—the “older” fashion it comes to pass is, in fact, a form of wistful, and in this way, Paul seems not to grow up, but rather to grow backwards, answering Doctor Blimber’s suggestion “Shall we make a man of him?” with a demure, “I had rather be a child” (141). As Schwan points out, this backwardness is inherent to Paul’s corporeality: “Paul is constructed not simply as failed, but as a resistant body since his development constitutes a reversal of his father’s projected linear trajectory” (97).

What *Dombey and Son* offers, then, is a vision of children without childhood. Where Paul is so backwards that he is simply deathly, Florence is—like many Dickensian heroines—an adult from the start, robbed of her childhood by her mother’s death, and then forced to take her place by Paul’s sheer neediness. She is, very briefly, miserably adolescent before becoming—at novel’s close—a much more literal wife and mother. Other children in the novel fare no better. Blimber figures all his young students as “all Doctors... born grown up” (161). Edith bluntly charges her mother, Mrs. Skewton, with having groomed her to be a gold digger from infancy, charging her, “What childhood did you ever leave to me? I was a woman—artful, designing, mercenary, laying snares for men—before I knew myself... You gave birth to a woman” (378). Alice Marwood shares much the same fate, essentially doomed from the start because she is beautiful and, therefore, pimped out by her avaricious mother. “It was only ruin,” she tells her mother, “and [I] was born to it” (466).

If Kincaid suggests that children's semiotic emptiness makes them empty "tableaux" for adult desires, then in *Dombey and Son*, Dickens lays the stakes of such an imaginative scheme on the table. When children serve as little more than investment plots for their parents, then they are never really children—never fully human, really—at all. Dombey's determined attachment to Paul is a form of emotional investment that renders the son little more than an emotional speculation; he has no real subjectivity apart from his father's hopes and his mother's lack, and so he simply fades away "like one of those terrible little Beings in the Fairy tales, who, at a hundred and fifty or two hundred years of age, fantastically represent the children for whom they have been substituted" (90). Pure investment without substance, Paul is only ever a substitution, a commodity to be exchanged.

As with *Mary Barton*'s child-like adults, however, Paul's growing backwards is problematic not only because it tethers the figure of the sentimental child to something other than reproductive futurity, but also because it associates determined attachments to childhood with a fatalism that is not outside or opposed to that figure of the child, but rather inherent to it. In this way, although Paul's death restages tropes of the sentimentalized child, his loss demystifies childhood's figuration as futurity by acknowledging the fatalism inherent to such a myopic investment. In other words, through Little Paul, Dickens performs a highly self-critical move whereby the death of the child is not a spectacular, sentimental failure of the hope for futurity—though in some senses Paul's death is also that—that reaffirms the goodness of such an investment. Rather, in killing off Paul, Dickens underscores the naiveté of such wholehearted investments in children, to the exclusion or subordination of other social ties, depicting the plot of reproductive futurity as a narcissistic, fatalist farce. Oliver, David, Nicholas, Estella, and Pip, Dickens suggests, only succeed—when and where they do—insofar as we ignore the

precariousness of their lives, and take their triumphs as the ne plus ultra of the social. Such single-mindedness, Dickens suggests, is hardly necessary: life goes on in *Dombey and Son*, however miserably, and thus the novel's shifted investments throughout the remaining two-thirds of the text underscore the necessity for more contingent reckonings of the social, of narrative, and indeed of emotional attachment.

Ironically, then, Paul's death is intensely generative; Henkle outright calls it "a purging so that something new can happen" (98). That "something new" is, ironically, Florence's already well-trod plot to learn how to show her father she loves him. But again, things are not nearly so straight-forward in *Dombey and Son*. If melodrama trades in the sorts of emotional crises and too-late epiphanies that determined attachment sets subjects up for, then *Dombey and Son* asks its readers to feel Paul's death as a cathartic release whose emotional payoff comes too soon and leaves Florence too loose a narrative end (218). As Henkle remarks, "after the compelling involvement in Paul's poignant life, we are abruptly obliged to shift our interests to another story, and it takes some shunting around of new and old characters before we can pick up the threads of a new set of relations" (90-1).

At the level of the text, then, *Dombey and Son* suffers from the same misrecognition of value that Dombey does, and readers might thus share in Miss Tox's exasperation "that Dombey and Son should be a Daughter after all!" (219). This narrative—and, I would add, emotional—"dislocation" is important, Henkle expands, insofar as it "marks Dickens's realization that the old novelistic strategies of his previous successes can no longer serve to represent the new experience of the mid-Victorian period" (90). At the middle of *Dombey and Son*, which is itself the crux between Dickens's "early" and "late" stylistic modes, Florence's plot is in many ways the turning point of Dickens' career. It is thus on Florence's already over-burdened shoulders

that Dickens' narrative gambit rests. In this regard, Florence's transfer from one mode of attachment—determined—to another—diversified—signals the success or failure of Dickens' maturation as an author. It is as though, through Paul, Dickens sacrifices the figure of the child so that he might force Victorian realist fiction—and his career—to come into its own.

In order for readers to reinvest in Florence as the new sympathetic core of the novel, though, Dickens first needs to render her sufficiently pitiful. He does so by assuring his readers that Paul's death has in no way easily bought a happy future, but instead assured Florence an even more painful present. As Mary Armstrong remarks, this trial is very much the determined lot of the sentimental heroine insofar as "Sentimentality, specifically for women in nineteenth-century literature, is not only about the fact of suffering, but the act of suffering" (286). "Part of that act," she continues, "is suffering long, and suffering with patience." Confronting her father "with extended arms" following Paul's death, Florence is thus met only with an even colder disregard, tinged with abject fear (246). The shock of proximity is returned as Dombey "start[s], and leap[s] up from his seat" at Florence's longing approach. His fright frightens Florence in turn, so much so that "the glowing love within the breast of his young daughter froze" (246). Hopeful past the point of what is justifiable given the evidence of her father's coldheartedness, Florence comes to the realization that she can only love her father through a form of mourning. Thus, she comes "to love him rather as some dear one who had been, or who might have been, than as the hard reality before her eyes" (616). That such a form of sympathetic love—desperately counterfactual, defiantly optative—is possible signals that Florence *and Dickens* have abandoned a certain idealization of domesticity. Such a form of fictive feeling is directly aligned with the maturity of emotional adulthood: "The change, if it may be called one, had

stolen on [Florence] like the change from childhood to womanhood, and had come with it” (617).

Florence’s more “mature” project—to say nothing of her loneliness, abjection, and pure need—thus leads her into the figurative and literal arms of characters more than willing to sympathize with her. In this way Florence functions as the chief mode of exchange—the fetish, really—that allows determined attachments to find emotional exchange with those who trade in diversified attachments. The linchpin for this exchange is Florence’s sympathetic contemplation of a neighboring family—left nameless—wherein a group of thoughtful daughters with “rosy faces” cares for their widowed father, and thus offer Florence an important, if anonymous, resource from which she tries, “with patient hope, to gain the knowledge that she wearied for” (328-9). Reaching out imaginatively, Florence attracts the pity of an orphan girl who appears in only one scene, advised by her caretaker that her “misfortune is a lighter one than Florence’s; for not an orphan in the world can be so deserted as the child who is an outcast from a living parent’s love” (332). In this way, Dickens clearly capitalizes on the figure of the lost child as a lightning rod for public sympathies; having given Oliver a home, Dickens takes up Florence as an even more worthy, because more pathetic, focal point for the novel’s social sphere. Indeed, while Paul’s bodily dependency cracks open the door to the Dombey house, it is Florence’s broader sympathetic appeal—coupled with her status as an unmarried girl of means—that keeps the social world of the novel in flux well after Paul’s death. This appeal requires no effort on her part, in part because it is erotic; the rule of exogamy trumps even Dombey’s self-involved airs.

Through Florence’s entry into the novel’s more variegated social strata, Dickens opens her to a mode of diversified attachments. In contrast to Dombey’s determined attachment, diversified attachment is highly promiscuous in *Dombey and Son*; it entails a large number of

interconnections that it fosters, and entails attachments between characters of vastly different socio-economic backgrounds. Indeed, the standard Dickens plot for the social, in which it is ultimately revealed that all of the novel's characters bear relation to one another in ways that are, however baroque or coincidental, incredibly *meaningful*, is a hallmark of Dickens' valorization of diversified attachment. In *Dombey and Son*, diversified attachment tends to be associated most with characters that are working-class. Working-class parents, in particular, are depicted as forging families with many children—though never *too many*, as in *Mary Barton*—as is the case with the Toodles. More than this, though, diversified attachment entails openness to transference and familial feeling in line with cozier readings of Dickens' domesticity; in this way, the novel offers a more uneven treatment of mothering than in *Mary Barton*. While the loss of Frances Dombey is fundamental to the novel's plot, the novel is over-populated with mothers and mother figures who serve as ready replacements. In line with, but also inverting the novel's fairytale motif, Edith is ever-loving (rather than cruel) stepmother and wish-fulfilling fairy godmother all in one, promising Florence, "Begin by thinking well of me... Begin by believing that I will try to make you happy, and that I am prepared to love you, Florence" (389). Having herself been born into unfortunate familial attachments—an over-bearing, manipulative mother—Edith is more than willing to offer Florence the form of sympathetic affection she never had.

Precisely because diversified attachment forges multiple forms of kinship and emotional connection, it seems better equipped to deal with losses, and especially the loss of children. Not only does diversified attachment offer the possibility that lost attachments can be more-or-less replaced, it also offers a broader sense of mourning as a communal activity, as with *Mary Barton*'s pall bearing. In this way, the loss of diversified attachments feels more quotidian than melodramatic; attachments are lost, but might live to see another day. To the side of Paul's more

avaricious mourners—the group of Dombey sycophants who hope to gain the widower’s favor through demonstrations of mourning allegiance—Mr. Toodles offers his more heartfelt sympathies to Dombey when the two happen to meet on the train platform where the former works. Supposing Toodles merely wants money, Dombey is utterly flabbergasted when Toodles means instead to pay respect to Paul’s memory, having placed a piece of crape on his hat in remembrance of the infant. True to form, Dombey mistakes the crape as a sign of mourning for the Toodles’ son Rob, whom he wrongly assumes to be dead. Dombey’s dumbfoundedness, however, is immediately juxtaposed with Toodles’ newfound literacy, a boon of his own children’s education, and in this way Dickens suggests that Toodles’ sympathetic profession of loss coincides with his ability to read not just words, but also emotions; as in *Smith*, sympathy is a fictive function. The same episode also underscores that diversified attachments, however well-intentioned, entail a crisis of relation for Dombey, who refuses to share his son’s memory, and whose resentment of the Toodles’ upwards mobility thus dovetails with that towards their sheer familial plentitude. “To think that his lost child,” the narrator supposes for Dombey, “who was to have divided with him his riches, and his projects, and his power, and allied with whom he was to have shut out all the world as with a double door of gold, should have let in such a herd to insult him with their knowledge of his defeated hopes, and their boasts of claiming community of feeling with himself, so far removed: if not of having crept into the place wherein he would have lorded it, alone!” (269). As part of a sympathetic project, the materials of mourning, here, as elsewhere, presume that Victorian mourning was a profoundly social enterprise. Toodles’ crape creeps; it tracks sympathies and sympathetic attachments as literal ties through which one binds one’s thoughts and feelings to those of others.

Because they operate largely through transference, emotional economies of diversified attachment apprehend children in a completely different manner than determined attachments. Rob the Grinder's perennial failings are a matter of course, and not crisis, for the Toodles parents, in part because the sheer number of their children (more than six, but less than ten) means that one can go astray without compromising the form of the family. That Walter Gay goes missing (presumed dead) causes no small alarm to Captain Cuttle. But it is hardly surprising that when Florence finally flees from Dombey—who first orders Carker to break her bond to Edith, and then outright beats her—she immediately makes a home with Cuttle; he needs a child, she needs a parent, and so the immediacy of the arrangement suggests an all-too-easy solution. Diversified attachments can be both contingent and convenient. Florence is so fit a replacement for the missing son, that Cuttle is simply able to transfer his hopes to her. Where the Dombey family plot stalls out in Paul's grave, Florence's flight to the *Wooden Midshipman* immediately sets Cuttle's narrative gears back in motion, inspiring "an odd sort of romance, perfectly unimaginative, yet perfectly unreal, and subject to no considerations of worldly prudence or practicability" (649-50). Having lost his hero, shipwrecked on foreign shores, Cuttle simply adopts Florence as "the principle figure" of newly "impossible pictures" (650). In the economy of diversified attachment, there is always another apple wagon to which one can hitch one's star.

While all of this seems for the best in contrast to the sheer negativity of Dombey's domineering—he plays Scrooge to the *Wooden Midshipman*'s Cratchits, after all—diversified attachments are not without their drawbacks. For one thing, by sheer dint of their plurality and the ease of their replacement, relationships in the context of an economy of diversified attachment might come to feel like they simply aren't worth much on their own. Cuttle's cuddliness is a boon for Florence, to be sure, but it also suggests that because Cuttle's relations

are *all* wholly contingent; there's nothing *particularly* necessary about them. They serve a need (however mutually), and thus come to seem much more instrumental than intimate. Like Cuttle's wearisome trinkets, while they assuredly serve a purpose, but they don't necessarily sell. A social sphere constructed wholly of diversified attachments might seem cluttered, in terms of both emotional life and narrative structure: it is no accident that *Dombey and Son's* diversified attachments are borne almost entirely by Dickens' nearly endless secondary characters (until, that is, Florence enters the schema as a safe harbor). Walter Gay is uncomfortably aware that Sol Gill's commitment to him—however cozily queer by some critics' reckonings—entails a form of loss all the same. "What I mean, Uncle Sol," Walter reveals, "is that . . . I feel you ought to have, sitting here and pouring out the tea instead of me, a nice little dumpling of a wife, you know,—a comfortable, capital, cosy old lady, who was just a match for you, and knew how to manage you, and keep you in good heart" (111). At the other end of the scale, Paul feels his monomania for Florence brush up against larger social possibilities. Paul is thus disheartened by Blimber's assessment that "we can't like you, you know, Dombey, as well as we could wish" (179). Committed only to Florence, Paul, "from some hidden reason, very imperfectly understood by himself—if understood at all," feels "a gradually increasing impulse of affection, towards almost everything and everybody in the place" and thus he cannot "bear to think that they would be quite indifferent to him when he was gone" (179). Staging such a conflict between determined and diversified attachment, Dickens throws into relief that both modes entail forms of loss. It is a gift to others to hope that they might survive our loss; it is an insult to our pride to think we can simply be replaced.

Ambivalently poised between both economies of attachment, Florence does not simply abandon one mode for the other, as some critics would have it. Without wholly disavowing the

tensions and problems inherent in both economies of attachment, Dickens posits that reappraisal—aligned with a form of sympathetic “re-reading”—offers a method for reconsidering and resituating emotional investments in others, in order to more fully appreciate their value. Typically, the narrator of *Dombey and Son* signals such reappraisals through first wholly disavowing any commitment to knowledge about characters’ emotional lives, or alternately through signaling that his characters have missed something crucial that they might have noticed had they possessed greater sympathies for one another. The most paradigmatic version of this technique occurs when Florence is observed by her father who, having let her into his quarters briefly, obscures her returned gaze by sitting in the shadows. “What would have been [Florence’s] thoughts if she had known that he was steadily regarding her” is never made clear, and so too does the narrator conceal Dombey’s obscured reaction behind a series of nearly ungrammatical restrictive clauses which confirm only ironically:

That the veil upon his face, by accident or by design, was so adjusted that his sight was free, and that it never wandered from her face an instant. That when she looked towards him, in the obscure dark corner, her speaking eyes, more earnest and pathetic in their voiceless speech than all the orators of all the world, and impeaching him more nearly in their mute address, met his, and did not know it! That when she bent her head again over her work, he drew his breath more easily, but with the same attention looked upon her still—upon her white brow and her falling hair, and busy hands; and once attracted, seemed to have no power to turn his eyes away! (*Dombey and Son* 480)

“And what were his thoughts meanwhile?” the narrator ponders (480). “With what emotions did he prolong the attentive gaze covertly directed on his unknown daughter? Was there reproach to

him in the quiet figure and the mild eyes? Had he begun to her disregarded claims and did they touch him home at last, and waken him to some sense of his cruel injustice?" Throughout the passage, Dickens continually opens the possibility that this is a "yielding moment," that Dombey's heart has thawed at last, that Florence might yet become "blended with the child he had loved. But any such emotions are cagily kept at arm's length by Dickens' continual invocation of the potential with regards to those "yielding moments." "The sight of her beauty... may have struck out" such moments; "some passing thought that he had a happy home within his reach... may have engendered" them; "some simple eloquence... though uttered only in [Florence's] eyes... may have arrested" them; "meaner and lower thoughts, as that his dead boy as now superseded by new ties, and he could forgive them having been supplanted in his affection, may have occasioned them" (480). The potential form marks ambivalence at the level of language, and so the narrator posits Dombey's sympathies in the realm of the imaginative, the fictive, to which they already in some senses belong. Neither confirming nor denying the presence of such softer sentiments, Dickens holds open the possibility that in such epistemological ellipses—unknown to readers, as to Florence—Dombey may yet come around.

When Dombey is left literally bankrupt by the deliberately bad investments of his manager, such statements pass into simple regret. His son dead, his daughter disowned, his second wife estranged, and his reputation ruined, Dombey contemplates suicide briefly before Florence reappears, all-too-ready to forgive her father. In a clear reversal of the earlier scene's uneven gaze, here the narrator is over-emphatic: "Yes. His daughter! Look at her! Look here! Down upon the ground, clinging to him, calling to him, folding her hands, praying to him" (799). That Florence should ask for her father's forgiveness is deeply unsettling; that she should invoke the birth of her child as a reason for that forgiveness is simply bizarre, given the novel's

ambivalence about the precariousness of such a child's promise. And yet as conventional and unconvincing as *Dombey and Son*'s ending might be, it is perhaps best read not for what it pushes forward, but for what it recalls. If, in the novels' opening chapter, Dombey "might have read" Florence's "pitiable need," her "passionate desire to run clinging to him, crying," then in their reconciliation, he finally reads Florence—and responds to her—sympathetically (31).

In this way, *Dombey and Son* does not just emphasize the need for broader attachments in the face of the precariousness of human life; so too does it offer the need to return to attachments—however disappointed—in the hopes that their value might be recognized under new emotional needs, and efforts at attachment might therefore be justly, sympathetically read. For Florence, reappraisal entails affirming that determined attachments—such as the cruel one to her father—have turned out to be bad investments, and so have been emotional losses. But even in acknowledging such loss, Florence does not wholly give up her father. Instead, finding a foster family through diversified attachment, Florence finds the emotional resources to make her life livable so that she can make a return investment on her father, and finally incorporate him, too, into the broader framework of the family she makes with Walter Gay. Such a gesture of forgiveness emphasizes that, rather than seeking happy profits through flatly reproductive futurity, Florence's form of family feeling turns back upon itself as much as it pushes forward and outward. In this way, Florence suggests a mode of renewed emotional investment that is capable of surviving losses through diversified attachments, and—perhaps more importantly—can recoup such losses through the form of emotional labor exemplified by Mary Barton. Indeed, if *Dombey and Son*'s conclusion parallel's *Mary Barton*'s in offering resolution that is also deeply unsettling, it is less for the rushedness of its domestic reassemblage, and more for the manner in which that act of reparation falls utterly to Florence, as it does to later Dickensian

heroines like Esther Summerson and Amy Dorrit. For all of Dickens' optimism about diversified attachments, then, *Dombey and Son* suggests that sympathetic enterprises are simply inoperable without selfless women.

This failure of imagination on Dickens' part suggests that, for all his keen awareness that kinship networks might prove as flexible as the needs of those who forge the contingent attachments that constitute them, Dickens could not ultimately offer a vision of the domestic completely uncoupled from the ideals of the conjugal domestic, as discussed above and in the previous chapter. And yet, in its final moments, *Dombey and Son* offers a crucial turn. Readers would be forgiven for viewing *Dombey and Son*'s conclusion as undercutting its exploration of the perils of over-investing in one's children to the exclusion of all other relations. Indeed, the novel ends with the image of Dombey fawning over his granddaughter's curls with tears in his eyes, gasping, "Little Florence! Little Florence!" (833). However, Dombey's tears for his grandchild should by no means be taken for granted. Instead, Dickens' novel suggests that Dombey's tears are an achievement that, while dependent on the work of his daughter, nevertheless mark that he can finally feel for his family—not as a matter of determined course, but rather as an act of genuine sympathy. In this way, Dickens' vision of family feeling persists not in the naturalization of domestic enclosure through blood-ties, but rather in a form of deliberate, dedicated, and sometimes difficult turning toward the family—however diffuse—as a form of sympathetic attachment whose value must be worked towards, rather than assumed.

## CHAPTER 4

# GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS

## HEARTBROKEN NARRATIVES AND DESIRE AFTER THE END

How does heartbreak tell a story? How do fictions of queer loss inflect our understanding of how narrative gets us to an ending when such fictions necessarily already take place *after* an end? Both with and against pre-existing theories of narrative, this chapter seeks to trouble neat and tidy understanding of how endings take shape (or not) by looking to narratives that are motivated not by lively, expansive Eros, but by melancholic attachments that persist long after erotic unions between lovers have been rendered impossible. This is not to oppose Eros to melancholia, and in so doing impoverish loss of the longing that often renders it all the more painfully persistent. Rather, the heartbroken narrative modes I explore in this chapter demonstrate that melancholia—for all its trappings of narcissistic gloom and morbid stillness—can nevertheless provide narrative ground as fecund as that of any “live” romance. At the same time, heartbroken narratives expand notions of what counts as “productivity” in the first place. In this way, heartbreak demands alternative plotting structures, and in turn necessitates new models for understanding how plots work not just *towards* ends, but also *after* and *against* them.

My conviction that heartbreak requires alternative theories of narrative desire arises from the ubiquity of melancholic characters in nineteenth-century fiction. Melancholic lovers—Dickens’ Miss Havisham, Emily Brontë’s Heathcliff, Thackeray’s Amelia Sedley, and Austen’s Anne Elliot, to name a few—occupy an iconic place in the nineteenth-century canon. Moreover, the appearance of a heartbroken character in fiction tends to coincide with a number of remarkably consistent plotting patterns. Novels like *Great Expectations*, *Wuthering Heights*, and

*Persuasion* find their narrative drive and shape as a direct result of their doomed romances, and their emphases on obsessions with romantic loss (Havisham's singular fetishization of her snub at the altar; Heathcliff's wildly tenacious attachment to Catherine beyond the grave) underscore that they move not only *forward* through a plot, but are equally focused on maintaining a backwards glance. I thus remain unconvinced that the dynamics of heartbreak plots can be reduced to the notion that the erotics of heartbreak serve merely as desire's *ne plus ultra*: ultimately frustrated and therefore endless. Certainly, desire and melancholia operate in tandem, but melancholic desire's capacity to generate narrative does not operate according to the predictable patterns discussed by narrative theorists. What needs to be accounted for, then, is how melancholic attachments complicate the processes by which narratives of heartbreak find their energetic impulses, as well as notions of the ends towards which they work.

I do not seek here to account for an exhaustive theory of "heartbreak." Like the term "love," "heartbreak" refers to an incredibly diverse range of emotional experiences arising from a plethora of erotic investments and myriad social situations. It nevertheless strikes me as both possible and advantageous to specify and describe a distinctly *melancholic* mode of heartbreak insofar as such a limit helpfully frames heartbreak around the larger issues of emotional embodiment, narrative erotics, and queer loss under consideration in this study. In this light, melancholic heartbreak names a form of queer loss when it refers to a form of loss that troubles the modus operandi of Victorian fiction in relation to the ambivalent ideals of marriage, coupledness, and erotic union. Unlike other figures of queer loss considered in this study, however, the subject of heartbreak is notable in that she or he experiences loss in a manner that is extra-judicial. Where the dissolution of actualized marriages, either by divorce or the death of a spouse, entails—at least nominally—a rubric for determining either fiscal damages or the

emotional demands of mourning, no such easy matters of recourse are available to the heartbroken. Though heartbreak may, of course, be felt in relation to marriage, those who are heartbroken are in some ways romantic outlaws; cast-offs whose romantic “crimes” (of which they may be guilty or innocent) arise from the best of intentions, but nevertheless locate them decidedly outside the purview Gayle Rubin once called the “Charmed Circle” of erotic life.

Indeed, regardless of one’s ideological stance towards marriage or the marriage plot, it is nearly impossible not to read stories of heartbreak as tales of romantic “failure.” Because erotic union serves as a powerfully evocative narrative, social, and emotional ideal, heartbreak is the ultimate cautionary tale, a nightmare vision made only *more* painful by virtue of one’s awareness of the promises of happiness (however amorphous) from which one feels oneself to deviate when heartbroken. Aristophanes is the patron saint of the heartbroken; his myth of the lover’s primordially singular body—divided in two and then scattered by heavenly intervention, damned to wander the Earth aching in search of its other half—is heartbreak’s watchword. Where erotic union is further tethered to the ideal of monogamous marriage—as in most nineteenth-century British fiction—the romantic failure of heartbreak also makes failures of plot feel intensely personal. However, while feeling one’s heart break may make social norms retrospectively clear, such knowledge does very little to numb the pain of their loss.

The other figures of queer loss explored in this study occupy ambivalent stances in relation to marriage through knowledge of what happens *after* it has occurred (parents who lose children), after it has ended (widows and widowers), or *to the side of it* (determined spinsters, confirmed bachelors), such that marriage’s lack or end might *not* feel like a loss *per se*. For the heartbroken, however, the loss of another, or form of relation with another, is definitively felt *as* a deeply painful loss. Even from the most staunchly antisocial queer perspective, then,

heartbreak seems more or less irredeemable. For all its obstinacy, heartbreak's emotional drag is by no means "resistance" in the usual sense of the term. Indeed, part of what makes heartbreak most painful is the awareness it gives us that our hopes, however embedded in normative institutions or life narratives, have been felt as deeply valuable *to us*. The ideals indexed by heartbreak in absentia are by no means pre-political or ahistorical. But insofar as heartbreak always already entails the recognition (however unconscious) of ideals *through their loss*, the demystification of such ideals seems utterly beside the point. In this light, heartbreak can make the work of certain queer interventions seem pointless, callous, and even heartless. Knowing where our desire "comes from" does very little to comfort someone who already regrets that their desire has come to nothing.

Scenes of heartbreak call for sympathetic reading in a way that few bodies of literature can. Encountering heartbreak in real life temporarily suspends imperatives of narrative coherence, social propriety, and even good taste. We have all seen (and sometimes been) the raw bundle of nerves forced to compose him- or herself long enough to buy groceries, only to overshare with the clueless, but kind cashier when she or he asks in a precursory way, "And how are you today?" We make excuses for such outbursts (or hope we have the grace to do so) because we know too well that feeling of falling to pieces in public spaces, over the phone, and on the page. Heartbreak calls for recognition; it pleads for care, even at the most inopportune times. Heartbreak also makes us acutely aware of the contingencies haunting even the happiest of our romantic relationships. Heartbreak can make us more humble about the innumerable, circumstances that have led us (when or if they lead us) to love. In sympathizing with the heartbroken, it can be hard not to feel a smug sense of relief: this love has gone awry; I hope my

own never will. Heartbreak can make the non-heartbroken feel lucky. Such felicity can, in turn, make sympathizing with heartbreak all the more pressing as cause for communal concern.

And yet, when faced with the ongoing realities of heartbreak—the fourth one a.m. call from a friend in need, the glum despondency over coffee talk weeks or months later, the lingering neuroses that crop up bafflingly several relationships down the line—how many of us make the same apologies for behaviors and modes of feeling that seem counter-intuitive, self-destructive, and merely inconvenient? At some point, heartbreak’s demand for emotional triage tends to elicit an imperative upon the heartbroken. Sympathy pales into platitudes: Get back on the horse! Stop listening to “Purple Rain!” Find that Life Drive! This is for the best, in most respects. Indeed, if I can make one definitive claim about the emotional ramifications of loss without worrying about veering into prescription, then this is it: *heartbreak hurts*. At the same time, this injunction to repair the breakage of heartbreak—by whatever means necessary—also means that it can be very difficult to conceive of heartbreak as anything besides a temporary, unfortunate deviation from what Foucault called “care of the self.” How, by contrast, could one sympathize with, or simply understand, heartbreak *without* such a horizon of expectations? In fiction, how does one read heartbreak not as a flatly pedagogic or moralistic negative example—*What Not to Do If You Want A Man*, by Jane Austen—or problem in need of fixing—*Sympathy Fixes Everything, So Stop Pining for Your Dead Husband Already*, by W.M. Thackeray—but as a way of narrative life unto itself?

In this light, “melancholic heartbreak” grants us a vantage point from which to consider the complexities of heartbreak in a sustained way. Theories of melancholia are helpful for considering certain modes of heartbreak in that they offer important models for considering the relation between narrative and desire in situations where desire is founded upon loss,

disappointment, and regret. Like heartbreak, melancholia supposes that desire is perhaps felt most powerfully when its object has fallen into the realm of impossibility. Narratives of melancholic heartbreak do not work towards semiotic “totalities,” reproductive ends, or the fulfillment of single desires for discrete objects, as theorized by Brooks, Miller, and Roof in the introduction to this study. Instead, they work through a diffuse constellation of conflicted, heterogeneous aims, typified by a conflict between sustained ideals and the reality of their disappointment. Accordingly, melancholic heartbreak’s form of narrative futurity has nothing particularly reproductive about it; indeed, melancholic heartbreak’s tenacious grasp on an object that has been lost is more a matter of suspension and survival. Nevertheless, the plot of melancholic heartbreak is inexhaustibly narratable insofar as it is profoundly unhappy and characterized by thick, but ambivalent attachments. In grappling with ambivalent objects, the plot of melancholic heartbreak continually throws into relief the double-edged sword that desire poses for the subject. But where many stories simply find their ends in such disappointment, marking the negative space of heartbreak as a comfortably tragic metaphor, plots of melancholic heartbreak turn over lost objects well after their supposed end. Melancholic heartbreak orients lives, sometimes fetishistically, around losses that must be disavowed in order to sustain the notion that marriage, coupledness, and reproductive futurity serve as fitting, stable, and happy ends where no such convenient, discrete end is really possible.

*Desperate Remedies* (1871), Thomas Hardy’s first novel, exemplifies the plot of melancholic heartbreak. Like many of Thomas Hardy’s later novels, *Desperate Remedies* aligns the aims of its plot with the desires of a female protagonist, through whose aspirations various male characters’ desires are refracted, or against which they must compete as erotic antagonists. But unlike the cases of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) or Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the*

*Native* (1878), female desire is never a singular or solitary affair in *Desperate Remedies*. Instead, the novel adopts a doubled plot whereby the thwarted union between Cytherea Aldclyffe and Ambrose Graye finds its twin in the succeeding generation as the young Cytherea Graye (Ambrose's daughter with another woman) is brought under the influence of her heartbroken namesake. Cytherea Aldclyffe's machinations thus supply much of the novel's plot, even as they converge and compete with those of her ruthless bastard son, Aeneas Manston. *Desperate Remedies* bears more than passing similarities to both *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *Great Expectations* (1860-1). Manston's obsession with Cytherea Graye recalls Heathcliff's love for Catharine Earnshaw to the grave and beyond, while Cytherea Aldclyffe's manipulations of Cytherea Graye echo the jilted Miss Havisham's revenge through her ward, Estella, in *Great Expectations*. *Desperate Remedies* thus serves as a valuable index for the melancholically heartbroken investments of its more famous thematic cousins.

*Desperate Remedies* is usually discussed for containing one of the most frank scenes of intimacy between women in all of Victorian fiction. But while critics have tended to take the scene in question—a particularly languid bedroom scene between the two Cythereae—as the occasion for “Are they or aren't they?” criticism<sup>1</sup>, what seems most intriguing about *Desperate Remedies*' queer erotics that they suggest a generative link between melancholic heartbreak and Gothic doubling. It is nearly impossible to disambiguate where one Cytherea's desires end and the other's begin, and thus doubling highlights the extent to which characters' objects of desire in heartbroken narratives cannot be understood discretely. Objects of erotic attachment in the novel point not only to sets of ideals in the abstract, but also to a range of entirely different, often contradictory aims as well. Desire in *Desperate Remedies* is thus thoroughly ambivalent; it

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<sup>1</sup> See Faderman, Lillian. *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*. New York: Morrow, 1981. Print.

causes pain and pleasure in equal measure, brings erotically competitive characters into identificatory sympathy with each other against all odds (and their own interests), and haunts any a project of erotic and generational “succession” with the heartbreak of the past. The novel’s plot never moves forward without looking backward.

Ambivalent desire imparts a melancholic model for *Desperate Remedies*’ heartbroken plotting. Within this schema, the “main” story of *Desperate Remedies*—the romance between Cytherea Graye and Edward Springrove—incorporates Cytherea Aldclyffe’s disappointed love story as a melancholic object. This establishes a set of doublings and identifications between and among characters such that the *Desperate Remedies* plays out as a series of conflicts over marriage as an ambivalent narrative ideal. The fact of heartbreak thus serves as that which must be repressed in order to maintain the useful fiction of marriage as narrative’s “happy ending” in *Desperate Remedies*. Ultimately, though, the novel’s efforts to “work through” the ambivalence of marriage continually break under the pressure of the identifications made possible by melancholic heartbreak. Unlike Miller’s formulation—in which “bad love” is merely part of the “middling” plot—or Brooks’ model—in which love gone awry can only serve as a dilatory deviance which prolongs the “squiggle to the end”—erotic loss is absolutely foundational to the plot of melancholic heartbreak, as illustrated by *Desperate Remedies*. Erotic loss is not opposed to erotic union in *Desperate Remedies*, but instead serves as its condition of possibility. Thus, while *Desperate Remedies*’ broken heart may beat out the marriage plot, it also tells the tale of the cracks inherent to its narrative project’s shaky erotic foundation.

This thesis entails several important implications for theories of narrative desire. *Desperate Remedies* troubles easy notions of narrative beginnings and ends. Insofar as Cytherea Graye’s plot serves as the uncanny double for Cytherea Aldclyffe’s, and both plots “combine” to

form the narrative at large, it would be difficult to establish any easy teleology between the two. Moreover, the ellipsis between the two parts—maintained by a gap in narrative time of almost thirty years—makes it hard to keep the two plots entirely contiguous. Indeed, it is hard to establish a sense of primacy and subordination between the two (an ambiguity further toyed with by the two Cytherea’s continual power reversals). Indeed, it is impossible to “make sense” of one plot without the other—*Desperate Remedies*’ marriage plot is unintelligible without its prior disappointment. No marriage can ultimately “make good” on Aldclyffe’s heartbreak, no matter how over-determinedly Cytherea Graye’s marriages might be identified with Aldclyffe’s desires. In this regard, the novel’s reparative logics serve more as an ongoing project than *fait accompli*. Even when Aldclyffe’s story is supposedly “all” told, and the novel’s various riddles are demystified, the text remains effectively “broken” insofar as its sense of loss remains unsettlingly palpable, and is in fact only re-doubled by the other losses inhabiting the novel. Although Aldclyffe’s love story is identified with Cytherea Graye’s so that the former’s “bad” middle might finally find its narrative resolution by proxy in the latter, the fulfillment of Cytherea Graye’s desires is not enough to suture the gaps, recursions, and retroversions key to the novel’s doubled plot.

Second, then, desire continually renders marriage an ideologically unstable, temporally open, and emotionally contingent object in *Desperate Remedies*, in stark contrast to its figuration in extant theories of narrative. This is underscored by Manston’s bigamous aspirations. Marriages not only “fail” to materialize in *Desperate Remedies*, sometimes they also prove redundant. If in Miller’s terms, “marriage” is the term by which heartbreak—or singleness, loneliness, and any other highly narratable erotic position—might be soothed into quiescence, then no such magical closure can prove felicitous for a novel in which marriage is an unwieldy,

pluralized object. Bluntly stated, *Desperate Remedies* maintains that sometimes you have to break a lot of hearts (and sometimes wives) in order to make a marriage. Rather than finding closure by novel's end, *Desperate Remedies'* heartbroken plot leaves its erotic terms open, turning in their supposed grave.

As a tale about how loss tells stories, *Desperate Remedies* finds narrative sympathies with Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917). Although melancholia" takes many of its cues from the notion of "melancholy," a related, but distinct emotional experience with a long etymology and philosophical history dating back to Aristotle,<sup>2</sup> "Mourning and Melancholia" is the first sustained effort to consider melancholia not just as an emotion, but also as a narrative. Throughout his essay, Freud's central goal is arrive at a coherent, exhaustive account of responses to loss as they relate to the economic model of the libido, as well as the formation of the subject. "Mourning and Melancholia" is not just a story about "what happens" to the subject, but also of how there comes to be a subject about whom there is anything to tell in the first place. As we shall see, however, Freud's tale is anything but as straight-forward.

It is difficult to characterize the trajectory of "Mourning and Melancholia" according to extant theories of plot. In Freud's formulation, mourning and melancholia are not opposed terms so much as they are a story told two ways. Accordingly, "Mourning and Melancholia" unfolds less like a traditional novel and more like a "Choose Your Own Adventure" book. Throughout Freud's account, melancholia is emphasized as thoroughly contingent; it results not just from the fact of loss, but also from the specifics of its experience, as well as the character of the subject who experiences it. A diagnostic story, the essay functions as a flow chart with several crucial

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<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Radden's *The Nature of Melancholy* provides a helpful archive of essays dealing with melancholy, melancholia, and related issues from Classical philosophy through contemporary writing.

junctions. Returning to Brooks' image of narrative desire as a steam engine, then, melancholia's story is less a matter of getting from points A to B than it a method for conceiving an entire system of narrative exchanges.

"Mourning and Melancholia" begins straightforwardly enough with the loss of a loved object, and the subject's confirmation that such a loss has occurred. Because "people never willingly abandon a libidinal position," though, reality's "demand" that the subject let go of his or her attachment to the lost loved object poses some difficulty (244). The work of grieving is always, for Freud, experienced *as* a kind of labor. Indeed, the demand to perform the work of grieving can feel so overwhelming, and opposition to the reality-principle's pronouncement of loss so powerful, "that a turning away from reality takes place" and the subject is left still "clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis" (244). Here, the split between mourning and melancholia fractures Freud's essay into parallel tales. For the subject experiencing mourning, slowly but surely, "bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy" each of the "the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected" (245). As work, mourning is a matter of producing a steady production line of singular memories of the lost loved object that, once reflected upon, can be released so that "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (245). The work of mourning is not done, however, until the ego takes all of its reserves of cathectic energy and displaces those energies from the old loved object to a new one.

More troubling for extant theories of plot is Freud's insistence that the process of mourning is inherently conservative. Freud's characterization of the mourning libido's actions as "detachment" and "displacement" suggest that the bonds forged with a new object of love at the culmination of mourning are more or less the *same* as those libidinal tentacles which bound the

subject to the lost love object. There is nothing novel about any forms of attachment in the Freudian account. Instead, social “expansion” is a method of refashioning and retrofitting pre-existing attachments. “Mourning and Melancholia” thus implies that, even at our most outgoing, our attachments are a response to loss of one form or another (or, indeed, a response to the loss of one form of a mother). Thus, it becomes very difficult to pinpoint exactly where one object cathexis ends and another begins. Loss and social extension are not opposed in the Freudian account. Rather, the theory of mourning implies that there can be no happily reproductive “ending” without the loss of pre-existing libidinal investments.

In part, melancholia is mysterious to Freud because he cannot get his stories straight. In characteristic psychoanalytic fashion, Freud’s account of melancholia can only find its beginning at the symptomatic end of things. Treating differences between mourning and melancholia, Freud remarks that the latter is unique in that it entails “a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity,” as well as a characteristic “lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment” (244). But this “impoverishment” of the melancholic subject’s ego is accompanied by no sense of shame (246). Instead, the melancholic subject is prone to public fits of “insistent communicativeness”; he or she is shameless, but craves chastisement for his or her perceived shortcomings or wrongdoings (247). In this way, melancholia “behaves like an open wound” which the melancholic cannot resist holding up in front of others like a badge of honor.

At first, Freud is unable to account for the melancholic’s penchant for self-abasement. Over the course of clinical ventures, however, Freud notices that “that the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient’s own

ego” (248). Melancholia thus involves a splitting of the ego by which the melancholic’s apparent masochism is really a form of sadism directed towards the lost object, which has been “incorporated” through its identification with the ego. Freud notes that this splitting of the ego results in “the agency commonly called ‘conscience’” which, “along with the censorship of consciousness and reality-testing” is “among the major institutions of the ego” (247). Melancholia is thus, as a long discourse on the topic maintains, foundational to our sense of self. By contrast, mourning is certainly painful, but it leaves the ego “free,” “uninhibited,” and otherwise unchanged (245).

Ambivalence is the linchpin between mourning and melancholia, the proverbial switch in the track. Crucially, this ambivalence is of a few sorts. First, Freud insists that part of what makes melancholia most painful is the indeterminacy of its object. While mourning results from a form of loss occasioned more-or-less by the death of a loved object, what has been lost for the melancholic subject is not any discrete loved object, but rather “a loss of a more ideal kind” (245). While certainly the object itself might be apprehended as one aspect of what has been lost for the melancholic, the object is more the way it references hopes, dreams, and ideals. In this respect, the melancholic object is semiotically ambivalent in that it both is and is not itself; it both does and does not refer to its referent. The melancholic object points towards a certain something, but that something is virtual; it exists only at the horizon of expectation as the guarantor of a hoped-for future. The melancholic thus mourns not only what is past, but also the future as it can never come to be, and in this regard he or she is temporally ambivalent as well. This temporal foreclosure distinguishes the heartbroken melancholic from the retrospective, or alternative standpoints of the other figures of queer loss discussed in this study. Melancholic heartbreak takes place in the perpetual past conditional.

Secondly, Freud emphasizes that emotional ambivalence plays a crucial role in melancholia. Freud's sense of "love" is not the sort untainted by the reality that few, if any, relations could be described as wholly "positive" or "nurturing" without slights or disappointments. Instead, Freud notes that loss always serves as "an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself effective and come into the open" (251). In the case of the melancholic subject, however, such ambivalence cannot be admitted by the subject, and is instead enacted through the forms of self-reproach and masochism accomplished by the incorporation of the lost object and its conflation with the ego. Where ambivalence cannot be admitted—presumably because the ideals to which the lost object is tethered are so pervasively, if unconsciously compelling that their disappointment must be repressed—melancholia results rather than mourning.

Ambivalence underscores that the relationship between the melancholic subject and the melancholic object is thoroughly contingent; what is lost for the melancholic subject is not a person per se so much as an "object-relationship": a manner of coming into contact with the lost object such that certain ideals come into view. In his opening description of melancholia proper, for example, Freud mentions no discrete "loss of an object" has occurred for the melancholic, noting instead that "An object-choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed" (249). "Then," Freud continues, "owing to a real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the object-relationship was shattered." Freud's choice of the phrase "object-choice" suggests a distinctly erotic economy of relation. In this respect, melancholia is distinctly sexualized from the start, and has closer ties to the experience of what I have been calling "melancholic heartbreak" than it does to the sort of mourning one performs when someone passes away. Indeed, Freud's choice of the verb "shatter" bears metonymic ties to

the “break” of “heartbreak,” and implies that the experience of loss for the melancholic subject is experienced as sudden and perhaps even violent. In melancholia’s sense of experiencing “shattering” as “too much too soon,” its early stages seem to echo Freud’s description of trauma and its attending *nachträglichkeit*<sup>3</sup>. With melancholia, this narrative break is shot through with an intense form of desire for a future that has been rendered inaccessible. Thus, part of what might make the experience of melancholia so intense is the feeling that a world—however virtual, contingent, and promissory—is indeed coming to an end.

Indeed, the matter of an ending is another signal of the shift from mourning to melancholia. For the melancholic, the cathexis with the lost object is not merely retracted and refashioned, it is actually “brought to an end” (249). Left without any object-relation to anchor itself, the libido is “withdrawn” into the ego itself, where its energies continue to work, and eventually establish “an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object” and, in particular, the ideals which that abandoned object pointed towards (249, 256 Freud’s emphasis). Freud’s focus on the process of “identification” highlights that the lost object “established” alongside the ego is *not* the object, or even its discrete image. Instead, identification sets up what Freud calls “the shadow of the object,” an uncanny doppelganger which stands alongside, but apart from the ego, and can therefore “be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object” (249). Even as Freud aligns the act of melancholic incorporation with “the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development,” then, what actually occurs is more a form of doubling, a repetition of that which has been lost which undermines the notion that loss has occurred. If mourning entails a proper “respect” for reality, then melancholia entails reality’s

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<sup>3</sup> While I do not wish to collapse the experience of melancholia (or heartbreak) with any of the various theories of trauma—and in so doing equate the experience of barely surviving wartime violence with, say, the quotidian experience of being dumped—these similarities are notable insofar as they imply that the experience of intense emotion entails a form of temporal chaos that thoroughly upends tidier, “straight-forward” notions of narrative succession.

manipulation through psychic distortions. Melancholic incorporation results in a form of doubling that is thoroughly uncanny, entailing “doubts [about] whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate” (“The Uncanny” 5). In this capacity, melancholic incorporation serves as a form of survival against extinction, and the various fetish objects by which we remember those lost—tombstones, photographs, and eulogies, as well as the mourning textiles more fully discussed in Chapter 1—embody variations on the “magical thinking” that Freud aligns with the uncanny.

The process of melancholia concludes either from a simple matter of self-preservation whereby the melancholic subject ‘gives up’ the lost object out of sheer exhaustion, or it succeeds in debasing the lost object to the extent that it is incapable of being loved anymore, and is thus abandoned. As the ego chides itself through the critical faculty of conscience, “each single struggle of ambivalence loosens the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging it, denigrating it and even as it were killing it... either after the fury has spent itself or after the object has been abandoned as valueless” (257). Thus, even as the melancholic subject ensures the death of the loved object by “taking revenge” on it, his or her identification with that object remains intact, and so the “shadow of the object” persists, incorporated into the ego as a ghostly reminder of that which has been lost, but has since become other-within-self.

The melancholic’s “self-revilings” are, in a sense, a method of assuring the object a death that is controlled because anticipated, socialized, and ritualized. Such a practice bears more than passing resemblances to the Victorian notion of the “good death,” as explicated by Patricia Jalland in *Death in the Victorian Family*. Thus, from a historical standpoint, it seems at least plausible that melancholia may stem from an effort on the part of the subject to experience loss in accordance with social ideals of ritualized, public mourning. So too does melancholia’s

disavowed ambivalence bespeak a certain difficulty arising from the idealization of the marital bond in particular. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that the form of melancholia so eloquently described by Freud coincides with the enshrinement of bourgeois domesticity in the nineteenth century. A disappointed marriage could leave marriage itself feeling disappointing, especially if one is left feeling heartbroken. But because such ambivalence could not be broached openly without raising doubts about marriage's efficaciousness as a social and narrative good, melancholia may have provided one of the best routes through which to experience a form of heartbreak that, while painful, could at least grapple with the psychic realities of erotic disappointment at a time when marital triumphs and domestic plentitude were a cause célèbre in conduct manuals, genre paintings, and fiction.

And yet, one would be mistaken to read the rise of melancholia as nothing more than seething resentment behind the façade of connubial bliss. Ambivalence perennially turns the emotional terms of relation between melancholic subject and object. So, even as the ambivalence of melancholia entails violence, the incorporation of the object still betokens a profound form of affection and care. Indeed, in one of his most beautiful turns of phrase, Freud suggests that melancholia is a method of preserving love against all odds and beyond all ends: "by taking flight into the ego," he writes, "love escapes extinction" (257). Ambivalence is the impetus for the object's doubled deaths, but also for its untimely survival. Ambivalence begins as a liability to be disavowed, but it becomes a gift. Incorporating the sins of the beloved, the lover not only airs his or her grievances, but also accepts responsibility for the beloved's guilt.

*Desperate Remedies* offers its own theory of melancholia when one of its most distinctive characters, the heartbroken Cytherea Aldclyffe, explains how erotic loss implies narrative shape. Near the end of the first volume, Aldclyffe attempts to lay out the plot that will face her young

companion, Cytherea Graye, if she opts to pursue a romance with Edward Springrove, a local whom Aldclyffe knows is already engaged despite his earnest, sustained flirtations with Cytherea. Cytherea Aldclyffe (heretofore simply “Aldclyffe”) is a heartbroken spinster who engineers most of the novel’s plotting by bringing her bastard son Aeneas Manston to Knapwater House in order to marry him off to Cytherea Graye (from here on, “Cytherea”), who serves as her maid. Having had her heart broken over the course of an affair with Cytherea’s father, Ambrose, Aldclyffe thinks she knows how Cytherea’s story will end:

‘What does he do next?—Why, this is what he does next: ruminates on what he has heard of women's romantic impulses, and how easily men torture them when they have given way to those feelings, and have resigned everything for their hero. It may be that though he loves you heartily now—that is, as heartily as a man can—and you love him in return, your loves may be impracticable and hopeless, and you may be separated for ever. It may be that though he loves you heartily now—that is, as heartily as a man can—and you love him in return, your loves may be impracticable and hopeless, and you may be separated for ever. You, as the weary, weary years pass by will fade and fade—bright eyes *will* fade—and you will perhaps then die early—true to him to your latest breath, and believing him to be true to the latest breath also; whilst he, in some gay and busy spot far away from your last quiet nook, will have married some dashing lady, and not purely oblivious of you, will long have ceased to regret you—will chat about you, as you were in long past years—will say, "Ah, little Cytherea used to tie her hair like that—poor innocent trusting thing; it was a pleasant useless idle dream—that dream of mine for the maid with the bright eyes and simple, silly heart; but I was

a foolish lad at that time." Then he will tell the tale of all your little Wills and Wont's and particular ways, and as he speaks, turn to his wife with a placid smile.'

(*Desperate Remedies* 84-5)

In the terms of popular psychology, this passage is an obvious example of "projection." While Aldclyffe's concerns for Cytherea might be well founded and well-intentioned, despite their curtness, Aldclyffe isn't *really* talking about Cytherea so much as she is speaking circumspectively (though not subtly) of herself in the past. Aldclyffe's hubris in predicting Cytherea's fate—apart from her ignorance of the particulars, as well as the break in propriety by which she has a heart-to-heart with a woman who is effectively her employee—hinges on the prescriptive assumption by which she typifies her own case as determined, rather than contingent. Rather than helping Cytherea to "hope for the best," or to resolve the love triangle in her own favor, Aldclyffe's pronouncement serves as a form of damning curse whereby she chides herself for what she perceives as her *own* foolishness by sadistically taking it out on her young ward. For Aldclyffe, Cytherea's story is one which has already been told *as her own*. At level of narrative, then, this passage dramatizes the "self-revilings" that follow the incorporation of the ambivalent object—in this case, Aldclyffe's heartbroken story, which in turn indexes marriage as an ambivalent narrative ideal.

In giving an account of the story in which she feels herself to be incorporated, Aldclyffe acknowledges the extent to which her story *might be retold*, but not any ways in which Cytherea's might *differ*. The tragedy of Aldclyffe's situation is not just that she feels a general cynicism about romance as a result of her personal disappointment, but also that heartbreak renders romantic union such an implausible object for her that she feels confident in predicting how her story will end: she will "die early—true to him to [her] latest breath, and believing him

to be true to the latest breath also” (85). Though this prediction is qualified by a deferring “perhaps,” the bravado with which Aldclyffe speaks throughout the rest of the pronouncement renders such hedging ironic. Aldclyffe’s heartbreak renders Cytherea’s tale anachronistic—a repetition of the same—even as it flattens out the story time of the novel into a knowable, coherent plot that will brook no alternatives. The latter, messianic mode of temporality assures the “rightness” of Aldclyffe’s interpretation of her own story while the former paradoxically assures us that the story’s “end” is really just a breather before the whole thing plays out once again. The novel’s sense of temporality, then, is both “out of joint,” to borrow from *Hamlet*, filtered through Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx*, and set on an infinite loop; heartbreak renders Aldclyffe’s romantic worldview nearly traumatic in its compulsions.

The novel’s narrator explains Aldclyffe’s fatalism with a thesis for the novel’s take on what heartbreak feels like. In discussing Cytherea Graye and her brother Owen’s pain at the sudden loss of their father to an architectural accident, the narrator comments that “Point-blank grief tends rather to seal up happiness for a time than to produce that attrition which results from griefs of anticipation that move onward with the days: these may be said to furrow away the capacity for pleasure” (22). Here “point-blank” connotes a form of loss which is felt as violent not only because it is sudden—an affective gunshot to the gut—but also because it seems inescapable; a blast rendered at a range too close to be dodged. This sudden form of loss is contrasted against the slower “attrition which results from grief” and then “move[s] onward with the days” (22). This second type of grief does not simply “go away,” but instead accompanies the subject onward through the progression of his or her life; loss becomes a kind of futurity unto itself. In this regard, the latter type of loss seems to align more easily with melancholia by virtue of its tenacious mobility, as well as its ability to “furrow away the capacity for pleasure” (22).

With the first loss, pleasure is merely “sealed up” until the work of mourning is complete; with the latter, its generation is wholly impossible. This description thus distinguishes between Cytherea and her brother Owen’s loss of their father and Aldclyffe’s “weary, weary years” following her loss of the same man (although certainly not the same object) to heartbreak (84). While this seems to set up a clear opposition between traumatic and melancholic losses in *Desperate Remedies*, the novel sets up both traumatic loss and its melancholic alternative as equally related to compulsion. Thus, the novel’s various repetitions come to resemble Aldclyffe’s heartbroken disposition.

Aldclyffe’s sense of absolutist conviction is rendered even more palpable in her speech as a series of linguistic repetitions (“What does he do next... this is what he does next,” “he loves you heartily, now... as heartily as a man can,” “weary, weary years will fade and fade—bright eyes *will* fade,” “useless idle dream—that dream”) which iconicize the passage’s more general project of aligning Aldclyffe and Cytherea as doubles. Aldclyffe speaks cyclically as part of the novel’s larger pattern of eternal erotic returns. Tracing the identifications further, the passage establishes a correspondence between Ambrose Graye (Cytherea’s father) and Edward Springrove (her romantic interest) while simultaneously positioning her mother, the imagined “wife” towards whom the husband “turns... with a placid smile,” in the position of Adelaide Hinton, Cytherea’s romantic rival. In this way, Aldclyffe’s doubling operation figures Cytherea as lusting after her father while resenting her mother. I bring up the Oedipal dynamics here less as a point unto itself (Oedipal triangles are not particularly hard to come by, after all), and more as a sign of the novel’s more general politics of identification, which indulge transference to an absurd degree. Cytherea’s desires are never discretely “her own”—they are sometimes Aldclyffe’s, sometimes her brother Owen’s, sometimes those of whichever man happens to be

pursuing her. Thus, the objects of her desires are similarly confounded, contingent, and confused. Accordingly, Cytherea is subject to flights of desiring fancy which range from the merely “convenient” (Edward is, early on, the only game in town) to the figuratively incestuous (Cytherea carries out early flirtations with Edward vis-à-vis her brother, Owen).

Cytherea’s erotic flexibility poses a problem of closure insofar as it centers the novel on a protagonist whose desires are capable of migrating from one object to another and back again. In this way, Cytherea’s refracted desires risk an all-too-easy metonymical slide into the forms of promiscuity and outright bigamy characterized by Manston, whose iterative (and indeed simultaneous) marriages mark the boundary between the licit and illicit, even as his desire for Cytherea threatens to corrupt and ruin her (again, shades of *Tess*). *Desperate Remedies*’ particular brand of erotic multiplicity is never flatly romanticized. Fancifulness, faithlessness, and murder in cold blood are continually held alongside one another in an identificatory circuit which, by the novel’s conclusion, leaves very few characters free of suspicion. Contrasted against these potentially scandalous forms of easy erotic detachment and relocation—which we might align with Freud’s libidinal economy of mourning—Aldclyffe’s melancholic attachment to Ambrose seems like a remarkably sane and licit alternative; a lifelong commitment in the face of flighty teenage romance.

The novel’s queer punctuations underscore the extent to which identification and desire work in tandem through melancholia. Throughout the homoerotic episodes of the *Desperate Remedies*’ first half, the novel highlights the extent to which finding oneself to “be like” someone is often indistinguishable from more brazenly “wanting” someone. As Sedgwick has noted, the structural conflation of identification with desire is particularly common to the homoeroticism of Gothic fiction. Indeed, the plot of melancholic heartbreak seems rife with

Gothic possibilities: traumatically jilted lovers, uncanny doubles, and repressed desires certainly populate. But where Sedgwick notes that “many Gothic novels... offer neatly demarcated pairs of doubles, whose relationships degenerate under the power pressures of the novel into something less graphic and more insidious,” the doublings in Hardy’s novel are at once so multivalent and so over-determined that any “insidiousness” in the novel is diffused by revelations that usually come too early and too often to pack any melodramatic punch (*Between Men* 97-8). The first example is the divulgence of Cytherea Graye’s first name to Cytherea Aldclyffe, who almost immediately explains her disappointed romance with Ambrose to her successor. The ensuing revelation of Cytherea’s last name and parentage does not arrive in a moment melodramatically “too late,” but instead becomes the basis for all of Aldclyffe’s marital plotting. Meanwhile, when Aldclyffe finally tells Manston that she is his mother, Manston seems hardly surprised, and even Aldclyffe’s more-or-less “full” explanation of Manston’s secrets to Cytherea Graye comes at a point in the novel when the knowledge can hardly change anything.

*Desperate Remedies*’ particular brand of Gothic is thus one which, far from reveling in the “unspeakable,” compulsively says its name(s) and shows its hand. Despite the novel’s flirtation with Detective fiction in its third volume, it is difficult to consider *Desperate Remedies*’ narrative desires as hinging upon getting the “whole story.” Indeed, the third act’s mystery—How did Manston’s wife, Eunice, survive the fire which apparently killed her?—serves less to tell us anything new about Manston, and more to annul his marriage to Cytherea and exonerate her for the “crime” of her inconstancy to Edward. Knowing that Cytherea Graye is Ambrose’s daughter, or that the second “Eunice” is really a prostitute named Anne Seaway, or that Manston is Aldclyffe’s bastard son does very little to settle any one’s desire; the economy of “the name” in *Desperate Remedies* actually works to redouble desires by facilitating frustrations and

identifications that set the plot back into compulsive motion. The novel's various duplicates, replacements, adaptations, and other forms of repetition do not "bind" its energies, as Brooks maintains of narrative repetition, but serve only to expand characters' voracious, migratory, and thoroughly narratable desires.

However, in keeping with the Gothic status quo, *Desperate Remedies*' treats same-sex erotics structure as fundamentally structuring a social sphere that nominally hinges upon heterosexual marriage plots. Although Sedgwick's chief examples of this function in *Between Men* concern the male homosocial and homosexual, *Desperate Remedies* offers a narrative terrain in which female desire radically structures and renegotiates kinship structures, as well as the transfer of wealth. Thus for all of her time in the background in the third act, Aldclyffe's marital plotting works towards the establishment of what Catherine Neale calls a distinctly "matrilineal culture" in which she bequeaths the money she inherited from her mother not on to her illegitimate son, Manston, but to his wife, "thereby using the channel of illegitimacy to make Cytherea her heiress" (120-1). Insofar as Aldclyffe hopes to benefit herself by benefitting her double, though, her act of feminist-inflected largesse cannot be disentangled from more narcissistic pleasures. Because the means of identification in *Desperate Remedies* play out through melancholic incorporation, easy distinctions between manipulation, sympathy, homoeroticism, and narcissism are bound to collapse.

Within this schema, it is unsurprising that at many points throughout *Desperate Remedies*, Aldclyffe's designs for Cytherea are effectively indistinguishable from her designs on Cytherea. Fittingly, when the two women meet as Cytherea answers an advertisement for a lady's maid, Cytherea's fitness for domestic labor is assessed with very much the same attention to the female body as one might expect from a gentleman selecting a prostitute in a brothel. In

this case, however, the attraction is very much mutual, as the narrator notes that “Both the women showed off themselves to advantage as they walked forward in the orange light; and each showed too in her face that she had been struck with her companion's appearance” (54). While Aldclyffe notices in “Cytherea’s face a voluptuousness which youth and a simple life had not yet allowed to express itself there ordinarily,” Cytherea is equally inquisitive, finding “in the elder lady's face... the customary expression, which might have been called sternness, if not harshness, to grandeur, and warmed her decaying complexion with much of the youthful richness it plainly had once possessed” (54). The narrator’s deft focalization of both women’s responses highlights not only the mutuality of their regard, but also their nearing likeness; Cytherea appears older while Aldclyffe seems younger. Thus, the mirroring of the gaze recalls the self-regard of the ego as it contemplates its incorporated object in Freud’s account of melancholia.

Robert Dingley maintains that scenes of intimacy between Cytherea and Aldclyffe are less notable for their same-sex eroticism than for the manner in which they toe the dividing line of appropriate intimacy between women *of* different classes who were nevertheless idealized as comprising a singular, intimate family unit. While the desire for domestic familiarity might reflect one aspect of Aldclyffe’s plotting to form a cohesive family composed of herself, her bastard son, and Cytherea, this over-simplifies the complicated series of symbolic positions which Cytherea occupies for Aldclyffe. Indeed, Cytherea’s first night of employment at Knapwater House is filled with a sense of nervousness less akin to that of a new employee, and more similar to a bride’s wedding jitters. Tending to her new mistress’ dressing and undressing in what reads like a striptease, the narrator focalizes Cytherea’s worries in a way as reminiscent of sexual as professional competence, noting tenuously that “If she [Cytherea] could get through this first evening, all would be right.” But for all of her trepidation, Cytherea is a quick study.

Soon, she finds herself enjoying the sight of her employer's body bathed in sumptuous lighting, noticing that "her neck was again quite open and uncovered," revealing a "fair white surface, and the inimitable combination of curves between throat and bosom which artists adore, being brightly lit up by the light burning on either side" (70). Growing impatient with Cytherea (as she has with all of her previous, ill-treated maids), Aldclyffe chides herself for her shallowness, growling openly, "The idea of my taking a girl without asking her more than three questions, or having a single reference, all because of her good l—, the shape of her face and body!" (73). In a fashion that speaks volumes about the novel's half-hearted attempts to cover its tracks, Aldclyffe's stuttering here doesn't actually do much to obscure the attraction upon which her choice of maid has been made.

It is worth lingering over *Desperate Remedies*' "notorious bedroom scene," in which Aldclyffe, lonely and regretful after chiding Cytherea, comes to her room and begs, "Let me come in, darling" with all the bereft longing of Cathy's ghost in *Wuthering Heights* (Roberts 51, *DR* 79). Recent critics have made much of the scene as an index for the illegibility of mid-Victorian lesbianism, relative to the public scandals of male homosexuals. So, while Hardy's inclusion of scenes of desire and intimacy between women in *Desperate Remedies* caused a minor scandal<sup>4</sup>, some revisions, and one or two awkwardly ineffective clarifications in foot notes, A. Aziz Bulaila contends that "the book was not attacked, perhaps because the law, which punished male homosexuality with imprisonment as in the case of Oscar Wilde, did not recognize that such a sexual act could happen between women" (68). Indeed, given the baldfacedness of Aldclyffe's physical attraction to her maid—Aldclyffe insists that the two

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<sup>4</sup> Roberts notes that John Morley pointed to the "highly-extravagant" scenes between Aldclyffe and Cytherea as one reason that MacMillan should have "nothing to do with the novel." See Roberts, Patrick. "Patterns Of Relationship In *Desperate Remedies*." *The Thomas Hardy Journal* 8.2 (1992): 50-57.

women lay in bed together, and then demands Cytherea kiss her—the sequence hardly registers as “subtext” so much as flamingly gay. And yet, the sequence is so over-determined by Aldclyffe’s melancholia that its potential lesbianism is far less interesting than the specific way its tethers homoeroticism to issues of narcissism, identification, and sadomasochism. In keeping with the archive of mid- to late-Victorian writing by men on same-sex attraction between women (Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*, at once conceived as *The Lesbians*, is perhaps the most famous example), lesbianism is inconceivable as a positive attraction unto itself. Instead, after the fashion of the melancholic object, it serves as a convenient, if ambivalent reference point for *other* desires. Neale concurs, insisting that homosexual attachment becomes a tell-tale shorthand for “symbolic narcissism” such that the two women “become one composite character of woman in relation to [Ambrose Graye]: lover, wife, mother and daughter” (120-1)<sup>5</sup>. To wit, Aldclyffe figures the “sameness” of homosexual attraction as indistinguishable from the “oneness” of onanism, which is also here the solidarity of the melancholic object conflated with the ego. “I can't help loving you,” Aldclyffe insists, “your name is the same as mine—isn't it strange?” (79).

The narrator attempts to facilitate the greatest degree of sympathy possible between Aldclyffe and Cytherea by collapsing any distinctions between them. When Cytherea admits Aldclyffe into her room, the narrator notes that the show of empathy marks a breakdown of distinctions. “It was now mistress and maid no longer; woman and woman only,” he notes (79).

But for all of the flexibility of the women’s roles, problems arise nonetheless insofar as *any*

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<sup>5</sup> Bulaila, meanwhile, is content to place Cytherea and Aldclyffe’s bedroom visit comfortably and simply underneath the sign of “homosexual,” and contrasts the relationship between the two women against their mutual subjugation to the novel’s male characters, noting that “As in any homosexual scene, the two partners are apt to be equals not because they are of the same sex but because they tend to have the same rights” (67). In an opposite vein, Faderman dismisses any notion that the scene might be read as “lesbian” given that the term itself would not be coined until well after the publication of the novel, and therefore she argues that the novel can only be read under the “romantic friendship” paradigm, “in which a specifically sexual element is not generally recognised and in which physical consummation should not be assumed” (Dingley 104). Dingley, as mentioned above, emphasizes the extent to which same-sex attraction in the novel serves largely as an index for middle-Victorian anxieties about cross-class intercourse.

configuration of the two women seems to deny them equal footing. Indeed, in navigating their newfound intimacy, Aldclyffe immediately makes a show of friendship by asking Cytherea to “remember that you are mistress in this room, and that I have no business here, and that you may send me away if you choose” (79). This offer is disingenuous; even as Cytherea apparently tortures Aldclyffe into a fit of jealousy, she only does so in response to Aldclyffe’s questions, which she cannot effectively refuse to answer. As in Deleuze’s formulation of masochism in *Coldness and Cruelty*, there is effectively no sadism in the masochistic relation; instead, the former’s sadism is merely a form of masochism accomplished through identification with the latter. Thus, even in Aldclyffe’s utter dependence upon Cytherea, nothing has *really* changed in the power dynamic between the two; Cytherea’s habit for selflessness has merely found a painful outlet in an effort to please a masochistic master.

Sharon Marcus has contended that such controlling relations between older and younger women in Victorian fiction “simply intensified the normal dynamics of the Victorian mother-daughter relationship represented in fashion magazines and doll stories: the maternal determination to make a daughter an irresistible marriage prospect, or the appeal of turning a young girl into a pretty poppet to be adorned and adored” (*Between Women* 170). But where Marcus calls Miss Havisham’s project in *Great Expectations* an effort to render Estella into “doll, trained to toy with men” whose “inanimate state makes her susceptible to multiple personifications,” the dynamic in *Desperate Remedies* fails to instrumentalize, and so make a thing out of, Cytherea (*BW* 175). Unlike Havisham’s more brazenly sadistic efforts to turn Estella into an automaton that breaks men’s hearts, Aldclyffe’s none the less narcissistic desire is to position Cytherea to marry her bastard son in order to mend her own by bringing together the Graye and Aldclyffe families by proxy. It seems, then, that the desiring ends of the plot of

melancholic heartbreak rest in reparation, a form of “fixing” heartbreak which would work through the “ambivalence” of the melancholic object and thus “win it” over to the side of love despite its disappointments. In other words, at the level of the text, the novel’s intergenerational structure aligns family unity with a form of felicitous melancholic incorporation.

But such incorporation is not, as Freud would have it, without struggles. True to form, Cytherea’s story is one which must wrestle with its uncanny iterations because of, and not despite, their perceived similarities. On one the one hand, Cytherea self-consciously ponders “the strange likeness which Miss Aldclyffe’s bereavement bore to her own; it had the appearance of being still another call to her not to forsake this woman so linked to her life, for the sake of any trivial vexation” (111). Indeed, such a degree of sympathy seems a promising alternative to the messiness of a marriage market that, by all appearances, will indeed break Cytherea the younger as assuredly as it did Cytherea the elder. It is not for nothing that Aldclyffe promises, and so it is not for nothing that Aldclyffe promises, “I love you more sincerely than any man can” (82). On the other hand, though, the “mysterious cloud hanging over the past life of her companion” renders their association suspect, and so Cytherea’s knowledge of Aldclyffe’s past “nourished in her a feeling which was scarcely too slight to be called dread” (110). While Aldclyffe notes that she Cytherea “get more and more into one groove,” Cytherea’s desires—however flighty—are at least as insistent as those of her namesake, and so she is ultimately intractable.

In contrast to my reading of homoeroticism in *Desperate Remedies* as a form of narrative melancholia whereby the marriage plot wrestles with the realities of its own disappointments, Bulaila is content to place Cytherea and Aldclyffe’s bedroom visit comfortably and simply underneath the sign of “homosexual,” and contrasts the relationship between the two women against their mutual subjugation to the novel’s male characters, noting that “As in any

homosexual scene, the two partners are apt to be equals not because they are of the same sex but because they tend to have the same rights” (67). In an opposite vein, Faderman dismisses any notion that the scene might be read as “lesbian” given that the term itself would not be coined until well after the publication of the novel, and therefore she argues that the novel can only be read under the “romantic friendship” paradigm, “in which a specifically sexual element is not generally recognised and in which physical consummation should not be assumed” (Dingley 104). Dingley, as mentioned above, emphasizes the extent to which same-sex attraction in the novel serves largely as an index for middle-Victorian anxieties about cross-class intercourse.

In *Desperate Remedies*’ critical reception we thus see a microcosm of debates about historiography, eroticism, and legibility that have engaged scholars of sexuality studies for the past thirty years. For my own part, rather than seeking to “pin down” the relation between the two Cythereae under one name, what seems *most* crucial about their engagement is precisely the permutations and role reversals it undergoes over a remarkably short span of narrative time. For all of the directness of Aldclyffe’s familial plotting, her projection of her own desires onto Cytherea, and Cytherea’s ambivalent relation to those desires, is no straight-forward affair. Recognition and misrecognition facilitate relations between the two that are simultaneously those of employer and subordinate, mother and daughter, masochistic top and bottom, and lover and beloved, with each woman constantly switching her role within a given dyad. Any effort to collapse these various roles, and so settle the relationship under a singular sign, ultimately misses the point. *Desperate Remedies*’ melancholic identifications remain shifty and fleeting despite efforts to the contrary, and thus the novel requires a critical gaze which is as committed to multi-valence as are its characters.

This flexibility of identification is also, however, one of the central threats posed by the ambivalence of heartbreak. Not only does melancholic heartbreak render our antagonists into those with whom we should share the greatest capacity for sympathy, it raises the very real possibility that we will in fact become so identified with others—and the desires of others, by extension—that we become outright indistinguishable from them. For Roof, the central issue with Freud’s take on identification via melancholic incorporation is that it collapses difference into sameness. With a distinctly pessimistic air, Roof dismisses the potential of melancholic identification to preserve the difference of the lost other, calling it “a regression because it is narcissistic, a politics of same in retreat from the more productive politics of difference represented by object cathexis’s conjoinder of self and other” (165). Roof maintains that the lost other is ultimately irrelevant to melancholia; any particulars which might have distinguished the melancholic subject from that other are ultimately negligible, and the identification formed as a result of loss was really only a re-doubling of pre-existing, narcissistic investments. The love which “escaped extinction” was really only self-love, for Roof, and thus melancholic incorporation comes to resemble a sort of masturbation. Whereas desire, characterized by Roof as the formation of object-cathexes, extends the subject towards the diverse social network of difference, melancholic identification is only ever assimilative, rendering difference into sameness, other into self.

But Roof’s conclusions about “Mourning and Melancholia” raise several objections. Certainly her concerns reflect queer theory’s more general suspicions about identity, and her self-assured faith in the radical potential of erotic anti-citizenship speaks to particular branches of queer critique. However, Roof too quickly assumes that the reproductive ends of identification are a settled matter. What of the identifications *after* melancholic incorporation that are only

possible *because* of it? Rather than ending only in homogenization and assimilation, couldn't identificatory "sameness" be the means through which sympathy finds its footing among otherwise radically disparate subjects? Given the ambivalence of the object's repetition at the site of the ego, is the identification with that object ultimately a "copy," and therefore reducible to "sameness," or is it something else entirely? Moreover, wouldn't a "copy" inevitably be *different* from the lost object insofar as it is *not* in fact the object itself? For Roof's model to hold, the work of mourning must *come to an end*. But what if that ending never comes?

In *Desperate Remedies*, melancholia never fully finishes the work of mourning a broken heart. Instead, it sets off a series of operations which in turn trigger a *new* set of possibilities for relationality. In this way, *Desperate Remedies* suggests that melancholia can serve as the impetus not for not just one repetition—the incorporation of the melancholic object—but rather for an iterative series. In the process, heartbreak becomes a communal affair. The novel's many repetitions, doubles, and over-determined identifications thus present another problem implied by the plot of melancholic heartbreak. Throughout the novel, various repeated scenes threaten to rob any moment of its particular emotional impression by virtue of its serial similarity. This is equally true of genuinely awful experiences—the death of Aldclyffe's father forces Cytherea to recall the death of her mother—as it is of pleasurable sensations. Indeed, what seems most to characterize Springrove's "impressionable heart," even in its most lyrical expression, is not its singularity, but that it yearns for "echoes of himself" rather than novel impressions of his beloved (173). These "echoes" are apparently indiscriminate and polymorphously perverse; "sometimes they were men, sometimes women," the narrator continues. Edward desires not only narcissistically, but also in pluralities. In this regard, Cytherea seems less like an idealized,

singular match for him, and much more like one in a long line of loves (just as she is one in a long line of wives for Manston).

In light of the novel's emphasis on iterative and imitative desire, Cytherea's early naïveté is never more glaring than in her conviction that her love for Springrove is something new. On the one hand, the narrator notes that both Cytherea and her brother "possess the charming faculty of drawing new sensations from an old experience" (21). Although loving Springrove would seem like a fresher alternative than pining for Manston—which structurally repeats her father's affections for Aldclyffe, albeit with a gender inversion—the novel continuously emphasizes that Cytherea's desires for Edward take shape primarily through a description of him offered by her brother Owen, who serves as a clerk alongside Springrove. Cytherea "transfers" her affections to Springrove only when she realizes Owen's employer, Gadfield, is unsuitable for her (23). It is thus with no small amount of irony that the narrator comments that a "responsive love for Edward Springrove had made its appearance in Cytherea's bosom with all the fascinating attributes of a first experience, not succeeding to or displacing other emotions, as in older hearts, but taking up entirely new ground; as when gazing just after sunset at the pale blue sky we see a star come into existence where nothing was before" (34). Even as the narrator emphasizes the newness of this "first experience," the succeeding simile—"as when gazing just after sunset"—makes clear that this experience is figuratively similar to another. And, as we discover with Cytherea, this is hardly Edward's first stroll down lover's lane.

Aldclyffe is well aware that desires are almost always felt through one another. At her most sadistic, then, she harshly warns Cytherea harshly that "women are all alike" and challenges her to "Find a girl, if you can, whose mouth and ears have not been made a regular highway of by some man or another!" (82-3). Cytherea—who is an obedient, monogamous

narrative subject in the Brooksonian vein, by contrast—excuses her affections for Edward as a form of compulsion and compulsion of form: “I must love him now I have begun” (82). A singular lover Aldclyffe can only find disgust in desires that mourn the loss of a beloved and then move on. Thus, she offers that there *is* no new desire to be found anywhere, only a “staleness” of repetition which leaves every love “but the hulk of an old wrecked affection, fitted with new sails and re-used” (83). While Aldclyffe’s chiding is harsh, the real cruelty of the situation is that she is hardly wrong in remarking “he has had loves before you, trust him for that, whoever he is, and you are but a temporary link in a long chain of others like you” (84). Indeed, even Edward’s introduction seems to mark the seriality of his attraction to Cytherea, “his glance sometimes seeming to state, ‘I have already thought out the issue of such conditions as these we are experiencing’” (31). “At other times,” The narrator continues “he wore an abstracted look: I seem to have lived through this moment before.”

Cytherea develops over the course of the novel by learning to recognize when and how repetitions occur. In so doing, she shifts from possessing what we might call a “novelizing imagination” to being a critical reader of both texts and the world around her. Cytherea’s brand of “novelizing” consists in her ability to intuit and develop stories about the lives of others, often with an uncanny accuracy. The flirtation between Cytherea and Edward is well underway before they even meet because of Cytherea’s ability to limn a more-or-less accurate depiction of him solely based on details she gleans from her brother’s remembrance of his workday. Accordingly, Springrove’s appearance seems very much like an instance of wish fulfillment: having imagined the perfect lover to rescue her from the doldrums of idleness at home, Springrove is exactly the escapist venture Cytherea needs in order for her plot to finally find its footing. Similarly, while Aldclyffe is at a loss to intuit Cytherea’s parentage despite the intensity of her obsession with

Ambrose, Cytherea accurately constructs a sentimental simulacrum of Aldclyffe's back-story based on her recollection of father's regret. Springrove's corollary ability to imagine an ideal love as one in which the "true lover breathlessly finds himself engaged to a sweetheart, like a man who has caught something in the dark" might be one of the novel's few hints that, difficulties and convolutions aside, he is a fitting match for her (26).

At first, the narrator attributes Cytherea's power to her sex, noting that "Young women have a habit, not noticeable in men, of putting on at a moment's notice the drama of whosoever's life they choose" (23). In effect, this faculty is explained as unexceptional; it is a human ability more generally conceived, but fostered under contingent circumstances. "As is well known," the narrator explains, "ideas are so elastic in a human brain, that they have no constant measure which may be called their actual bulk" (24). "Any important idea," he continues, "may be compressed to a molecule by an unwonted crowding of others; and any small idea will expand to whatever length and breadth of vacuum the mind may be able to make over to it. Cytherea's world was tolerably vacant at this time, and the young architectural designer's [Edward's] image became very pervasive." The narrator implies that the strength of a fictive imagination is directly tied to the experience of loneliness or idleness, and that fictitious daydreams are not "new" so much as they are distortions and adaptations, extravagant embellishments of things as they already were (if only slightly). Given such a model for fiction, it is hardly surprising that Cytherea and Aldclyffe motivate much of the novel's plot. While Owen fails at his career as an architect due to his inability to do anything but repeat existing designs by tracing them, Cytherea's novelizing imagination allows her to build desiring castles in the sky by adapting the details she gleans about the world and people around her.

True to form, Aldclyffe's fictionalizing is less a form of adaptation than it is a matter of melancholic remodeling figured through the renovation of an old, crumbling manor house on her estate. Ostensibly the building project functions as a convenient excuse for Aldclyffe to bring her estranged son, Manston, to Knapwater House as a steward. More than this, though, the manor house serves as an apt metaphor for Aldclyffe and her broken heart. Knapwater House itself embraces the grand nostalgia of the neoclassical, and this aligns the abode with Aldclyffe's own facial features, characterized by "clear steady eyes, a Roman nose in its purest form, and also the round prominent chin with which the Caesars are represented in ancient marbles" (54). The old manor house, by contrast, is little more than ruins, a crumbling "Elizabethan fragment" of "ragged lines" consisting of an "ancient" tower and "three gables" with a "cross roof behind" (99). As a metaphor for Aldclyffe's heart, the manor house thus represents a hodgepodge of anachronisms. In enlisting a steward to assess the manor house's "fitness for adaptation to modern requirements," Aldclyffe's project entails a version of what Elizabeth Freeman has called "queer drag," a "usefully distorting pull backward, and a necessary pressure on the present tense" (*DR* 99, *Time Binds* 64). In this same cross-temporal mode, Aldclyffe renders Cytherea's story into an allegory of her *own* disappointed love, and so she "push[es] [her] rather solipsistic incorporation back outward in order to remake the world in a mock-imperialist gesture" (Freeman 70). On both counts, what seems like a "renovation" is in fact retrogression to an older tale. In this regard, then, Cytherea and Aldclyffe's projects aren't entirely dissimilar: both make use of existing components in order to constitute their desires as imaginative or literal visions.

Cytherea finds the most apt application for her fictionalization in the novel's final act as she discerns fact from artful fiction. Working with Owen and Edward to uncover evidence that might explain Eunice's bizarre reappearance, Cytherea's attention to descriptive detail—

formerly aligned with her ability to form adaptations and likenesses—becomes the key to unraveling the novel’s persisting mysteries. Examining a poem that Manston has written for Eunice, Cytherea notices a discrepancy between the “Eunice” she has met, who has black eyes, and the Eunice described poetically by Manston as having “azure eyes” (309). This disparity allows the group to discover that the returned “Eunice” is in fact Anne Seaway, one in a long line of prostitutes whom Manston has taken as lovers alongside his marriages. Counter to Aldclyffe’s constant efforts to make two plots into one—and so collapse circumstances that are, after all, dramatically different—Cytherea’s skill consists in highlighting, rather than glossing over, the differences between repetitions.

Perhaps the only sense of genuine novelty in *Desperate Remedies* occurs through Cytherea’s physical maneuvers, which continually move the plot forward even as they allow Cytherea deftly to avoid merely falling into line with the stories of heartbreak presented to her by Aldclyffe. In meeting Aldclyffe for employment, Cytherea is initially dismissed, only to be saved by one of her chance movements, “one of her masterpieces,” which has “as much beauty as was compatible with precision, and as little coquettishness as was compatible with beauty” (56). This striking ability to move gracefully strikes Aldclyffe as a valuable asset for a maid, especially given her dismissed former maids’ string of clumsy mishaps. Motion marks the difference that sets Cytherea apart from other women in her similarly desperate financial circumstances. “Indeed,” the narrator notes, “motion was [Cytherea’s] specialty, whether shown on its most extended scale of bodily progression, or minutely, as in the uplifting of her eyelids, the bending of her fingers, the pouting of her lip” (11). The narrator takes special care to emphasize that this gift for gracefulness “had never been taught [to Cytherea] by rule, nor even been acquired by

observation, but ... had naturally developed itself with her years,” and in this way it serves as one of the only genuinely “new” variations in a novel otherwise obsessed with iterations (12).

Accordingly, the sequences in which Cytherea feels most ambivalent about a situation are those in which she is rendered motionless. Considering a marriage of convenience to Manston that rests entirely on her active consent, Cytherea is ironically immobile. “The stillness oppressed and reduced her to mere passivity,” the narrator notes (216). “The only wish the humidity of the place left in her was to stand motionless. The helpless flatness of the landscape gave her, as it gives all such temperaments, a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single entity under the sky.” But as one of the major variations in a text otherwise saturated by sameness, Cytherea’s adeptness continually works to her benefit. During her final confrontation with Manston, in which the murderer continually circles his bride around a table, Cytherea’s adroitness saves her life. “Round this table she flew,” the narrator describes, “keeping it between herself and Manston, her large eyes wide open with terror, their dilated pupils constantly fixed upon Manston's, to read by his expression whether his next intention was to dart to the right or the left” (358-9). “Never before had the poor child's natural agility served her in such good stead as now,” he commentates (359). Confronted with a textual landscape rife with ambivalent erotics, Cytherea’s motions grant her the ability to wrestle with ambivalence by taking action. In this way, she starkly disidentifies with her namesake, and maneuvers away from the track she might otherwise retread, step by heartbroken step.

Crucially, though, Cytherea’s happy ending does not “escape” the plot of melancholic heartbreak. Instead, Cytherea’s *near*-repetition of Aldclyffe’s story leaves readers with a narrative assemblage—*not* completion—that is tentative, fractured, and contingent. In some senses, the difficulty in getting *Desperate Remedies*’ broken narrative heart back together again

hinges on the very nature of repetition. As J. Hillis Miller has argued in *Fiction and Repetition*, while there are various forms of repetition, they are all more or less reducible to two interdependent modes. The first, “normative” mode of repetition is “grounded in a solid archetypal model which is untouched by the effects of repetition” and thus conforms to the notion that a repetition is a miming of a “real” object whose integrity and primacy as such is never rendered suspect (*Fiction and Repetition* 6). In this mode, the correspondence between the “real” object and its repetition is “logical” insofar as it relies upon “daylight,” “mimetic” notions of similarity founded upon “pre-established similitude or identity” (5-6, 9). Miller’s second form of repetition is an “involuntary form of memory” based primarily on the distortional logic of the dream work whereby “one thing is experienced as repeating something which is quite different from it and which it strangely resembles” (8) This form of repetition “defines the world of simulacra,” producing meaning only in the difference “echoing” between the object and that which comes to represent it (6, 9). Miller maintains that these forms of repetition are not opposite so much as interdependent. The two modes of repetition thus exist in “strange relation whereby the second is the subversive ghost of the first, always already present within it as a possibility which hollows it out” (9). Freud’s “shadow of the object,” set up as an uncanny double in the process of melancholic incorporation, is intriguing in that it seems to embody *both* forms of repetition simultaneously. On the one hand, the “shadow” set up alongside the ego corresponds more or less with the “real” object that has been lost insofar as the loss of that object, in whatever capacity, is precisely what prompts the melancholic subject to set up its proxy. On the other, the lost object is taken up only because it serves as a convenient, if contingent index for other ideals.

In *Desperate Remedies*, the melancholic incorporation of Aldclyffe’s story into the “main” narrative of Cytherea Graye establishes exactly this form of tension in resemblance. The

repetition of one story in the other—and the destabilization of plot “primacy” accomplished by that repetition—at once opens up possibilities for radical identification between and among characters (principally Aldclyffe and Cytherea), but it also highlights the differences which persist and distort in rendering the two alike. As with geometric transformations, the various forms of repetition in *Desperate Remedies* imply a variety of correspondences between and among characters, plotlines, and erotic attachments. Thus, the novel’s interest in compulsion is hardly reducible to narcissism. To the contrary, repetition in *Desperate Remedies* is a matter of establishing and maintaining difference, rather than simply collapsing it. *Desperate Remedies*’ heartbroken plotting thus hinges on repetition *with a difference*. The melancholic mode of narrative repetition, then, is not about putting the pieces of a broken past back together again so much as it is a matter of crafting something new from pre-existing fragments that can only ever remain as such. Like Plath’s “Colossus,” the bricolage work of narrative reparation is an active process that can never get any heartbroken story “put together entirely, / Pieced, glued, and properly jointed” (1-2).

Even in offering up what seems very much like the traditional, “romantic” ending, *Desperate Remedies* resists giving over the simple form of reproductive, closed narratives characterized by Miller, Brooks, and Roof. While Cytherea and Springrove do indeed marry at the novel’s end, and Aldclyffe effectively dies of a broken heart at the loss of Manston, who is executed for his crimes, the novel’s insistence upon repetition in the aftermath of heartbreak renders any sense of closure suspect, and marks the desire for easy endings as smugly quaint at best and deadly naïve at worst. What matters most, then, is that the heartbroken plotting of the novel insists upon the inextricability of one plot from the other; we can understand Cytherea’s “successful” marriage only in relation to Aldclyffe’s heartbreak, and vice versa. By closing with

a near-perfect reenactment of the lovers' first romantic row on a lake together, the novel offers Cytherea and Edward's romantic union only the most uncomfortable sense of closure. In the context of such a plot, who is to say that heartbroken history won't repeat?

## CHAPTER 5

# LOSERS' HISTORY

## DARWIN, DINOSAURS, AND THE EROTICS OF EXTINCTION

In an 1862 letter to the American botanist Asa Gray, Charles Darwin remarked, “Children are one’s greatest happiness, but often and often a still greater misery” (*More Letters* 202). “A man of science ought to have none,” Darwin advised his friend, “perhaps not a wife; for then there would be nothing in this wide world worth caring for and a man might (whether he could is another question) work away like a Trojan.” Darwin’s sentiment posits a few well-worn binarisms: science versus romance, head versus heart, detached austerity versus intimate attachment, man versus woman, study versus experience, and workaday public versus private home life. Indeed, Darwin’s caution against marriage with children is almost so overstuffed with stereotypes of scientists and scientism that, despite its marked dissonance with the Victorians’ noted enshrinement of domesticity, one could be forgiven for reading it as utterly banal. In Darwin’s reckoning, the ideal man of science is one without “care”; his work is not a labor of love so much as a self-abnegating war against the unknown. But from a queer vantage point, Darwin’s invocation of Greek warriors as bastions of abstemiousness is deeply ironic if accounts in Plato’s *Symposium* (and contemporary historical accounts<sup>1</sup>) are to be believed. It is as though at the very moment that Darwin thinks he has found the secret to abdicating the messiness of fatherhood for the pristinely solitary life of the mind, his appeal to simile unwittingly opens a trapdoor that plops him not only into the depths of an equally charged homosocial milieu, but also the murky figurations of the historical record.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, John Addington Symonds’ “A Problem in Greek Ethics,” discussed below.

Moreover, in the context of Darwin's more famous writing, such an anti-familial bent is nearly heretical. While *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) offer a great deal of nuance in treating the polymorphous perversity of the animal kingdom's sexual proclivities—hermaphroditism, polygamy, and interspecies adoption all feature prominently in Darwin's bestiary—the dictum of Darwinian thought is nevertheless unequivocal with regards to the necessary ends of such diverse means. Reproduction is the very literal be-all and end-all of Darwin's theory of natural selection. Those individuals of a species who do not produce offspring make no contribution to shaping their species' future. Regardless of one's individual suitability for survival within a given environment, if one does not have children, then such adaptation is little more than a dead end. In the impossibly large scale of geological history, non-reproductive individuals essentially fall out of the proverbial Tree of Life as little more than broken-off branches that have never borne fruit. Obviously, on the human scale of things there are other ways to influence the future—writing some of the most culturally pervasive scientific treatises of the nineteenth century, for example—and in this light Darwin's man of science is not stoically anti-creative so much as a creature of sublimation. But on the evolutionary scale of achievement, human knowledge is a poor substitute for babies; a presentist minor victory in the context of a much longer game. For all its secularizing force, then, *The Origin of Species* repeats an old injunction: be fruitful and multiply.

Accordingly, Darwin's advice to Gray figures seemingly exclusive measures of human productivity as standing for dramatically different conceptions of value and history. In the process, it brings home what should be most unwieldy about Darwinian thought; the evolutionary time scale that stretches both backwards and forwards across what Martin J.S. Rudwick calls “deep time” becomes a matter of domestic import. Children figuratively supply

not only a link between present and future in Darwinian thought, but also between the increasingly cagey bourgeois family and the grand récit of life on earth. Conversely, the coarse materialism of the empirical sciences becomes at once highly desirable—and so, inaccessible—and incredibly abstract. The work of a single lifetime becomes the stuff of a father's idle daydreams before receding into epistemological opacity. Darwin's remark thus registers his profound ambivalence about the very human stakes of his decidedly post-human project. Evolutionary futurity is suddenly a matter of everyday familial praxis, and in this way Darwin (perhaps unwittingly) grants Victorian domestic ideals the stamp of scientific authority. At the same time, though, Darwin implicitly refuses to reject the scale of individual human achievement as a temporary, anthropocentric stopgap.

That Darwin did not follow his own advice and fathered a total of ten children, seven of whom lived to adulthood, is ultimately beside the point. In this one exchange—however glib, peripheral, and counter-intuitive it might seem—Darwin registers just a few of the contradictions and tensions concomitant with the rise of evolutionary theory. In particular, he glances toward the deeply felt stakes of the dawning realization that all that survives in the world, and all that we might know about it, is “absolutely as nothing compared with the incalculable generations which must have passed away” (*Origin* 307). Indeed, for all of his coveting of a scientificity detached from pithily human distractions, Darwin continually evinces awareness that his theories, and especially his considerations of extinction, were intimately unsettling not only to contemporary philosophers and theologians, but also to individuals' conceptions of how their existence matters (or not) in larger frames of reference.

Darwin is thus at pains to reconcile extinction's explanatory value with the disconcerting notion that incalculable, irrevocable losses litter geological history. Previous accounts of earth history—whether the Bible's notion of a Noachian flood that bifurcated all time into flatly post- or antediluvian, or Lyell's notion of cyclical catastrophe—envisioned extinction as a traumatic, annihilative event: the stuff of Turner paintings and Roland Emmerich films. Darwin's version of extinction, on the other hand, is not usually an event so much as an interminable process resulting from competition for resources. "As new species in the course of time are formed through natural selection" he argues, "others will become rarer and rarer, and finally extinct" as "each new variety or species, during the progress of its formation, will generally press hardest on its nearest kindred, and tend to exterminate them" (162). Darwin's model of extinction is understated and quotidian; competition implies precarity, which precedes rarity, and then finally a quiet decline into the obscurity of a geological record that, time and again, Darwin bemoans for its infuriating gaps. Darwinian extinction takes disaster as the melodramatic exception; the rule is loss so unremarkable that it tends towards erasure.

It is thus with a certain hollowness that Darwin assures readers of *The Origin* that a simple mental exercise can offset our ignorance regarding the endless contingencies of environment and adaptation that ultimately determine what survives and what falls to the evolutionary wayside. "Probably in no single instance," he admits, "should we know what to do, so as to succeed" (143). In place of knowledge affirmed by empirical methods, Darwin offers the principles of natural selection as an epistemological consolation prize. "All that we can do," he shrugs, "is to keep steadily in mind that each organic being is striving to increase at a geometrical ratio; that each at some period of its life, during some season of the year, during each generation or at intervals, has to struggle for life, and to suffer great destruction" (143). In

perhaps the least successful effort to assuage readers' anxieties, Darwin offers the kind of empty, probably wrong platitudes that the veterinarian offers as he or she puts down the family pet. "When we reflect on this struggle," he supposes, "we may console ourselves with the full belief, that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply" (143). As far as eulogies go, Darwin's is half-hearted and hardly comforting. Moreover, if we may never know which adaptations best equip evolutionary survivors' sustainability then Darwin's presupposition that "the happy" survive is erroneous and anthropomorphically bizarre. At the very moment that Darwin's natural history is most red in tooth and claw, Darwin assures us that it has been defanged when it is, in fact, only muzzled.

Caught between "one's greatest happiness" and "a still greater misery," Darwin carves out a place for considering the impossible choice between an assured, if minor role in the drama of life on earth, and consigning oneself to ephemerality and then wholesale oblivion. If species death is the foundational loss at the heart of evolutionary theory, then in his consideration of the scientist-bachelor, Darwin suggests a missing link between extinction and more localized, quotidian ways that one passes out of history. The scientist-bachelor—like the child, his mirror image—awkwardly sutures together two orders of history, the human and the inhuman, and in the process Darwin points towards an unlikely, retroactive affinity among everyone and everything that has ever failed to leave issue. In this context, the Trojan indexes a lineage of history's losers; the once-proud now passé; the fierce creatures who have fallen prey to the contingencies of environmental unfitness and archaeological obscurity. As he envies the bachelor's life from the privileged vantage point of the married man, Darwin doubles back not only on his domestic fecundity, but on his professional output as well. Coming down on the side

of history's losers, Darwin disidentifies with his own reproductivity, and sympathizes instead with those whom his own life narratives leave behind.

Given Darwin's faith in "the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy" reproducing against all evolutionary odds, what are we ultimately to make of his imaginative alliance with the bachelor-scientist who, if not "happy," is at least content when alone in his laboratory? What are we to make of evolutionary thought's oddly tenacious emotional valences, both in Darwin's own texts and in the cultural fallout of what we might call, after Derrida, the Darwinian impression? How are losses—of the animal kingdom, of the fossil record—foundational for evolutionary theory's ability to tell a "complete" story of life on earth, even though they serve as missing chapters? My contention is that Darwin's theory of extinction is, for all of its post-human aspirations, deeply indebted to the tropes and narrative logic of the marriage plot, and that evolutionary historiography therefore produces figures of queer loss. Such figures of queer loss mediate between orders of history—the human and the geological—insofar as they necessitate an epistemological erotics that reaches for anachronistic affinities through the work of analogy. In this way, although Darwinian thought insists that heteronormativity's imperative to reproduce is the only story with any future, in order to make such a claim it leans on queer logic in order to make present sense of the past.

In emphasizing the straightness of Darwin's account of evolutionary history, I don't mean to chide him for it. Insofar as *The Origin* and *The Descent* reinscribe the metanarrative of the marriage plot, Darwin strives to maintain thorough digressions into the queerer variations on that narrative, as in the consideration of a female baboon who "had so capacious a heart that she not only adopted young monkeys of other species, but stole young dogs and cats, which she

continually carried about,” even if “her kindness . . . did not go so far as to share her food with her adopted offspring” (*Descent* 90). The question of how evolutionary processes account (or fail to account) for any number of queer remainders is an open one, and certainly there are a number of late-Victorian writers who made efforts to adapt Darwin’s theories in order to consider how any number of sexual novelties, including modern homosexuality, might signify. In this regard, Richard A. Kaye’s assertion that “Historically, those late-Victorian and Edwardian writers who strove to win public acceptance for homosexual eros were reluctant to rely on Darwinian thought” is patently wrong (90). Towards very different ends, Edward Carpenter and John Addington Symonds both took up variations of Darwinian thought as the key to understanding the role of homosexuality either as a social adaptation or a secondary effect of aesthetic development<sup>2</sup>.

In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin seeks to account for a notion of biological agency that was necessarily jettisoned from *The Origin’s* emphasis on impersonal processes of competition and natural selection discrete from the designs of any individual or god. Like any good second volume, *The Descent of Man* does not abolish or contradict the law of natural selection, but rather seeks to fulfill it through an exploration of looming variables. Where Darwin’s model of natural selection “depends on the success of both sexes, at all ages, in relation to the general conditions of life,” Darwin’s new model of sexual selection is at least nominally a matter of subjective practices insofar as it hinges “on the success of certain individuals over others of the same sex, in relation to the propagation of the species” (*Descent* 684). “Success” in the former instance is a matter wholly dependent on contingency; a species’ members are born with

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<sup>2</sup> A thorough discussion of both writers would require much more space than is available in, or pertinent to, the discussion at hand. In future work I would like more fully to consider the irony that both Carpenter and Symonds embraced (albeit somewhat bastardized) versions of post-Darwinian philosophy.

adaptations that render them capable of surviving and reproducing (or not) under a certain environmental aegis, and in abstracted competition with other species. With sexual selection, “success” gets personal as individuals vie with other individuals of the same species and same sex “in order to drive away or kill their rivals,” but also in a more cordial “battle to excite or charm those of the opposite sex, generally females, which no longer remain passive, but select the more agreeable partners” (684).

Throughout, *The Descent* readily makes use of the tropes of the courtship novel and three-volume marriage plot in order to explain sexual selection. Indeed, sexual selection is a distinctly narrative affair, “by no means so simple and short an affair as might be thought.” Like any good marriage plot—particularly in a Dickensian vein—the story of sexual selection ends not with the female’s choice of the best suitor among “the more ornamented males, or those which are the best songsters, or play the best antics,” but continues into the happy event of “rearing offspring,” and the epilogic idyll of a “long course of generations” through which the parents’ suitable adaptations are passed along (249). Darwin continually anthropomorphizes his objects of analysis through the ascription of distinctly human values and emotions, as with the “happy” survivors of natural selection. What results is a pan-species send-up of courtly romance filtered through vaguely Austenian drawing rooms. For Darwin, sexual selection is “an extremely complex affair” played out through “the ardour in love, the courage, and the rivalry of the males,” but ultimately decided by “the powers of perception, the taste, and the will of the female,” at least in the case of non-human animals (276-7). Such aesthetic determinations, Darwin reasons, are in fact the cause of sexual dimorphism itself, and in this way sexual selection becomes the explanation for the very gendering it tends to require as, for example, “female birds, by selecting, during thousands of generations, the most melodious or beautiful

males, according to their standard of beauty, might produce a marked effect” (149). Such a process bears more than passing resemblance to Judith Butler’s “heterosexual matrix”: hence, in Darwin’s model of gender/sexuality vis-à-vis aesthetic dimorphism, we see—at the scale of evolutionary history—a version of KISS’ notion that (a normatively gendered male) I was made for loving you (baby), and (a normatively gender female) you were made for loving me.

As Gillian Beer surmises in her now-classic study *Darwin’s Plots*, Darwin’s willingness to expropriate the terms of the novelistic courtship plot alerts us to a larger pattern of cross pollination between “literary” and “scientific” texts in the nineteenth-century. Indeed, such generic distinctions might be entirely useless in considering nineteenth-century scientific treatises, which arose from a culture of earth-science scholarship conducted by amateur men of letters as well as those who were “professional” academics. As Lawrence Frank argues, nineteenth-century scientific writing was a hodgepodge genre in which men of science also wrote as men of letters, “resorting to allusions to classical literature and to British literature” and “self-consciously [turning] to figurative language, not only to render the difficult intelligible, but to constitute the fields of study that they, along with others, were in the process of creating” (18). Nineteenth-century British scientific writers sought to render accounts of earth’s history that could convincingly displace or co-exist with extant paradigms—especially those supposed by Christian theology—and so they readily appealed to the rhetorical appeal of narrative.

Thus, Beer argues that “Because of the shared discourse not only *ideas* but metaphors, myths, and narrative patterns could move rapidly and freely to and fro between scientists and non-scientists,” and thus Victorian scientific writers “drew openly upon literary, historical and philosophical material” (5). This was especially apropos in the case of Darwin, Beer points out,

insofar as “Evolutionary theory is first a form of imaginative history” which, because “it cannot be experimentally demonstrated sufficiently in any present moment,” “is closer to narrative than to drama” (6). Taking the novelistic marriage plot as a narrative schematic for *The Descent of Man*, Darwin grafted his own story onto one whose tropes, intrigues, and ways of sense-making were already familiar to his readers. As Richard Kaye puts it, “*The Descent of Man* confirmed the prevailing Victorian faith that the ‘courtship plot’ was so universal as to possess a basis in nature” (85). In Kaye’s reckoning, such a model proved even more convincing as the decades of the Victorian era wore on, and the concomitant shift in gender styles and relations seemed only to further confirm the truth of Darwin’s account. “The marriage-postponing New Woman and the self-priming dandy were suddenly united in their shared roles,” Kaye writes, “not so much as denaturalized subjects (for Darwin the scientific empiricist, an impossibility) but as figures who simply took nature’s ‘laws’ to extreme conclusions” (86).

The literary edge of the courtship plot in *The Descent of Man* is especially apparent insofar as it accounts for several of the text’s internal contradictions. As theorized by literary historians, one of the functions of the novel was that it at least appeared to locate agency in an autonomous woman whose voluntary decision to enter into marriage with her suitor-of-choice aligned the rise of the novel with a post-Enlightenment understanding of liberal subjectivity. Courtship novels thus offered what Katherine Sobba Green calls a “revisionist view” in the context of a “feminized genre” wherein “women, no longer merely unwilling victims, became heroines with significant, though modest, prerogatives of choice and action” as part of a “broader social imperative to legitimize women’s self-actualization as affective individuals” (2-3, 14). While such autonomy was conferred with severe limits in the novel—notably the demands upon narrative intelligibility and communal integrity explored in Chapter 2—it was also utterly at odds

with the social mores of the time, to say nothing of the material realities of Democracies that continued to deny women the rights to vote, to own property, or to divorce.

Novelistic female autonomy was equally counter-intuitive for Darwin given his awareness of patriarchal restrictions on female autonomy, to say nothing of some of his more archly regressive views regarding women. As a result, Darwin struggles to square his choosy women with conflicting views of culture, gender, and power in *The Descent*. While he chalks women's "bondage" up to a "savage" state of "exceptional" affairs whereby man's (supposed) greater strength and intellect grants him superiority, he quickly notes that "women are *everywhere* conscious of the value of their own beauty; and when they have the means, they take more delight in decorating themselves with all sorts of ornaments than do men" (665, my emphasis). In his precocious assumption that "in civilized nations women have free or almost free choice, which is not the case with barbarous races," Darwin shows the useful fictions of his novelistic approach to courtship. As if to undercut such assurances, however, with a straight-faced scientism he suggests that "The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shewn by man's attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can woman," and concludes that "if men are capable of a decided pre-eminence over women in many subjects, the average of mental power in man must be above that of woman" (629).

In the context of a presumed female idiocy directing the course of sexual selection, Darwin might very well conclude that the law of sexual selection is, like the marriage of Dickens' Mr. Bumble, "a ass" (*Oliver Twist*). But if human society has confused matters, then it can also clarify them. Thus, Darwin supposes that men's superior intellect is merely another means to reproductive ends, and that all social achievement is therefore nothing more than an

increasingly elaborate form of plumage. Indeed, Darwin's appeal to Schopenhauer confirms as much, positing that "the final aim of all loving intrigues, be they comic or tragic, is really of more importance than all other ends in human life" (qtd. 653). "What it all turns upon," Schopenhauer affirms, "is nothing less than the composition of the next generation ... It is not the weal or woe of any individual, but that of the human race to come, which is here at stake" (qtd. 653). Sexuality is formally elastic in Darwin's account, but its story can (or should) only ever end in one way: babies.

Of course, this still leaves Darwin's bachelor as a loose end. If Bumble's "law is a bachelor," then Darwin's is quite the opposite, and in this light the bachelor becomes a figure not just of loss, but also failure. Although evolutionary theory is not inherently teleological—it deals in contingencies and complexities of adaptation, rather than wholesale advantages and improvements—Darwin surely waxes triumphalist when he invokes the language of defeat in *The Origin*, remarking that "The inhabitants of each successive period in the world's history have beaten their predecessors in the race for life, and are, in so far, higher in the scale of nature" (309). More pointedly and painfully, successful suitors patently "conquer their rivals" in *The Descent*, and because they can mate earlier (and presumably more often), they go on to "leave a greater number of offspring to inherit their superiority than their beaten and less attractive rivals" (249, 247). Such homely losers *may* go on to find their own, presumably dowdier mates, if only "when the sexes exist in exactly equal numbers" and are not polygamous, but even then the outcome is a kind of aesthetic degeneracy where the "worst-endowed males" beget sons who, while perhaps as generally well-adapted as their prettier peers, are nevertheless plain (247). In different ways and at different orders of history, Darwin's menagerie is populated by species and individuals who are essentially born losers.

At the level of geological history, losers also run the risk of getting lost. Darwin's remark that "The whole subject of the extinction of species has been involved in the most gratuitous mystery" is symptomatic of the larger epistemological crisis that deep time poses for the earth sciences (293). Extinction poses a methodological problem for Darwin, the earth sciences, and empiricism as an enterprise insofar as the spurious contingencies of geological preservation "fail" to materialize a fossil record that is complete. Nineteenth-century paleontologists continually puzzled over the question of how to articulate fossils with one another in order to create "complete" reconstructions of extinct animals, as well as the much murkier question of how best to "restore" such animals into illustrations that would depict them as they appeared in life. As Martin Rudwick puts it succinctly, "Any scene from deep time embodies a fundamental problem: it must make visible what is really invisible" (Rudwick 1). Hypothetical thinking led to hopeful anachronisms as paleontologists constructed "monsters" that are now dismissed as embarrassing flights of fancy.

The debate about how best to make sense of fossils, and to create "complete" reconstructions and restorations based on scant material evidence, provides an index for these debates, and underscores the queerly erotic dimensions involved in any effort to envision extinct organisms. In this regard, paleoart—considered both in terms of fossil reconstructions, but also life-restorations in either painting or sculpture—challenges certain notions of historiography. Michel de Certeau has aligned modern historiography with "dogmatism" insofar as it works through an "institution of the real" that transforms "its products into representations of a reality in which everyone must believe" (200). "By demonstrating the presence of errors [and] deporting fiction to the land of the unreal," de Certeau writes, historiography "must pass off as 'real' whatever is placed in opposition to the errors" (201). To the contrary, de Certeau argues that

“fiction, in any of its modalities... is a discourse that ‘informs’ the ‘real’ without pretending either to represent it or to credit itself with the capacity for such a representation” (202-3). Because fiction—which often takes the form of hypothetical or theoretical knowledge in the sciences—is not opposed to historiography, but rather “haunts” it, their “combination is frequently treated as the effect of an archaeology that must be gradually eliminated from any true science” (214). Fiction is thus that which historiography “must keep hidden”; it is “held to be shameful and illegitimate—a disreputable family member that the discipline disavows” (215, 219). Fiction is a queerly uncomfortable remainder; it obstructs teleologies and defies the imperative to produce definite historical knowledge. It is thus unsurprising that de Certeau describes fiction in terms equally applicable to the gay black sheep of the family.

As representations of contingent knowledge, paleontological reconstructions place scientific knowledge and evolutionary historiography in the realm of fiction. In order to make the extinct visible, paleontologists lean on literary logics. Resistant to the empirical verification that would render any representation definitively “real,” paleontological reconstructions depend utterly on the deferral logics of analogy, and an uncanny degree of showmanship. Visual stimuli and rhetoric held a premium for Victorian considerations of the prehistoric world, even if the project of representing prehistory was risky. In this light we can consider the ambivalence at play in the work of Georges Cuvier. In Cuvier’s pioneering work on comparative anatomy, genealogical relations between animals are established by the comparison of analogous parts. Thus, the femur of a prehistoric beast is established to *be* a femur so that it might be articulated with the animal’s other bones in order to form a reconstruction. Ray Lankester—writing over a century later, but using the same methodology—continually describes extinct animals in terms of extant ones; the newly bipedal Iguanodon is “kangaroo-like” and pictured balancing on its tail, as

though rearing back for a punch; the triceratops is “the size of the living rhinoceros”; the dimetrodon is “as big as a large dog” (*Extinct Animals* 207).

For all the justifiability of a restoration given the evidence at hand, its bones are never definitively settled. In place of “realism,” reconstructions and restorations thus offer what W.J.T. Mitchell calls “irrealism,” a continually “emergent consensus” that “has to explain everything,” but can only ever do so through useful, contingent fictions, especially as figured through analogic thinking, which at once calls attention to, and suspends, notions of difference. Analogy makes scientific knowledge “precarious,” in Beer’s reckoning, insofar as analogy entails “predictive metaphor” (174). This representational undecidability made restorations of extinct life outright risky in the first half of the nineteenth-century. As Ralph O’Connor explains, because the foundations of the emerging earth sciences were on shaky footing with Biblical worldviews, many geologists avoided any rhetoric that could be deemed too “fictional” or theoretical. “Typically,” O’Connor notes, “restorations were demarcated from the surrounding prose in style and textual location, so that they would not be received as ‘fact’ on quite the same level as other parts of the text” (236).

Thus, Rudwick remarks that for all Cuvier’s attention to detail, he was reluctant to publish illustrations that inferred the shape of flesh and musculature on his creatures for fear that his “lively” drawings would be deemed too sketchy (34). Even Lankester—writing after the paradigm shifts of Lyell, Huxley, and Darwin—is careful to couch his illustrations of extinct animals as “*probable* appearances in life” (xix, my emphasis). This is an especially vexing diffidence to convention given Lankester’s bravado in proclaiming:

Some people talk about the “fairy tales of science.” There never was a more inappropriate phrase: it is altogether wrong to speak of fairy tales having anything to do with science. The wonderful things which science reveals to us are altogether remote from fairy tales, for in regard to the tales of science you can test what you are told, you can see the things of which I speak, you can ascertain the truth of what is asserted. That is the great pleasure of this study; one knows that the things one examines, however astounding and incredible they seem, really exist, and are not mere imagination or fancy. (*Extinct Animals* 61)

On one side of the nineteenth-century, geologists were cautious to limn any restorations of prehistoric animals for fear that their speculations would give themselves away. At the latter end, Lankester’s disavowal that paleontology might ever trade in “fairy tales” is just as paranoid in its repetitions. Cuvier kept his monsters in the closet; Lankester protests too much.

In the intervening century, images of dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals nevertheless became ubiquitous as part of the Victorian fascination with spectacle and exhibition. Dinosaurs, in particular, went through a dizzying array of transformations over the course of the Victorian era. Some very much resembled the dragons of Lankester’s bemoaned “fairytales,” as in John Martin’s “Land of the Iguanodon,” commissioned for Gideon Mantell’s *Wonders of Geology*. Some were constructed in close parallel to extant creatures, but in the process came to resemble something altogether monstrous, as with Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins’ restorations for the Crystal Palace, assembled under the guidance of Richard Owen. Some are now the object of scientific derision for forwarding alternative theories of physiology, as with Gustav Tornier’s lizard-legged diplodocus, as depicted by Oliver P. Hay. Still others were outright mistakes, as with Edward Drinker Cope’s infamous restoration of elasmosaurus with its head plopped onto its

stubby tail, rather than its gangly neck. Despite the malleability of these forms, however, the category of the dinosaur nevertheless emerged as a distinct cultural icon in the public imagination. It is with no small bit of irony, then, that we might read W.J.T. Mitchell's comment that "No one has ever seen a dinosaur, but everyone knows what they look like" (48). If, as this "paradox" suggests, it takes a dinosaur to know a dinosaur, then a question emerges: If restorations of dinosaurs flaunt the contingency and limits of our knowledge about prehistory, then what—if anything—do we really "know" when we look upon dinosaurs? Why did dinosaurs come out of the archive and into the streets?

In a similar vein, queer historiographers have—since the publication of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*—struggled with the question of how to make present sense of radically different modes of past sexual practice and subjectivity. Glossing this literature, Scott Bravmann has remarked troubling tendencies whereby queer historians either appropriate the past as proof of homosexuality's transhistorical endurance, or posit easy dividing lines between "modern homosexuality" and an amorously "other" pre-modern queerness. Over the past decade, though, a group of scholars including Heather Love, Elizabeth Freeman, and Carolyn Dinshaw, has emphasized that for all its anachronism, much queer historiography emphasizes a mode of engagement with the past that keeps it lively and imminent. Embracing analogy, Dinshaw supposes that "Pleasure can be taken in the assertion of historical difference as well as in the assertion of similarity, and any such pleasure should not be opposed to 'truth'" (35). Rather than finding such historical enquiry lacking, Elizabeth Freeman instead finds it "longing," supporting an "erotics" that "traffics less in belief than in encounter, less in damaged wholes than in intersections of body parts, less in loss than in novel possibility" (13-14). Queer historiography speaks powerfully to paleontology's assemblage of precarious, but intimate knowledge. Indeed,

Freeman's description of the queer historiographer as taking up Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's advocacy for reparative criticism brings to mind the image of the comparative anatomist sifting through a find: "we gather and combine eclectically, dragging a bunch of cultural debris around us and stacking it in idiosyncratic piles 'not necessarily like any preexisting whole,' though composed of what preexists" (13).

In place of definitive knowledge, paleontology embraced (sometimes begrudgingly) retro, Romantic notions of historical knowledge as gained through forms of powerful feeling, such as wonder, amazement, or terror. The development of paleontology thus relied on certain modes of thinking, identifying, *and feeling* across historical relations, and established a set of schema for representing those relationships in visual media. A very different Sedgwick—the geologist Adam Sedgwick—proposed that "the imagination, the feelings, [...] and the highest capacities of our nature" are all that keep geology from becoming "a moral sepulchre" (qtd. O'Connor 186). Against de Certeau's "dogmatic" historiography, Victorian representations of prehistoric beasts offer a mode of queerly knowing natural history through speculative longing for a past that, for all its opacity or "wrongness" of restoration, feels powerfully present. In the Victorian context, knowing the past through imaginative restorations points to the unfinished business of Romantic historiography, complicating not only de Certeau's tidy genealogy of scientific asceticism, but also Elizabeth Freeman's pronouncement that the Victorians "distanced themselves" from such a tradition. Rudwick highlights that Mantell worked with John Martin in order to emphasize the "Romantic" or "Gothick," in the prehistoric, "evidently [believing] this alliance between geology and the Romantic imagination would promote the popularity of the science" as well as "a sense of the otherness of a world without human beings" (95-6). Images of

prehistory occasioned seemingly “retro” modes of historical thinking and feeling. I term these modes of seeing, knowing, and feeling an extinct, distant past “paleo queer.”

Paleo queer images and texts not only imply profound longing for the past, but also offer a form of belonging in the present. In this capacity, I want to risk my own analogy. John Addington Symonds’ *A Problem in Greek Ethics*—published to a much smaller audience three years after Lankester’s *Extinct Animals*—revels in the anachronistic delights of the historical throwback. Throughout, Symonds details the intricacies of Classical same-sex practices, providing a genealogy for the sexual menagerie he terms “Greek love.” Even as he represents the Classical world as undeniably other, though, Symonds stages his project as an implicit justification for greater tolerance of homosexuals in the present. Thus, he regularly superimposes the category of “homosexual” onto his objects of inquiry, drawing analogies between Lucian’s *Dialogues* and the poems of de Maupassant, and concluding that for all the historical variety of same-sex practices, such permutations “only prove the universality of unisexual indulgence in all parts of the world and under all conditions of society” (X). We could certainly charge Symonds with a totalizing nostalgia. And yet, for all the awkwardness of his account, what emerges over the course of *A Problem in Greek Ethics* is a profoundly attentive sense of respect, awe, and hope. Symonds not only wants the past to want him back, he wants a vision of the past that can make the present feel bearable.

Similarly, in turning to a more thorough consideration of extinction in *The Origin*, Darwin does not stake a claim for his argument through an appeal to scientific rigor, but rather to the seriousness of the issue as he has himself *felt it*. As with Waterhouse Hawkins’ restorations of extinct beasts for the Crystal Palace, knowing the past takes place through an experience of

wonder. “No one I think,” Darwin writes, “can have marveled more at the extinction of species, than I have done” (293). For all its opacities, extinction occasions spectacle. Insofar as feeling fails to render definitive evidence, however, it is also an extreme source of consternation for Darwin, who bemoans—in what is clearly disciplinary one-upmanship—that “The noble science of Geology loses glory from the extreme imperfection of the record” (*Origin* 396). Where Darwin’s natural selection embraces contingency as a generative, if unpredictable force, geology’s simply erratic preservation is “an unusual concurrence of circumstances” that leaves troubling “blank intervals” (396). Darwin is left puzzling over a series of agitated questions:

On this doctrine of the extermination of an infinitude of connecting links, between the living and extinct inhabitants of the world, and at each successive period between the extinct and still older species, why is not every geological formation charged with such links? Why does not every collection of fossil remains afford plain evidence of the gradation and mutation of the forms of life? .... Why, again, do whole groups of allied species appear, though certainly they often falsely appear, to have come in suddenly on the several geological stages? (*Origin* 381)

While these issues are those that faced a broad range of scientific enterprises, with Darwin things get personal. “We meet with no such evidence,” he regrets, “and this is the most obvious and forcible of the many objections which may be urged against my theory” (381).

That such objections could only be made in bad faith is beside the point for Darwin; he feels the losses of the geological record as a weakness of his own work. It is unsurprising, then, that Darwin supplants such a lack of evidence with a story that—ideally, at least—can recoup his losses. In yet another reversal of both stance and affect, Darwin assures readers that “extinct

forms of life help to fill up the wide intervals between existing genera, families, and orders,” and thus “whole pages could be filled with striking illustrations from our great paleontologist, Owen, showing how extinct animals fall in between existing groups” (299-300). That such “illustrations” would necessarily be just as sketchily anachronistic as the fossil record is irrelevant for Darwin. Presence, however spectral, magicks away absence—“blank intervals” become “filled” pages—and thus he is able to make a schematic for a narrative that, if perpetually on the losing side, can always be made to work towards completion.

Darwin’s historiographical method is one in which no fragment exists that, however broken off from the Tree of Life, cannot theoretically be grafted back onto it, if only as a phantom limb. In this vein, evolutionary history is both agglutinative and almost limitlessly repairable. However, like the reconstructions and restorations he invokes to conjure away the problem of geological erasure, such peripheral extremities can never comfortably fall into a final resting place of empirical certainty. Having incorporated such losses into his story, however awkwardly they might stick out like sore thumbs, Darwin tells us that “we need not marvel at extinction” after all (295). “If we must marvel,” he proposes, “let it be at our presumption in imagining for a moment that we understand the many complex contingencies, on which the existence of each species depends” (295). For all its substantive insights, then, *The Origin* is also a profound effort to come to terms with the profound necessity of unknowing.

All of this is so well and good so far as natural selection is concerned. In terms of *sexual* selection, however, the transvaluation of losers’ losses is quite another matter. Excepting the case of the vanquished under-performer who finds a mate by sheer dint of a numbers game, Darwin has very little to say about what happens to those males incapable of producing. Still less does he

have to offer regarding those males who wholly abstain from taking part, or those whose proclivities might bend more towards other males, or those females more interested in other females. Darwin's lack of attention to homosexuality is, of course, understandable from a historical perspective: modern homosexuality had not quite yet picked up discursive steam by 1871. That being said, naturalists were certainly aware that non-procreative sex took place between any number of animals, and many were not shy about spreading tales regarding such queer ducks. Hyenas, for example, had been considered notoriously queer animals since at least the middle ages<sup>3</sup>. Darwin's lack of insight into such habits is understandable given that his concerns lie only in forms of sexuality that result in offspring that can inherit adaptations. And yet, given his keen awareness of the many varieties of reproduction, as well as the elastic kinship structures among social animals, Darwin's inattention to asexuality is certainly conspicuous. If Darwin could at least *theoretically* account for lapses in evolutionary history, then surely in *The Descent* he could treat manifest détentes in the course of sexual selection. Instead, bachelors and other queer losers merely slink away from the drama of Darwin's story, languishing in obscurity.

The implication of *The Descent of Man* is that social life, like evolutionary history, ultimately revolves around offspring. Accordingly, men's relations to one another are wholly limited to forms of violent conflict and sexual rivalry, while men's relations with women are reduced to the courtship plot. "Man is the rival of other men; he delights in competition," Darwin states confidently (*Descent* 629). Moreover, man is in fact *made* of homosocial antagonism; the very dimorphic qualities—"the greater size, strength, courage, and pugnacity of the male"—are ultimately "acquired or modified" through sexual selection (618). From such a viewpoint of radical opposition, it becomes very difficult to grapple with a notion of homosociality that is not

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Aesop's *Fables*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*.

always already a sublimation for the kinds of antagonism between males that Darwin finds everywhere in nature. Especially given Darwin's insistence that all human achievement ultimately works towards either natural or sexual selection, any forms of alternate sociability that might be possible are ultimately in service of those ends, as with the various minor characters in a novel who exist as nothing more than part of a social tableau that either supports or productively antagonizes lover and beloved.

Such a singularly-invested social vision did not sit comfortably with the social realities of Victorian England, especially as the decades of the nineteenth century wore on. With the rise of the New Woman, renewed imperial ventures, and political radicalism, the family hearth could not hold as the center of Victorian life. As Christopher Hatten surmises, the final decades of the nineteenth-century saw a rapid devaluation of domesticity in Britain. "The the orthodoxies of middle-class domestic ideology had a less monolithic control over Victorian attitudes and behavior than we might imagine," Hatten argues, noting that "a long-standing tradition of radical dissent vigorously criticized the idealization of the traditional middle-class family" (17). John Tosh concurs, noting that the rise of civic clubs offered a homosocial alternative to home life, and because such organizations were at least nominally "graced with the dignity of public duty," the conflict of virtuous interest was no longer solely won out by domesticity: "neither sphere could be cultivated to the exclusion of the other without reproach" (136). Literature too, Hatten notes, shifted from the 1880's onward, "shifting from domestic themes to the celebrations of the male-dominated world of empire, sailing, and war, largely homosocial worlds that maintained in adult life the bracingly all-male environment of the public school" (30). If Darwin relied on the courtship novel as a ready-at-hand archetype for *The Origin* and *The Descent*, then writers'

adventures in imperial romance suggested alternative perspectives from which to consider the implications of Darwin's evolutionary history.

Published in 1912, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* is something of a generic throwback to the peak of imperial romance, an uncanny anachronism in its own right. Indeed, the novel's dedication—"To the boy who's half a man, / Or the man who's half a boy"—suggests the awkwardness of its fit in terms of both literary history and a heteronormative narrative of development (*The Lost World* 1). Like its intended readership, *The Lost World* is both gangly youth and man-child, at once precocious and perennially lagging behind its peers. It is the kind of book that entertains flights of fancy even though it is well aware it should know better. Thus, even as *The Lost World* repeats many of the tropes of H. Rider Haggard's equally escapist novels *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She* (1887), it only ever does so through the lens of embarrassed nostalgia. Like its more respectably literary kin, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *The Lost World* sounds the call to "Exterminate all the brutes" that populate its imperial excursion, but it does so unevenly, as if with a cracked voice (need page). As with Conrad's novel, however, the spectacle of genocidal violence is its own critique in *The Lost World*. Accordingly, the politics of colonial encounter in the novel never quite fall into lockstep with the civilizing imperatives and racist science that lent bad-faith legitimacy to British imperialism. Instead, *The Lost World*'s intrepid explorers, having tripped and fallen down the evolutionary ladder into a land populated by extinct species, recognize much of themselves in both the saurian and hominid natives. As much as *The Lost World*'s fantasies play out across the generic conceit of imperialist conquest, then, its wish-fulfillments need to be taken seriously in their prehistoric particularity.

As a post-Darwinian novel deeply invested in exploring the human dimensions of evolutionary theory, *The Lost World* dramatizes how extinction's queer losses undergird the love-plot of Darwin's *The Descent of Man*. By adopting a losers' view of geological and social history, *The Lost World* underscores how the erotic dimensions of extinction are integral to late-Victorian and Edwardian understandings of geological history. From such a vantage point, *The Lost World* fantasizes highly eroticized modes of inhabiting, and relating to, the losses of evolutionary history. First, it offers a queerly anachronistic mode of scientific witness whereby the gaps and ellipses of historical remove are "filled in" through living, breathing restorations, offering empirical confirmation of facts unavailable to the geological sciences. Characters' interaction with the past in the present allows them to ensure that Darwin's narrative of human descent plays out as it "should" by setting the evolutionary record straight. At the same time, the titular *Lost World* offers its gentleman-scientist characters—and especially its bachelor narrator—a mode of prehistoric social life to the side of the heteronormative constraints of the metropole. Thus, even as heterosexual desire provides the impetus for the novel's action, the hero's journey leads him away from marriage and on to further explorations of an epistemological frontier that is as endless as it is accessible. Conan Doyle's novel thus works to establish a community of evolutionary losers, whose unlikely, anachronistic forms of relation I have termed paleoqueer. In so doing, *The Lost World* aligns paleontological enquiry with a reparative vision of male homosociality, and offers a queer mode of historiography that feels through and with prehistory as an alternative to Darwinian history's official narrative.

Conan Doyle overtly stages the plot of *The Lost World* as a dramatization of the principles Darwin puts forward in *The Descent of Man*. The intrigue that leads Ned Malone—the novel's bumbling, but muscle-bound narrator—to the far reaches of the fossil record begins in

the uneasiness of a London drawing room. Attempting to propose to his beloved, Gladys Hungerton, Ned is rebuffed not because he is not buff enough (characters continually recognize Ned from his exploits in a local rugby club, and not his bylines as a reporter), but rather because his sportsmanship is all modern bark with no romantic bite. Gladys is a New Woman with atavistic tendencies; utterly aware of her own desires, she nevertheless longs for a lover in retro fashion. Well versed in Darwin's sexual economy, she wants a dashing swashbuckler more than anything. "There are heroisms all round us waiting to be done," Gladys assures Ned; "It's for men to do them, and for women to reserve their love as a reward" (*Lost* 6). Like any connoisseur, Gladys will accept no imitations. "You should do it because you can't help it," Gladys implores, "because it's natural to you---because the man in you is crying out for heroic expression" (6).

Thus, when Ned rebuts that he helped miners trapped by a coal explosion, his gambit is undercut by his admission of professional interest in seeking out "good copy" from the disaster (7). Ned, for his part, begrudges Gladys' directness as "perfectly frank, perfectly kindly, and perfectly asexual," and in its place he longs for "timidity and distrust... [that] heritage from the old wicked days when love and violence went often hand in hand" (4). In a witless battle of the sexes, Gladys and Ned make contrary claims of the heart, all while using the same source text. Gladys appeals to the pre-human forms of sexual selection practiced by preening birds. Ned, on the other hand, looks to Darwin's "barbarous races," who throw such Sadie Hawkins conventions to the wind. Upset that their association has been "spoiled" by an amorous turn, Gladys regrets that "It's all so beautiful and natural until this kind of thing comes in" (5). "I didn't invent it," Ned conciliates. "It's nature. It's love," he argues before gaspingly charging, "Oh Gladys, you were made for love! You must love!" (5). Here, *The Descent of Man* is motivated towards opposing ends. If "nature" is the ne plus ultra of post-Darwinian romance

plots, then the problem remains that nature's course, like love's, rarely runs smooth. Confounded and confounding, Darwinian thought does Ned no favors; however, it does provide him—and Conan Doyle—with a narrative alibi. Thus, he returns to the offices of the Daily Gazette, “with the desire all alive in his heart” and with “the settled determination on that very night, if possible, to find the question which should prove [him] worthy of [his] Gladys” (7, 8). Shortly thereafter, he accepts an assignment to voyage to South America in order to debunk Professor Challenger, a biologist who claims to have found evidence of prehistoric life on a remote plateau eventually dubbed Maple White Land. Marooned on the plateau by duplicitous guides, Ned and his fellows come face-to-tooth with a cadre of animals heretofore thought extinct—most prominently dinosaurs—as well as a group of fashionably late early hominids who violently persecute a tribe of humans indigenous to the plateau. The group of travelers aids the human natives to overthrow the ape-like tyrants, engages in misadventures, and escapes back to London, where they publicly exhibit a pterosaur that drives the scientific world wild and wins the group instant fame.

But at the other end of the adventure, Conan Doyle reveals that the marriage plot, especially as articulated through *The Descent of Man*, is a sham. Like many beautiful birds, Gladys is flighty. No sooner has Ned return to London a celebrated man of action than he discovers that Gladys has married another man in the novel's meantime. Gladys' husband, “a little ginger-haired man” ensconced all-too-cozily in the domestic landscape of a “deep arm-chair,” is at least sympathetic (187). “It's always like this, ain't it?” he shrugs (187). “And must be unless you had polygamy, only the other way round; you understand,” he reasons, invoking *The Descent* in an inverse and exceptional fashion. Having lost the love plot despite his plucky willingness to play by its rules, Ned finds himself left only with questions. “How did you do it?” he asks pointedly (188). “Have you searched for hidden treasure,” he continues, “or discovered a

pole, or done time on a pirate or flown the Channel, or what? Where is the glamour of romance? How did you get it?" When Mr. Potts is baffled by Ned's bevy of questions, Ned opts instead for the more material measure of a man and asks simply, "What are you? What is your profession?" Here, the knife twists. Gladys Hungerton wanted a hero; Gladys *Potts* is married to a "solicitor's clerk" (188). As if to drive home the point that Gladys has in no way chosen the finest specimen of his professional species, Ned learns that he is playing second fiddle to someone who is only "second man at Johnson and Merivale's" (188).

The rejection retroactively colors the rest of the events in the narrative, even as it frays its erotic impulses and sets them loose. Indeed, Ned telegraphs the emotional gut punch, noting the rote obligation of showing the "results" of the intrigue that acted as "the springs of my action" before glumly remarking, "At least I have been driven forth to take part in a wondrous adventure, and I cannot but be thankful to the force that drove me" (176). Immediately before narrating—analeptically—the scene in which he discovers that Gladys is married, he sets his readers up for disappointment, but also suggests that he has known all along how things will end:

Did I not always see some hard fiber in her nature? Did I not, even at the time when I was proud to obey her behest, feel that it was surely a poor love which could drive a lover to his death or the danger of it? Did I not, in my truest thoughts, always recurring and always dismissed, see past the beauty of the face, and, peering into the soul, discern the twin shadows of selfishness and of fickleness glooming at the back of it? Did she love the heroic and the spectacular for its own noble sake, or was it for the glory which might, without effort or

sacrifice, be reflected upon herself? Or are these thoughts the vain wisdom which comes after the event? (*The Lost World* 186)

Having claimed Maple White Land's central lake for his lady love, Ned decides to rename it, bitterly noting, "never shall she have immortality through me" (186). Of course, the displacement itself is notable; Ned suffers from the realization pointedly ("It was the shock of my life"), but it does not completely faze him. Unlike the more thoroughly brokenhearted texts discussed in Chapter 4, Ned's tale does not incorporate his loss into a plot of melancholic desire. Instead, Gladys' rejection radically renegotiates the terms of value and attachment in the text. Like the lake, which is rechristened "Central," the text still revolves around Gladys, but she is only its organizing force, and not its ultimate destination or its arbiter of social fulfillment. Gladys makes a novelistic man out of Ned, but she also leaves him unwed. In this regard Ned, has always already been working towards becoming both romantic hero and romantic loser.

Though Ned's achievements do not build toward marriage and reproduction, as in the Darwinian account, they are not all for naught. Indeed, were Conan Doyle unable to cleverly resignify the terms of the adventure, then the narrative would not just be lost, but also semiotically bankrupt. Instead, the text deploys the anachronistic erotics of its fantastical subject matter as the means to affirm and revalue that which has already been formed, but went discarded under the aegis of the text's official narrative: the strong bonds of friendship formed between Ned, Professor Challenger, Professor Summerlee, and Lord John Roxton (also a bachelor). As with the many other queer losers this project has examined, the formation of such bonds is more a matter of dealing with the contingency of bachelorhood, then an overt effort at resistance, deviance, and subversion. It is only because Ned has played *and lost* the courtship

game that the text can—and indeed *must*—hold homosocial bonds sacred as a form of attachment equal, rather than supplemental or subservient, to reproductive heterosexuality.

More than this, bachelorhood offers Ned a futurity in the figural past that he could never achieve through marriage, and so while the text comes to a literal end—it has a final page, clearly—its erotic energies stay in flux. Left a loser, Ned seeks out Lord Roxton, who divulges to the group that he has secreted a cache of giant diamonds away from Maple White Land. Though Challenger opts to use his inadvertent winnings to fund a museum, and Summerlee opts for early retirement, Roxton decides that he will fund another expedition to “the dear old plateau” (189). “As to you, young fellah, you, of course, will spend yours in getting’ married,” Roxton presumes to Ned. Ned, however, decides that perhaps the best use of the riches is to mine Maple White Land for further narrative. “Not yet,” Ned replies, offering, “I think, if you will have me, that I would rather go with you” (189). The gentleman’s pact conditions and makes possible Ned’s narration through a non-disclosure agreement; he is free to report what he will so long as he keeps it secret, pending Challenger’s approval and announcement of his discoveries. The bachelor’s disclosure, on the other hand, assures readers that there will always be more stories to tell. *The Lost World*’s imaginative open-endedness and recursivity—enabled by bachelorhood, and made all the more poignant by its more spectacularly paleoqueer characters, as we shall see—goes a long way towards accounting for the text’s tenacious afterlife. *The Lost World* has spawned no fewer than five film adaptations and a television series, to say nothing of its role in inspiring both Michael Crichton’s *Jurassic Park* novels and their film adaptations (the second of which is simply titled *The Lost World*). If critics’ general disregard for the novel implies that it suffers from aesthetic shortcomings, then it is all the more remarkable that—as per intelligent

design—it never ceases to inspire. Like its prehistoric subject matter, *The Lost World* refuses to go completely extinct.

In *Between Men*, perhaps the most famous critical treatment of male homosociality in fiction, Eve Sedgwick claims that the nineteenth century’s “emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetro- and homosexuality” bore important relations to class, “and that no element of that pattern can be understood outside of its relation to women and the gender system as a whole” (1). In the case of *The Lost World*, so far so good: Ned’s relations to his comrades is both necessitated by, and later revalued through, his relation to Gladys. At the same time, *The Lost World* complicates Sedgwick’s consideration of homosocial desires as they play out across empire. Where she remarks that the “thematic of Empire” often lent texts a “Gothic-derived paranoid racist theme of male penetration and undermining by subject peoples,” *The Lost World* complicates this schema by seeing Challenger’s team allied quite happily with Maple White Land’s natives against a series of shared, inhuman enemies. Cynically, we might read this maneuver as a mere displacement of the racist logic of, say, Levi-Strauss’ “false evolutionism” wherein “primitive peoples” are wrongly taken “to embody the infancy of humanity,” as discussed in Howard Davies reading of the novel (118). Bradley Deane, by contrast, argues that because *The Lost World*’s explorers in fact embrace atavism, they “do not confirm their manliness by vanquishing the primitive, but by partaking of it, immersing themselves in the struggles of the men they recognize as their primal counterparts” (207). Reading the novel as a precocious posthumanist manifesto, Deane suggests that “Stories of lost others require their readers to entertain the notion of a forgotten shared identity, so that differences between peoples can be regarded as circumstantial rather than ontological, and difference itself read as a sign of absence rather than proof of progress” (216). Pointing to the

novel's title, Deane concludes that "Loss presupposes some value worth recovering, and even the hope of restoration, of paradise regained" (216).

Deane's optimism needs to be taken with a grain of salt. *The Lost World* is by no means a paradise—there's a bit too much running, screaming, and genocide for that—and its residents remain irrevocably unreconstructed, if not outright "lost," insofar as they retain their atavistic pull and epistemological remoteness. At the same time, Deane's reading registers *The Lost World*'s powerful insistence that the extinct world exerts a powerfully erotic thrall on the modern world. Indeed, the expedition to Maple White Land—like the novel itself—is self-consciously framed as a nostalgia project. When Ned consults his editor, McArdle, about the assignment, he is glumly informed that "the day for this sort of thing is rather past" (9). "The big blank spaces in the map are all being filled in, and there's no room for romance anywhere," McArdle laments (10). The novel's project, then, is to reinvest "romance" into a genre—and set of tropes—that has lost the proverbial magic. As with fossil reconstructions, however, such atavistic renovation is not without risk. "The condition of atavism suggests," Seitler writes, "[that] we are constituted as individuals... not just by way of the content of the recent past, but in relation to a more distant biological past as well" (2). In this way, Seitler argues that atavism "belies the conception of identity as direct and individualized and of time as an unbroken continuity," and poses a "category of personhood that erases an immediate reproductive connection between parent and child, situating the locus of the individual's identity in a much earlier ancestral moment that is no longer secured in the past but destined to recur" (2). Expanding on Seitler's compelling and far-reaching consideration of backwardness in nineteenth-century racial, medical, and psychoanalytic discourses, the pull of the paleoqueer poses both opportunities and problems for transhistorical attachment.

As discussed briefly above, deep time posed an epistemological problem for the emerging earth sciences of the nineteenth-century. In *The Lost World*, such debates take place as a series of heated, but often infantile arguments about scientific minutiae and, more importantly, evolutionary historiography. Just cause for Challenger's expedition stems precisely from his accusation that another scholar's claims of dinosaurs' extinction have been greatly exaggerated. Challenging a "bird's-eye view of creation" forwarded at a lecture by Perceval Waldron, Challenger contends that "Mr. Waldron is very wrong in supposing that because he has never himself seen a so-called prehistoric animal, therefore these creatures no longer exist" (44). "They are indeed, as he has said, our ancestors," Challenger concurs, "but they are... our contemporary ancestors<sup>4</sup>, who can still be found with all their hideous and formidable characteristics if one has but the energy and hardihood to seek their haunts" (44). In the domain of the paleoquer, the acceptance or defeat of scientific narrative selection replaces sexual selection and witness trumps theoretical historiography.

As a contrary element on Challenger's team, the botanist Professor Summerlee serves as a canny skeptic who represents the vested interests of London's scientific establishment. Throughout their journey upriver, Summerlee continually ribs Challenger as the two debate heady matters utterly incomprehensible to the other men. Once they arrive to the Plateau, however, the truth of Challenger's claims literally comes screaming out of the sky, as a winged pterosaur<sup>5</sup> flies down from the plateau and attack the group's camp. With a "swish like an

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<sup>4</sup> It may of course be objected that such a figuration renders the dinosaurs and other beasts on Maple White Land "contemporary," rather than extinct, and "survivors" rather than "losers." Such renegotiations, however, do nothing to dissolve the fantasy structures conditioned and enabled by those creatures' previous consignment to the realm of the extinct. Like the real-world example of the coelacanth—a bony fish presumed extinct, but proven extant when one was caught in 1938—the dinosaurs and other residents of *The Lost World* only more acutely posit the epistemological challenges and paleoquer erotics outlined here once re-discovered.

<sup>5</sup> The novel continually refers to these creatures as "pterodactyls," but that term tends to function as a kind of garbage taxon for any winged dinosaur, and the animals described don't fit with size of any known specimens of the

aeroplane,” a “canopy of leathery wings” descends, and the pterodactyl is finally glimpsed as a “momentary vision of a long, snake-like neck, a fierce, red, greedy eye, and a great snapping beak, filled... with little, gleaming teeth” (85). Summerlee, faced with such ferociously compelling evidence, *immediately apologizes* to Challenger, begging, “I am very much in the wrong, and I beg that you will forget what is past” (86). But “what is past” is precisely what resolves tensions between the two scientists, and indeed a different pterosaur—captured and ensconced back to London—later proves the rightness of Challenger’s scientific vision. The paleoqueer spectacles of *The Lost World*, then, fantasize not only the dislocation of conflict between men into the realm of science, but also the dissolution of such conflict in the service of creating homosocial bonds. So, too, does Maple White Land offer the fantasy of a direct correspondence between different orders of paleoqueer vision; the pterodactyl and other dinosaurs all match up nicely not only with the prevailing norms of their reconstructions and restorations—including one by Challenger’s “gifted friend” Ray Lankester, in what reads like publishing cross-marketing avant la lettre—but also with the sketches and tarnished remains that Challenger recovers and earlier reveals to Ned in order to prove his claims.

The expedition’s first sustained glimpse at *The Lost World*’s dinosaurs is thus deeply moving, reassuring, and pleasurable. Stumbling upon a group of large footprints, Challenger assures the group that they have, in fact, stumbled across the tracks of “a dinosaur” (100). But no sooner has trace evidence been found than Challenger—rarely at a loss for words—is struck utterly speechless. Coming upon an “open glade,” Ned and the others are treated to a panoramic, prehistoric idyll featuring a group of gently grazing iguanodons. This painterly vision leaves Challenger and Summerlee utterly enchanted. “The two professors were in silent ecstasy, Ned

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genus pterodactylus itself, which tend to be much smaller. I’ve opted for “pterosaur,” which is the accepted name for the clade to which such winged dinosaurs belong.

narrates (101). “In their excitement they had unconsciously seized each other by the hand,” he continues, “and stood like two children in the presence of a marvel, Challenger’s cheeks bunched up into a seraphic smile, and Summerlee’s sardonic face softening for the moment into wonder and reverence.” As with the more mundane conventions of the pastoral, the scene inspires a sense of sublime peacefulness that puts any and all scientific inquiries politely to rest. Where the tracks left “a worthy Sussex doctor puzzled,” the dinosaurs themselves inspire only awe (100). “Wonder” leaves no one wondering here; it is not a plodding, paranoid lack, but sheer enjoyment at epistemological plenitude. Resuming their more pedantic habits, Challenger and Summerlee pontificate on the pterosaurs, and spend the rest of the afternoon “proving the nature of the food of these creatures” and “congratulating each other on having cleared up the point why the bones of these flying dragons are found in such great numbers in curtained well-defined areas, as in the Cambridge Green-sand” (104). As several commentators have noted, the great majority of prehistoric beasts in *The Lost World* comprise a veritable “Who’s Who?” of British paleontological naturalism. For all its mystery, then, the group’s arrival at Maple White Land is also a homecoming vis-à-vis virtual time travel. Challenger thus recognizes the iguanodons as his fellow countrymen, cheering, “Wealden! ... I’ve seen them in the Wealden clay!” and later remarking with zero irony that Maple White Land is “not larger than an average English county” (100, 113).

Even as the iguanodons supply only transtemporal pleasures and scientific reassurance, though, not all *The Lost World*’s creatures are quite so cuddly (12). As with the tensions at the heart of extinction, the denizens of Maple White Land suggest the possibility that there are “queer animals” whose place in evolutionary history, and connections to contemporary life, are suspect, precarious, or heretofore unknown. “We have to bear in mind,” Challenger surmises, but

with none of Darwin's resentment, "that there are many prehistoric forms which have never come down to us" (111). "It would be rash to suppose," he informs his colleagues, "that we can give a name to all that we are likely to meet." With both scientific and queerly anachronistic accuracy, then, the group discovers a number of surprising novelties among the fauna on the plateau. First among these is a terrifying toad-like creature without any historical precedent. The beast, terrifying in part because it remains opaque, stalks the plateau's human natives by hopping on, crushing, and then finally eating them. Indeed, even the more familiar dinosaurs prove a perennial threat to the group, and thus even the fantasy of confirmed knowledge in no ways tames the paleoqueer. Like the awkwardness of fit between modern homosexuality and classical pederasty, the resemblances are only as pleasing as the differences are sometimes threatening.

*The Lost World's* paleoqueer historiography at once invites and rebukes analogy, refusing either the comforting dividing line of totalizing historical alterism, or the crudely humanist willful ignorance of appropriation. Indeed, the centrally discomfiting and thoroughly queer irony of *The Lost World* is that for all its paleoqueer visions' overwhelming presence, Conan Doyle's prose can only render through a series of similes and analogies. This is especially pointed following the group's return to London, where they host a gala in order to announce their findings to the scientific community. Challenger, with typical obstinacy, coyly institutes to his audience that he has brought only information to the crowd, "For example, upon the domestic habits of the pterodactyl," but the crowd grows rowdy at his mere repetition of earlier unsubstantiated boosts. The very Dickensian-named Dr. Illingworth rejects Challenger's offer of illustrative photographs of the beasts in Maple White Land, disrupting the novel's fantasy of unrivalled correspondence between different visual orders of prehistoric representation. "You would require to see the thing itself? ... And you would accept that?" Challenger challenges.

“Beyond a doubt,” Illingworth responds, at which point Challenger unveils a covered case, from which emerges a living, breathing pterosaur (183). Even as the sight of the beast leaves its spectators “petrified” in fascination, effectively fossilizing them into a turgidity of delight as in earlier scenes of paleoqueer witness, “the thing itself” is immediately displaced as “the wildest gargoyle of imagination” and “the devil of our childhood in person” (184). The pterosaur does not have proper wings, but rather “what appeared to be faded gray shawl”; its teeth are “shark-like” (184). Even at the moment when the pterodactyl is most phenomenologically and—finally—empirically available to the gathered scholars, it recedes back into the literary logic of analogy; its paleoqueer appeal cannot abide mimesis, and thus its deracinated body—a hodgepodge of naturalists’ books and demonic bogeyman—leaves the audience outright terrified. As the audience is left in frenzied, confused, and discombobulated turmoil, the pterosaur simply escapes through an open window. The sequence—and others where Challenger and company find themselves under physical threat—suggests that the epistemological push and pull of paleoqueer gazing utterly refuses to be brought definitively to a close; paleoqueer endeavors may imply powerful forms of affinity, but they can never be fully domesticated. So, too, does *The Lost World* undercut any easy triumphant of its imperialist mission; Ned and Roxton are free to return to Maple White Land, but they can never presume to bring it home to Mother England.

Atavism, too, suggests an equally compelling-repelling dynamic of attraction and rebuke. Indeed, part of the tension between the explorers and the plateau’s indigenous hominids is that, where the dinosaurs serve as spectacles and survival hazards, the ape-like hominids are paleoqueers who definitively *look back*. When Ned first comes face-to-face with a hominid—having climbed a tree where he observes a group of parasitical insects—he describes it as “a

face... gazing into mine ... crouching behind the parasite, and had looked round it at the same instant that I did” (117). With a “human face—or at least... far more human than any monkey’s,” the hominid’s inquisitive gaze is awkwardly aligned with Ned’s; it not only takes an abstract inquisitiveness in the world around it, but also pushes back against falling into mere landscape. Indeed, the leader of the hominids resembles Challenger so strongly—“The very image of our professor,” says Lord John—that the text clearly resists any reading that would read them as “primitive” or “early” men. Instead, their species is more of a hanger-on in evolutionary history; a contemporaneous equal whose rule over the plateau’s humans suggests that Darwin’s story has gone wholly astray; it has gotten so “lost” that the “losers” of history have wholly overtaken the (in Darwin’s reckoning) winners.

The *Lost World* thus seemingly turns from paleo queer fantasy into a more rotely generic endeavor as the hominid natives—perpetual tormentors of their definitively human neighbors—take Challenger, Roxton, and Summerlee captive, leaving Ned to free the group, and eventually lead the cowardly human natives in a violent revolt against their oppressors. This is where the novel’s queer critique would apparently fall apart. Challenger’s open embarrassment at his awareness of his resemblance to the king of the hominids points to a breaking point in the novel’s alignment of male homosociality, paleo queer pleasures, and creative anachronism. Pushed to the limits of acceptable conduct within the already narrow aegis of Darwinian history, the group endeavors to preserve a single evolutionary timeline, however displaced, distorted, and prone to recursions it might be. For prehistory to remain fertile grounds for paleo queer historiographical projects, history must remain a singular narrative; it can offer no branching paths in the form of contradictory narratives or alternate realities. Indeed, the novel’s dedication presupposes that, for all the imaginative recursions both positions imply, “boy” and “man” are

assured positions along a path and not a circuit; the “boy” cannot grow up into a “boy,” or a “woman,” or—perhaps saddest of all—a dinosaur. In this regard, then, *The Lost World* appears to offer wish fulfillments bizarrely eradicated of the optative. Because it is effectively backwards-looking, the novel’s paleoqueer vision can only motivate and renegotiate relations between past and present; it can never presume to make a claim on the future.

However, the story of humanity’s inevitably Darwinian triumph is far from the end of *The Lost World*. Instead, Ned’s bachelorhood retroactively unsettles *The Lost World*’s straightforward story of genocide in the service of a singular story. In place of assured ends, Ned’s singleness sees him at home in the wilds of prehistory; he moves backwards into the future of historiographical adventure rather than forward into the future of evolutionary history itself. If one cannot grow up to be a dinosaur then perhaps, *The Lost World* suggests, one might do just as well growing up to be a bachelor. In this way, the novel cannily suggests that there are viable alternatives to the extinct ends of Darwinian historiography. Indeed, paleoqueer erotics hold open the possibility of a historiography that is potentially limitless in its scope because it requires a perpetual willingness to radically renegotiate the terms of its own telling. For paleoqueer historiography, the past is all the more deeply felt in the present for—and not in spite of—its fragility, ferociousness, and contingency.

Temporary cover image is Gregory Maiofis' *Adversity Makes Strange Bedfellows*.

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