IMPROVING LANGUAGE:

VICTORIAN LITERATURE AND THE CIVILIZING PROCESS

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Whereas "civilization" has often been dismissed in nineteenth-century studies as a rallying cry for empire, this dissertation offers a critical re-evaluation of how the Victorians understood this concept and its implications for literature's educational possibilities. Integrating Norbert Elias's theory of the civilizing process into a critical framework that draws on literary linguistics and rhetorical studies, my first chapter studies nineteenth-century writings from a range of disciplines – including economics, sociology, and linguistics – to show that "civilization" represented a key site for Victorian writers to reflect holistically on wider processes of social change and their linguistic dimensions. The second chapter analyzes the poetics of John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold in the context of this discourse. Arguing that the discourse of civilization provides a crucial framework for understanding how these thinkers conceived literary language as "improving," I reveal the impact of this discourse on the period's

most influential theories about literature's educational value. While the first part of the dissertation considers the literary implications of "civilization" on the level of theory, the second part explores how Victorian poets and novelists addressed these implications in practice by considering classic texts such as *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* alongside less canonical female *Bildungsromane* and children's adventure tales. Chapter Three begins by demonstrating how a range of Victorian genres dramatize and reflect on the civilizing process, then focuses specifically on narratives of writers' *Bildung* (formation). I argue that these *Bildungsromane* show particularly clearly how Victorian writers' creative engagement with the discourse of civilization enables them to construct a model of literary language that facilitates social integration, while fostering a value for individuality and inventiveness essential to active participation in social processes. Turning to narratives of feminine *Bildung* like Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* and Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the concluding chapter illustrates how writers imagined how such private pastimes as reading might sustain wider civilizing trends. By exploiting the links between gender and genre, these texts are able, I suggest, to conceive the possibility of altering Victorian society's deeply ingrained sexism through the strategic appropriation – rather than outright rejection – of its gendered norms.

For Family, near and far,

under whose love and care this dissertation was written

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and appreciates best the re-making of self that this dissertation has entailed.

EPIGRAPH

If then the power of speech is a gift as great as any that can be named,—if the origin of language is by many philosophers even considered to be nothing short of divine,—if by means of words the secrets of the heart are brought to light, pain of soul is relieved, experiences recorded, and wisdom perpetuated,—if by great authors the many are drawn up into unity, national character is fixed, a people speaks, the past and the future, the East and the West are brought into communication with each other,— if such men are, in a word, the spokesmen and prophets of the human family,—it will not answer to make light of Literature or to neglect its study; rather we may be sure that, in proportion as we master it in whatever language, and imbibe its spirit, we shall ourselves become in our own measure the minister of like benefits to others, be they many or few, be they in the obscurer or the more distinguished walks of life,—who are united to us by social ties, and are within the sphere of our personal influence.

John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*

Contents

Introduction

In these days of dizzying technological innovation and increasingly sophisticated forms of electronic media, print literature in general – at least in its most recognizable forms – is rapidly acquiring an air of obsolescence (cf. Hillis Miller 1). *A fortiori*, reading and studying Victorian literature strike most people today as quaintly old-fashioned (or hopelessly superannuated) activities.[1] In contrast to the somewhat stuffy, dated image of this literature in the public mind, the present study finds in the Victorian world of letters highly developed technologies of the word – rhetorical models and devices whose sophistication might surprise even the most jaded of critics. Drawing on a range of genres from the mid- and late-Victorian period, I suggest that the linguistic and cognitive resources offered by these texts are carefully designed to mediate "civilized" and "adult" values and structures of thought, aligning them in yet more important ways with modernity. In Norbert Elias's terminology, Victorian literature participates actively and self-consciously in the "civilizing process"; from an orality-literacy perspective, one might say that the writers of this period recognized and attempted to realize the potential of literature to promote a "noetic culture" for coping with the new psychological demands created by modern civilization.

In my efforts to explicate how Victorian literature functions to enrich the linguistic and cognitive resources of its readers, I avail myself generally of work such as Elias's and Walter Ong's, but do not rely exclusively on a particular critical narrative (e.g., Ong's account of the orality-literacy shift). Rather, my study attempts to generate at least

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[1] In his seminal 1982 study, Walter Ong, for example, notes how readers have come "self-consciously to depreciate" (143) as "too 'easy'" (151) the novel-size climactic linear plot whose development culminates in the emergence of the Victorian detective story. Similarly, David Miller observes in *The Novel and the Police* (1988) that "many people define their modernity by no longer reading" the Victorian novel (x).

part of its theoretical apparatus *in situ*, adapting critical models and terms from a range of nineteenth-century writings on civilization, language, and improvement – and not least from the literary texts themselves. While not adhering strictly to any single critical method, this study shares the general assumption in cognitive poetics "that literary texts are characterised by particularly novel and creative uses of the linguistic and cognitive resources used in everyday communication" (Steen and Gavins, qtd. in Semino: 38). *Improving Language* combines ideas from literary linguistics and rhetorical studies to re-examine how Victorian writers understood the concept of civilization, and how this understanding informed their efforts to engage (and develop) the rhetorical and cognitive resources of their readers.

Doubtful Connections: Literature and Civilization in the Nineteenth Century

As an attempt to elaborate the civilizing project of Victorian writings, this study responds to a rhetorical situation that has developed over the last three decades in English studies – a combination of rhetorical vectors whose net effect has been to block discursive production in this area. My general analysis of this rhetorical situation is that powerful critical voices have, whether intentionally or not, collectively produced a discursive field which has had a severe damping effect on the possibility of having a fruitful conversation on the relationship between Victorian literature, language, and the notion of improvement – moral, intellectual, or material.

The main purpose of this section, therefore, is to provide a sketch of the rhetorical configuration which has, in my view, prematurely determined that there is little merit in the Victorians' claims about the improving effects of literature. The following survey of

scholarly work which has shaped foundational assumptions in the field is perforce highly selective, but it should provide a sense of what motivates this study, and also of the basic obstacles to the "project of recovery" that it undertakes in relation to its chosen texts. It should be emphasized that the critical texts surveyed here have been selected for their representative value and not in order to blame them for the unsatisfactory state of affairs at the present time. The devaluation of our critical vocabulary for discussing the improving potential of Victorian literature cannot be attributed to any single school of critical thought or to a particular group of critics. Rather, this problem is better understood as a discursive phenomenon that, to some extent, has evolved independently of the intentions of individual actors – a rhetorical effect that is open to analysis and, possibly, intervention.

So what kind of rhetorical dynamics have cast such a powerful freezing spell on the idea that Victorian texts might offer vital educational resources for coping with modern civilization? How has the current critical climate evolved to make the connection between Victorian literature and civilization – and the notion of improvement in general – such a doubtful one? In the first place, the difficulty of conducting a meaningful discussion about the relationship between the language of Victorian literature and civilization arises because of a general cynicism surrounding the latter term in contemporary critical discourse. In spite of diverse concerns, influential critics from across a range of subfields appear to have reached a remarkable consensus about the corrupt nature of civilization, and the need, above all else, to stress reform in their critical discourse. Deeply skeptical of the Victorians' faith in modern civilization and possessed by an urgent sense of the need for radical social change, these scholars have paid far

more attention to the ills of civilization than its achievements. Accordingly, their critical rhetoric is marked by a degree of suspicion of and hostility towards modern civilization that ultimately attests to their belief in its resilience. Thus, in spite (or because) of the fact that modern critical theory is itself a child of the institution of literature and a product of the "bourgeois civilization" on which so much scorn has been heaped, leading critical voices have, over the past three decades, collectively rendered "civilization" an extremely dubious term – at best, shorthand for vain illusions of a better life, and at worst, an elaborate screen for the "latent barbarity of civilised society" (Beaumont 140).

Signs of the critical trend that have enveloped the notion of civilization in a cloud of negativity are already detectable in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal work of nineteenth-century feminist criticism, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) – for example, in the way they celebrate *Jane Eyre*'s "refusal to accept the forms, customs, and standards of society," privileging Jane's "rebellious feminism" over the modes of aesthetic order she masters (338). While Gilbert and Gubar question the norms of civilized society and emphasize the desirability of disruptive resistance, Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory* (1983) raises the intensity of the rhetorical onslaught against modern civilization to an entirely different level. Offering a Marxist reading of "the rise of English," the opening chapter of Eagleton's highly influential introductory text represents the birth of modern industrial society during the Romantic period as an unmitigated disaster:

> In England, a crassly philistine Utilitarianism is rapidly becoming the dominant ideology of the industrial middle class, fetishizing fact, reducing human relations to market exchanges and dismissing art as unprofitable ornamentation. The callous disciplines of early industrial capitalism uproot whole communities, convert human life into wage-slavery, enforce an alienating labour-process on the newly formed working class and understand nothing which cannot be transformed into a commodity on the open market. As the working class

responds with militant protest to this oppression, … the English state reacts with a brutal political repressiveness which converts England, during part of the Romantic period, into what is in effect a police state. (17)

Shifting into the present tense to create a sense of dramatic immediacy, Eagleton portrays the "harsh realities of the new bourgeois regimes" in unequivocally negative light (17). Bourgeois civilization, in his account, assumes a nightmarish aspect, marked by rampant commodification and insidious forms of enslavement.

Focusing on the exacting tolls of modernity on the bourgeois subject himself, David Miller's *The Novel and the Police* (1988) similarly emphasizes the subtler – but in the end no less repellent – forms of violence perpetrated by bourgeois civilization. In Miller's brilliantly executed Foucauldian reading of the Victorian novel, modernity is viewed primarily in terms of the development of a totalizing disciplinary power in a system of discourses and practices which control and, ultimately, victimize the bourgeois subject in diffused yet highly efficient ways (17). Again, the result is a terrifying vision of bourgeois civilization as a bleak world of relentless policing and self-mutilating subjectivities – a "total social system" which produces "pathetically reduced beings" and "damaged life" (207-208).

It scarcely seems necessary to add that the notion of civilization – or, as Gayatri Spivak puts it, its return in the "current idiom of modernization and development" (254) – has fared no better in postcolonial critical discourse. In order to provide a fuller illustration of the extremely hostile rhetorical environment surrounding "civilization" in English studies, however, a brief consideration of the arguments of two major postcolonial thinkers in relation to the term may be useful. For these critics, whose writings explore the devastating cost of Europe's "civilizing mission" for both the

colonizers as well as the colonized, "civilization" is often dismissed as little more than a form of Orwellian newspeak for concealing more refined atrocities. Thus, in her well-known 1985 critique of the "imperialist axiomatics" at work in *Jane Eyre*, Spivak clearly implies that imperialism and the civilizing narrative on which it relies are merely elaborate ideological constructs designed to legitimate European authority over the natives ("Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" 247). Targeting a passage from *Jane Eyre* in which St. John Rivers speaks of his missionary hopes of "carrying knowledge into the realms of ignorance – of substituting peace for war – freedom for bondage – religion for superstition," Spivak writes, "Imperialism and its territorial and subject-constituting project are a violent deconstruction of these oppositions" (249). Her indictment of imperialism provides a clear example of the tendency in postcolonial criticism to ignore (at the very least) the material factors used to measure the distance between more and less civilized states. In the zeal to expose "insidious and fundamentally unjust" colonial practices and the civilizing discourses sponsoring them (Said xxii), postcolonial critical discourse often risks reducing "civilization" to an empty buzzword, failing to acknowledge the very real benefits it offers many people, regardless of their class, gender, or race.

Unlike Spivak, Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) makes an effort to recognize some of the tangible benefits of civilization that her essay effectively trivializes. Aware that "[l]arge groups of people [in former colonies] believe that the bitterness and humiliations of the [colonial experience] nevertheless delivered benefits – liberal ideas, national self-consciousness, and technological goods" (18), Said is prepared to acknowledge that the discourse of civilization might be more than a mere generator of

ideological illusions. He remarks, moreover, that "one of imperialism's achievements was to bring the world closer together" (xxi), and even refers obliquely to the important role which European discourses of civilization and improvement might have played in the process of decolonization, saying that it was "the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment [which] mobilized people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection" (xiii). Overall, however, Said's book confirms the prevailing assumption in much postcolonial criticism that "*la mission civilisatrice*" was merely an ideological ruse to propagate the notion "that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination" (9). "Civilization" remains largely a hollow term used to legitimate an imperial project which "violently disturbed" the colonized (xviii), resulting in "horrors," "bloodshed," and "vengeful bitterness" (xxi-xxii).

It would seem, therefore, that the dominant "message" emerging from the patterns of rhetorical activity illustrated above might be glossed as "the narrative of civilization is merely a confidence game used to exploit the powerless," or, more simply, "modern civilization is bad." Although it is unlikely that any of the aforementioned critics would commit themselves to such crude formulations, the notion of civilization, as we have seen, is consistently negatively evaluated in their writings. And the impact of such textual practices on the critical fortunes of the term can be felt in subsequent work on mid-Victorian literature. Thus, for example, Jonathan Esty's 1996 essay on *The Mill on the Floss* describes "modernisation as a constant, ruthless process" (115) and applauds George Eliot for challenging " the recuperative rhetoric of 'development'" (105), while, more recently, Matthew Beaumont's suggestive article on the figure of the cannibal in *Wuthering Heights* has asserted that "the profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of

bourgeois civilization" makes "barbarism … not the diametrical opposite of civilised culture, … but its dialectical obverse" (137). Even pedagogical materials reflect the extent to which negatively inflected notions of civilization and improvement have become normalized as part of the critical orthodoxy: in Open University course materials for *An Introduction to the Humanities*, for instance, "Britain's 'civilizing mission'" is casually dismissed as "part of a … cynical process of rendering the indigenous population more governable" (194).

My immediate object in highlighting this rhetorical trend is not so much to contest the validity of such accusations or even to protest the way in which demystifying gestures have become routinized in contemporary critical discourse. Silence about the positive aspects of modern civilization doesn't mean that an implicit recognition of its benefits doesn't exist in English studies. Nevertheless, in a discipline whose methods and objects of study are so very much grounded in language, it is important to be conscious of one's language use, and to take seriously the potential consequences of certain textual practices over time. The point in sketching out how the tone set by influential criticism has produced relentlessly negative evaluations of the term "civilization" is to suggest one of the unforeseen, cumulative effects of certain scholarly habits of discourse. While contemporary critical discourse should be applauded for its concern with equality and social justice, there is a danger that, without an adequately developed language for evaluating civilization and its achievements (among which literature must be numbered), their value is constantly at risk of being underrated – or, worse, of being left out of the equation altogether. And nowhere are the polarizing effects of contemporary critical rhetoric on our thinking more apparent than in its consequences for Victorian literature.

Because "civilization" was such an important – and on the whole, affirmative – term for the Victorians, the dubious reputation of "civilization" in contemporary critical discourse has had particularly problematic consequences for our capacity to make sense of their literature. Powerfully influenced by the negativity surrounding "civilization" and the notion of improvement more generally, the rhetorical dynamics of the field strongly inhibit the possibility of imagining Victorian literature in a positive, mutually beneficial relationship with modern civilization. With the notion of civilization so severely vitiated, the rhetorical field has become polarized in such a way as to make it very difficult to conceive of Victorian literature as morally sound *and* modernizing at the same time. On the one hand, if this literature is represented in a constructive relationship with civilization, then it is morally compromised (i.e., literature is modern and bad). On the other, if one seeks to represent Victorian literature as promoting ethical behavior, one seems almost compelled to read these texts as resistant to, or disruptive of, the civilizing process (i.e., literature is good but anti-modern).

Thus, looking once again more closely at a selective cross-section of critical texts, one can see that studies which acknowledge the close ties between literature and notions of modern or civilized culture have generally allowed their dark vision of modern civilization to color their perception of literature's rhetorical functions. The larger rationale behind such criticism seems to be that, if literature is suspected of promoting or collaborating with such a corrupt process as civilization, it too must be condemned for its pernicious ideological effects.

Chris Baldick's *The Social Mission of English Criticism* (1983) neatly sums up the battle-lines along which Victorian literature is attacked as ideology. Based on his 1981

doctoral dissertation, Baldick's study does important work to historicize the formation of English literature as a discipline during the nineteenth century, but his account of literature's genealogy – to which Eagleton's narrative of the rise of English in *Literary Theory* is indebted – tends to focus almost exclusively on the way in which "literature" has functioned in the service of the establishment as an instrument for controlling and exploiting groups marginalized by class, gender, and race. English literary studies, according to Baldick, was conceived by the Victorians as a means of cultivating in the working classes a disabling sense of class inferiority (67); a suitable subject for "confirm[ing] women in their established roles" (68); and a form of ideological indoctrination for natives in the colonies (70-71).

Although Baldick does not give one the impression that he holds the improving pretensions of literary texts in high esteem – he refers, for example, to the Oxford English professor Walter Raleigh's "clear-headed understanding of the ridiculousness of literary culture's ambitions for bringing about social change" (79) – he does not, strictly speaking, concern himself with literary texts and their authors, but, rather, confines his attention mainly to "literature" as defined by Victorian critics and educationists. Between Baldick and Eagleton, however, some kind of rhetorical slippage occurs between "literature" the academic subject and the literary texts themselves: in *Literary Theory*, the object of suspicion is no longer confined to Victorian educational programs, but has expanded to include literary practitioners and their texts as well. Thus, in his dramatic account of "The Rise of English," Eagleton constructs a narrative of emasculation in which Victorian literature is stripped of the radical energies possessed by its romantic forerunner, and co-opted by the establishment. The "roles" open to literature in

Eagleton's script are clearly rather limited: in relation to bourgeois civilization, literature can play either the rebel or the sycophant, and Victorian literature is represented as taking the worse option.

Presenting nineteenth-century English studies as "a subject fit for women, workers and those wishing to impress the natives" (25), Eagleton follows Baldick to portray literature for the Victorians as a highly useful instrument of social control – the "sugar" which "sweetened" the "pill of middle-class ideology" along the lines of the familiar trinity of gender, class, and race (23). In keeping with his Marxist sensibilities, Eagleton dwells in great detail on the role of literature in the confidence game supposedly designed to exploit the working class. Literature, according to Eagleton, offered the "philistine middle class" with "a suitably rich and subtle ideology" to "underpin their political and economic power" (21). More importantly, it could play a crucial role "in controlling and incorporating the working class" (21). Eagleton observes rather cynically how literature's aspirations to bridge the class divide by appealing to "universal human values" in fact make it "admirably well-fitted to carry through the ideological task which religion left off" (22). The qualities which make literature "modern ideology for the modern age" (24) seem linked more to the inherent properties of Victorian literature itself than to the ideological machinations of any particular educational program. Literary texts are represented as remarkably well-adapted for preserving the status quo: their emphasis on emotion serves to limit "analytical thought and conceptual enquiry" (22); their capacity to facilitate imaginative experience enables them "vicariously [to] fulfil someone's desire for a fuller life" (23); such texts will "communicate … the moral riches of bourgeois civilization, [and] impress upon [the working classes] a reverence for middle-class

achievements" (22). Eagleton suggests that literary activity tends by its very nature to inhibit social change: because reading is "essentially solitary" and "contemplative," cultivating literary habits among the working class will "curb in them any disruptive tendency to collective political action" (22).

In *The Novel and the Police*, Miller quite clearly makes Victorian literary texts – rather than "literature" the academic subject – prime suspects in his investigation of the ideological crimes perpetrated by bourgeois society. Fully assenting to the modernity of Victorian literature,[2] Miller challenges the "subversion hypothesis" habitually used to explain literature's cultural functions, and develops a series of ingenious textual analyses to show how mid-Victorian fiction operates as part of an entire system of "informal … and extralegal principle[s] of organization and control" (3). For Miller, the Victorian novel functions as part of a distinctly modern mode of social control – a system of discourses and practices which dupe bourgeois subjects into feeling "free" and "special" when actually their lives are relentlessly determined. For example, he reads *David Copperfield* (1849-50) as trading in the discursive performance of secrecy and other novelistic strategies for figuring inwardness which actually "register … the subject's accommodation to a totalizing system that has obliterated the difference he would make" (207). Far from tracing the formation of a unique subjectivity, Charles Dickens's beloved *Bildungsroman* is shown to enact the "dreary pattern in which the subject constitutes himself 'against' discipline by assuming that discipline in his own name" (220).

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[2] According to Miller, the unfashionable image of Victorian literature does not mean that it is anachronistic or irrelevant to our understanding contemporary cultural issues. Rather, he suggests that "The 'death of the novel' (of [the Victorian] novel, at any rate) has really meant the explosion everywhere of the novelistic, no longer bound in three-deckers, but freely scattered across a far greater range of cultural experience" (x).

Insofar as postcolonial criticism is interested in exploring the role of literature as a vehicle of imperialist ideologies, it, too, regards Victorian literary texts as agents of a highly dubious "civilizing" process, and has invested a great deal of intellectual energy developing innovative strategies to reveal the participation of literature in the imperialist project. For Spivak, Victorian literary texts played an important role in producing imperialism as England's social mission, and the fact that this ideological function "continue[s] to be disregarded in the reading of nineteenth-century British literature … itself attests to the continuing success of the imperialist project, displaced and dispersed into more modern forms" (243). Bringing together feminist and postcolonial concerns in her focus on the use of the "native female" in *Jane Eyre*, Spivak argues that Bertha Mason is a figure produced by "the unquestioned ideology of imperialist axiomatics" – on which the logic of the heroine's *Bildung* also depends (248).

Similarly, Said writes: "One of [the great European realistic novel's] principal purposes" was "almost unnoticeably [to] sustain … the society's consent in overseas expansion" (12). According to Said, nineteenth-century literature manufactures this consent by "creat[ing] what [Raymond] Williams calls 'structures of feeling' that support, elaborate, and consolidate the practice of empire" (14). As "a cultural artifact of bourgeois society," the novel, in particular, is deeply implicated in this process: Said goes as far as to say that "imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible … to read one without in some way dealing with the other" (70-71). Besides the active role played by literary texts in constructing "structures of attitude and reference" that supported imperialism (xvi), there are the sins of omission: "classic" works of nineteenth-century literature "devalue[d] other worlds" in the process of

validating "our" world, and failed to "prevent or inhibit or give resistance to horrendously unattractive imperialist practices" (81). Said extends the web of complicity to include not only Victorian writers such as Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, and Joseph Conrad, but also "pre-imperialist" texts like Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. Practicing his notion of "contrapuntal reading" (51) and focusing on the relation between narrative and social space, Said argues that the logic governing Fanny's domestic movements replicates on a smaller scale – and so legitimates – "the larger, more openly colonial movements of Sir Thomas" (89).

Although critics like Said and Spivak clearly do not represent the alliance between literature and civilization as having very desirable consequences, they register the need to move beyond "a kind of retrospective vindictiveness" and the rhetoric of blame it engenders (Said xxi). They have, accordingly, been careful to qualify their demystifying critical praxes with statements intended to preserve a sense of esteem for the texts they critique. Said, for example, insists that "what we learn about [nineteenth-century texts' participation in the imperial process] actually and truly *enhances* our reading and understanding of them" (xiv), maintaining, for example, that "a true historical sense" of *Mansfield Park*'s complicity with colonial regimes can co-exist with "a full enjoyment or appreciation" of the "taste and irony" of Austen's textual design (97). It is questionable, however, whether the complex, nuanced quality of such critical work has been transmitted into the criticism which has patterned itself after its example. Frequently, critical interventions which draw their rhetorical energy from postcolonial and other kinds of demystifying critical praxes read like exercises in convicting Victorian literature for its role in the ideological machinations of bourgeois civilization. A fairly typical

example, which extends the demystifying approach to Victorian children's literature, is Joseph Bristow's *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (1991). Importing into the study of children's fiction the notion of literature as the agent of an imperialist civilizing project, Bristow reads such texts as Frederick Marryat's *Masterman Ready* (1841-42) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1882) as propagating narratives of "imperialist boyhood and manhood" (2). An explanation of colonization in *Masterman Ready*, for example, is claimed to provide "a remarkable piece of self-legitimation" (98), and used to accuse Victorian children's fiction of cultivating an imperialist mindset in its impressionable readers. The one-sidedness of the "literature-as-ideology" approach can also be seen in Cicely Havely's reading guide to *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Written as part of the Open University course materials for *An Introduction to the Humanities* (1998), Havely's guide effectively reduces acclaimed Victorian texts like *Jane Eyre* to instruments in a project of "massive cultural indoctrination" – one of the channels through which "from the beginning of the nineteenth century British governments systematically educated an elite in every major colony to think like their rulers" (194).

To suggest that such demystifying critical approaches are problematic is not to deny the truth or the justice of the charges they bring against Victorian literary texts, for in many cases these claims are valid. But while the ideological functions of this body of writing are undoubtedly worth exploring, it is inadvisable to take for granted the assumption that Victorian literature served only the interests of the powerful. Such habits of discourse blind one to the potential benefits literary texts may have offered the same individuals and marginalized readers who are often portrayed as the hapless victims of literature's ideological illusions. Even Franco Moretti, who in his various writings on

nineteenth-century literature has astutely recognized the psychic benefits which literature-as-ideology might provide individual readers, admits that his notion of literature as a device for securing consent is "unliberating" and "disagreeable" (*Signs Taken for Wonders* 41), implicitly underlining the need to expand our conceptual vocabulary for understanding the socio-cultural and cognitive resources that literature might hold for the individual. Moretti's hypothesis that literature's "substantial function" is to "make individual's feel 'at ease' in the world they happen to live in, to reconcile them in a pleasant and imperceptible way to its prevailing cultural norms" makes literature little better than a textually-mediated narcotic. The notion that one reads Victorian literature primarily for its sedative effects does very little justice to literary practitioners, and implies an act of deliberate self-delusion that most readers would understandably find difficult to endorse.

As might be expected, the negative publicity surrounding the civilizing aspirations of Victorian literature has undermined the value of reading these texts, and the effects of this devaluation can strikingly be observed in the ways that scholars have sought to rescue their beloved texts from the ideological charges against them. Why read such literature if it serves only to reconcile us to a corrupt, exploitative civilization? The answer, according to many critics, is quite simply that it does not. Thus, many studies make Victorian literature assume the other role available in Eagleton's account of nineteenth-century literary history in *Literary Theory* – that of the rebel. Attempting to challenge the image of literature as a sycophant to bourgeois civilization, they have developed ingenious ways of reading into Victorian texts the subversive energies which Eagleton had reserved for romanticism.

Thus, even prior to the appearance of *Literary Theory* and the influential postcolonial readings of the eighties, Gilbert and Gubar had celebrated Jane Eyre's "promethean way of fiery rebellion" (347) and sought to reclaim Bertha Mason – described as Jane's "truest" double (360) – into an icon of "rebellious feminism" (338). Gilbert and Gubar's affirmative reading of *Jane Eyre*'s madwoman reflects an attempt to rescue literature's moral authority by placing it in an antagonistic relation to what is perceived as an unjust social order, and a similar rescue strategy can be found in many important feminist interventions around the same time. For example, in "The Power of Hunger: Demonism and Maggie Tulliver" (1975), Nina Auerbach celebrates Maggie Tulliver's subversive, destructive energy by linking her to witches, pagan goddesses, vampires and other types of the monstrous female. Focusing on psychological development, Marianne Hirsch's "Spritual *Bildung*: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm" (1983) similarly seeks to affirm the destructive endings of female *Bildungsromanen* like *The Mill on the Floss* by arguing that "the heroines' allegiance to childhood, pre-Oedipal desire, spiritual withdrawal, and ultimately death" – in other words, their anti-developmental tendencies – is "not neurotic but a realistic and paradoxically fulfilling reaction to an impossible contradiction" created by "the limited possibilities offered by their societies" (28).

The critical move which involves valorizing Victorian literary texts as disruptive and anti-developmental persists in later feminist criticism. In her *Unbecoming Women* (1993), for example, Susan Fraiman also concentrates on the "stress points, blockages, and jammings" arising from tensions between gender and genre in *The Mill on the Floss*, the better to show the "special vehemence" with which the novel resists classical models

of development (126). Fraiman's interest in the "ironisation and interrogation" of the notion of development (126) – rather than in making sense of Maggie's moral development – is symptomatic of an apparent need to cast Victorian literature in an oppositional relation to the bourgeois social order, and conventional notions of improvement more generally.[3] Such studies offer a valuable corrective to scholarship which tends to dismiss Victorian literature as a vehicle of bourgeois ideology. However, they have with demystifying criticism the common effect of making it difficult to discuss and conceptualize how mid-Victorian literary texts might serve to mediate "modern," "civilized" values and structures of thought, thereby enhancing readers' linguistic and cognitive resources. Strategies of reading which focus on the anti-developmental, disruptive character of Victorian literature can hardly, after all, be expected to contribute significantly to our critical vocabulary for conceptualizing the relationship between literature and improvement.

Improving Language: Further Incentives for Studying the Civilizing Effects of Victorian Literature

We have now established the patterns of critical activity whose combined effect has been to make it difficult to explore how nineteenth-century writers engaged with the concept

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[3] This critical trend in the study of mid-Victorian texts continues in more recent work by Jonathan Esty and Matthew Beaumont. Esty, for example, applauds George Eliot's resistance to "historical, generic, and psychological conventions of development" (101) in *The Mill on the Floss*, and characterizes the novel as an "anti-*Bildungsroman*" (107) which "does not simply cast doubt on the idea that societies or individuals improve over time, but also the more radical question of whether societies or individuals can be said to possess any kind of continuous identity over time" (101). More recently, Beaumont has attempted to reclaim the figure of the cannibal other in *Wuthering Heights*, going so far as to invest the notion of cannibalism with utopian potential, and claiming that it is "the cruelty of civilised convention … that Brontë is most keenly concerned to reveal" (156). Beaumont's essay strikingly illustrates the reversal of values attached to "civilization" and its others which has occurred in the field: "civilization" is downgraded, the term associated with a pre-civilized state is invested with positive significance, and the literary text is represented as laboring heroically to effect this semantic transvaluation.

of civilization, or in what sense Victorian literature might be claimed to be "improving." The survey in the previous section clearly reveals considerable rhetorical resistance to the possibility of aligning literature with civilizing processes in a constructive manner. If literature is viewed as promoting assimilation into civilized society, then it is swiftly dismissed as ideology. The only way for Victorian texts to qualify as morally acceptable – as worthy objects of study – is to accept an antagonistic role in relation to civilization. It is hardly surprising, then, that our critical resources for describing and evaluating the civilizing effects of Victorian literature are so impoverished.

But why does this matter? Even if is assumed that cultivating civilized structures of thought and feeling in readers is indeed a substantial function of this literature, one might still quite justly question whether such a function merits critical study. After all, if bourgeois civilization is even half as corrupt and destructive as some critics represent it, is it worth elaborating conceptual models for describing how Victorian literature sought to equip readers with the wherewithal to integrate into such a social order? Is the civilization that Victorian literary texts promote worth the effort?

Recognizing the deeply flawed state of "things as they are," and that bourgeois civilization is gravely in need of reform in more areas than one can imagine, my short answer to this question is "yes." For one thing, literature is undeniably a product of this civilization, so that to make the study of literature one's profession is tacitly to acknowledge that there are many aspects of the social order worth preserving. In any case, quite independent of the desirability of bourgeois civilization – and the question of whether literature's promotion of this civilization is a good thing or not – there are

compelling reasons for developing more satisfactory critical models for understanding the civilizing designs of Victorian literature.

On a general level, insofar as literature is itself a product of civilization, a more developed critical language for describing the textual strategies whereby such texts achieve their civilizing aims would shed valuable light on their conditions of possibility. Studying their civilizing rhetoric could promote greater disciplinary self-knowledge, raising – if nothing else – awareness of the cost of the kind of literary culture enjoyed by the Victorians. And even if is true that literature is an ideological instrument which supports bourgeois civilization out of self-interest, its civilizing rhetoric should not be trivialized, for not all ideologies are equal. Admitting literature's status as ideology should not diminish the interest or value of an attempt to investigate more precisely *how* it functions as ideology – how its textual and cognitive mechanisms work. If Victorian literary texts do indeed sponsor "modern," "civilized" values and mental structures, it would be highly useful to be able to describe the new "technologies of the word" – the "improved" linguistic and cognitive resources – with which it sought to equip its readers.

Moving away from the more general value of studying the civilizing designs of Victorian literature, I have in mind three more specific incentives for pursuing such a project. First, as an attempt to study the improving effects of literature in the context of mid-Victorian discourses on civilization, such a project constitutes a useful contribution to ongoing work in literary linguistics and discourse studies to identify the special features of literary language and to characterize the "super-genre" of literature (see, e.g., Bex 395). Few would contest the notion that literary texts represent highly sophisticated instances of language use, yet – partly as a result of the rhetorical dynamics outlined in

the previous section – it has become increasingly difficult to speak of how reading literature might help readers develop similarly "sophisticated" ways of doing things with words. Integrating ideas from literary linguistics with nineteenth-century rhetorical thought, this study explores the idea that, within the context of Victorian understandings of "civilization" and the changes in consciousness it produces, the language of many Victorian texts was not only highly civilized, but more importantly exercised a "civilizing" influence on its readers. As such, *Improving Language* aims to provide a more historically grounded approach to the linguistic study of literary discourse.

In particular, a study of how literary texts interact with readers' responses which focuses on the pedagogical function of literature would counterbalance the tendency in linguistically-inflected approaches to literature to overplay the subversive effects of literary discourse. Guy Cook, whose insightful and intelligently argued *Discourse and Literature* (1994) otherwise represents an invaluable contribution to the field, falls into this regrettable one-sidedness when he characterizes literature primarily as a "schema refreshing discourse," emphasizing the "liberating and disruptive function of unpredicted form" (255) at the expense of the potentially consolidating effects of literary discourse in relation to beliefs and social values. Characterizing the "literary experience" as "one of mental disruption, refreshment, and play, more typically effected when the individual withdraws from the world of social and practical necessity," Cook overlooks, for example, the role that literature might play in constructing the very "inner world of the individual" which he regards as so intimately tied to literature's "particular function in human life" (255).

And a more balanced appraisal of the functions of literary discourse does not merely represent a more satisfactory answer to a purely academic question. Beyond contributing to the field of literary linguistics, developing a more adequate critical language for theorizing the relation between literature and improvement represents a way of beginning to address pressing pedagogical issues involving the teaching of literature. A more holistic account of the properties of literary language – one attuned not only to its disruptive effects but also to its role in the formation of cognitive structures, for example – would be of great service to teachers and scholars who need to explain the benefits of teaching literature in institutionalized settings.[4] And there is little doubt that literary scholars are in grave need of a critical discourse which would better enable them to articulate reasons for studying literature in educational institutions. Even within English departments, the impoverished state of our resources for describing the socio-cognitive benefits of reading literature is felt, and is perhaps nowhere more strikingly illustrated than in the "lit-comp wars" – a longstanding and highly polarized debate within English studies about the place of literature in the teaching of college writing.

In their attacks on the use of literature in freshman composition, Erika Lindemann and Sharon Crowley, for example, exploit the weakness of standard arguments for using literature in writing instruction, implying that because these arguments are unconvincing, they must be made in bad faith. Since defenders of literature in this debate have often failed to produce stronger reasons for using literary texts in the teaching of writing, it would appear that the discourse of participants on both sides of the question confirms

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[4] Accounts which focus one-sidedly on the subversive effects of literary language clearly do not offer much help in this area: Cook, for example, is led by his theory to conclude that because literary experience "is as much about rejecting social values as assimilating them," it "may not be suited to an educational environment at all" (255).

what Gary Tate suggests in "Notes on the Dying of a Conversation" (1995): that the cultural idiom that has traditionally been used to articulate the value of studying literature has been debased, and those who would advocate the use of literature in writing instruction must develop a discourse which would persuade non-believers that their arguments are not merely motivated by matters of personal taste or institutional exigency. Studying how the civilizing language of Victorian literary texts interacts with the mental worlds of readers to enhance their linguistic and cognitive resources constitutes an important step towards developing such a discourse.

Besides the potential gains for literary linguistics and writing pedagogy, a second advantage of the studying the civilizing effects of Victorian literature is that such an approach does far greater justice to nineteenth-century critical discourse and literary theory. For different reasons discussed earlier, readings shaped by the literature-as-ideology and literature-as-rebel paradigms fail to give serious attention to the relationship between literature and the notion of improvement, thus ignoring an entire body of nineteenth-century writing which emphasizes the benefits – intellectual, moral, psychological – of reading literature. Writers separated as widely in time and temperament as Wordsworth and Wilde developed arguments defending the value of literary art, so that the fact that contemporary English scholars have not more profitably tapped this rich source of theory linking literature and improvement only demonstrates the extent to which "reading against the grain" has hardened into a routine method of interpreting the Victorians.

The potential costs of blindly adhering to a hermeneutics of suspicion when reading the Victorians' "aggrandizing" claims on behalf of literature are readily suggested by the

fate of Matthew Arnold, whose writings on the cultural functions of literature have often been singled out for attack by critics determined to uncover the ideological dimensions of literature (see, e.g., Baldick; Eagleton). In such accounts, extracts from some of Arnold's more high-flown rhetoric are typically used to expose the irrationality or bad faith of his claims about the edifying effects of reading literature – and, doubtless, this strategy of reading against the grain has yielded many important insights about the class-bound nature of literary institutions. However, the reflex manner in which many English scholars cringe at phrases like "sweetness and light" and "the best which has been thought and said in the world" suggests that such habits of resistant reading have perhaps become a little too ingrained in contemporary critical practice. The result is that, in relation to nineteenth-century assertions about the value of literature at least, a rather reductive interpretive procedure has become pervasive in English studies – one which involves simply reversing the value of what appear to be grandiose or excessive claims.

Unsurprisingly, the habit of applying Mr. Grimwig's philosophy to Victorian arguments for the value of literature does not make for a critical environment conducive to a more accurate understanding of their ideas. More often, misprisions occur and false impressions develop. Take, for example, the way Baldick finds fault with Arnold's reliance on "literary intuition" in his critical writings (37) – a charge consistent with Eagleton's characterization of literature as dealing primarily with feeling, and therefore as antithetical to "analytical thought and conceptual enquiry" (22). This reading of Arnold clearly undermines the idea that literature might facilitate intellectual development, when in fact Arnold's aesthetic ideals quite explicitly involve the

tempering of subjectivity and the cultivation of critical distance.[5] And – as the following chapters will show – although Arnold was very far from uncritically endorsing the tendencies of modern civilization, he did appreciate the potential of literature to facilitate the individual's adaptation to modernity, and, significantly, cast literature's distinctive service in intellectual terms. The assumption that Arnold helped establish a notion of literature which privileged the emotions at the expense of the intellect is therefore, quite simply, misleading – the unfortunate by-product of the excessive zeal with which Arnold's "mystifications" about literary culture have been attacked. Such a reading is not only unjust to Arnold, but leads one to overlook a considerable body of nineteenth-century writing – including influential earlier work by Joanna Baillie, William Wordsworth, and John Keble – that explains the psychological benefits of reading literature in terms of its regulating effects on the emotions.

The third important source of motivation for this project has similarly to do with the way we read nineteenth-century texts – in this case, the mid- and late- Victorian literary texts themselves. Studying the civilizing designs of these texts can potentially afford a richer, more complex account of nineteenth-century literary history, and in particular yields a fuller understanding of the literary experience of the Victorians. A study which takes seriously the relationship between literature and the notion of improvement does far more justice to Victorian literature as textual design, and to the relationship between writers and readers encoded therein.

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[5] In his "Preface to the First Edition of *Poems*" (1853), Arnold suggests that an important function of poetry is to counter the "morbid" excesses of "modern" subjectivity, disapproving of literary representations which "monotonous[ly]" depict "a continuous state of mental distress [which] is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance" (599).

It is no doubt true that this relationship can only imperfectly be reconstructed by the present-day reader, but just a little effort to enter into how authors imagined their readers relating to their books would suggest far more interesting models of interaction – and a far more sophisticated meta-literary awareness of the power transactions involved in textual activity – than dominant critical paradigms allow. As the following chapters will reveal, there is in many of the literary texts that I include in this study at least one character whom the reader is encouraged to treat as her proxy: figures of the "apprentice reader" whose developing ability to make sense of the textual world mirrors the reader's own imperfect state of knowledge (most immediately vis-à-vis the given text), and whose apprenticeship in meaning-making forms an important concern – if not the main subject – of the narrative. The widespread interest in training readers and developing their reading practices in the literature of this period clearly runs counter to the assumption, implicit in many "rebellious" readings, that these texts are not at some level committed to the notion of improvement. A basic recognition of the pedagogical dimensions of reading suggests that they had to have been – had to have retained some faith that the literary event might possibly leave one changed for the better.

At the same time, an attempt to understand the tutelary designs of mid- and late-Victorian literature enables a far more nuanced understanding of the complex distribution of power in the relationship between texts and their users. Many of the texts discussed in this study represent characters reading in unexpected, highly creative ways, using texts in ways which clearly exceed authorial intention in order to satisfy highly individualistic needs and desires. Jane Eyre, Alton Locke, and Maggie Tulliver are just a few instances of such readers, whose unorthodox (and not always profitable) use of texts suggests the

Victorians' awareness of the inherent power of literacy – a power which readers may or may not employ to their own advantage. Such representations of reading imply a far more sophisticated model of the interaction between texts and readers than the literature-as-ideology approach tends to assume. While demystifying critical praxes – especially in cruder manifestations – tend to treat texts as having a monopoly over meaning and representation, many Victorian texts recognize the literary event as a far more complex process of negotiation in which the reader necessarily plays an active role. To study the civilizing effects of this literature is to explore how – in spite of the recognition that readers often read subjectively for their own purposes – such texts attempt to engage, and perhaps to alter, their readers' private mental worlds.

The Power of Refinement: Reading for Improvement in *Jane Eyre*

The foregoing sections have attempted generally to motivate this project on a higher level of abstraction, dwelling in some detail on scholarly discourse practices in order to justify my own critical intervention. But perhaps the most effective way of justifying such a critical undertaking – and the most fitting, for a study which emphasizes the immense potential of literature for theoretical statement – is to illustrate some of the general claims made so far with reference to a specific literary text. The closing section of this introduction will, accordingly, use the case of *Jane Eyre* (1847) to illustrate some of the interpretive costs of the critical hostility to "civilization" and its cognates, and also to suggest the potential yields of treating the relationship between Victorian literature and improvement more seriously, and with an open mind.

Brontë's much-studied novel provides a useful case study not only because Spivak's powerful attack on its "unquestioned ideology of imperialist axiomatics" (248) almost demands to be addressed by such a study as the one I'm proposing; having occasioned influential readings informed by both the literature-as-sycophant and literature-as-rebel paradigms, the text enables us to bring out the limitations of both cynical and affirmative approaches quite economically. While pointing out the blinkering effects induced by negative attitudes towards notions of civilization and improvement, this section also attempts to show how Brontë's novel sets out to map Jane's improving powers as a (verbal) artist, a maker of representations which mediate her interiority to – and enable her to act on – the external world. While no attempt will be made at this stage to insert Brontë's depiction of Jane's *Bildung* into the broader context of nineteenth-century discourse on civilization, we will explore the increasingly sophisticated technologies of word and image which Jane acquires – insights into the enabling possibilities of rhetorical refinement which are at the same time extended to the reader.

That the idea of improvement should play a significant role in *Jane Eyre* is not really remarkable, since, as a *Bildungsroman* – and arguably one of the most important English mobilizations of the genre – the novel is expected to be primarily concerned with its protagonist's development. But even when generic factors are taken into consideration, the novel's preoccupation with the notion of improvement is striking, and, indeed, evident from its very first page, with Jane banished from the intimate circle of the domestic sphere until she improves – that is, until she convinces Mrs. Reed that she is "endeavoring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner; – something lighter, franker, more natural" (63). Spivak

rightly seeks to link Jane's *Bildung* with larger projects for "regenerating [the human] race" (487), for the text deals with ideas of education and improvement on multiple levels: we see Jane not only as a pupil subject to the harsh discipline at Lowood, but also as an educator herself both at Thornfield and Morton. Neither does Jane wholly relinquish the role of pupil after she leaves Lowood; Helen Burns, Miss Temple, Mr. Rochester, and St. John Rivers form a series of characters who play mentor to Jane at different stages of her career. The plot further involves civilizing projects on a larger scale – Jane's village-school at Morton, and, on the most ambitious level, St. John's missionary work in India.

The novel's extensive engagement with the notion of improvement is hardly exhausted by these examples. Given the overdetermined significance of this term in the text, one should immediately be wary of Spivak's efforts to explain the "narrative energy" (247) driving Jane's *Bildung* in terms of "the unquestioned idiom of imperialist presuppositions" (249). As it turns out, in spite of her claim to have inferred a general "axiomatics of imperialism" at work in the novel (247), Spivak's dismissive reading of "civilization" and "improvement" as phantoms of imperialist ideology is in fact based on rather limited textual evidence – four "key" passages, to be exact. Two of the extracts from which Spivak derives the text's "imperialist axiomatics" are, moreover, speeches delivered by Rochester and St. John – characters whose arguments can hardly be taken to represent the text's position in any straightforward manner.

Of course, Spivak's use of a fairly narrow range of textual examples need not in itself result in an unsatisfactory assessment of the novel, but perhaps as a result she neglects the much larger network of meaning surrounding "improvement" in the text.

Consequently, her reading of *Jane Eyre*'s participation in the "active ideology of imperialism" (247) becomes liable to a more serious objection: namely, that it overlooks the highly critical position that the novel itself adopts in relation to various projects of "improvement" within the textual world, representing them as hypocritical or, simply, as in the case of Mrs. Reed's notions of child-rearing, ill-conceived. By exposing the cruelty and injustice committed by characters like Mr. Brocklehurst under the pretense of "sav[ing] … souls" (129), the novel anticipates postcolonial critiques of literature, demonstrating its awareness that the discourse of improvement can easily be co-opted to legitimate the abuse of power. In addition, the narrative is cognizant of the complex ethical issues raised by any attempt to subject another to one's own schemes for improvement. As with St. John's attempts to enlist Jane for his missionary efforts, such projects may be well-meaning but nonetheless rendered futile by egotism, or the failure to understand the needs of others. Thus, even if *Jane Eyre* ultimately validates the Christian discourse of salvation motivating St. John's mission, the novel's position in relation to such massive projects of improvement must be understood as far more considered than Spivak gives it credit for.

If Brontë allows Jane to endorse St. John's civilizing mission, it is because the text maintains a firm sense of the palpable differences corresponding to different levels of exposure to modern, civilized culture. In other words, while the text shares with many cultural critics a sense of sympathy and indignation on the part of those subjected to specious projects of improvement, it does not, like Spivak, dismiss "civilization" as an ideological sleight-of-hand. The novel affirms that literacy and modern cultural forms produce genuine changes in the social and mental world, so that while *Jane Eyre* might

protest against the harsh conditions of Jane's education at Lowood, the novel is far from undervaluing the cultural training she acquires there. Resolutely refusing to idealize the virtues of pre- or semi-civilized others – be they children or uneducated servants – Brontë takes pains to show the disabling effects of being relatively "uncultured."

The costs of a less developed mental culture are first of all borne by the uncultivated themselves: for example, the ill-treatment that Jane suffers as a child are bad enough on their own, but as the adult narrator recognizes, they are compounded by her childhood self's inadequate mental resources for dealing with adversity: "in what darkness, what dense ignorance, was the mental battle fought!" (73) The external harassment to which the child is subject is exacerbated by the violent turmoil within. More will be said about Jane's growing ability to manage inner and outer realities later; at this point, another important disadvantage which the novel attaches to the lack of higher culture is worth underlining. While literature has often been accused of creating ideological abstractions which serve the interests of the powerful, Brontë shows that a lack of higher culture can lock people into the mundane concerns of material existence in equally restrictive ways – that such a drowsy state of consciousness is precisely what retards efforts to alter to the *status quo*. The novel clearly illustrates this idea in its representation of working-class characters, whose crude sense of social justice is represented as seriously stunting their capacity to sympathize with those marginalized for being different. The Rivers' "honest" Hannah provides a case in point: unable to separate the idea of virtue from the material trappings of respectability, the otherwise sympathetically portrayed servant equates Jane's destitution with criminality, with nearly fatal consequences.

In fact, the way in which the lack of culture might produce a materialistic mentality which blunts one's sense of social justice is hinted at much earlier in the novel. It is no accident that the exchange which underlines the Gateshead servants' peculiar blindness to the injustices Jane suffers in the Reed's household terminates abruptly in the elaboration of their fancied supper ("a Welsh rabbit … with a roast onion" [84]). By means of this carefully constructed conversation, Brontë suggests a connection between a lack of cultivation and a habitual lack of critical distance from "things as they are": chaining people to the immediate desires of the body, such myopic habits of mind evidently tend to bind them to the establishment as effectively as (if not more so than) any ideological abstractions. Just like Hannah, the Gateshead servants conflate merit with its conventional material signs, so that, according to their logic, Georgiana's beauty makes her a far worthier object of compassion than Jane.[6] Interestingly, as a child, Jane herself is not exempt from such limiting habits of thought. When asked to consider the possibility of living with relatives poorer than the Reeds, she treats poverty as "synonymous with degradation," admitting that she is "not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste" (82).

Directly challenging assumptions about literature's predominantly ideological function, Brontë presents literature and its sister arts as potential means of emancipating oneself from the fetters of such class-bound prejudices and restrictive habits of thought.

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[6] Brontë does acknowledge, however, that a desirable critical distance from things as they are may be derived from sources other than literary culture: Bessie's mother, who visits Gateshead from an alternative domestic setting, tells her daughter that "she would not like a little one of her own to be in [Jane's] place" (98)

In a fascinating piece of ekphrasis,[7] the text suggests how the (in this case, imaginatively anticipated) cultivation of mental discipline through art and literature helps Jane to liberate herself at least partially from the tyranny of physical hunger, so that she can confidently affirm – in contrast to her earlier "unheroic" admission – that she "would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations for Gateshead and its daily luxuries" (139):

> in a few weeks I was allowed to commence French and drawing. I learned the first two tenses of the verb *Etre*, and sketched my first cottage …, on the same day. That night, on going to bed, I forgot to prepare in imagination the Barmecide supper of hot roast potatoes, or white bread and new milk, with which I was wont to amuse my inward cravings: I feasted instead on the spectacle of ideal drawings, which I saw in the dark; all the work of my own hands: freely penciled houses and trees, picturesque rocks and ruins, Cuyp-like groups of cattle, sweet paintings of butterflies hovering over unblown roses, of birds pecking at ripe cherries, of wrens' nests enclosing pearl-like eggs, wreathed about with young ivy sprays. I examined, too, in thought, the possibility of my ever being able to translate currently a certain little French story-book which Madame Pierrot had that day shewn me; nor was that problem solved to my satisfaction ere I fell sweetly asleep. (139)

Imaginative art in its various media are shown opening up for the child a bold, new virtual world, whose increased plasticity enables the mind to discriminate between material signs of well-being (good food) and the more abstract sense of personal worth to be derived from intellectual achievement and creative effort. Contact with literary culture, Brontë implies, transforms the mental world, introducing new aspirations which serve to counterbalance the peremptory demands of corporeal "inward cravings." As we shall see, this passage is just one piece of evidence which the text produces to show the enabling effects of literary refinement: the "refining" power of imaginative discipline develops one's analytical capacities, opens up a potential space for critical reflection on

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[7] In fact, the passage contains an interesting example of "secondary" ekphrasis: since the visual images that Brontë describes in such loving detail are pictures which exist only in Jane's imagination, the ekphrastic representation is triply removed from reality, signaling the high degree of reflexivity made possible by art.

the prevailing social order, and, in particular, plays a crucial role in sustaining Jane's resistance to various forms of masculine domination later in the novel.

We have now established two major interpretive blind spots induced by the hostility towards "civilization" in the literature-as-ideology approach exemplified by "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" – first, that such a cynical reading fails to register the novel's sophisticated critical engagement with the notion of improvement; and, second, that such an approach hinders one from noticing the arguments developed by the text to demonstrate the potentially enabling "civilizing" agency of literature and the arts. One further substantial oversight results from Spivak's deconstructive postcolonial critique: in its determination to prove that the heroine's progress occurs at the expense of Bertha Mason (the figure of the "native female"), it takes too little notice of the intimate relationship between Jane and the madwoman in the attic.[8] This important relationship is, of course, the key to Gilbert and Gubar's influential reading of the novel, and their sustained analysis of Bertha's role as Jane's double has justly secured them a prominent place in the novel's critical history. It is not just that Bertha functions as a negative model for Jane (Gilbert and Gubar 361), or that Jane herself demonstrates a compassionate attitude towards her unfortunate predecessor[9] – the text cannot *but* be deeply interested in Bertha's predicament, for Bertha's "madness" is in important ways Jane's as well. As Gilbert and Gubar take pains to establish, the

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[8] In "The Tropical Extravagance of Bertha Mason," Sue Thomas provides a valuable corrective to Spivak's imperialist reading by showing that Brontë "carefully historicized" the relationships among Bertha, Rochester, and Jane. However, by establishing Bertha as the figure of the "ineducable despot rather than the "rebel slave" (13), her reading effectively disavows Jane's imaginative identification with the madwoman in the attic.

[9] It is significant that, even in the midst of her own crushing disappointment, the characteristically unsentimental and sharp-tongued Jane can find it in herself to reproach Rochester for his harsh language in relation to Bertha: "you speak of her with hate – with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel – she cannot help being mad" (391).

experience of the red-room has taught Jane only too well what it's like to be incarcerated for "irrational" behavior. Neither is Jane's "madness" safely contained in her childhood: even as she resists Rochester with an impressive display of mental fortitude, Jane calls herself "mad" and "quite insane," while Rochester describes her resistance as that of a "savage, beautiful creature" (408). Gilbert and Gubar's critical intervention helps us see that the pre-civilized impulses which Bertha embodies *in extremis* are by no means alien to the adult Jane's inner world – a salutary reminder that no-one, regardless of their supposed level of maturity or civilization, can afford to take the coherence of the self for granted.

While the value of Gilbert and Gubar's critical insights is certainly not to be underestimated, their valorization of Bertha as a figure for the novel's "rebellious feminism" (338) is animated by a hostility towards notions of civilization and order which skews their reading of the novel in problematic ways. For one thing, they tend to over-emphasize Bertha's role in Jane's development, repeatedly referring to her in such terms as Jane's "truest" double and "secret self" (360). Emphasizing Jane's kinship with Bertha might be a crucial interpretive move, but it is questionable whether this necessitates turning Bertha into Jane's most significant double – and a metaphor for the feminist rage which is somehow taken to be the novel's most important articulation. To make such an undeniably violent, destructive figure so central to Jane's process of self-formation seems less than useful, for Bertha on her own – as Gilbert and Gubar themselves acknowledge[10] – can at best only teach Jane (and the reader) how *not to be* –

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[10] Gilbert and Gubar privilege Bertha's tutelary role over Miss Temple's by saying that Bertha "teach[es] [Jane] a lesson more salutary than any Miss Temple ever taught, " but even they must admit that Bertha can only provide a negative model – that is, with a "monitory" example of "how not to act" (361).

she does not offer any viable alternatives. Bertha, in other words, offers but a partial model in the novel's larger project of *Bildung*, which involves a range of other characters functioning as Jane's *alter egos*. Gilbert and Gubar's underlying suspicion of "civilization" and its cognates tends, however, to prevent a more just estimate of milder tutelary figures like Helen Burns and Miss Temple – and their importance to Jane's development.[11] Thus, while Bertha is Jane's "truest" double, Helen and Miss Temple are relegated to maternal figures, whose ways of "saintly renunciation" and "ladylike repression" (347) are represented as ultimately incompatible with Jane's "native vitality" (364). The patronizing attitude of these feminist critics towards Jane's more refined doubles is symptomatic of their inability to appreciate the power to be derived from the models of refinement and self-control they provide. Distracted by the imagery of unruly, pre-civilized energy surrounding Bertha (and Jane herself), Gilbert and Gubar can perceive neither the illuminating moonlight associated with Miss Temple, nor the beauty "of meaning, of movement, of radiance" which "kindle[s]" and "glows" in Helen (137). They forget that order need not be opposed to energy, and – by channeling this energy appropriately – might even serve to multiply its effects in important ways.

Both skeptical and affirmative readings share a peculiar shortcoming that underscores the way in which the suspicion of "improvement" has impoverished our understanding of the novel: whether Jane is implicated as imperialist subject or celebrated as feminist rebel, both studies tend to treat her as a more or less static character – a

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[11] Significantly, contemporary scholarship on the novel rarely dwells on the importance of these two figures to Jane's development, preferring instead to focus on Jane's relationship to Bertha or even Grace Poole (Fraiman). Thomas, whose work on the novel has usefully clarified the limitations of identifying Jane with Bertha, similarly de-emphasizes Helen Burns's role as a model for Jane, associating Helen's arguments for Christian endurance with Brocklehurst, Mrs. Reed, and the Biblical justification of slavery (Thomas, "Christianity and the State of Slavery in *Jane Eyre*" 66).

convergence which is the more surprising considering the novel's fairly explicit affiliations to the *Bildungsroman* genre. Spivak, for her part, assumes that the exclusive model of reading exemplified in the opening scene of the novel adequately represents the adult Jane's textual practices – a figure for the "unique creative imagination of the marginal individualist" (246). Meanwhile, for all their talk of Jane's "pilgrimage" (358) and "progress toward selfhood" (366), Gilbert and Gubar have no adequate language to describe the changes in Jane or how these changes occur: they gesture to some vague notion of organic development by referring to "the goal of [Jane's] pilgrimage" in terms of attaining a "wholeness within herself" (362) or a "life of wholeness" (366), but do not explain how such images of unity might be recognized or achieved. The Jane whom they seek to validate is not a being whose interest lies in her capacity for change; rather, she is one who discovers "the deepest principles and laws of her own being," and learns to affirm some essentialized core of "native vitality" (364) – a "Byronic heroine" whose "Promethean way of fiery rebellion" is radically discontinuous with the kind of compromise represented by Miss Temple (347). Moretti, who produces a more tolerant reading of the novel as a carrier of bourgeois ideology, sums up clearly this "static" reading of its heroine. Employing novels like *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* to generalize about the English *Bildungsroman*, Moretti claims that

> the most significant experiences [in these novels] are not those that alter but those which *confirm* the choices made by childhood "innocence." Rather than novels of 'initiation' one feels they should be called novels of "preservation." (*The Way of the World* 182)

But Jane *does* change, as I have already suggested above, and if she retains her capacity for "fiery rebellion," it is by virtue not of preserving, but transforming, the undeniably limited mental world of childhood. The question, then, is *how* Jane changes –

what significant changes in her protagonist does Brontë seek to communicate, and in what terms does the text invite us to conceptualize her development? The remainder of this section proposes that Jane's *Bildung* is best conceptualized in terms of her apprenticeship as a reader – a meaning-maker – a rhetorician of word and image: it is the power of the increasingly refined representational technologies she acquires which the text both demonstrates and affirms in the story of her development.

Since Brontë's *Bildungsroman* is very much about Jane's formation as a manipulator of texts, it is no surprise that the novel opens with a scene of reading – an activity which, as Spivak observes, is conceived as an act of construction even at this early stage of Jane's career: it creates a space of "self-marginalized uniqueness" that "can make the outside inside" (246). In other words, one might read Jane reading "in double retirement" (64) as a figure for a certain mode of reading – a solitary act of meaning-making which allows the reader to withdraw into her private, mental world. Noting Jane's preference for "reading" the pictures instead of the "letter-press" of Bewick (64), Spivak rightly recognizes the highly individualistic, subjective character of her reading practices, but mistakenly assumes that they are uncritically endorsed by the novel. In fact, Brontë almost immediately highlights the hazards of this solipsistic mode of reading. While her imaginative absorption in Bewick undeniably provides some refuge from the harsh domestic environment, it also makes Jane dangerously oblivious to external reality. John Reed's rude interruption of her imaginative retreat quickly serves to warn the reader that one ignores the outside world at one's own peril. As if to underline the dangers of this self-absorbed kind of reading, Brontë has Jane hit on the head with Bewick – a very

concrete reminder of the status of texts (and their readers) as physical entities in a material world.

One might say, therefore, that Jane's apprenticeship in rhetorical "refinement" begins early – and (quite literally) in the hands of the brutish figure of John Reed. Her first lesson, described above, may be understood as a rudimentary exercise in refinement – that is, learning to separate the imaginary from the outer world, for in her self-absorbed reading Jane is guilty of attempting to substitute her private, mental world for the larger reality she inhabits. Brontë illustrates that this is no trivial lesson: so limited is Jane's control over her powers of meaning-making at this stage, that her highly subjective representations tend to be exaggerated in scale and intensity, making it difficult for her to keep external reality in perspective. Thus, just after having learned the dangers of conflating internal and external realities, Jane's attempts to externalize her subjectivity and resist John immediately result in the same error. Likening her persecutor to "a murderer," "a slave-driver" and "the Roman emperors" (67), Jane's language effectively places her experience of nursery bullying on the same footing as slavery and imperial tyranny: too close to her sense of personal injury, she magnifies her cousin's act of aggression to epic proportions. The hyperbolic quality of her similes quickly leads her, once again, to confuse her imaginative constructions with objective reality – "I really saw in him a tyrant: a murderer" (68) – with disastrous consequences. Jane's imaginative script becomes reality, and she herself is reduced to "a desperate thing" (68), a "rebel slave" (69) whose only means of resistance – physical force – is still more primitive than her hyperbolic rhetoric.

The sequel to Jane's first outward act of resistance emphasizes the need for marginalized readers like herself to develop more refined techniques of self-assertion, and of meaning-making in general. In the first place, as a puny ten-year-old girl and a dependent in the Reeds' household, Jane's attempts to practice her childish doctrine of retaliation can only be self-defeating.[12] Like most mutinies in the external world, Jane's physical rebellion is swiftly and forcefully contained by an establishment whose command of physical might far exceeds her own. But, as humiliating as the experience of physical defeat might be, the aftermath in Jane's mental world is even more traumatic. Isolated in the red-room, Jane pays a heavy price for her lapse into primitive desperation – for being "*out* of [herself]" (69). The violence of Jane's emotions wreaks such havoc in her inner world that her own imagination turns against her, tormenting her with spectral fears which eventually overwhelm her more completely than her cousin's physical assault. The futility – and the psychic costs – of mobilizing the primitive "language" of

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[12] Jane explains her notions of natural justice to Helen later in the novel: "When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should – so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again" (119). Even if the Christian teachings which Helen immediately reminds Jane of are not taken into consideration, it is highly unlikely that Brontë would have endorsed Jane's initial faith in the efficacy of retaliatory force: the socio-political milieu in which she operated ensured that she was well-acquainted with the limitations of force as a means of political action. Not only would Brontë have observed the failure of various Chartist strikes and riots to move Parliament in the 1840s, her research for the novel, as Thomas's *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness* (2008) persuasively argues, would very likely have led her to consider the "West India Question" and impressed on her the futility of actual slave uprisings in the West Indies. While emphasizing the general state of violence and disorder resulting from the 1760 St. Mary's rebellion, even a text as sympathetic towards the Creole planters as Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774), for example, reveals the particularly devastating consequences suffered by the rebel slaves themselves (461-62). Moreover, as a regular reader of *Blackwood's*, Brontë would most likely have encountered essays on the Jamaica Question by Archibald Alison, and would thus have been aware that the allegedly savage mentality of the African laborers was the central argument used to legitimate slavery as an institution designed to facilitate "the vast transition from savage to civilized life" ("Colonial Government" 85). Violent resistance not only threatened to "involve … in one promiscuous ruin the slaves and their oppressors" (Alison, "The West India Question" 422), the use of violence by the disenfranchised would only serve to confirm their primitive mentality, validating the idea that "personal freedom" would be a "fatal gift … to men still actuated by the passions, and requiring the restraint, of savages" (418).

force urgently underscore the necessity of developing alternative modes of meaning-making, and supply a crucial initial impetus for Jane's rhetorical evolution.

In fact, Brontë hints at the paths along which Jane must develop in the very first episode with John Reed. By representing this rather atavistic figure flinging a book at Jane – that is, reducing the text to a physical weapon – the novel suggests that Jane must reverse this decivilizing gesture by learning to transform her resistance into text. Jane's narrative of formation can be read in terms of her gradual mastery of increasingly subtle (or refined) methods of mediating her interiority in order to act on the external world. Thus, Jane's verbal encounters with Mrs. Reed dramatize the child's discovery and development of the "faculty … of fierce speaking" (97) – a belligerent mode of rhetoric which mediates Jane's turbulent interiority in a form more refined than physical aggression, and at the same time compensates for her lack of physical strength by effectively unleashing "the venom of [her] mind" against her adversary (323). Jane's triumphant discovery of this verbal power is clearly depicted as a mental breakthrough occurring in a moment of crisis, when her lack of external resources is most apparent, and her need for a new organ of resistance greatest: "*Speak* I must: I had been trodden on severely and *must* turn: but how? What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist?" (95)

It is not just that verbal aggression replaces physical force during this episode to provide Jane with a more effective mode of resistance. Brontë also suggests a process of rhetorical refinement occurring in the very language which Jane uses to cow Mrs. Reed. Instead of the exaggerated, far-fetched comparisons used against John Reed earlier, Jane is described here as "gather[ing] [her] energies and launch[ing] them in [a] *blunt*

sentence" (95, emphasis added). Indeed, though highly charged with passionate feeling, Jane's invective is surprisingly free from figurative language: it is as if the subjectivity animating her words has been "refined" in the sense of being broken up into finer particles – and is no longer conspicuously present as spots of colorful imagery. As a result, Jane's rhetorical performance is far more oriented to external reality and objective facts, and assumes a tone of rationality and truth which corresponds to her defense of her veracity ("Deceit is not my fault!" [96]). Brontë emphasizes that it is precisely this semblance to adult rationality – and *not* raw passion – that gives Jane's fierce speaking its disturbing power. Jane's newly refined rhetorical organ expresses her deeply felt sense of injustice with intensity, but because her emotional intensity is framed by the norms of "reasonable" language, her speech radically shifts the grounds on which the conflict is unfolding: her newly acquired rhetorical refinement forces Mrs. Reed to speak to her "rather in the tone in which a person might address an opponent of adult age than such as is ordinarily used to a child" (95). Mrs. Reed's recollection of Jane's speech years after the event confirms that its efficacy lies in its precociously "refined" or adult character – indeed, she figures the haunting effects of Jane's childhood performance in terms of a dramatically accelerated process of rhetorical evolution: "I felt fear, as if an animal that I had struck or pushed had looked up at me with human eyes and cursed me in a man's voice" (323).

In short, the power of "fierce speaking" depends on Jane's capacity for rhetorical refinement and control as much as it does on the inner "fire and violence" (323) which Gilbert and Gubar have made so much of. In addition to – or rather as a necessary condition of – the kinds of "refinement" described above, this forceful act of self-

assertion involves a process of refinement on the cognitive level – the analysis of intensely felt emotion.[13] In order to mediate the "fire and violence" of her inner world effectively, Jane must perform a crucial act of separating, for instance, the cause of her turbulent feelings from their effects. It is this process of analysis which enables her to distil into speech just enough of her turbulent subjectivity to make its sting felt, but not so much as to lapse into incoherence.

If Jane's discovery of "fierce speaking" represents a vital breakthrough in her rhetorical development, Brontë shows that this relatively refined verbal instrument still requires a great deal of fine-tuning. The "savage, high voice" in which Jane speaks hints that it still amounts to a rather primitive form of verbal technology (96), and, as Jane's "fierce pleasure" in "[her] conqueror's solitude" gives way to "the pang of remorse and the chill of reaction," she recognizes the "dreariness of [her] hated and hating position" (97). Fierce speaking may be a powerful means of self-assertion, but the forceful way in which it mediates the self also tends to be socially alienating. It follows that this relatively crude organ for self-expression needs further refinement, and soon Jane is exploring the possibility of externalizing her interiority in ways which are less menacing to others. In fact, as Jane learns from Bessie, a certain degree of self-expression is expected and appreciated by others – one reason, it turns out, why Jane has been made "the scape-goat of the nursery" (73) is because of her overprotective attitude towards her subjectivity. By fearfully screening her inner world from others, Jane similarly invites others to distrust her, provoking suspicions like Abbot's: "She's an underhand little thing:

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[13] The adult narrator highlights the challenge that such a task poses to children: "Children can feel, but they cannot analyze their feelings; and if the analysis is partially effected in thought, they know not how to express the result of that process in words" (81).

I never saw a girl of her age with so much cover" (69). Having, however, made some important, if basic, steps in the art of self-representation, Jane is ready to refine the faculty of "fierce speaking" into a more socially-attuned instrument, and Brontë depicts her developing "quite a new way of talking" to interact more harmoniously with others (99). Jane's "new way of talking" represents a further advance in her ability to manipulate language to meet her needs – in this case, the formation of social bonds – and again this involves some artful rhetorical balancing. In order to accommodate others without effacing the self altogether, Jane must find ways of inserting into social discourse increasingly refined elements of subjectivity. Thus, while her "new way of talking" tempers the degree of self-assertiveness in her language, elements of her critical subjectivity are still very much present – so much so that Bessie calls her (albeit affectionately) a "little sharp thing" (99).

By now, considerable evidence has been adduced to demonstrate Brontë's sustained interest in Jane's developing craft as a meaning-maker; there is no need to trace further refinements in her rhetorical apparatus in such great detail. Suffice it to say that Brontë represents Jane evolving increasingly sophisticated technologies of representation in the course of the narrative: for example, while her experiences at Gateshead have taught her that one's representations of the inner world are very much situated in – and not identical to – a larger external reality, Jane learns from Helen's example that the sustaining power of imagined realities are not to be underestimated. Provided one maintains a clear distinction between inner and outer realities, one may draw freely on subjective representations in order to act effectively in the external world. It is this capacity to tap the power of an alternative virtual reality which enables Jane to "master … the rising

hysteria" she experiences on the "pedestal of infamy" at Lowood (130) – and thereby to avoid a repeat of the complete dissolution of self in the red-room. While Helen's lesson in refinement is effectively to emphasize the potential impact of intangible, imaginative realities on the material world, Miss Temple offers Jane yet more refined techniques of resistance and self-assertion. Strategically concealing her scorn for Mr. Brocklehurst, Miss Temple finds subtle ways of ameliorating his cruel policies in her daily administration of the institution – micro-acts of resistance whose effects can only be felt in the long-run. Jane's interaction with her mentor leads her more fully to realize the value of "subdued" language (135) – in particular, its capacity to command credibility – and also of patience: like the exchange of letters required to prove Jane's innocence, one's efforts at meaning-making might take effect very gradually, yielding results only after an interval of time. Thus, Jane's vindication from Brocklehurst's charges illustrates the quiet, almost imperceptible effects of rational discourse acting gradually through the agency of public opinion – the modernizing force of which eventually checks Brocklehurst's abuses and reforms Lowood. Jane's successful integration into the school may be read in terms of her increasing awareness of the complicated discourse network which structures the workings of modern society – and her internalization of the linguistic and cognitive operations required to access it.[14]

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[14] Jane's highly condensed, depersonalized account of how the scandalous details of Lowood's mismanagement are "discovered" glosses over the agency that motivates the inquiry into the typhus outbreak ("Inquiry was made into the origin of the scourge, and by degrees various facts came out which excited public indignation in a high degree" [149]), yet there is some suggestion that Miss Temple, who "through all changes" maintains her position as superintendent (150), has a hand in publicizing the facts that lead to Brocklehurst's removal. Since Miss Temple's social network is wide enough to include Mr. Lloyd, it seems reasonable to assume that she would have access to sufficiently influential members of the public to whom she could present her case. The term "inquiry" as well as the gradual manner in which public sphere discourse operates ("by degrees" [149]) on this occasion supply further traces of Miss Temple's involvement, recalling the way in which she vindicates Jane by writing to Mr. Lloyd. Lowood's

Thus far, I have argued that Brontë intends us to read Jane's development as a form of apprenticeship in meaning-making, and have analyzed various instances in the text which signal changes in Jane's textual practices. Jane's reading practices (in an expanded sense) certainly do change, but what does the text represent as driving this developmental process? While many of the examples examined up to this point seem to suggest that Jane's rhetorical habits evolve in response to various exigencies in the external world, Brontë also makes it clear that Jane's motivation for refining her techniques of externalizing "the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of imagination" (316) stems also from a deeply felt pleasure in her ever-more precise mastery over various modes of meaning-making: technical developments, Brontë implies, are driven as much by play as by necessity. Hence the importance attached to literature and art in facilitating Jane's development. Visual art in the text functions both as an extension of Jane's resources for externalizing imagination, as well as a figure for literary representation, since readers only have access to Jane's paintings through the medium of writing. Jane's initial thrill at learning to draw at school, described in the extended passage quoted above, suggests the potentially self-sustaining evolution of such techniques of representation. As noted earlier, the text suggests that contact with "higher" mental culture transforms Jane's internal make-up qualitatively: no longer largely oriented towards particular objects of consumption, she develops a taste for the more abstract pleasures to be derived from a sense of personal agency and creative power ("all the work of my own hands" [139]).

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reform, and Jane's success at the school, present, therefore, an affirmative account of the public sphere and the force of opinion. The positive light in which Brontë presents Jane's initiation into public sphere discourse at this point of the novel is consistent with more optimistic nineteenth-century narratives of the rise of public opinion – for instance, William Hazlitt's representation of public opinion as "the great organ of intellectual improvement and civilisation" in his *Life of Napoleon* (1828-30) (*Selected Writings* 84).

Such abstract ("refined") pleasures render the practice of the craft rewarding in itself, without the need for external incentives: thus, given adequate cultural resources, Jane's art of meaning-making can be said to contain the seeds of its own development.

Moreover, the text emphasizes that Jane derives this peculiar sense of abstract pleasure not only from the more well-established art of painting, but from the other medium of representation in which she excels – conversation. Thus, one of the "chief … delight[s]" of her relationship with Rochester stems from their playful rhetorical sparring, and the opportunities it affords Jane for exploring the limits of her powers: "I knew the pleasure of vexing and soothing him by turns … a sure instinct always prevented me from going too far: beyond the verge of provocation I never returned" (235). Even when faced with an almost hysterical Rochester and a potentially "perilous" situation, Jane continues to derive an abstract sense of pleasure from exercising her rhetorical abilities: "I was not afraid: not in the least. I felt an inward power; a sense of influence, which supported me. The crisis was perilous; but not without its charm: such as the Indian, perhaps, feels when he slips over the rapid in his canoe" (393). Indeed, the text even seems to suggest that, by inducing a peculiar indifference to external danger and facilitating a state of focused concentration, this capacity for abstract pleasure is precisely what enables Jane to act effectively under pressure. Brontë's simile, too, is instructive: while it replaces physical daring in the wild with a virtual version, it simultaneously preserves elements of the thrill of action on a mental plane, thus effectively gesturing to the refining dynamic of Jane's rhetorical practices.

Still, if Brontë emphasizes the important ways in which Jane's evolving textual practices resist instrumentalization, Jane nevertheless goes on in the course of the novel

to employ – and improvise – her techniques of representation in a wide range of situations, and to perform a variety of functions. Jane's talent for painting is shown to have an important social function: for example, it serves to make Rochester aware of her interiority in ways crucial to their initial friendship, and also plays an important role in facilitating civil relations with her previously estranged cousins, thus enabling a partial reconciliation at Gateshead. On a psychological level, Jane is also represented as employing verbal and visual rhetoric with great skill in order to regulate the emotions. The visual simulations of art are used to stimulate pleasurable feelings of attachment – for instance, when she "unconsciously" draws Rochester (317), or when she paints Rosamond Oliver for St. John (467-71) – but are also mobilized to discipline such emotions. Jane's self-directed sermonizing, together with her self-portrait and painting of Blanche Ingram, are described as indispensable aids to Jane's psychic integrity. Such devices enable her, in her own words, "to meet subsequent occurrences with a decent calm; which, had they found me unprepared, I should probably have been unequal to maintain even externally" (238). It is only by virtue of such sophisticated resources for shaping social and psychological reality that Jane is able successfully to resist Rochester and St. John at critical points of the novel. One might say that, on the whole, Jane's narrative affirms the idea that more refined technologies for externalizing inner realities not only facilitate a better understanding of the psyche, but also offer a potential resource for acting in the external world.

By presenting her apprenticeship in terms of the progressive refinement of her rhetorical apparatus, this account of Jane's development risks creating the misleading impression that Brontë naively subscribed to some linear model of progress, or that the

novel (and this study) uncritically endorse some grand historical narrative of enlightenment. However, Brontë does not represent Jane's rhetorical evolution as inevitably leading to moral improvement. As mentioned earlier, the affective and cognitive changes which accompany rhetorical refinement may facilitate moral change – for example, the development of more refined tastes may help liberate the subject from pre-existing, morally degrading habits. But like all new technologies, the process of rhetorical refinement does not simply eliminate existing difficulties – it creates new problems as well. Brontë clearly registers the moral hazards of refined rhetoric in the novel. For one thing, the very capacity of such a rhetorical instrument for small-scale adjustments and highly precise meaning-making increases the possibilities for self-deception and morally damaging compromises. A good example of this potential danger is the Foucauldian scenario produced by refined rhetoric during Jane's first engagement to Rochester. All the while conscious that she is keeping him "excellently entertained" with her "pungent" conversation, Jane's vaunted "needle of repartee" allows her to sustain the illusion of autonomy when in fact she is adopting a mere pose of resistance to Rochester's "despotism," (360). The narrator exposes Jane's self-deception by juxtaposing her sanguine remarks about "keep[ing] [Rochester] in reasonable check" with the more sober realization that she has made "an idol" of him (361). Far from offering any genuine resistance to Rochester's domination, Jane's pleasure in "devis[ing] new "expedients" to "thwart" and "afflict" her master serves only to distract her from her slavish devotion to him (360-61).

And, of course, with new capacities for pleasures come new capacities for pain, as Jane discovers in her dealings with St. John. While Jane's increasingly refined techniques

of representation greatly enhance her mental resilience, her enhanced level of consciousness also renders her vulnerable to the "refined, lingering torture" inflicted by similarly highly-organized minds (510). So subtly constructed is St. John's meaning-making instrument, that he is able – much to Jane's mortification – to "extract from every deed and every phrase the spirit of interest and approval which had formerly communicated a certain austere charm to his language and manner" (510). Jane's metaphors for the psychological torture she experiences at the hands of St. John vividly captures how such refined rhetorical technology might expand the possibilities for legitimized brutality: "this good man … could soon kill me; without drawing from my veins a single drop of blood, or receiving on his own crystal conscience the faintest stain of crime" (510).

Yet for all the dangers of refined rhetoric, the text leaves little doubt that rhetorical development creates many highly enabling possibilities which may be exploited for the benefit of individuals and their societies. In particular, such a process of refinement undoubtedly serves to level the field in favor of individuals like Jane, whose otherwise very limited resources would almost certainly have entailed even narrower opportunities for self-determination under earlier regimes of force. Jane's practice of refined rhetoric might temporarily allow her to accommodate Rochester's despotism, but it is also the power of such textual practices which eventually enables her to liberate herself psychologically and physically from his domination. After the abortive wedding, Jane's ultimate struggle for freedom takes place on a rhetorical and psychological plane, on which Rochester recognizes the futility of attempting to retain her by violence and is compelled to submit to Jane's "indomitable" will and moral courage (409).

Likewise, Jane may protest that St. John's "refined" mental torments are "killing" her (512), but, of course, they don't: with her sophisticated level of linguistic and cognitive development, she proves equal to the task of resisting his attempts to control her; moreover, having successfully resisted St. John, Jane's level of mental culture enables her to maintain a just sense of his merits and an amicable relationship with him. When compared to the traumatic after-effects of Jane's earlier, more violent encounters – with John Reed and Mrs. Reed, for example – the intimations of moral improvement articulated by this particular resolution become more readily apparent. To an important extent, it is the level of rhetorical refinement that Jane has acquired which makes such resolutions possible.

Without introducing extra-textual sources of the nineteenth-century discourse on the study of language, this section has explored a single Victorian novel's sustained interest in the relationship between language and improvement, showing a sophisticated elaboration of the topic which clearly merits more scholarly attention than it has hitherto received. While *Jane Eyre* surely deserves recognition for the intriguing and original model it develops to chart the rhetorical evolution of the modern subject, it is equally certain that Brontë's sophisticated network of ideas connecting language and improvement did not emerge from a vacuum. What kinds of discourses relating language and the civilizing process was Brontë in dialogue with? How did other Victorian writers imagine reading to be improving and seek to realize these ideas in their literary designs?

These are the kinds of questions that the following chapters seek to answer. In an effort to develop a more accurate understanding of Victorian ideas of civilization, Chapter One surveys a range of nineteenth-century nonfiction prose on the topic,

including writings by Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, and Matthew Arnold, as well as less studied works such as W. Cooke-Taylor's 1840 treatise, *The Natural History of Society in the Barbarous and Cvilized State.* Employing Elias's concept of the civilizing process to interpret these writings on civilization, I identify key features of Victorian theories of civilization, demonstrating that the Victorians' understanding of civilization was already, like Elias's, dialectical. Along with such benefits as pacification, the multiplication of physical comforts, the advancement and diffusion of knowledge, and the achievements made possible by large-scale co-operation, they clearly perceived the "dark spots" of the civilizing process as well (Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 279) – for instance, the widening gulf between rich and poor, the loss of individual agency, and the dull monotony of civilized life. At the same time, I reveal how these theorists emphasized the linguistic dimensions of the civilizing process, establishing narratives of linguistic evolution that had significant implications for literary language. If Victorian writers often identified poetic language as anachronistic, retrograde, even "savage," how can this view of literary language be reconciled with their firm belief in literature's educational and cultural value?

This question is taken up directly in my second chapter, which studies the poetics of Mill and Arnold in order to show how Victorian theories of civilization provided a crucial context for theorizing the improving effects of literary form. I argue that their notions of literature's "higher" civilizing power can be explained in terms of their understanding of the distinctive formal features of literary discourse, and how such discourse might serve to counter the undesirable socio-psychological effects of modern civilization. On the level of the individual, for example, Mill conceived the self-absorbed,

spontaneous *form* of poetic utterance as a rhetorical buffer against "the tyranny of public opinion" (De Tocqueville, qtd. in Mill, "De Tocqueville in America" 85), while *Culture and Anarchy* argues that the creative energies of poetic language are equally vital to political discourse, serving to "float" public discourse out of the narrow channels into which partisan politics have confined it. This chapter argues that the Victorian emphasis on self-cultivation need not serve conservative ends; for thinkers like Mill and Arnold, poetry and literary cultivation promote psychic well-being not at the expense of – but in order to support – effective political engagement. Reading Victorian poetics in the context of the discourse of civilization also enables us to see how Mill and Arnold value poetic language not only for its critical, unsettling energies, but for its stabilizing, harmonizing effects – thus providing a valuable corrective to a long tradition in literary linguistics that has focused one-sidedly on the disruptive, "deviant" quality of literary language.

While the first part of the dissertation considers the literary implications of "civilization" on the level of theory, the second part focuses on how Victorian poets and novelists addressed these implications in practice. My third chapter begins by demonstrating how a broad cross-section of poetry and fiction thematize questions surrounding the civilizing process, revealing how antithetical rhetorical modes – one associated with order and restraint, and the other with wild, Byronic freedom – were both employed to support the concept of civilization. The chapter then focuses on narratives of writers' *Bildung* such as *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Alton Locke* (1850), and *Aurora Leigh* (1857), arguing that the genre engages particularly clearly with the "civilizing" effects of literature as conceived by Victorian thinkers. Drawing on the fierce, disruptive

energies of Byronic verse as well as the "soothing" paradigm of poetic language modeled by John Keble's *The Christian Year* (1827), these narratives construct a model of literary language that facilitates social integration, while fostering a value for individual creativity essential to active, critical participation in social processes.

If Chapter Three emphasizes literature's capacity to promote social cohesion by facilitating the integration of exceptional individuals, the final chapter investigates more closely the implications of "civilization" for women in order to address the question of whether – and how – this model of literary discourse might also support wider social change. Juxtaposing *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866) against a range of writings on the Woman Question, I examine how these female *Bildungsromane* negotiate the Victorians' contradictory ideas about women's relationship to civilization: the argument, on the one hand, that women are agents of civilization, and, on the other, that women are in need of – if not altogether beyond – civilizing. While these novels underscore the resulting contradictions, I argue that they also gestures to the possibility of creatively synthesizing these paradoxical images of women. The chapter closes by showing how dramatic texts such as a *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Pygmalion* (1913) bring sharply into focus how language and genre are implicated in cultural assumptions about gender and domesticity. These plays, I suggest, help us imagine how literature's "improving" language might, through the strategic appropriation of discursive conventions that structure private life, drive gradual processes of social reform on a larger scale.

My study concludes by reflecting briefly on how its critical re-evaluation of "civilization" invests children's literature with new significance. Focusing on the

Victorian Robinsonade, the Epilogue shows how texts such as R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1858) imagine civilization as a process whereby people acquire increasingly sophisticated modes of reading and using texts, yet do not simply endorse the superiority of civilized literacy. Rather, these island adventure tales develop as their pedagogical ideal a synthesis of "civilized" introspection, sociability, and restraint with "savage" independence and energy, illustrating the diffusion into broader cultural circles of the Victorians' dialectical understanding of civilization – a self-reflexive concept of progress that motivated efforts to recover an entire constellation of concepts previously excluded as retrograde and infantile.

CHAPTER 1

Victorian Discourse on the Civilizing Process: A Map for Literary Study

The Introduction has described the negative value attached to "civilization" in contemporary criticism, analyzed the consequences of this negativity for Victorian studies, and, with close reference to *Jane Eyre*, has illustrated the potential costs of such critical hostility. Concentrating on the rhetorical dynamics surrounding the term, I have questioned the cynical presuppositions about "civilization" which seem endemic to much contemporary scholarship, but have hitherto only implied that the significance of the term is far richer and more complex than is often assumed in critical praxis. How exactly is this term being deployed in this study? What is the primary referent of "civilization" here?

The "civilization" which this project makes its central object of interest refers first of all to the discourse on civilization available to writers in Victorian Britain: a complex of interrelated terms, utterances, tropes, images, and schemata emerging from contact with – and therefore intimately tied to – the particular forms of material and cultural existence which constituted nineteenth-century British industrial civilization. While in one sense highly specific to a particular set of historical and material conditions – and, moreover, mediated through the largely middle-class perspective of the writers who generated it – Victorian discourse on civilization should also be recognized as a more abstract rhetorical construct. It was an active site of theorizing, where writers offered various *Gestalten* to make sense of the "immense, moving, confused spectacle" of

modernity (Arnold, "On the Modern Element in Literature" 5), trying to conceive the multiplicity of "things as they are" more holistically in terms of a larger process, and to discern in this process a promise (or premonition) of things as they could be.

Nevertheless, if "civilization" often functioned as a rhetorical structuring device which could accommodate idealized, if not utopian, visions of human advancement, the term always retained for Victorian thinkers a firm connection to material improvements in human life, and perhaps this was one of its advantages over, for example, the less tangible appeals of religion. In any case, whatever the precise combination of factors behind its resonance for the Victorians, it is generally recognized, both among Victorian intellectuals themselves[1] and modern scholars, that "civilization" enjoyed great rhetorical currency – and power – during the period. But "civilization" was no mere catch-word, or, in William Hazlitt's terms, a dangerous but empty "nick-name," and the broader aim of this chapter is to recover a sense of the intellectual fecundity and rhetorical versatility of Victorian discourse on the civilizing process. Surveying the growing body of writing engaging the topic from the 1830s to the 1870s,[2] one can see such texts producing a more

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[1] In his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870), for example, Cardinal Newman identified the term as one of the watchwords of the nineteenth century: "It is thus that political and religious watchwords are created; first one man of name and then another adopts them, till their use becomes popular, and then every one professes them, because every one else does. Such words are "liberality," "progress," "light," "civilization" (53-54).

[2] Although I include works such as Herbert Spencer's *Study of Sociology* (1873), which are clearly shaped by evolutionism and nineteenth-century biological thought, my focus here and throughout this dissertation is on the Victorians' response to a central element of Scottish Enlightenment thinking – in particular, the stadial model developed by such thinkers as Adam Smith, David Hume, Adam Ferguson, and John Millar to explain the cultural history of civilization and of individual psychology. Examining how Victorian writers like Mill and Arnold adapt and employ the "Science of Man" in their writings, my dissertation examines the implications of this approach to human development for the function of literature in modern society. My study does not, however, trace the genealogy of Victorian discourse on the civilizing process – for an illuminating account of how Scottish Enlightenment discourse on the civilizing process became a vital element of the political language in nineteenth-century Britain, see Daniel O'Neill's *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (2007). O'Neill reads the debate between Burke and Wollstonecraft over the meaning of the French Revolution as developing from "a Scottish

or less distinct dialogue in which subsequent writers could participate – and an invaluable rhetorical resource for literary practitioners. Beyond providing an overview of British theorizing on civilization during this period, this chapter will foreground the centrality of language to Victorian accounts of the civilizing process, and show how literature assumes a prominent (if sometimes paradoxical) position in their meta-rhetorical narratives about civilizing changes in language use. Nineteenth-century discourse on civilization emerges from this survey as a particularly rich reservoir of meaning for Victorian readers and writers, making available an elaborate system of rhetorical and linguistic choices at meta- , macro-, and micro-textual levels.

To this end, therefore, this chapter is divided into three sections. To begin with, I illustrate how studies of imperialism tend to construct Victorian accounts of civilization as a rhetorical façade deserving little credit and attention, and then provide a concise overview of how the civilizing process has been studied by the contemporary sociologist Norbert Elias,[3] suggesting how his work might serve to guide our efforts to map

Enlightenment language of politics structured broadly around 'moral sense' philosophy and the closely connected historical narrative of a 'civilizing process' in which the Scots understood that moral sense to be embedded" (9). Burke and Wollstonecraft, O'Neill shows, are in "dialogic disagreement about deep democracy and whether it was synonymous with 'savagery' or 'civilization.'" (10). For useful accounts of Scottish Enlightenment thinking about civilization, see Broadie (2003); Meek (1976); and Phillipson (1981). The discourse of civilization with which I am primarily concerned must be distinguished, therefore, from the ethnological and anthropological discourses that Patrick Brantlinger (2003), Christine Bolt (1971), and George Stocking (1987) have studied in great depth – discourses on civilization that make racial biology a prime determinant of human history.

[3] Elias's *magnum opus*, *Über den Process der Civilization* (*The Civilizing Process*), was originally published in 1939. Partly because of the Second World War, for a long time his work did not become widely recognized in Anglophone circles. An English translation by Edmund Jephcott was published in two volumes by Basil Blackwell, Oxford: *The Civilizing Process: the History of Manners* (1978) and *State Formation and Civilization* (1982). More recently, this translation has been reissued as a single-volume edition, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (1994). Some of Elias's critics have argued that his theory is overly deterministic and marginalizes subjective choice in human affairs (e.g., Bauman and Smith); others like Rojek (2001) write that Elias "processual" approach to social phenomena operates could amount to a pretext for never making any commitment (594), while there are those who argue that Elias is merely replicating nineteenth-century models of social evolution and positivism (e.g., Alt and Mulkay). Hans-Peter Duerr has gone as far as to suggest that Elias's notion of the

Victorian discourse on civilization. Thus equipped, I proceed in the second section to survey a range of texts, spanning approximately a forty-year period from 1830 to 1870, which might be viewed as landmarks of British thought on the subject during the Victorian period. My aim is not to produce a definitive account of Victorian theories of the civilizing process, but rather to identify key characteristics of this discourse on both the levels of structure and content, in an attempt to develop a working topography of these rhetorical "ruins." The concluding section focuses on the importance of language in Victorian accounts of the civilizing process: what kinds of roles are assigned to language and technologies of the word? How are the rhetorical and stylistic features of highly "civilized" language defined? In short, what does civilized language mean, and what does its representation in Victorian civilization discourse mean for literature? The chapter closes by briefly considering the implications of these models of civilization for literary language, as well as some of the actual roles – some counter-intuitive, some contradictory – assigned to literature in their underlying narratives of linguistic evolution.

In Search of Lost Civilizations

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civilizing process – in particular, the systematic development of a civilized "psychic habitus" – is a myth (Mennell and Goudsblom 731). In spite of these various challenges to his theory, the power and insight of Elias's methods have more recently become more widely appreciated, as several collections attest: e.g., *Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, ed. Eric Dunning and Chris Rojek (1992); *Norbert Elias and Human Interdependencies*, ed. Thomas Salumet (2001); *The Sociology of Norbert Elias*, ed. Steven Loyal and Stephen Quilley (2004). There is even a growing body of work that adapts Elias's work for literary study – see, for example, Davis (2003); Headley (2000); and Saunders (2004). However, while several scholars have applied Elias's theory to the study of early modern literature, few studies of nineteenth-century literature have availed themselves of his work. Helmut Kuzmics and Roland Axtmann employ nineteenth-century literature to trace the civilizing process in Austria and England, but they are more interested in literary texts as sociological evidence rather than as an important branch of civilization theory in its own right.

The topic of religion has been described by Michael Wheeler as "one of the larger lost continents" in Victorian studies (180); I would like to make a similar – albeit more modest – claim on behalf of "civilization," and figure Victorian writings on civilization in terms of a ruined city – an image which looms ominously, for example, in one of the most sustained efforts devoted to the topic during the period: William Cooke Taylor's two-volume *The Natural History of Society in the Barbarous and Civilized State* (1840).[4] Victorian discourse on civilization is not "lost" in the sense of being absent from contemporary criticism – rather, if these ruins are neglected, it is because scholars have apparently written them off as "lost" in a moral and intellectual sense. Usually regarded as a mere façade concealing the most banal of vices, Victorian discourse on civilization has been assumed by critics to be at best a pale shadow – and at worse the nightmarish opposite – of all that it promises to be.

A more in-depth survey of these neglected ruins is undoubtedly in order. This need is readily confirmed by a brief review of a cross-section of contemporary scholarship on British imperialism which – in contrast to several of the critical texts explored in the Introduction – has a much more direct interest in Victorian notions of the civilizing process, and might therefore be expected to take nineteenth-century discourse on civilization more seriously. However, although studies engaging with nineteenth-century British imperialism invariably and frequently invoke "civilization", they routinely empty the term of meaning, embedding it in discredited formulations such as

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[4] Taylor devotes two chapters in his first volume to assessing the "evidences of lost civilization" (ch. 11 and ch. 12). According to him, the ruins of lost civilizations provide the "awful warning, that to destroy is easy, while to restore is all but impossible. The eloquent silence of ruin here proclaims to those nations which still hold the sacred treasures of civilization, that its continuance depends on incessant vigilance, and its preservation on constant watchfulness" (1: 249)

"the civilizing mission" (e.g., Schmitt 12) and "the mask of civilization" (Purchase 58). The result is that "civilization" becomes in contemporary critical discourse permanently trapped within scare-quotes (e.g., Archibald 7; Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness* 25): to "civilize" is to do anything but. Even P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins' magisterial *British Imperialism, 1688-2000* (first publ. 1993; 2nd ed. 2001), which provides a sophisticated, nuanced account of imperial expansion as "an integral part of the configuration of British society" (56), leaves largely unexplored the nineteenth-century discourse on civilization, thus neglecting an important means of illuminating the cultural dimensions of the relationship they establish between the workings of the "gentlemanly order" in domestic politics and the "imperial mission" abroad (47-48).

In literary and cultural studies, the way in which anti-imperialist fervor tends to pre-empt any significance "civilization" might possess in favor of its own critical agenda is well exemplified in the work of Patrick Brantlinger. His influential *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (1988) masterfully traces the various forms of imperialist discourse in a wide range of texts from the early- to the late-Victorian period, but makes little attempt to investigate more carefully the Victorian theories of civilization which informed imperialism, treating "civilization" as a mere device for legitimizing the imperial project. Indeed, his attitude towards Victorian theories of civilization might well be summed up by the disillusioned Allan Quatermain's claim that "Civilisation is only savagery silver-gilt" (qtd. in Brantlinger: 33). In *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930* (2003), Brantlinger's zeal for exposing the pretensions of "civilization" remains unabated. His determination to attach a negative meaning to the term emerges clearly, for example, in

the way he privileges pre-Darwinian racial theories which highlight "the violence of the so-called civilizing process" (44). In spite of the fact that such racial science naturalizes the idea that "fair, stronger races invariably defeat and either enslave or exterminate the dark, weaker races" (39), Brantlinger credits their destructive accounts of colonization with being "more unblinkingly honest" than "Whiggish interpretations of the civilizing process" (44). His treatment of Victorian accounts of the civilizing process makes it almost impossible to speak meaningfully about "civilization" at all: on the one hand, more positive views of civilization are dismissed as an imperialist ruse for normalizing the "fading away" of primitive races (44); on the other, the "strange, gloomy" visions of unbridled destructiveness to which writers such as Richard Knox reduce civilization are endorsed for their truth-value (44) – a move which makes a mockery of everything the term is supposed to stand for.

Brantlinger's prejudice against "civilization" – and the corresponding inability to perceive nineteenth-century writing on the topic as anything other than an ideological instrument of imperialism – can similarly be observed in other literary-critical studies which explore imperialist discourse in interesting and compelling ways, and which might otherwise be expected to take a greater interest in Victorian discourse on civilization. For example, Susan Meyer's *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction* (1996) makes the important point that ideology does not work "uniformly, but variously, on the different members of society" (201), and defends the nineteenth-century domestic novel against charges of imperialism by suggesting that the "feminist impulses [of women writers] to question gender hierarchies often *provoked* an interrogation of race hierarchies" (11, original emphasis). Nonetheless, she remains bound to the underlying

assumption that the imperial project was as "nightmarish" as critics like Brantlinger have made it out to be (*Rule of Darkness* 15). There is little attempt to contest the general structure of values in which the imperial project is viewed in purely negative terms, and "civilization" as a mere ideological illusion. Since both Meyer and Diana Archibald are interested in investigating the relationship between domesticity and imperialism – Archibald even notes that "Victorian women functioned as 'symbols of civilization'" (Deirdre David, qtd. in Archibald: 19) – it is surprising that it occurs to neither of them to consider discourse on civilizing processes operating *within* nineteenth-century British society. As we shall see, Victorian discourse on civilization was not confined to questions of colonization and civilizing racial others, but clearly regarded modern civilization as an ongoing process within the nation, with important ramifications for the gender categories that Meyer and Archibald focus on. That such studies of domestic imperialism should overlook, for instance, John Stuart Mill's writings on the tendencies of civilization at home reveals the extent to which Victorian discourse on civilization is lost to contemporary criticism.

Not surprisingly, therefore, critics like Brantlinger and Meyer offer little guidance towards developing an accurate understanding of the structure and content of Victorian theories of civilization. To recall the metaphor of the lost city, with such skeptical guides we would be unlikely to begin exploring – let alone find our bearings amidst – the ruins of Victorian discourse on civilization. Indeed, their critical discourse renders doubtful the ontological status of the civilizing process – and even if a more than nominal reality is granted to the term, it is consistently implied that it is nothing more than a flimsy cardboard construct which hardly merits careful study. Hence, in the dominant modes of

critical discourse, the absence of a shared vocabulary and more constructive models for studying the civilizing process constitutes a serious obstacle to mapping Victorian discourse on civilization.

Fortunately, alternative ways of studying the civilizing process have developed in the human sciences. Combining sociological insights into the dynamics of human interdependencies with Freudian psychoanalytic models, the work of the sociologist Norbert Elias provides a complex and fascinating account of the civilizing process – one which, moreover, opens up suggestive possibilities for the role of language and literature in the formation of a "civilized" psychic habitus. In his *magnum opus*, *The Civilizing Process*, Elias draws on a wide range of historical data to demonstrate the "civilizing" of manners and personality in Western Europe. He relates changes in personality structure since medieval times to "the growing differentiation and stabilizing of social functions and the growing multiplicity and variety of activities that continuously have to be attuned to each other" (369). "Civilized" mental traits such as "constant and differentiated self-constraint" (369) and "habituation to a higher degree of foresight" (407) are acquired, Elias argues, through the "moulding" individuals undergo within the "social figurations" associated with modern state-formation and the monopolization of physical power within them (403). In this manner, his theory not only restores to the concept of the civilizing process a historical and material basis which critics like Brantlinger would deprive it of, but also enables us to think of civilization in more general terms as a "structural transformation of society" (421) occurring in "a specific order and direction" (367) – in other words, a general pattern in societal development which is amenable to systematic study.

Approaching civilization more neutrally as a large-scale social process driven "by the autonomous dynamics of a web of relationships" rather than by individual or collective will (367), Elias offers – in contrast to the studies of imperialism mentioned earlier – a far more balanced account of the civilizing process. His focus on the material, empirical dimensions of the civilizing process enables him to keep its concrete benefits clearly in sight, but he certainly does not glorify Western civilization as the lofty goal to which all societies should aspire. As in the work of Brantlinger and others, the discourse of civilization is clearly implicated in imperialist expansion. At various points in the text, Elias draws attention to the ideological work performed by nineteenth-century discourses which made "civilization" the "watchword of its colonizing movement" (432). Much more striking, however, is the way in which Elias foregrounds the inescapable psychic "wounds" that individuals suffer in the course of the civilizing process. Indeed, Elias represents the pressures of the civilizing process on the individual psyche to be just as serious a danger as the ideological abuse of "civilization" in the political arena:

> The learning of self-controls, call them "reason" or "conscience", "ego" or "super-ego", and the consequent curbing of more animalic [sic] impulses and affects, in short the civilizing of the human young, is never a process entirely without pain; it always leaves scars. (377)

From a psychological perspective, the "conflicts inherent in the civilizing of young humans – conflicts with others and conflicts within themselves" (377) – risk permanently maiming the individual. The "wounds of … civilizing conflicts" may prove "too deep," and have severe consequences for the individual's psychological well-being and social relations in adulthood (377).

In short, although Elias views the "great formative pressure on the psychic habitus of 'civilized' people" as developing autonomously out of the larger network of human

interdependencies associated with the modern nation-state (369), he makes it clear that the pressures exerted on individuals during the civilizing process are *not* "restricted in our world to those constraints and fears necessary to a stable equilibrium between the desires of many and for the maintenance of social collaboration" (443). The idea that "the wounds of … civilizing conflicts" (377) might be rationalized as "hav[ing] as their 'purpose' simply and fundamentally the basic necessities of human co-existence" (443) is thus firmly rejected, so that Elias's theory of the civilizing process can in no way be accused of merely legitimizing "thing as they are."

Yet while Elias openly acknowledges that the civilizing process is "riddled with contradictions and … full of disproportions" (443), he makes it equally clear that "[n]o society can survive without a channelling of individual drives and affects, without a very specific control of individual behaviour" (443). Because "[n]o such control is possible unless people exert constraints on one another, and all constraint is converted in the person on whom it is imposed into fear of one kind or another" (443), some of the pressures induced by the civilizing process are ultimately unavoidable: "Without the lever of human-made fears," for example, "[t]he child and the adolescent would never learn to control their behaviour" or "become an adult deserving the name of a human being" (442). To assume that the civilizing process as it has been observed is perfectly adapted to the needs of human society is callously to ignore the unnecessary suffering – mental and physical – it has exacted; but it is equally vain to imagine a social world without some form of the moulding – and conflicts – which occurs during the civilizing process. In Elias's words:

> We should not deceive ourselves: the constant production and reproduction of human fears
> by people is inevitable and indispensable wherever people live together, wherever the

desires and actions of a number of people interact, whether at work, in leisure or in love-making (443).

In the final analysis, therefore, Elias maintains a firm sense of the value of the civilizing process and the basic socio-psychological mechanisms whereby it enables increasingly large numbers of people to co-exist relatively peacefully. "Civilization" in Elias's model is at best a mixed blessing: it clearly serves a crucial social function and yet does so in an undeniably flawed manner. This notion of civilization as an imperfect instrument – a "two-edged weapon" (407) – is consistently reflected in Elias's treatment of the specific social and psychological effects produced by the civilizing process. For instance, civilization generally results in a greater sense of physical security, but that does not necessarily ensure freedom from mental anxiety. In fact, Elias makes it quite clear that a "less dangerous" existence is purchased at a certain psychic cost to the individuals: for one thing, life becomes "less emotional or pleasurable, at least as far as the direct release of pleasure is concerned" (375). More disturbing, however, is the idea that the decrease in external violence necessitates a corresponding increase in internal conflict: "[t]he battlefield is … moved within. Part of the tensions and passions that were earlier directly released in the struggle of man and man, must now be worked out within the human being" (375).

Similarly, while the "psychologization" of individuals induced by the civilizing process gives rise to a "more complex … experience of themselves and their world at levels which were previously hidden from consciousness through the veil of strong affects" (419), it is clear that this heightened sense of inner life and more nuanced modes of perception do not simply open up an exciting "new world" in which, for example, the aesthetic appreciation of nature becomes possible (400; 419). Obviously, "the greater…

the sensitivity to shades or nuances of conduct [becomes], the more finely attuned people grow to minute gestures and forms" (419), and the greater the possibilities for psychological conflict – for "people [to] exert pressure and force on each other in a wide variety of different ways" (398). In general, therefore, although "habituation to a higher degree of foresight and greater restraint of momentary affects … can give one group a significant advantage over another," Elias's model also emphasizes that the civilized psychic habitus is vulnerable in ways which the pre-civilized psyche is not: after all, "a higher degree of rationality and drive inhibition can also, in certain situations, have a debilitating and adverse effect" (407).

My larger object in summarizing Elias's groundbreaking theory here is not to "apply" his model of the civilizing process to nineteenth-century literature or society in any direct fashion, but rather to draw attention to a current, credible model of the civilizing process that might help us better interpret the Victorians' ideas of civilization.[5] Beyond the more immediate purpose of guiding our efforts to explore the ruins of Victorian discourse on civilization, Elias's model offers, for my purposes, three specific advantages. First, Elias, like all the Victorian theorists and literary practitioners included in this study, does important work to make more visible the ongoing presence and consequences of civilizing processes even in societies which are considered to have reached a highly "advanced" state of industrial civilization. The continued relevance of studying the civilizing process – not only in relation to the experiences of our ancestors

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[5] Considering the remarkable degree to which nineteenth-century British authors were reading German literature and philosophy (see Ashton), the importance of the German intellectual tradition to Elias's work – for instance, his use of Goethe to exemplify the importance of integrating external civilization with inner culture (28-29) – supplies further impetus for emplying Elias to make sense of Victorian thinking about civilization.

or to "primitive" tribes in remote parts of the globe, but to people in "developed" countries – assumes a particular clarity in his text. Elias brings the civilizing process home in several ways. As suggested above, he identifies the domestic space of child-rearing as one of the primary sites of the civilizing process, describing "the specific psychological process of 'growing up' in Western societies" as

> nothing other than the individual civilizing process to which each young person, as a result of the social civilizing process over many centuries, is automatically subjected from earliest childhood, to a greater or lesser degree and with greater or lesser success. (xi)

In addition to the key insight that the "psychogenesis of the adult make-up in civilized society cannot … be understood … independently of the sociogenesis of our 'civilization'" (xi), Elias suggests that the civilizing process continues to operate – if less visibly – on the adult psyche (377; 442), and, moreover, underscores the relative fragility of the civilized adult habitus (441). On the broader level of society, students of the civilizing process are reminded that "we ourselves are in the midst of the swell of such a civilizing movement and the characteristic crises it produces, not at its end" (382). Elias's sobering reflection that such civilizing trends "today as in the past … can go at any time into reverse gear" strikes a particularly melancholy note of truth in the current geopolitical climate (445).[6] Whether it is viewed as a social structure of reciprocal relationships or a psychological construct, "civilization" cannot taken for granted, for "[n]o more than our kind of social structure, is our kind of conduct, our level of constraints, prohibitions and anxieties, something definitive, still less a pinnacle" (445).

Another general aspect of Elias's theory which allows it to provide a valuable point of reference for my study is its strong commitment to relating the social and

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[6] For an essay that focuses on decivilizing trends, see Stephen Mennell's "The Other Side of the Coin: Decivilizing Processes" (2001).

psychological dimensions of the civilizing process to one another – a commitment shared

by many Victorian writers on civilization. Elias's model clearly recognizes the claims of

the inner world as an important determinant of individual behavior – and, ultimately,

history – but, unlike certain strands of psychoanalytic criticism, he firmly maintains the

important influence of larger socio-historical formations on patterns of individual

behavior (409). At the same time, his work resists the idea that human conduct is totally

determined by larger social institutions, for

> What is decisive for a human being as he or she appears before us is neither the 'id' alone, nor the 'ego' or 'super-ego' alone, but always *the relationship* between these various sets of psychological functions, partly conflicting and partly co-operating levels in self-steering. (409, original emphasis)

This relationship between various psychological agencies, enacted in a series of

interiorized encounters between individual and society, opens up exciting possibilities for

literary scholars and discourse analysts to engage with Elias, for the role of language as a

medium of such encounters is one of the under-theorized aspects of his model. Although

Elias employs literary documents in his efforts to trace civilizing trends and – by freely

drawing on literary examples to elaborate theoretical concepts – clearly acknowledges the

capacity of literature to shape to sociological thinking, he does not say a great deal about,

for example, the influence of print culture on the civilizing process. On this subject, he

simply notes that "[t]he increased demand for books within a society is … a sure sign of a

pronounced spurt in the civilizing process" (401), leaving much more to be said about

how discourse and literary culture figure in the dynamics of human interdependencies

driving civilizing trends. It is in this area, therefore, that Victorian discourse on

civilization – and literary discourse on civilization in particular – has perhaps the most to

contribute to Elias's model.

Finally, the study of civilizing processes does not merely represent an intellectual question for Elias; as complex as he conceives the dynamics of modern civilization to be, his theory represents the study of civilizing processes as a potential basis for intervention, and keeps faith with the possibility of constructing more life-affirming models: the civilizing processes which Elias has traced in Western Europe might have occurred "blindly" and "autonomously," yet he suggests that "it is by no means impossible that we can make out of it something more 'reasonable', something that functions better in terms of our needs and purposes" (367). Recognizing the contradictions and wasted human potential associated with civilization (443), Elias looks beyond sociological description to a worthier aim for studying civilizing processes – that increased consciousness emerging from such intellectual activity might facilitate *a more durable balance, a better attunement, between the overall demands of people's social existence on the one hand, and their personal needs and inclinations on the other"* (447, original emphasis). Victorian discourse on civilization is often motivated by a similar sense of purpose, except that these texts – and the literary texts explored in the following chapters – often attempt to imagine and elaborate, in highly concrete terms, the alternative civilizations to which Elias only gestures. To some extent, my own project draws inspiration from Elias's hopefulness. For in the process of studying Victorian discourse on civilization, and the kind of models it imagines, we might be able to supplement and even modify aspects of Elias's theory, thus contributing to the development of more effective strategies for intervention.

Although Elias's work certainly informs my general approach to the topic of "civilization" in crucial ways, this study does not concern itself directly with the actual,

historical civilizing process in Britain during the Victorian era. It does not, like Helmut Kuzmics and Roland Axtmann's *Authority, State and National Character: The Civilizing Process in Austria and England* (first publ. 2000; English trans. 2007), seek to trace in Victorian literature the formation of a national habitus in nineteenth-century England. Rather, the primary object of interest is Victorian discourse on the civilizing process – a discursive structure of which literature forms an important branch, and which therefore also serves to illuminate our understanding of distinctive rhetorical and stylistic features of Victorian literary language. Besides, for all the strengths of Elias's theory – among other things, the fact that its theoretical integrity clearly surpasses Victorian achievements in this area – his work is in certain respects less adequate for our purposes than the theories of the Victorians themselves. It is not just a question of anachronism: the very act of recovering nineteenth-century discourse on civilization, for example, necessitates a revision of certain aspects of Elias's thought – most conspicuously, his rather dismissive assumptions about nineteenth-century ideas about civilization:

> Unlike the situation when the concept was formed, from [the turn of the eighteenth century] on nations came to consider the *process* of civilization as completed within their own societies; they came to see themselves as bearers of an existing or finished civilization to others, as standard-bearers of expanding civilization. Of the whole preceding process of civilization nothing remained in their consciousness except a vague residue. (43)

As the following sections – and subsequent chapters – will show, this was far from being the case: nineteenth-century theories on civilization were far more developed and sophisticated than Elias suggests. Likewise, Victorian literature does not simply reflect sociological theories, but was capable of reflecting on – and speaking to – them.

Rediscovering Victorian Discourse on Civilization, 1830-1870

Elias might have greatly underrated Victorian writers' engagement with notions of modern civilization, but he nevertheless provides a useful model for placing the broad features of Victorian accounts of the civilizing process. With Elias's theory as a general guide, this section attempts to provide a preliminary mapping of Victorian discourse on civilization from (roughly) 1830 to 1870. Our tour of this lost city must perforce be highly selective, but all the texts included may be considered significant landmarks in British thought on the subject. That these writings form a discursive *Gestalt*, a coherent rhetorical resource for Victorian writers – and not merely an arbitrary assortment of texts – the following analysis must show. Still, before we proceed to trace the broad outlines of this discursive formation on the levels of both structure and content, some remarks on the rationale behind my choice of texts may be helpful, and provide a better sense of the range of the rhetorical field I seek to reconstruct.

So what kind of texts and writers played an important role in shaping – even as they were shaped by – this discourse? The boundaries of this field of rhetorical influence have been drawn according to selection criteria based on topic, the author's nationality, and genre. Thus, if not the main subject of the text, "civilization" is often one of its key words, and every one of these texts takes a strong interest in nineteenth-century industrial civilization, its characteristics and tendencies. Indeed, many of these texts are occasional – written in response to recent national events and cultural trends – and even more academically-oriented works such as Taylor's *Natural History of Society* and Herbert Spencer's *The Study of Sociology* (1873) contain many highly topical references. My survey includes only British writers, omitting work by European and North American

writers – for example, François Guizot's *History of Civilization in Europe* (English transl. 1846) and Francis Lieber's *Manual of Political Ethics* (1838) – which exerted a significant influence on British theorizing about civilization during this period. The fact that such writers as J. S. Mill, Taylor, and Matthew Arnold were well-read in Continental philosophy – and therefore reflect such ideas in their own writings on the subject – might partially excuse the exclusive focus on British writers, but a more comprehensive study of nineteenth-century theories of civilization would undoubtedly have to take such texts into consideration. Lastly, the writings covered in this survey all operate within the broad conventions of the genre most typically associated with theoretical statement – that is, nonfiction prose. At this point of the study, therefore, only passing references will be made to fictional genres; for this reason, too, a hybrid text such as Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34) – though very much engaged with the problem of modern civilization – is not treated at any length. Focusing on Victorian nonfiction prose which explicitly engages with questions surrounding nineteenth-century industrial civilization affords readiest access to the period's "lost" theories of civilization, because this kind of writing defines most clearly the terms, structure, and stakes of the unfolding dialogue on the subject.

Under the broad category of nonfiction prose, however, there is plenty of diversity in this selection – in terms both of the writers' political sympathies and of the disciplinary and sub-generic affiliations of their texts. The rhetorical field around "civilization" during this period was generated by writers from across the political spectrum: on one end, there were well-known radicals like Mill and Spencer; on the other, Archbishop Richard Whately, a staunch defender of the Anglican establishment. Prominent Victorian "sages"

such as Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold – today commonly (if less than justifiably) portrayed as proponents of cultural elitism and apologists for *bourgeois* ideology – made significant contributions to this discursive formation, as did the relatively unknown William Cooke Taylor (1800-1849), a prolific historian and journalist, and an active member of the Anti-Corn Law League. The inadequacy of classifying Victorian theories of civilization according to the ostensible political commitments of the writer is clearly illustrated by Taylor's position in the field. Although his career clearly reveals his commitment to progressive political causes, Taylor's admiration for Whately was so strong that he dedicated *The Natural History of Society* to the Archbishop, and frequently draws on and supports Whately's ideas in this little studied work.[7] The text-types which these writers employed were equally diverse: their contributions to the discourse on modern civilization took the form of reviews, periodical essays, book-length studies, and textbooks, and invoked a variety of disciplinary contexts, including literary-cultural criticism, political science, economics, and sociology. In fact, Whately's *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy* (first publ. 1831) and Spencer's *The Study of Sociology* (1873) played significant roles in establishing economics and sociology, respectively, as academic subjects, indicating the importance of the discourse on civilization to the institutionalization of these emergent disciplines during the nineteenth-century. That the cross-section of texts examined here is bracketed by such disciplinary "pioneers" – works which devote more space to justifying the need for these new disciplines than to their

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[7] The fact that Taylor's *Natural History* – described in a "Memoir" published in *Bentley's Magazine* as his "greatest effort" and "a philosophical work of very considerable merit" (502) – has received so little scholarly attention indicates the extent to which Victorian theories of civilization have fallen into disrepute in English studies. Few studies have gone beyond listing his work in their bibliographies, and, in the bibliography of *Vanishing Races*, Taylor's title is misquoted. Taylor's fate in other disciplinary circles would seem to be just as bleak – the only study I could find which is devoted exclusively to his writings is an unpublished sociology masters thesis written by Holbert Allen in 1932.

actual subject-matter – also suggests the capacity of Victorian discourse on the civilizing process to function as a space of relative generic fluidity, inviting and sponsoring novel combinations of rhetorical modes and generic vectors.

My attempt to sketch a working map of Victorian discourse on civilization takes as its central principle of organization, therefore, the multidimensionality of its discursive form. The protean character of this rhetorical field exhibits itself on various levels, providing convenient lines along which the discursive field of "civilization" might be analyzed. The principal division comes from its plurality of functions on a synchronic plane – namely, its dual character as a "scientific", epistemic discourse as well as a highly performative, hortatory mode. To draw on J. L. Austin's speech act theory, it may be true that all utterances ultimately have both a constative and performative function, but the constative and performative dimensions are usually not equally prominent. Victorian discourse on civilization involves both dimensions to a remarkable degree: on the one hand, for instance, essays like Mill's "Civilization" (1836) rely significantly on the epistemic function of language to develop a network of "objective" truth-claims about modern civilization; on the other, such texts also engage in pitching a series of recommendations at the reader, persuading him to adopt certain measures or positions promised to ameliorate the current state of civilization. Within each of the dimensions produced by the Victorians' twin interest in what modern civilization *is* and what it *should* or *could* become, it is also possible to discern the generic fluidity of this discourse from a diachronic perspective: one can see the discourse on civilization displacing and transforming other more established discourses and modes of writing in order to satisfy both of its larger rhetorical functions.

Such divisions enable us to move quite naturally from larger conceptual, generic, and rhetorical approaches to "civilization" to the more specific characteristics and tendencies of modern civilization made available by these writings, and provide a number of distinct headings which facilitate the presentation of my analysis. In spite of the diversity of opinion and sentiment represented in these texts – and the resulting differences in their accounts of the civilizing process – the relatively limited headings under which the analysis of these texts can be organized argues for the coherence of theoretical discourse on civilization during this period. Even if theories varied considerably and sometimes irreconcilably, these writers can still be shown to operate within similar discursive boundaries and rhetorical structures. All of them understood civilization as a dynamic process amenable to empirical study; an ideal with great rhetorical potential; a multidimensional concept; and a process that entailed both loss and gain. Moreover, this presentational format renders far more accessible the otherwise mind-boggling array of conceptual and rhetorical resources which discourse on civilization made available to Victorian literary practitioners.

The scientific study of an ongoing, material process. As instantiated in these texts, Victorian discourse on the civilizing process initially appears to be a highly heterogeneous body of writing. Given the writers' often very different priorities and concerns, it is not surprising that their accounts of civilization should diverge dramatically on key issues such as, for example, the role of religion in the civilizing process. However, for all their differences, there is consensus on significant points as well, so that it is possible to identify a shared frame of reference informing the "science"

of civilization they helped to establish. Thus, like Elias, all these texts approach "civilization" as an ongoing, relatively autonomous, material process. None of these writers entertain the notion that the civilizing process is "finished" or "complete" in Victorian society, and this is as true for the relatively conservative Whately in the early 1830s as it is for Spencer in 1873. Indeed, the complacency that Elias identifies with nineteenth-century thinking about civilization (43) is markedly absent from these texts. Adopting the perspective of an imagined state of futurity, Spencer's *Study of Sociology* satirizes the "semi-civilized" social practices of nineteenth-century Britain at length (139-144); meanwhile, Whately's assessment of the achievements of British civilization is much more measured, but far from complacent: "No doubt we are *more* civilized than our ancestors, and than the mass of mankind at the present day. But I hope and trust that our posterity five centuries hence will look back on *us* as semi-barbarians" (*Political Economy* 184). Similarly, Mill deplores nineteenth-century attitudes towards women as "one of the barbarisms to which men cling longest" (*The Subjection of Women* 133), while the very terminology that Arnold invents in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) to describe class divisions – Barbarians, Philistines, Populace – emphasizes the uncivilized nature of Victorian society, and the immense distance that remains to be traversed in the "whole evolution of humanity" (92). These theories of modern civilization undoubtedly had their flaws,[8] but they cannot fairly be accused of treating – or even of wanting to treat – their own state of civilization as the end-point of the civilizing process.

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[8] It is not difficult to find in some of these theories evidence of "racist" hierarchical thinking or what, from our twenty-first century perspective, looks like a crackpot mixture of theology and pseudo-science: for example, Taylor takes seriously racially inflected biology which assumes the perfection of the Caucasian brain relative to the other races (*Natural History of Society* 1: 17), and both Whately and Taylor are invested in the idea that civilization is divine in origin. However, while it is tempting to dismiss Victorian

In general, a sense of rapid – sometimes relentless – change was inseparable from Victorian models of civilization during this period. Whately and Taylor make the idea of progressive change central to their basic definitions of civilization: for example, Taylor describes the primary element of civilization as "progress … from one condition to another, and always in advance" (*Natural History* 1: 4-5). "The idea of progress, development, amelioration, or extension, appears to be the predominant notion … in the definition of civilization," he reiterates, adding that "the most prominent attribute is, that the progress should be made in social life" (1: 4-5). For Whately and Taylor, this notion of civilization as a potentially unbounded process of change is stabilized by a larger providential narrative: civilizing transformation was "predestined" and "predetermined" for humanity (*Natural History* 2: 341). No such reassurance is provided by Carlyle and Mill, who speak of "a mighty change in our whole manner of existence" ("Signs of the Times" 8) and characterize their period as an "age of transition" ("Spirit of the Age" 5), but do not attempt to counter the disconcerting dynamism of the civilizing process with the ballast of religion. Whatever their attitude towards the established Church, these Victorian writers share with Elias the practice of thinking of civilization as a dynamic process. So far from being – as Elias claims (43) – largely unconscious of the civilizing process in their own past, these texts are not only conscious of the long-term historical changes wrought by this process since medieval times, but also demonstrate – and seek to promote – a keen awareness of civilizing trends that continue to unfold around them.

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accounts of the civilizing process on such grounds, such intellectually embarrassing elements should not blind us to the possibility that many aspects of such theories might yet be well worth studying. As Taylor says about exploded religious systems, "No opinion or dogma, totally and absolutely false, ever held dominion over mankind; a prevalent creed must, in the outset, have won its way by giving prominence to some great truth, and by keeping in the back-ground the portion of falsehood with which it was united" (2: 141). In any case, the less credible aspects of Victorian models of civilization certainly do not compromise their potential value as an interpretive context for understanding Victorian literature.

However, if the Victorians were no strangers to the idea of civilization as an ongoing process, they nevertheless retained a strong sense of its product-like aspects. Carlyle and Mill may seek to evoke the dynamic nature of modern civilization by employing the ethereal language of "spirit," but many of these thinkers also externalize civilization in terms of a set of tangible, material phenomena, thus doing much to establish under the rubric of "civilization" a field of empirical inquiry akin to the kind of sociological research pursued by Elias and his followers. It is not just that these writers anchor the civilizing process in concrete developments such as rising standards of living, the factory system, or expanding networks of economic relations; more striking is their insistence on the highly visible presence of civilization in the material world – in "the obvious and universal facts, which every one sees and no one is astonished at" (Mill, "Spirit" 4). By emphasizing that the material signs of civilization are available to anyone who is prepared to look "calmly around [him]" instead of "gazing idly into the obscure distance" (Carlyle, "Signs" 5), Victorian discourse on civilization democratizes its object inasmuch as it makes the phenomena it studies accessible to the common observer. "Civilization" is no mystery to be revealed only to those with prophetic insight or prodigious learning: far from an esoteric scheme of salvation which applies only to a particular sect of believers, its material products may be apprehended by – and affect – everyone. By grounding "civilization" in the material world, these texts make the systematic study of its phenomena relevant to all – even while they (implicitly or explicitly) maintain that special training is required in order to interpret the "signs of the times" accurately.

Another important basic concept developed by Victorian discourse on civilization *qua* science was the relative autonomy of the civilizing process. As they work to raise awareness of large-scale civilizing trends taking place outside, these texts also acknowledge the degree to which these forces are outside human control. Their growing recognition of the autonomous nature of the civilizing process is registered by language and imagery which evokes the newness and unprecedented character of these transformations – even a sense of alien otherness. This is self-evident in Carlyle's famous characterization of the period as a "mechanical age" in "Signs of the Time" (1829), while Taylor figures the new elements of industrial civilization in terms of irresistible tidal forces (*Natural History* 2: 274), whose immense power "we cannot destroy," but can only attempt to "use and regulate" (275). The unpredictability and resistance to direct control of the civilizing process are similarly recognized by Mill and Spencer. In "Civilization," Mill views the undesirable effects of modern civilization as the result of "irresistible tendencies" which cannot simply be opposed, but can only be corrected by means of "establishing counter-tendencies" (136). Likewise, by foregrounding the complexity of social causation throughout, *The Study of Sociology* makes it abundantly clear that the civilizing process is difficult enough to observe accurately – let alone to manipulate (13).

The efforts of these Victorian thinkers to develop a science of civilization had important implications on the level of genre. In order to invest their writings on civilization with scientific authority, many of these writers – from Whately to Spencer – gesture to the need to develop new modes of historiography, quite self-consciously distancing themselves from older modes of writing "things as they are." Part of this

movement towards generic innovation follows logically from a heightened awareness of the newness and, in particular, the small-scale, gradualistic nature of civilizing trends. For if the Victorian science of civilization grounds the civilizing process in material – and therefore empirically observable – changes, thinkers like Mill, Taylor, and Spencer also emphasize the slow genesis of social phenomena (*Study of Sociology* 102). Such a gradual and undramatic process of change, "effected by insensible gradations" (Mill, "Spirit" 3), demands more subtle, sensitive instruments of observation and representation. The methods of traditional historiography – for example, what Spencer derisively refers to as the "great-man-theory of History" (*Study of Sociology* 32) – are simply too crude to capture the seemingly insignificant, quotidian details in which the civilizing process is realized.

Hence we find these writers not only calling for new modes of representation which are much more attentive to the everyday practices, material spaces, and "unhistorical" events of modern civilization,[9] but also attempting to define this more particularized, empirical mode of writing civilization in opposition to more established genres. To some extent, the truth-value of Victorian theories of civilization is purchased at the expense of history and certain literary modes. For example, many of these writers dwell on the inadequacy of older modes of historiography as an organ of scientific knowledge. Whately writes at length about the way in which history focuses on facts

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[9] Both Carlyle's "Signs of the Times" and Mill's "Spirit of the Age," for instance, emphasize the importance of directing one's critical vision at the proximate yet neglected facts of the present. Carlyle suggests that we must learn to "discern truly the signs of our own time" not by "gazing idly into the obscure distance," but by "look[ing] calmly around us, for a little," (5), while Mill asserts that one "may learn in a morning's walk through London more of the history of England during the nineteenth century, than all the professed English histories in existence will tell him concerning the other eighteen: for, the obvious and universal facts, which every one sees and no one is astonished at, it seldom occurs to any one to place upon record" (4).

irrelevant to an accurate understanding of political economy (*Political Economy* 232-35), while, for Spencer, history forms an obstacle to the development of a more credible social science (*Study of Sociology* 32; 57). Poetry and romance are similarly accused of vitiating our capacity for studying the civilizing process (e.g., Whately, *Political Economy* 176-77; Taylor, *Natural History* 1: 199), although, as I shall suggest later, literature in general occupies a more complex relation to nineteenth-century theories of civilization.

An alternative source of moral influence. Thus far we have considered very generally the *content* of Victorian discourse on civilization, noting important ways in which the general conceptual frame developed to make sense of "civilization" during this period agrees with and anticipates Elias's approach to the civilizing process. From the perspective of what language "does," however, there are marked differences between *The Civilizing Process* and Victorian discourse on civilization, which is clearly distinguished from Elias's more "scientifically" neutral register by its highly performative dimension and openly interventionist designs. These Victorian texts discourse on civilization not only attempt to convey scientifically accurate information about the subject, but to perform a variety of speech acts (or "text acts") more usually associated with older forms of moral and cultural authority. In particular, many of these texts – including Carlyle's "Signs of the Times," Mill's *On Liberty* (1859), and Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) – assume the monitory tone of homiletic rhetoric, admonishing readers against self-satisfied habits of mental indolence and calling for greater awareness of the shortcomings of modern civilization. Perhaps less conspicuously – but no less significantly – these texts can be observed to take on the consolatory function of religious discourse. This aspect of

Victorian discourse on civilization is particularly apparent in the writings of Whately and Taylor, who struggle against potentially demoralizing Rousseauian notions of fallen civilization to make people more conscious of the advantages of civilized society. In general, even the most sobering accounts acknowledge the "bright lights" and "promise" of modern civilization (Carlyle, "Signs" 22-23), gesturing to happier possible states of civilization and exhorting individuals to strive after such ideals.[10]

In short, scientific authority translates into moral authority as these texts build on the "global" relevance of the civilizing process – and their claim to describe it truthfully – to prescribe the adoption of certain ideas, attitudes, and practical measures for the sake of ameliorating the problems of modern existence. The diversity of political affiliations and religious sensibilities among the Victorian writers surveyed – as well as the range of local causes which "civilization" is enlisted to support – attest to the great importance of this discourse as a source of rhetorical leverage. Victorian discourse on civilization might acknowledge in principle the difficulty of manipulating the civilizing process directly, but nevertheless continues actively to counsel readers on how to cope more effectively with the machinery and pressures of modern civilization. In fact, the dangers of introducing half-baked reforms based on faulty principles means that an even greater moral imperative exists to develop more rigorous models of the civilizing process. All these texts make it clear that there is a great deal at stake in understanding and shaping the course of civilization. Even while visions of a better future promise much to be gained,

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[10] Given their affinities towards the exercise of moral influence, it is not surprising that – besides the common link to civilization – all these writers are united by a strong interest in education in some form or other: Whately's and Spencer's books are written as pedagogical texts, Mill's "Civilization" and Taylor's *Natural History* contain carefully thought-out schemes for educational reform, while works like "Signs of the Times," *On Liberty* and *Culture and Anarchy* seek to develop an educational philosophy to counteract the excesses of modern civilization.

the language of crisis (e.g., "a moment of emergency" [Mill, "Spirit" 16]) which pervades many of these texts emphasize the grave consequences of allowing the undesirable tendencies of modern civilization to proceed unchecked. Victorian discourse on civilization thus opens up a new field for moral action, becoming an important venue for articulating and working through ethical questions.

Paying attention to the performative dimension of Victorian discourse on civilization enables us to locate two important coordinates for mapping its macro-structural generic relations: on one hand, its relation to nineteenth-century Christian discourse, a still-powerful channel of moral and cultural authority that it drew upon and helped to transform; on the other, the new kinds of ethical and critical discourses it was helping to bring into being. As an increasingly important source of moral influence, Victorian discourse on civilization was necessarily conscious of its relation to religion – its most influential predecessor and rival in this area. Consequently, although the larger script involving the two terms varies, the topic of religion always occupies a prominent role in the rhetorical field surrounding "civilization."[11] As the portmanteau term "civilisade" very economically indicates (*On Liberty* 113), the Victorians were aware of the possibility of substituting "civilization" for "religion" within the structures of their culture: as to the precise nature of this substitution, the range of possibilities is well reflected in the collection of texts included here. For the Carlyle of "Signs of the Times," modern civilization exists in an antagonistic relation to religion: the two terms represent

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[11] The relationship between Victorian discourse on civilization and religion is an extremely important and complex topic, which cannot be treated adequately here; however, even this relatively limited selection of writings on civilization serves to provide a good sense of the range of possible relations between these two key terms in Victorian culture – and the diverse rhetorical ends that this yoking might be made to serve.

antithetical principles, so that the highly civilized state reflected in the "mechanical genius" of the nineteenth century also ensures that it is "not a religious age" (17). On the other end of the spectrum, Spencer's *Study of Sociology* regards the substitution of "civilization" for "religion" as mere repetition. From the highly detached perspective of the sociologist, the system of values implied by "civilization" is neither better nor worse than Christianity, but simply represents a different kind of "religious system," whose "specialities … have certain fitnesses to the social conditions" and whose "form is temporary [while] its substance is permanent" (313). Thus, whereas Carlyle treats civilization and religion as mutually destructive forces, Spencer – at least in this text – tends to flatten the differences between the two terms.

Between these two extremes, Victorian theorists of civilization take up various intermediate positions which are more attentive to the complex particularities of the relationship between nineteenth-century industrial civilization and its religious culture. For his part, Mill is prepared to recognize substantive similarities *and* differences between modern civilization and religion. The strengths and weaknesses of both kinds of cultural phenomena are appreciated, so that although Mill is clearly committed to the ideal of civilization ("Civilization" 119), he also acknowledges that the older religious culture possessed in far great measure certain elements which are wanting in modern society – for example, he would like to transfer to modern philosophical insights "the deep earnest feeling of firm and unwavering conviction" associated with an earlier age of faith ("Spirit" 134). While Mill conceives the relationship between the two terms in metonymic terms – based, that is, on looser, associative relations produced by contiguity and chance – Arnold's conception of their relation is synecdochic. Arnold clearly

acknowledges the civilizing power of Christianity (*Culture and Anarchy* 92), but emphasizes that religion is only one part of a much larger civilizing process, for "the human spirit is wider than the most precious of the forces which bear it onward" (93). A "deeper" relationship of necessity informs Whately's and Taylor's understandings of the connection between religion and civilization. Both writers quite literally locate the origins of civilization in divine revelation, so that civilization becomes in their account essentially Christian: as Taylor's reviewer in the *Dublin University Magazine* puts it, "Christianity was not the result but the cause of civilization; … the life, character, and teaching of Christ and his Apostles are utterly accountable as the *spontaneous* growth of the age in which they appeared" (379).

Even as it works to Christianize "civilization," *The Natural History of Society* demonstrates how this apparently deferential yoking of civilization to religion might at the same time serve to promote the development of more open, nonsectarian modes of ethical discourse. On the surface, making Christianity logically prior to civilization[12] seems like a profoundly conservative gesture, yet this same move shifts the religion in progressive directions as well. In order to fit its role as a prime bearer of modern civilization, the more progressive elements of Christian doctrine (e.g., its elevation of women and its individualism) are accentuated (see *Natural History* 2: ch. 8, esp. 173), so that a move which appears to defer to the authority of religious tradition in fact serves to open the door to new, secularized forms of ethical discourse. In particular, Whately and

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[12] This is, of course, not to say that the Victorians denied the achievements of Grecian and Roman civilization in classical antiquity. However, commentators such as Taylor imply that the weaknesses – and ultimately, the demise – of these civilizations is closely linked to "the decline and fall of their [polytheistic] religious systems," suggesting that the "new principles of civilization developed by the Christian system" are vital to forming more sustainable social structures (*Natural History* 2: 141).

Taylor foreground the lack of a fixed code of ethical rules as one of the distinctive ways in which Christianity departs from earlier religious traditions. Not bound to any specific "set of rules," the Christian religion demands instead that individuals assume increased personal responsibility for cultivating critical self-awareness together with "certain moral dispositions" (*Natural History* 2: 166-67). According to Whately and Taylor, Christianity is characterized by an ethical open-endedness which is integral to its identity – a uniquely "modern" feature of the religion which actually demands that moral problems be worked out through "personal exertion" (*Natural History* 2: 178), creating a special need for ethical inquiry and the study of moral philosophy (*Natural History* 2: 167).

Victorian discourse on civilization thus implies not only a different set of values based on the rule of law as opposed to physical force. Even as the scientific study of civilization claims to be more sensitive to the proximate, concrete details of modern existence, in its capacity as moral discourse, "civilization" is represented as more responsive to changing human needs and problems – as incorporating within itself the idea of a more flexible, evolving ethical system. In these texts, civilization does not simply involve the mechanical submission to law or public opinion, but entails a significant level of critical reflection and activism. Building on the acknowledged justice of past reforms, "civilization" is represented by these Victorian writers as the friend of those who have been marginalized by oppressive social institutions (see, e.g., *Natural History* 1: 101-103; 2: 173-74), and can thus be seen as an important seedbed for the discourse of human rights.

As a result, the weaker members of society – including slaves, the working classes, children, and the aged – occupy an important position in Victorian discourse on

civilization, for, in taking on the role of its beneficiaries, they are also an important source of its rhetorical power. Perhaps more than any of these marginalized others, the position of women in relation to civilization deserves special mention. Images of women not only function as an important index of the degree of civilization of a society (e.g., *Natural History* 2:3), the comparative elevation and moral influence enjoyed by women in the civilized West often become a self-evident sign of the progressive nature of modern civilization,[13] employed to legitimize the superiority of modern (Western) civilization over other cultures. At the same time, as Mill's *Subjection of Women* (1869) demonstrates, the engagement of civilization discourse with gender was not confined to celebrating women's existing privileges, but could serve as a platform for proto-feminist discourses. As Chapter 4 will show, the fluidity of the value-system implied by "civilization" raises particularly unsettling questions in relation to the issue of women's rights: were women agents or merely passive objects of civilization? Does an ethical program driven by feminist values represent an important step towards attaining a more balanced state of civilization, or does it merely crystallize the hopeless contradictions of the civilizing process – the impossibility of reconciling the demands of modern

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[13] Describing the revolutionary effects of Christianity on classical civilization, Taylor, for example, writes, "The recognition of individual rights was not confined to one sex. Woman became a moral being as well as man, and in her relations to the Deity, had an independent and equal existence with her lord. The relations between the sexes might not have been immediately changed by any open and public enactment, but the female sex was greatly elevated in influence and moral power" (*Natural History* 2: 175). Similarly, Arnold was not above using the cultural position of women to suggest the more progressive aspects of Indo-European culture relative to Hebraism, highlighting how absurd it was that "the race which invented the Muses, and chivalry, and the Madonna, [should] find its last word on this question [of feminine nature, the feminine ideal, and men's relations to them] in the institutions of a Semitic people, whose wisest king had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines" (*Culture* 122). Taylor's and Arnold's assumptions mirror those of nineteenth-century missionaries such as John Williams, who upon encountering friendly Samoan women, writes that he "could not but rejoice in the hope, that the period had arrived when they would be raised from the state of barbarous vassalage into which sin and superstition had sunk them" (115).

civilization with individual development? Such questions will be explored at length in Chapter 4.

A multidimensional concept. In the context of Victorian discourse on civilization, the concept itself acquires a multidimensionality that reflects the plurality of macro-textual features discussed under the previous headings. Like Elias, these Victorian thinkers were interested in "civilization" not only as a larger socio-historical process, but a psychological phenomenon taking place in the minds of individuals. In the work of Whately and Taylor, for instance, "civilization" is evidently as much a state of mind as a social formation: Whately points out that the technological resources of civilization are of little use without the appropriate mental training (*Political Economy* 114-15), while for Taylor, those which are "among the most … civilizing principles that could be suggested to man" – that is, "[t]he sense of personality, and the feeling of individual responsibility" that Christianity served greatly to enhance (*Natural History* 2: 176) – are obviously psychological in nature. Mill, too, includes a crucial psychological dimension in his broader definition of "civilization." Judging the state of civilization in a country by the degree to which its inhabitants are "happier, nobler [and] wiser," the opening paragraph of "Civilization" clearly places a high premium on the mental state of individuals as a measure of how civilized a society can claim to be.

The dual interest among British writers in the socio-economic and psychological dimensions of "civilization" gives rise to what might be described as the felicitous ambiguity of the term. "Civilization," in Victorian discourse on the subject, is marked by flexibility and capaciousness, denoting both a certain socio-economic structure as well as

a psychic construct. Besides referring to internal and external states, "civilization" also becomes capable of denoting both actual and potential states of society, as in Mill's 1836 essay. This felicitous ambiguity is no mere rhetorical sleight-of-hand or convenience, but arises from a distinctively British response to conceptual distinctions surrounding civilization which can be traced back to late eighteenth-century German philosophical discourse. As Elias explains, Kant's antithesis between inward *Kultur* and superficial *Zivilisation* (18) not only creates a distinction between inner and outer development, it also illustrates the German tendency to privilege internal culture over external manifestations of civilization (24).[14] The special significance of *Kultur* in German intellectual circles is contrasted with the form-oriented nature of nineteenth-century English culture and manners, so that Englishness becomes in Elias's account identified more with external civilization than internal culture.[15] This survey suggests that, by the Victorian period, however, English writers were increasingly aware of the need to "coordinate" mental cultivation with material developments (Carlyle, "Signs" 17), and were actively developing interiorized versions of civilization to complement more materially and economically grounded ideas about modern civilization. An Anglicized

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[14] Kant's privileging of *Kultur* over *Zivilisation* is evident in a passage from his "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" (1784), in which he writes: "We are *cultivated* to a high degree by art and science. We are *civilised* to the point of excess in all kinds of social courtesies and proprieties. But we are still a long way from the point where we could consider ourselves *morally* mature. For while the idea of morality is indeed present in culture, and application of this idea which only extends to the semblances of morality, as in love of honour and outward propriety, amounts merely to civilisation" (*Political Writings* 49).

[15] To illustrate this particular distinction between English and German culture in the nineteenth-century, Elias quotes from Theodor Fontane's *Ein Sommer in London* (1852): "England and Germany are related in the same way as form and content, appearance and reality. Unlike things, which in no other country in the world exhibit the same solidity as in England, people are distinguished by form, their most outward packing. You need not be a gentleman, you must only have the means to appear one, and you are one. You need not be right, you must only find yourself within the forms of rightness, and you are right. … Everywhere appearance. Nowhere is one more inclined to abandon oneself blindly to the mere lustre of a name. The German lives in order to live, the Englishman to represent. The German lives for his own sake, the Englishman for the sake of others" (qtd. in Elias: 30).

variant of the German *Kultur* is most famously elaborated and valorized by Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy*, but forty years earlier Carlyle had already called for British society to cultivate "the department of inward knowledge" ("Signs" 16) in order to "regulate, increase and purify the inward primary powers" (13), while Mill had emphasized the importance of "strengthening the weaker side of Civilization by the support of a higher Cultivation" ("Civilization" 143).

It is not just that these Victorian writers make a discernible effort to secure greater attention for the inner world of the psyche. More interesting is their attempt to connect both aspects of human development – to see the English cognates of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* not in opposition (i.e., *Kultur* is "better" than *Zivilisation*), but as interacting with each other: civilization would be incomplete and ultimately unsustainable without a commensurate degree of culture, but culture can only flourish with the support of the material resources afforded by civilization. This is why various writers stress the need to develop internal culture to sustain modern civilization as a whole, and also explains how a work like *Culture and Anarchy* can unite the seemingly incongruous aims of defending culture and legitimizing the use of force to preserve external order.

Directly or indirectly, these Victorian writers had evidently sufficient exposure to German ideas about self-cultivation to affirm the importance of inward culture, but they were not prepared to privilege *Kultur* over *Zivilisation* in the way that some German writers appeared to do. Instead, they viewed these two dimensions of civilization as closely interrelated. Thus, while writers like Carlyle and Arnold strive to valorize inner cultivation as a means of counteracting the excesses of an increasingly "mechanical" civilization, all of these writers maintain a firm sense of how external practices shape the

inner world as well. Carlyle, for example, insists that mental energies and material practices "work into one another, and by means of one another … intricately and inseparably" ("Signs" 17), while Taylor claims "[t]here is a much closer connection between the physical and moral condition of humanity than is generally imagined" (*Natural History* 1: 153), stressing the importance of "circumstances in the development of the passions, feelings, and moral principles" (*Natural History* 2: 168). Hence inner development requires as its *sine qua non* a certain level of external civilization – hence, too, the unexpected and potentially debilitating psychic complications arising from the unprecedented and rapid developments materializing in the modern world.

Loss and gain. Like Elias, who calls the civilizing process a "two-edged weapon" (407), all these Victorian writers view modern civilization as a mixed blessing, bringing unimaginable benefits together with new and unforeseen problems. The inherent goodness of civilization was far from taken for granted by the Victorians. Both Whately and Taylor, for example, devote considerable space – in the case of Taylor's *Natural History of Society*, more than half of Volume 1[16] – to proving the desirability of modern civilization compared to savagery. This suggests that, by exploring the relative advantages and drawbacks of civilization, such Victorian thinkers were merely engaging popular anxieties about the effects of the civilizing process in their society. Hysterical

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[16] Taylor devotes no less than seven chapters (chs. 2-8) to explicating the very concrete benefits of modern civilization, systematically comparing the institutions and material conditions of civilized existence with ways of life in semi-civilized communities in order to debunk the notion that civilization has exacerbated human suffering. His reviewer in the *Dublin University Magazine* was fulsome in his praise of Taylor's efforts: "Nothing can prove more clearly than this excellent survey, how truly the success of the vulgar encomiums of savage life has turned upon the simple fact, that the evils which are experienced in civilized society are well known and keenly stamped upon our recollection, while of savage life, knowing practically nothing, imagination has been able to dispose as she has pleased" (373).

ranting against some notion of diseased civilization was clearly not uncommon (e.g., Mill, "Spirit" 4), and all these texts distinguish their interventions from "indiscriminate … abuse" (Mill, "Spirit" 4) of modern civilization by acknowledging the concrete benefits of the civilizing process. At the same time, they also attempt to articulate more precisely the "dark spots of civilization" (*Natural History* 2: 279) – for instance, the widening gulf between rich and poor, the loss of individual agency, and the dull monotony of civilized life – and, with varying degrees of conviction, find in civilization possibilities for ameliorating these difficulties. Again, the loss and gain associated with modern civilization can conveniently be summed up under a small set of headings.

(i) Material comforts. None of these Victorian theorists of civilization fails to mention the higher standards of living that accompany the civilizing process. Among the most critical accounts of modern civilization included in this survey, Carlyle's "Signs of the Times" is quick to acknowledge the physical comforts of modern civilization (6). "We are Giants in physical power," (18) he writes, for "in the management of external things we excel all other ages" (17). Even for as careful a thinker as Mill, "the improvement in the arts of life, giving ease and comfort to great numbers not possessed of the degree of wealth which confers political power," are among the beneficial civilizing trends which "are known to every body" ("Spirit" 23) – and therefore, as Whately and Taylor take pains to emphasize, are liable to be taken for granted. Both writers deflate false idealizations of the "primitive poverty" and "amiable simplicity" of savage life (Whately 40), and since Taylor insists on a close connection between material and mental development (*Natural History* 2: 168), the greater physical well-being he identifies with civilization (e.g.,

Natural History 1: 20-21) clearly matters not only on a material, but on an intellectual and moral plane as well.

The increased material comforts of modern civilization are not, however, an unmixed blessing, and can have disabling psychological effects on human beings. The "perfection of mechanical arrangements" which are the source of advancing refinement buffer us not only from "actual pain, but of whatever suggests offensive or disagreeable ideas" (Mill, "Civilization" 131). The great danger of material comforts for Mill, therefore, is that they tend to produce in the human psyche "an inaptitude for every kind of struggle" (131) – an aversion to pain and effort which diminishes the modern individual's tolerance not only for physical hardship, but for intellectual and moral trials as well. In a similar vein, Carlyle suggests that the dramatic extent to which modern civilization has raised standards of living has detracted attention from the inward realm of the psyche – so much so that, deluded by the fallacy that happiness depends "entirely on external circumstances" ("Signs" 12), confused moderns become frustrated as they seek in material things comforts which they cannot give.

(ii) Increased security, reduced violence. Just as Elias identifies the civilizing process with the progressive pacification of society arising from the monopolization of force by a centralized authority, Victorian discourse on civilization also recognizes increased security and reduced violence as among the foremost achievements of modern civilization. As Arnold puts it in "On the Modern Element in Literature" (1869), "[o]ne of the most characteristic outward features" of modern civilization

> is the banishment of the ensigns of war and blood-shed from the intercourse of civil life.
> Crime still exists, and wars are still carried on; but within the limits of civil life a circle has

been formed within which men can move securely, and develop the arts of peace uninterruptedly. (8)

Taylor devotes several chapters of *The Natural History of Society* to the various levels on which civilization has enhanced security and diminished physical violence. Modern civilization, in his account, not only offers greater personal security (e.g., *Natural History* 1: 97; 101), but provides a sounder system for protecting individual property (1: 80), minimizing outbreaks of violence and potentially averting war (1: 129). Nor do Victorian thinkers undervalue the physical security afforded by civilization: only under such relatively peaceful conditions can "society at last acquire … repose, confidence and free activity" (Arnold, "On the Modern Element" 23). The absence of constant eruptions of violence facilitates the development of "a tolerant spirit" (23) and "the capacity for refined pursuits" (23), favoring the approach of such a society to the ideal of "intellectual maturity" (24).

Many of these Victorian writers also consider at length the fact that the instruments of social control are substantively altered as a result of the civilizing process. No longer is the authority of physical might supreme, and even the law, backed up by force, is not the sole means of regulating society, but shares this office with the force of public opinion – one of the agents of civilization about which Carlyle, Mill, Taylor, and Arnold have a great deal to say. While these thinkers clearly value public opinion as an organ for checking the abuse of power (*Natural History* 2: 259), or "as a kind of safety-valve by which dangerous accumulations of popular passion or prejudice may escape without detriment to the machinery of society" (2: 260), they also draw attention to the intellectually stifling effects of opinion. The next chapter, which elaborates on the civilizing power of literature for Mill and Arnold, will dwell in greater detail on the

conflicting attitudes towards public opinion; for now we shall simply note that writers like Carlyle, Mill, and Arnold were quite aware that the sense of social stability secured by public opinion came at a psychic cost – namely, a potentially damaging pressure to conform. Similarly, as Mill points out, the tranquility of modern existence does not necessarily serve to enhance mental development: the absence of the stimulus provided by "insecurity of property, or danger of life or limb" tends to reduce the higher classes to the state of "Sybarite[s]" ("Civilization" 147), while the energies of the middle classes become narrowly "confined to money-getting" (130).

(iii) Diffusion of property and intelligence. One of the salient features of modern civilization remarked by nearly all these Victorian thinkers is its increasingly massive scale. As the dimensions of Arnold's "circle" of civil life ("On the Modern Element" 8) are multiplied to a hitherto unimaginable extent, civilization becomes possible on an increasingly democratic scale, promoting the diffusion of property and intelligence to the masses. Taylor draws attention to the spread of wealth (*Natural History* 1: ch. 7), while Carlyle mentions the increase in "thinking minds" due to rising levels of literacy ("Signs" 23), but it is in the work of Mill that the implications of this process are most incisively explored. Inviting the reader to reflect more carefully on the phrase "growth of a middle class" ("Civilization 121), Mill points out that this diffusion effectively translates into a redistribution of social power, demanding radical revisions of existing notions of government and political agency. "[B]y the natural growth of civilization," he writes (126), "power passes more and more from individuals, and small knots of individuals, to

masses" (121), while "the weight and importance of an individual, as compared with the mass, sinks into greater and greater insignificance" (126).

As with the other characteristics of modern civilization mentioned earlier, the Victorians saw in the democratizing effects of the civilizing process "much to hope," but also "much to fear" (Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 274). On the one hand, it opens up new possibilities for the flourishing of human potential on an "unheard-of" scale (Mill, "Civilization" 122) – Mill registers this promising aspect of an increasingly democratized civilization in the "wonderful development of physical and mental power on the part of the masses" ("Civilization" 125). The higher classes of society, on the other hand, do not seem to have benefited from this democratizing trend in any comparable way – in fact, Mill perceives among them "no increase in shining ability" but "a very marked decrease in vigour and energy" (126). While many would probably argue that the enervating effect of the civilizing process on the aristocracy is a justifiable price to pay for democracy, this is only one aspect of the potential losses incurred by democratizing trends. The massive scale of modern civilization makes political organization an extremely complicated matter, and, depending on how well prepared the masses are prepared to govern themselves, political democracy may prove better or worse than earlier form of government ("Civilization" 127).

At any rate, as with reasoning, Mill's point is that "more" does not automatically translate into "better" ("Spirit" 8). In terms of intellectual culture, the "grand achievement of the present age," he claims, "is the *diffusion* of *superficial* knowledge" ("Spirit" 6, original emphasis):

> A large portion of the talking and writing common in the present day, respecting the instruction of the people, and the diffusion of knowledge, appears to me to conceal, under

> loose and vague generalities, notions at the bottom altogether fallacious and visionary. ("Spirit" 12)

As a result, the general populace remains in many ways as "accessible to the influence of imposture and charlatanerie" as ever ("Spirit" 17). Mill might have been deeply committed to progressive, democratic reform throughout his career, but he was also aware that the sheer numbers involved in the socio-political dynamics of modern civilization could have potentially deleterious effects on both society and the individual. His concerns about the migration of power to the masses – and the forms of mass communication developed to sustain social cohesion on such a scale – are explored at length in *On Liberty*, which seeks to counter the ascendancy of "mediocrity" in democratic culture, and rescue the individual from becoming "lost in the crowd" (92).

(iv) Enhanced powers of combination. A key socio-psychological dimension of the civilizing process explored by these Victorian thinkers – and, indeed, the human attribute foundational to all the civilizing trends discussed up to this point – is "the progress of the power of co-operation" ("Civilization" 122). For Mill, the development of this power is the most "accurate test of the progress of civilization" ("Civilization" 122), while Taylor asserts that it is responsible for "every advance in human improvement and human happiness" (*The Factory System* 1). Discipline, or "perfect co-operation" enables a smaller but civilized army to triumph over a larger number of barbarous people, because "discipline is more powerful than numbers" ("Civilization" 122), and Victorian society as a whole has become a "giant" in "physical power" (Carlyle, "Signs" 18) through its highly evolved capacity for combination.

It is not only the larger social unit that benefits from the increasingly effective co-operative powers developed in the course of the civilizing process. The individual, too, stands to gain from the habits of mental discipline acquired for the purposes of combination. Modern civilization develops in individuals certain cognitive resources – including "a power of self-restraint" and a "confidence" in others (Mill, "Spirit" 22) – which they "become capable of carrying … into new things" (Mill, "Civilization" 124). At the same time, "All combination is compromise" ("Civilization" 122), and many Victorian writers were deeply ambivalent about the impact of such highly developed powers of co-operation on the modern psychic habitus. Mill himself fears that, having successfully internalized the self-restraint necessary for combination, the highly civilized individual is in danger of compromising *too much* of his individuality, and becoming "sluggish and unenterprising" ("Civilization" 131). As we shall see in greater detail in the following chapter, Carlyle, Mill, and Arnold all express concerns that public opinion – one of the most important phenomena produced by, and enabling, more effective combination – is beginning to stunt the individual's capacity for independent thought. In general, there is considerable anxiety among these thinkers that an excessive dependence on the efficacy of social combination have undermined people's "faith in individual endeavor" (Carlyle, "Signs" 8). As a result, the collective power of modern civilization might be impressive, but – because of this diminished sense of personal agency – its individual members may in many ways be weaker than their less civilized counterparts.

As one of the "wondrous … new agent[s] or element[s] of [nineteenth-century] civilization" (Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 261) and a highly visible "result of the universal tendency to association" (Taylor, *Factory System* 1), the factory system is a subject

which readily illustrates the ambivalence of the Victorians towards the civilized capacity for co-operation. Taylor's 1844 vindication of the factory system registers the strength of popular sentiment against its dehumanizing effects, and already in his *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, Whately is concerned that "when carried to a great extent," the division of labor tends to

> reduce … each man too much to the condition of a mere machine, or rather of one part of a machine; the result of which is, that the mind is apt to be narrowed – the intellectual faculties undeveloped, or imperfectly and partially developed, through the too great concentration of the attention on the performance of a single, and sometimes very simple, operation. (195)

While Taylor acknowledges there is "something portentous and fearful" (*Natural History* 2: 275) about the factory system and the new industrial culture it is creating by concentrating large masses of people in manufacturing districts, he maintains that the factory system is a "necessary element in the progress of civilization, and a most efficient way of promoting human happiness" (*Factory System* 5). He also suggests that factory work might facilitate individual mental development in some respects, for it develops among operatives a sense of the superiority of moral over physical force, and strengthens their notions of rectitude (Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 274). And in spite of their reservations about the adverse effects of combination on individual agency, many of these thinkers agree with Whately that an advanced state of civilization also possesses the resources "most favourable to the application of [appropriate] remedies" (*Political Economy* 210).

(v) An increased sense of individuality. In his seminal study of the civilizing process, Elias traces the formation of a more inward, psychologized psychic habitus (e.g., 398-400) which he has sometimes termed *homo clausus.* The emergence of a peculiarly

modern, increasingly interiorized personality structure was similarly registered by many Victorian theorists of civilization. However, because they lacked a shared vocabulary for describing these psychological trends, the language and imagery that they use to articulate the increased sense of interiority attending the civilizing process are rather more diverse. In his Preface to *Poems* (1853), for example, Arnold memorably captures the opening up of an inner mental world with the sentence, "the dialogue of the mind with itself has commenced" (598), while Taylor speaks in more straightforward terms of the increased sense of personality and individual self-worth which he regards as essential to modern civilization (see *Natural History* 2: ch. 8, esp. 176, 183). For Taylor, this increased sense of individuality not only enables a person to become an increasingly self-aware, "moral being of his own" (2: 172), it can also serve to promote greater consciousness of others and their needs (cf. Elias 399). Significantly, modern individuality need not be an "isolating but a social feeling" (Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 182), for it is only by virtue of one's own sense of self-worth that one can learn to appreciate the individuality of others. The "softening of feelings" and the predominance of the "amiable and humane" in the modern character (Mill, "Civilization" 132) – civilizing trends documented by various Victorian writers – can therefore at least partially be attributed to the increased psychologization of modern culture, and not to external socio-political factors alone.

Nevertheless, like all the other benefits of the civilizing process discussed so far, this increased sense of individuality comes at a price. It is almost as if the dawning of consciousness on a new inner world simultaneously brings awareness of its fallenness. Thus, in Arnold's 1853 Preface, the commencement of "the dialogue of the mind with

itself" marks the onset of doubt and discouragement (598), as *homo clausus* immediately discovers "something morbid" in an excessive inwardness which threatens to overwhelm him (Preface 599). The "penalties" of modern subjectivity are even more clearly stated in "On the Modern Element in Literature." "[I]n the unsound, in the over-tasked, in the over-sensitive," Arnold explains, "[t]he predominance of thought, of reflection, in modern epochs … has produced a state of feeling unknown to less enlightened but perhaps healthier epochs – the feeling of depression, the feeling of *ennui*" (14).

The increased self-consciousness developed by the civilizing process can be a burden in more ways than one. To a certain extent, the anxieties surrounding the decline of individual agency expressed by Carlyle and Mill, for example, are paradoxically the result of their heightened consciousness of individuality. It is true that, in the course of the civilizing process, a small number of individuals lose the practically unlimited power they would once have wielded (Mill, "Civilization" 121-22), but the vast majority of individuals, if anything, have more agency than before. If Victorian writers could lament the tendency of civilizing trends to leave the individual "impotent in the crowd" (Mill, "Civilization" 136), it was also because the category whose eclipse they mourned had acquired a new depth and solidity. In other words, an increased sense of individuality creates a further source of psychological pressure simply by making people more conscious of themselves as individuals – and therefore more conscious of their relative insignificance "as compared with the mass" of other individuals (Mill, "Civilization" 126).

What does Civilized Language Mean?

As the previous section has shown, Victorian discourse on the civilizing process generated a wealth of rhetorical resources for literary practitioners to exploit; in this section, we shall see that the material afforded by civilization discourse is not restricted to the macro-textual level, for Victorian civilization discourse speaks much more directly to the very medium of literature, producing a sophisticated complex of ideas surrounding language and literature which writers could engage in and through their art. Indeed, no map – however rudimentary – of Victorian discourse on civilization could reasonably afford to omit the topic of language. Like the woman question, language is one of the favorite topics of Victorian civilization discourse,[17] and one visited by all the writers mentioned earlier in one form or another. Although only Taylor explores civilizing linguistic trends in detail, all the other writers evince considerable interest in discourse phenomena, ranging from the dynamics of public opinion to the place of literary culture in modern civilization. A comprehensive survey of the intersection between Victorian civilization discourse and the emergent science of linguistics is beyond the scope of this study,[18] but even the relatively limited cross-section of civilization discourse surveyed

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[17] The keen interest in language among Victorian theorists of civilization is nicely captured by the review of Taylor's *Natural History* in the *Westminster Review*. In contrast to the *Dublin University Magazine* reviewer, the anonymous *Westminster* reviewer is generally much cooler in his appraisal of Taylor's work, but responds warmly to the sections in the *Natural History* which trace the systematic differences between the state of language in civilized and barbarous societies. In addition to the fact that he includes a lengthy extract from Taylor's description of the hieroglyphic paintings of an American Indian tribe, his enthusiasm for the topic is apparent from the way in which he introduces it: "Of the history of society divided as we have inculcated, one of the most interesting chapters will be that which contains the history of languages, oral, pictorial and written; and no other of the possessions and attainments of nations will mark more clearly the state of civilisation they have reached, their characteristics, and even their private history" (170).

[18] A more careful engagement with Victorian notions about the civilizing potential of language must be deferred until the next chapter, but even there this study is unable to do justice to a great deal of more specialized scientific discourse on language which addresses the topic of civilization in significant ways, for instance, the Rev. Frederic W. Farrar's *An Essay on the Origin of Language* (1860) and *Lectures on Families of Speech* (1870), or A. H. Sayce's *Introduction to the Science of Language* (1890).

here is sufficient to demonstrate the centrality of language to Victorian models of the civilizing process, and to illustrate briefly the implications of such ideas about linguistic evolution for literature as a super-genre. As we will see, great significance came to be attached to the relationship between language and modern civilization, giving rise to conflicting notions about the role of literature in the civilizing process.

As in the case of women, the significance of language in Victorian discourse on civilization is two-fold: for Victorian thinkers, language serves both as an index and agent of civilization. Thus, on the one hand, language acquired an importance for students of the civilizing process because it was believed to provide reliable evidence of civilizing change: "As language is the instrument of thought, the nature of a language is in some degree a guide to the intellectual condition of those by whom it is spoken" (Taylor, *Natural History* 1: 27). Taylor's reviewer in the *Westminster Review* expresses this idea even more forcibly, asserting that "no other of the possessions and attainments of nations will mark more clearly the state of civilization they have reached, their characteristics, and even their private history" (170). On the other hand, language – and, in particular, certain verbal technologies such as writing and print – were regarded as key agents of civilization, affecting the civilizing process on various levels in significant ways. In general, most Victorian writers on civilization at least tacitly endorse the *Westminster* reviewer's claim that "language may, in some measure, be said to form, or at least modify, the character of a nation" (170).

Orality-literacy studies have established the complex and radical ways in which writing restructures consciousness (see Ong, esp. ch. 4), and Victorian discourse on the civilizing process appears to have anticipated these insights in the importance it attaches

to literacy as a carrier of modern civilization. Whately, for example, quotes an account of native New Zealanders from the *Library of Entertaining Knowledge* series to support the idea that the illiteracy of savage communities – the absence of any technology for recording or storing information – is a decisive factor trapping them in their stagnant, relatively primitive state (*Political Economy* 113-14). The importance that Taylor attaches to writing as one of the necessary conditions of civilization is evident from his willingness to confer on writing the status of a divine gift: he includes writing and the alphabet in the original "stock of information given to Adam" by God (*Natural History* 1: 323). For Taylor, "no element of civilization is of more importance than the art of recording events" (*Natural History* 1: 242). The capacity for forethought, which Taylor regards as an essential element of the civilized psychic habitus, is closely linked to literacy, for "[i]t is only when man begins to register the past, that he obtains a guide to his future" (242).

If Victorian thinkers were aware of the profound impact of literacy on human consciousness, then it is no wonder that their respect for the civilizing powers of language should extend to more sophisticated – and comparatively modern – technologies of the word. Print culture, with its capacity to give "intensity and extent" to literate habits of mind (*Natural History* 2: 258), receives due credit from many of these writers for its formative role in the development of modern civilization. In spite of their reservations about certain tendencies of print culture – explored in greater detail in the next chapter – writers like Carlyle, Mill, and Arnold would all agree with Taylor that the printing press, the "increase of the facilities of human intercourse" (Mill, "Civilization" 127), and the corresponding growth of public opinion are crucial agents of the civilizing

process. Carlyle welcomes the increasing numbers of "thinking minds" produced by the diffusion of reading ("Signs" 23), while Mill links to the "spread of reading" the greater tolerance, the increase in general understanding, the "softening of the feelings, and the decay of pernicious errors" in modern society ("Civilization" 132). Just as an earlier generation of writers had celebrated the press as the "great organ of intellectual improvement and civilisation" (Hazlitt, *Selected Writings* 84), Victorian writers affirmed the importance of public opinion in "extend[ing] and enforc[ing] … individual rights" and checking the "usurpations of the government" (Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 258-259). Defining "progress of the power of co-operation" as the most "accurate test of the progress of civilization" ("Civilization" 122), Mill clearly registers his regard for the civilizing potential of the print public sphere when he identifies the newspapers and periodical press as one of the most powerful, "universally accessible" instruments of combination ("Civilization" 125).

Kant's famous "Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" (1784) is usually remembered for its celebration of enlightened reason, but the actual word he uses to capture the attainment of intellectual and moral maturity (*Mündigkeit*) gives the process of Enlightenment (at least etymologically) a strong verbal dimension.[19] Enlightenment is demonstrated in – but also achieved through – discursive practice. Victorian discourse on civilization might be said to share this rhetorical vision of enlightenment, since, as we have seen, language – and how one uses language – mattered on many levels in Victorian models of the civilizing process. Given that language was important for these writers both as a sign and instrument of civilization, it is important to

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[19] First appearing in the fourteenth century, *mündig* is derived from *Mund*, the German word for "mouth" (Seebold 637).

ask what kind of language – what forms of discourse – are identified with, or regarded as conducive to, the development of modern civilization? What does civilized language mean?

In general, "civilized" forms of discourse in Victorian accounts of the civilizing process reflect and develop nearly all the principal elements of modern industrial civilization enumerated in the previous section. For example, in keeping with the Victorians' vaunted superiority "in the management of external things" (Carlyle, "Signs" 17), civilized language is represented as highly efficient on various levels compared to its less civilized counterparts. "Savage" language is distinguished from civilized language by its poor economy – its inadequacies as an instrument for communication. Thus, in comparison to civilized language, the linguistic structure of savage languages is marked both by "excess" and "defect" (Taylor, *Natural History* 1: 27). Language in pre-civilized communities tends to possess a superfluous "abundance of synonyms," and is constrained by a limited vocabulary and a "deficien[cy] in general terms" – in particular, generic categories and abstractions for time, space, and substance. "Savage eloquence" displays a similar lack of economy in its colorful figures and repetitiousness, as well as in its tendency to privilege sound over sense (Taylor, *Natural History* 1: 187). Likewise, methods of recording experience in semi-civilized societies are "clumsy, uncertain, and cumbrous," rendering language in such states unsuitable for the more complex rhetorical functions performed by language in civilized societies. Taylor notes "the utter inapplicability of [such primitive writing systems] to any great historical work, and still more to any philosophical or imaginative purpose" (Taylor, *Natural History* 1: 33-34).

Similarly, through the "government of opinion," civilized patterns of language use promote a greater degree of self-control in individuals, and develop an alternative source of influence to authority based solely on physical force (Mill, "Civilization" 127). In accordance with the pacific spirit of modern civilization, the press does not simply shift the balance of power in favor of the masses by facilitating co-ordination among large numbers of people, but serves to temper the level of unnecessary violence involved in social transactions. Hence, while an important function of the press is to check the "usurpations of the government", the "value of free discussion" lies also in its capacity to act as "a check upon the passions of the people" – to serve "as a kind of safety-valve by which dangerous accumulations of popular passion or prejudice may escape without detriment to the machinery of society" (Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 259-60).

Taylor's treatise also highlights the trend towards standardization in civilized languages – another linguistic phenomenon which corresponds to and supports one of the key characteristics of modern civilization identified earlier – namely, the diffusion of intelligence. Representing the mind-boggling proliferation of languages in America as a general "attribute of the savage stage" (*Natural History* 2: 297; see also 1: 26), Taylor clearly understands civilized language in terms of a linguistic system which has undergone a process of standardization and codification, and which therefore remains stable over extended regions of space and time. In contrast to the "disuniting" power of linguistic idiosyncrasy in pre-civilized areas (*Natural History* 2: 298), the standardization of civilized languages ensures that such linguistic systems support "the spirit of combination" (Mill, "Civilization" 135), and perhaps even facilitate "the progress of the power of co-operation" in civilized societies (122).

So far, then, it would appear that many aspects of modern discourse practices are in accord with the main characteristics and tendencies of modern civilization outlined earlier. At least as represented in the Victorian writings on civilization included in our survey, civilized language emerges as a sophisticated, highly efficient system of communication. But what about the field of modern literature and the patterns of language use cultivated therein? Can literary language readily be accommodated within the model of civilized language articulated by Victorian discourse on the civilizing process? At this point, civilization discourse gives rise to troubling implications for literary language. As composition teachers have so often reminded us (see Introduction), literary language does not offer a particularly efficient model for teaching practical communicative skills. Worse still, the distinctive qualities of literary language emphasized in Victorian discourse on civilization seem completely at odds with the notion of civilized language constructed in these texts. In Taylor's treatise, for example, the features of literary language are employed to characterize the very antithesis of civilized language:

> [S]avage eloquence is exclusively the language of passion, – short, energetic, and abounding with highly-wrought figures. It is metaphorical, because the orator's vocabulary is limited, and for the same reason it abounds in repetitions of the same ideas: it is poetical, because the speaker is obliged to deal largely in personification, and to employ pictures in words rather than arguments. (1: 186)

The mismatch between literary language and modern civilization is exacerbated, moreover, by the fact that literary discourse is routinely portrayed in Victorian discourse on civilization as an obstacle to developing a more accurate understanding of the civilizing process. Literary discourse, it is implied, may appeal to puerile, uninstructed tastes, but is deficient as a mode of representing scientific truth, propagating romantic

distortions which need to be dismantled. Thus, Whately blames "the erroneous estimate of the superior virtue of a poor and half-civilized condition of society" on an "early familiarity with poetical description" (*Political Economy* 176-77); a certain "style of eloquent declamation" (180); and the exoticizing tendencies of travel writing (179). Taylor, too, writes against the misguided notions about semi-civilized existence disseminated by literature, undermining the truth-value of Cooper's romances (1: 21-22), and reinforcing Whately's efforts to debunk false literary notions about the advantages of "primitive poverty" (Whately, *Political Economy* 40):

> It would be vain to seek among [real shepherds] for the features with which pastoral life has been invested in poetry and romance – just as 'love in a cottage,' so long the staple of novels, has no reality, save in
> > A cottage with a double coach-house,
> > A cottage of gentility. (Taylor, *Natural History* 1: 199)

In short, Victorian discourse on civilization appears readily to confirm arguments about the anachronistic, regressive qualities of literary discourse, harking back to well-known essays by Thomas Love Peacock and Thomas Babington Macaulay which represent literature as out-of-place in modern civilization.[20] This particular way of inserting literature into macro-narratives of the civilizing process actually conceives

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[20] In *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820) – a highly entertaining polemic in response to which Percy Shelley wrote his famous *Defence of Poetry* (first publ. 1840) – Peacock offers a wicked satire of the regressive impulses of modern poetry: "While the historian and the philosopher are advancing in, and accelerating, the progress of knowledge, the poet is wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance, and raking up the ashes of dead savages to find gewgaws and rattles for the grown babies of the age. … The march of [the modern poet's] intellect is like that of a crab, backward" (15-16). To be sure, Peacock's provocative arguments are to some extent facetious and exaggerated, yet they retain a disturbing power for their plausibility, and constitute a serious challenge to lovers of literature to explain the apparent "backwardness" of modern literature compared to other forms of intellectual discourse. Indeed, Macaulay's essay on "Milton" (1825), published just five years later, seems to take many of Peacock's ideas fairly seriously. "[A]s the magic lantern acts best in a dark room, poetry effects its purposes most completely in a dark age," he asserts (7), associating poetry with madness (6), childhood (8), emotion (11), and magic (10; 47). In particular, he emphasizes the pre-civilized nature of literary language: "language, the machine of the poet, is best fitted for his purpose in its rudest state. Nations, like individuals, first perceive, then abstract. They advance from particular images to general terms. Hence the vocabulary of an enlightened society is philosophical, that of a half-civilized people is poetical" (5).

literature and civilization as existing in an inverse relation to one another: as Macaulay puts it, "as civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines" ("Milton" 4). Consequently, literature is effectively denied any meaningful role in modern civilization, and as harsh as this sentence might seem, it appears to be the irresistible conclusion to which the various pressures against literary language in civilization discourse are leading. At any rate, it is the conclusion drawn by Taylor's reviewer in the *Westminster Review*, who states that "Every [civilizing] improvement which a language undergoes will render it less fit for the composition of works of imagination and poetry" (173). As language becomes progressively more civilized, he explains, it becomes

> too precise and scientific for the figurative diction of the bard and the romancer; and every subject in which the progress of knowledge had occasioned the substitution of scientific for vernacular names, has become unfit for verse. (173)

To be sure, Victorian discourse on civilization does make allowance for a more moderate position on the role of literature as well. Although the narratives of civilizing linguistic change implied by civilization discourse seem largely to support Peacock's charge that "A poet in our times is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community" (16), in practice most Victorian thinkers adopt a position of compromise. Thus, in spite of the opposition he sets up between literary and civilized language, Taylor frequently quotes poetry to illustrate his points. Acknowledging that "amusement … men *will* seek" (*Political Economy* 203), both Whately and Taylor suggest that the appeal of literary language is a valuable resource which should be exploited for pedagogical purposes – in particular, to secure the interest of the young and the uninstructed (Whately, *Political Economy* 204; Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 302). Furthermore, even as he is describing the limitations of savage – but poetical – language, Taylor concedes that literary language is

highly persuasive (*Natural History* 1: 186), perhaps admitting the possibility that such language might help to address the crisis of moral authority faced by modern civilization (Mill, "Spirit" 34). As Carlyle remarks in "On History" (1830), imaginative storytelling is the oldest activity in the world, and is unlikely to disappear altogether even in highly civilized states of society (25-26). More compromising approaches to the place of literary language in modern civilization recognize the ubiquity of imaginative invention and linguistic play, and, notwithstanding its associations with childish, primitive modes of speech, attempt to find some ancillary role for literary discourse in industrial society.

This moderate position on the place of literature is quite consistent with notions of civilized language articulated by Victorian civilization discourse, since one proof of civilized economy is the capacity to discern a use for everything, no matter how apparently useless. In fact, this accommodating approach is the more plausible for being far less extreme than narratives of poetical extinction. The paradox emerging from Victorian discourse on civilization for literature is that, in spite of its apparent incompatibility with notions of civilized language, influential thinkers like Carlyle, Mill, and Arnold should nevertheless accord to literature a high place of honor in modern intellectual culture, representing it as a crucial means of preserving "[a]ll that we are in danger of losing" and regaining "all that we have lost" in the course of the civilizing process" (Mill, "Civilization" 136). Given the frequent representations of literary language in atavistic, primitive terms, literature hardly seems a likely candidate for promoting the civilizing process or developing civilized discourse practices; so how could writers like Arnold, who commanded a sophisticated understanding of civilizing trends, suggest that modern civilization look to literature – of all places – for "intellectual

deliverance" ("On the Modern Element" 5)? Does this paradox point to an unacknowledged contradiction within Victorian literary practice – perhaps a deluded sense of self-importance among Victorian writers? Or does it reflect the failure of Victorian literary criticism to describe the qualities of its literary language? Or perhaps this puzzle has more to do with gaps in our reading of Victorian literary theory – some of which might be filled by reading such meta-literary writings in the light of discourse on the civilizing process. Focusing on selected writings by Arnold and Mill, the following chapter will attempt, in this manner, to illuminate the faith of the Victorians in the "higher" civilizing powers of literature.

CHAPTER 2

Theorizing Literacure: John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold on the Civilizing Powers of Literary Language

Gaps in Civilized Language: The Need for a Literary Supplement

The previous chapter attempted to restore a measure of credibility to Victorian discourse on civilization. This chapter builds on this argument by exploring a branch of this discursive network which has special significance for literature. Situating key critical statements about literary value within the vital network of ideas about language and civilization in Victorian intellectual culture, it seeks to develop a better understanding – and a more accurate assessment – of Victorian literary theory. In particular, I suggest that the investment in literature of such influential thinkers as J. S. Mill and Matthew Arnold may be read as a creative response to the problematic tendencies they perceived in modern rhetorical culture.[1] Thus, while their theories about the higher civilizing power of literature remain firmly committed to the general idea of modern civilization outlined in the last chapter – broadly speaking, to the diffusion of material and intellectual resources to increasing numbers of people through technological innovation and enhanced social combination – they are also deeply concerned with addressing the human costs of such

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[1] I use the term "modern rhetorical culture" to refer to the sum of linguistic practices and modes of discourse that Victorian commentators came to identify with the development of modern civilization – that is, a rhetorical culture in which the "civilized" patterns of language use described in Chapter One tend to predominate. Theorists of civilization such as Taylor understood this rhetorical culture to be shaped by and to reflect other aspects of modern culture – for instance, the improved technologies of communication and transportation – but also as exerting an important influence on the social and cultural contexts that had given rise to it (see, e.g., Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 258).

large-scale social processes and goals. If the "literature of civilization" they affirm in their writings supports the concept of civilization in general, Mill and Arnold imagine a literature which would make the individual in civilization – and civilization in the individual – its special concern. Such a literature would cultivate discursive practices and mental resources to enable the individual to cope more effectively with civilizing pressures, and even to resist those larger tendencies in modern civilization which threaten to undermine its basic ideal of human improvement.

In short, literature was conceived – explicitly by Mill and Arnold, but also more widely in Victorian literary culture – as a powerful remedy for "strengthening the weaker side of Civilization" (Mill, "Civilization" 143). It is the broad aim of this chapter to show that the almost miraculous therapeutic powers attributed to literature by these two writers are not the simply result of displaced religious feeling or muddled aestheticism, but, rather, springs from sophisticated, rigorous thinking about the rhetorical qualities of literary language, and the functions it might perform for civilized minds and societies.

This notion of literary therapy, or "literacure",[2] suggests that the most immediate element of modern civilization which literature would act on and modify would be its discourse practices. At first glance, this seems odd, since the representations of civilized language highlighted in the previous chapter generally portray modern forms of communication as highly sophisticated and efficient. Economical, standardized, and

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[2] I adapt this term from Harly Sonne's 1987 essay, which draws on linguistics and psychoanalytic discourse to reflect seriously on the relationship between literary production and psychosis. While I am aware that this portmanteau word has a slightly gimmicky ring to it, it does economically capture an abiding nineteenth-century interest in the therapeutic functions of literary discourse.

precise, civilized language is represented in much Victorian writing on civilization as one of its most impressive achievements. Supporting the spirit of combination and promoting non-violence and restraint in social transactions, civilized language seems to embody the progressive elements of modern civilization so completely that it is difficult to imagine what weaknesses it might have to remedy – if it has any weaknesses at all.

Yet Victorian writers on civilization were not as convinced about the perfection of civilized language as their discourse sometimes suggests. On closer inspection, even the glowing representations of civilized language discussed earlier tend to confess doubts about its completeness. For instance, one of the principal civilizing trends documented by many Victorian writers is the development of an increased sense of individuality, and, as a key shaper of mental culture, civilized language might be expected to address such changes in personality structure. However, little mention is made in Victorian discourse on civilization as to how civilized discourse practices respond to the changing psychological needs of modern subjects, or how civilized language might act to counter the enervating effects of civilization on the individual's sense of agency. Indeed, such representations hardly pay any attention to the individual at all – with their emphasis on standardization and objectivity, civilized discourse practices might even be said to enact, on the level of form, predictions that the modern individual's destiny was to "sink into greater and greater insignificance" relative to the masses (Mill, "Civilization" 126). In fact, commentators like Carlyle, Mill, and Arnold recognized serious inadequacies in civilized language, and were openly critical of its undesirable tendencies. In texts such as "Signs of the Times", *On Liberty*, and *Culture and Anarchy*, for example, public opinion

– the most important channel of modern rhetorical power – is represented as a grave threat to individuality and independent thought, so much so that, for these influential thinkers, the greatest challenges to modern civilization could be described as rhetorical in nature.

In the light of the undesirable tendencies perceived in civilized discourse practices, the turn to literature as a potent remedy to the problems of modern civilization becomes far more intelligible. Praise of literature as "a province of exertion upon which more, of the first value to human nature, depends, than upon any other" (Mill, "Civilization" 137) or as an agent of "intellectual deliverance" (Arnold, "On the Modern Element in Literature" 5) ceases to sound merely self-aggrandizing once one considers the immense importance ascribed to language by the Victorians and the possibilities they saw in literary discourse for cultivating a more adequate language for civilized existence. Literary discourse, as we shall see, offered a rhetorical space in which readers and writers could strive to combine the strengths of civilized language with "all that we have lost" in the course of civilizing language change (Mill, "Civilization" 136). In particular, literary language is represented as attempting to address the lack of resources in civilized language for dealing with modern subjectivity – a shortcoming which both Mill and Arnold perceived would have serious ramifications for society as well.

To explore the idea of literature as therapy for the civilized mind in Victorian literary theory is not only to illuminate the special emphasis on literature in Victorian intellectual culture, but also to shed light on debates about literary language which persist today. To writers such as Mill and Arnold, literary discourse was not, as Thomas Love

Peacock and others had suggested (see Chapter One), a naïve return to childish or primitive forms of language use. Far from a linguistic throwback, literary language in fact represents one stage onward in the development of civilized language – evolutionary adaptation on a rhetorical plane which attempts to infuse civilized language with the strengths of past forms. Mill and Arnold imagine literature as a field in which the rhetorical possibilities of older discursive forms might be combined with the analytical and organizational power of civilized language.

This chapter will attempt to illustrate the civilizing function of literary discourse affirmed by Mill and Arnold on both a specific and general level – in its special capacity to help the individual adapt to modern civilization and its peculiar pressures, but also in the way it empowers the individual to critique and act on society in order to sustain the civilizing process on a larger scale. Reconstructing Mill's theory of literature from his literary criticism and *Autobiography* (1873), we see how his ideal of the literature of civilization works its almost magical cure for the civilized mind by introducing to it a different kind of mental language – a language which draws on both civilized and pre-civilized discourse forms to deal with the challenges of modern subjectivity. Literary discourse affords for Mill a much-needed resource for externalizing and making sense of the modern subject's heightened sense of interiority, thus supporting the development of mentally stronger individuals. Meanwhile, Arnold expands the idea of "literacure" beyond the individual to imagine the general civilizing function of literary discourse – the important political function it might perform for society as a whole. Focusing on *Culture and Anarchy* and several well-known essays, we shall see how Arnold makes the

ostensibly "inward" language of literature the basis of a more effective political discourse.

Before turning to look more closely at the idea of civilizing "literacure" in the work of Mill and Arnold, a brief sketch of the development of this concept in nineteenth-century British writings may be useful. In the first place, were ideas about the power of linguistic form as generally accessible – and as seriously taken – in Victorian intellectual culture as the notion of literacure seems to require? And how did the notion of literature as therapy for the modern mind come to gain currency in the discursive economy of Victorian Britain? Besides sketching out the confluence of intellectual currents which are likely to have shaped Mill's and Arnold's literary theorizing in important ways, the following section also suggests that the ideas relating literature, language, and civilization which these eminent thinkers drew upon were readily available to other Victorian writers. Mill's and Arnold's theories of a literature of civilization may be regarded as representative of the kind of rhetorical model guiding the literary practices of many of their contemporaries.

In Search of "Literacure": Contextualizing Victorian Notions of Literature as Therapy

The notion of literature as therapy could only have developed in a culture with great faith in language, and there is considerable evidence to suggest that sophisticated ideas about the power of language were widely disseminated in Victorian intellectual culture – and perhaps taken more seriously than they are today. That linguistic issues received a great

deal of attention in Victorian culture is not in doubt. Scholars like Hans Aarsleff and, more recently, Christine Ferguson, have documented the colorful controversies over the origins of language and skillfully traced the implications of such debates for questions about human evolution. However, while such accounts illustrate the intellectual seriousness and emotional intensity that Victorian intellectuals brought to the topic of language, the focus on dissent perhaps tends to obscure the common sense of wonder inspired by language among these thinkers.

Thus, as fiercely as famous disputants like Charles Darwin and F. Max Müller might have disagreed about the origin and nature of language, a keen sense of the marvelous power of language to shape social and psychological reality informs both these writers' treatment of language. So strong are Müller's convictions about language, that he may be regarded as a prophet of what might be styled "linguistic faith" – a turn to language as a powerful medium of possibility, and a rich potential source of agency. As might be expected from his attempt to make language "our Rubicon" – "the one great barrier between the brute and man" (367) – Müller's *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1861) invests language with almost mystical significance: he speaks of language as "sacred ground" with "sermons in every word" (3), and the linguistic science he seeks to establish promises not only to reveal the "marvels" of language (2), but to aid humankind unravel "many of the [political and social] problems which have agitated the world from the earliest to our own time" (11). Language is represented as the animating force behind the ideological questions which "have exercised a powerful influence for good or evil in

the history of mankind," and the ultimate cause of much human conflict traced to a "disease of language" (11).

A cursory glance at Müller's enthusiastic prose might easily lead one to dismiss him as an eccentric "mythologist of language [rather] than a scientist of it" (Ferguson 29), yet as Ferguson points out, his philological writings were widely read – and remarkably popular – during the mid-Victorian period.[3] Müller's faith in the potency of language was, moreover, at least partially shared by his great antagonist in the debate about the exclusivity of language to humankind. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), for example, Darwin might have denied language the elevated position Müller claimed for it, but his attitude to language bears traces of a similar linguistic faith. Although he firmly rejects the idea that language is a uniquely human attribute, he nonetheless affirms that it is on the evolution of "articulate language" that man's "wonderful advancement" has "mainly depended," quoting Chauncey Wright's remark that "even the smallest proficiency in [language] might require more brain power than the greatest proficiency in any other direction" (49).

In relation to questions about the nature and accessibility of Victorian ideas about linguistic power, the philological writings of Richard Chenevix Trench (1807-1886), Church of Ireland archbishop of Dublin,[4] are most instructive. Although his style is

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[3] As Ferguson points out, "[h]is 1861 lectures on the science of language drew attendees from an incredible cross-section of British society, and their publication, as one *London Times* writer noted, was "watched for with an interest like that which awaits a new novel from a popular writer" (28).

[4] Like Richard Whately, whom he succeeded as archbishop of Ireland, Trench was an Anglican divine who made significant contributions to the study of language in nineteenth-century Britain. Besides raising considerable interest in philology through his books and lectures, Trench played a seminal role in establishing the lexicographical project that produced the *Oxford English Dictionary*. It is for this achievement that Trench is chiefly remembered today.

generally more sober than that of Müller's *Lectures*, his *On the Study of Words* (1851) and *English Past and Present* (1855) are similarly pervaded by a profound sense of wonder at the "intellectual and moral marvels" of language (*On the Study of Words* 10). *On the Study of Words*, in particular, clearly aims to "kindle admiration" for words as "living powers" (10-11), emphasizing their "reactive energy" on "every region of human knowledge" (132-33), and employing etymological derivation to reveal the wealth of cultural resources "embedded" in language (33).

In his Preface to *On the Study of Words*, Trench had explicitly stated his interest in making such ideas about language accessible to a wider, non-specialist audience, especially young people and educators. Accordingly, he deliberately sought to treat his philological subject-matter in "a more popular manner" (6). Judging by the reception of his books, he was remarkably successful – *On the Study of Words*, for instance, reached its nineteenth edition by the time of Trench's death (Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England* 235). The popularity of Trench's writings – and the audience at which they were pitched – argue that the linguistic faith animating his work was very much available to Victorian readers at large, and not confined to scientists or intellectuals. Moreover, although he published his books on language before he was archbishop, his *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord* (1841) had already established him as a theological writer by the time *On the Study of Words* appeared. Hence, Trench's reputation as a respected Anglican divine would have conferred legitimacy on his philological writings, making them a particularly effective conduit of linguistic faith. Trench's work illustrates how easily such bold claims about the power of language – approaching a relatively strong

version of linguistic determinism – might co-exist with orthodox Victorian values. In his books, ideas about linguistic power are placed securely in the service of moral instruction –Trench emphasizes throughout "the moral atmosphere which words diffuse" (*On the Study of Words* 99), and figures language itself as the "moral barometer indicating and permanently marking the rise and fall of a nation's life" (100). His participation in the dissemination of linguistic faith shows that such ideas were not merely available to the Victorians in some passive sense. Rather, the compatibility of linguistic faith with familiar Anglican values enabled its proponents to draw upon and support existing structures of religious feeling, so that mainstream Victorian culture afforded a very hospitable environment for such ideas.

Trench's philological work also brings into focus two noteworthy features of what I have called the linguistic faith of the Victorians. First, if the sense of wonder and reverence for language that writers like Trench hoped to generate justifies the use of the term "faith", it was a rational faith they hoped to inspire – one with a sound empirical basis. Far from requiring blind faith in some mysterious linguistic power, Trench claims that the aura of wondrous possibility surrounding language would not be diminished, but enhanced, by close scrutiny and scientific study (Trench, *On the Study of Words* 11). This emphasis on empirical investigation and historical knowledge is evident in Trench's methodology. While the meta-linguistic awareness offered by *On the Study of Words* is figured in highly romantic terms ("like the dropping of scales from his eyes, like the acquiring of another sense, or the introduction into a new world" [10]), the route to this visionary consciousness is much more pedestrian, involving the painstaking collection

and organization of over eight hundred etymologies. On a conceptual level, moreover, Trench repeatedly emphasizes the intimate connection between thought and language (e.g., 20; 25; 32; 215), effectively attributing language's wondrous power to the creativity of the human mind. This move to explain the "marvelous" power of language in naturalistic or psychological terms can similarly be found in Müller's and Darwin's texts. Notwithstanding his "mythologizing" of language, Müller justifies the elevated position he claims for human language by arguing that the power of concept-formation is essentially linguistic in nature: he uses etymological roots as evidence that knowing and naming are identical on some fundamental level (396). For Darwin, too, language's great power lies in its contribution to mental development – in the way that "the continued use and advancement of [language] … react[s] on the mind itself, by enabling and encouraging it to carry on long trains of thought (90-91). As marvelous as language was made out to be by these writers, its "living power" was not supernatural, but organic, human, in origin. In this respect, linguistic faith might be regarded as one mode of articulating the "natural supernaturalism" favored by so many Victorian thinkers.

The final aspect of Victorian linguistic faith that I shall highlight here is the assumed ubiquity of its object. For Trench and Müller, the "living power" of language was not subject to the monopoly of those with arcane knowledge, or even of the literate. Rather, with the meta-linguistic awareness offered these philologists, one would "never … cease wondering at the … marvels that surround him on every side" (*On the Study of Words* 10). The latent power which Trench and Müller sought to reveal in language was strikingly egalitarian in its distribution. To these writers, the marvelous potential of

language existed in linguistic forms from across the social spectrum, even in varieties of the language which carried little social prestige. Hence, Trench valorizes the "riches" that "lie hidden in the vulgar tongue of our poorest and most ignorant" (*On the Study of Words* 11), and devotes considerable space in *English Past and Present* to showing that "[t]]he dialects are worthy of respectful study" (231). Similarly, Müller emphasizes "the unbounded resources of dialects" (64) – his envisioned linguistic science will unveil the marvels to be found in "the language which every ploughboy can speak" (26). With such images of plenitude attached to its "boundless stores" of "living power" (*On the Study of Words*, 9-10), language could readily be imagined as a viable resource for re-enchanting – and transforming – the world.

The circulation of such ideas about the power of linguistic form helps explain why Victorian thinkers might have turned to the field of language for correctives to the undesirable tendencies of modern civilization. However, while it provides a conceptual foundation for notions of literature's therapeutic functions, it cannot, on its own, adequately account for the influence exerted by the notion of literacure on the Victorian imagination – especially since, as shown in the previous chapter, literary discourse was often identified with language in its pre-civilized state. So how did linguistic faith come to feed a faith in the healing power of literary discourse? In spite of the trend to regard literary discourse as regressive and anachronistic, there was a counter-tradition in early nineteenth-century British writings which posited an intimate connection between literary language and the understanding of psychological processes, and produced clearly-articulated statements about the importance of literature as a highly progressive aid to

mental well-being. In combination with linguistic faith, this Romantic current of thought created a rich intellectual environment for the idea of literacure to develop during the Victorian period.

Illustrations of Romantic efforts to describe the functions of literary discourse in psychological terms are readily available: my examples are chosen mainly on account of their prominence, but also because they together provide a sense of the variety of ways in which the idea of literature as a psychological aid was inflected. Thus, for the Scottish rhetoricians Thomas Campbell and Hugh Blair, it is the micro-linguistic features of literary discourse which offer a particularly important means of illuminating the workings of the mind. Although their highly successful textbooks of rhetoric tend to reinforce narratives of literary obsolescence (e.g., Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 63), their accounts of figurative language clearly resist the idea that literary discourse is irrelevant to modern society. Widely used throughout the nineteenth-century, Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (first publ. 1776) and Blair's *Lectures* (first publ. 1783) both establish a close relationship between figurative language and psychological processes, and emphasize the capacity of tropes to help speakers make sense of such processes. Not only do tropes provide insights into the "original and essential principles of the human mind" (Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* 305), they play an important role in developing a language for articulating and analyzing mental experience: "By their means, words and phrases are multiplied for expressing … the nicest shades and colours of thought" and "the most subtile and delicate workings of the imagination" (Blair 137-39).

While Campbell and Blair highlight the capacity of literature to illuminate human psychology through its creative use of language on a micro-linguistic level, Joanna Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" to her *Plays on the Passions* (1798) focuses on the psychological insights and benefits afforded by literary representation on higher levels of textual organization – namely, plot and characterization. Baillie, who enjoyed a considerable literary reputation in the nineteenth century, suggests that an important source of literature's appeal arises from the psychological interest it generates in its fictional characters and their actions. By exciting this universal "sympathetick curiosity towards others of our kind" (69), literary representation becomes a useful medium for exploring and making sense of interiority. Because its artful representations allow readers to trace "the varieties and progress of [the] soul" (73) in "a more enlarged and connected view, than their individual observations are capable of supplying" (76), literature provides a means of externalizing "concealed" relations between thoughts and feelings (75). The value of this psychological knowledge is not merely theoretical, however, for Baillie points out that such literary engagement facilitates greater self-understanding: "In examining others we know ourselves" (74).

The therapeutic value Baillie attaches to this heightened psychological awareness is evident from the pathological imagery used to describe the "agitating" mental forces which literature might ameliorate (e.g., "the agitated soul" [73]; "some powerful rankling passion" [73]; "varied passions, which disturb the minds of man" [85]). In "the most afflicting circumstances of distress" (74), these threaten to become "tyrannical masters" (94), and literature's psychological insights help the mind resist the "dominion" of such

extreme emotions (91), thereby promoting a more balanced internal state. The idea of literature as an aid to mental health emerges with particular clarity in Baillie's treatment of tragedy. "[R]epresenting the passions," she writes,

> brings before us the operation of a tempest that rages out its time and passes away. We cannot, it is true, amidst its wild uproar, listen to the voice of reason, and save ourselves from destruction; but we can foresee its coming, we can mark its rising signs, we can know the situations that will most expose us to its rage, and we can shelter our heads from the coming blast (94).

Significantly, Baillie does not claim that literary representation will enable readers to avoid such extreme feelings altogether – or that psychological knowledge will guarantee victory for the "voice of reason". As her meteorological metaphor suggests, Baillie fully acknowledges the intractable nature of the internal forces she writes about. Yet in the process of concretizing the psyche, her conceit expands the inner world to reveal other possibilities for coping with violent passion. Just as Baillie's figurative language dissociates the rational agent ("we") from the "tempest" of extreme passion, so too, she suggests, might the psychological awareness afforded by literature enable some distance – however minimal – from such dangerous emotions. These elemental forces may be beyond direct control, but by externalizing "their rise and progress in the heart" (91), dramatic representation might enable people to recognize larger patterns in the development of such feelings, and thereby more effectively forestall their most destructive effects. Creating a measure of critical space for agency and self-regulation, literature is presented as a valuable resource for alleviating the mental distress produced by "those great disturbers of the human breast, with whom we are all, more or less, called upon to contend" (91).

For Baillie, literature's therapeutic powers answer a universal human need to cope with extreme emotion. For William Wordsworth, on the other hand, the debilitating psychological effects of modern civilization create a particularly urgent need for literacure "at the present day" ("Preface" 735). In his celebrated 1802 "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, he emphasizes the decivilizing effects of industrial civilization on human beings, writing that "a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor" (735). According to Wordsworth, political change, industrialization, and the efficiency of modern communications – all central elements of modern civilization that were to be highlighted by Victorian discourse on the topic – have exacted a heavy toll on mental culture, producing a "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" (735). Literature's healthful effects are therefore to be realized through the medium of taste. In contrast to the "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and … idle and extravagant stories in verse" which pander to the "craving for extraordinary incident" (735), Wordsworth aims to produce a civilizing poetry which would "counteract" the degradation of mental culture by "enlarg[ing]" the mind's capacity "of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants" (735), and develop a taste for literary pleasures "of a purer, more lasting, and more exquisite nature" (741). No mere "matter of amusement and idle pleasure" (737), taste is made critical to mental well-being, and an important sphere secured for literature to exert its salutary influence.

The "Preface", then, offers one of the earliest and most prominent nineteenth-century statements suggesting that literature might be specially adapted to peculiarly modern psychological needs. Its other, no less significant contribution to the idea of literacure is to establish an important link between literature's therapeutic, regulating powers and its careful attention to form – in effect, integrating Baillie's idea of literature as an aid to mental balance with Campbell's and Blair's notions about the possibilities of form on a micro-textual level. Quite apart from his hints about "the powers of language [being] not so limited as [many] may suppose" (741), or the implications of his deliberate decision to evoke the "real language of men" (740), Wordsworth explicitly suggests that it is the structured patterns of language in literature that enable it to excite the mind without jeopardizing its mental balance. His comments about the regulating effects of meter might be extended more generally to the cultivation of formal order on any level: "the co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling" (739). The "Preface" therefore offers the germs of a theory of literature which makes the balancing, harmonizing effects of form – its capacity to unite energy and order – an important source of its civilizing potential. Wordsworth may have, as Mill lamented, "put forth nothing which can convey any adequate notion to posterity of [his theory of poetry]" ("The Use and Abuse of Political Terms," *Essays on Politics and Society* 4n), but his literary practices undoubtedly shaped the theorizing of many disciples, among whom, as

we shall see, Mill and Arnold must certainly be numbered. His profound influence on Victorian literary theory can hardly be overstated.

One of Wordsworth's admirers who produced a fully elaborated theory of literature was the Reverend John Keble (1792-1866), author of the most widely-read book of poetry in the nineteenth century, *The Christian Year* (1827).[5] No history of the concept of literature as therapy in the nineteenth century – however sketchy – could reasonably omit Keble's *Lectures on Poetry* (delivered at Oxford from 1832-1841), which he published as *De poeticae vi medica* (*The healing power of poetry*) in 1844. Prefaced by an enthusiastic dedication to Wordsworth, the theory of literature developed in Keble's *Lectures* is based on the central idea that poetry is "a kind of medicine divinely bestowed upon man: which gives healing relief to secret mental emotion, yet without detriment to modest reserve: and, while giving scope to enthusiasm, yet rules it with order and due control" (22). Like Wordsworth, Keble treats poetry's "prime and peculiar function of healing and relief" (66) as particularly important in an advanced state of civilization, which tends to produce a "more delicate sensibility" as well as a greater sense of reserve (20). As "the art which under certain veils and disguises yet reveals the fervent emotions of the mind" (47), poetry facilitates the articulation of personal feeling "without undue publicity" (11), offering a useful means of circumventing the peculiar communicative constraints of civilized society.

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[5] According to Perry Butler, "[b]y 1837 there had been sixteen editions and by Keble's death there were ninety-five. When copyright expired in 1873 there were 158 editions and copyright sales stood at 379,000" (3).

More importantly, Keble shares Wordsworth's emphasis on "the powers of language" ("Preface" 741), and develops at length the idea that literary form is the basis of literature's healing power. In his "Inaugural Oration", he traces poetry's "wonderful efficacy in soothing men's emotions and steadying the balance of their minds" to two main features of poetic language – namely, its rhythmical quality and its capacity, via tropes and figures, to "give … play to Imagination" (21). At several points, Keble asserts that it is "because it makes use of rhythmical language" that poetry is "specially and peculiarly … fitted" for "heal[ing] and reliev[ing] the human mind when agitated by care, passion, or ambition" (53). "For while we linger over language and rhythm," he explains, "[poetry] occupies our minds and diverts them from cares and troubles" (21) – in other words, formal patterns in sound ("repetition and variation of the cadences" [59]) serve to restore a sense of balance to the distressed mind. Similarly, the therapeutic workings of figurative language are also conceived of in terms of their capacity to confer a degree of coherence on emotional experience: Keble figures imaginative language as "striv[ing] to draw [the feelings] together, while … giv[ing] them outline and ornament," so that "men gradually become their own physicians and do not resent the change that comes over them" (59).

I highlight the importance Keble attaches to literary form because the formal commitments of nineteenth-century literary theories have often been obscured by attempts to classify them under an expressive critical paradigm – a tendency which, as we shall see, has affected understanding of Mill's literary thinking as well. The case of Keble usefully illustrates the potential misprisions invited by such theories of literacure, while

affording an opportunity to clarify Victorian ideas about literature's therapeutic, regulating functions. Given Keble's repeated claim that poetry "essentially consist[s] in a power of healing and restoring overburdened and passionate minds" (480) – and this by "reliev[ing] the outbursts of emotion by aid of song" (88) – modern critics have generally been content to assimilate his theory within some simplified version of Aristotelian catharsis. So far from linking Keble's theory to classical poetics, the term "cathartic" instead serves M. H. Abrams as a byword for a kind of literary emotionalism, and identifies Keble's theory with a critical paradigm that conceives literature as the expression of extreme emotion, privileging moments of climactic release. Seizing on Keble's image of poetry as a "safety-valve" (*Lectures* 55), Abrams puts Keble in the same camp as Byron – who figured composition in terms of a volcanic eruption – and focuses rather one-sidedly on the idea that Keble regarded literature as a means of releasing "threatening inner pressures" (*The Mirror and the Lamp* 146). As a result, Abrams effectively plays up the "sensational" and "radical" aspects of Keble's theory – in particular, pointing to how it is "subversive" of traditional genre distinctions (145).

Such a reading of Keble's *Lectures* clearly suggests that his "expressive" theory of literature privileges feeling at the expense of form – in fact, that it effectively renders form irrelevant by making subjectivity the ultimate determinant of poetic production. This simplifies Keble's conception of literature's therapeutic action in several ways. As pointed out above, Keble understands the distinctive formal qualities of literary language as the source of literature's healing power. It is true that he emphasizes the "healing relief" afforded by the externalization of emotion in literary discourse, but it is the form

taken by this emotional expression that makes all the difference, the artfully constructed patterns in language lending a measure of equilibrium and coherence to the mental world.[6] Moreover, by focusing on images of climactic release (e.g., poetry as a safety-valve), Abrams neglects Keble's interest in the role of literary discourse in the larger economy of affect it seeks to balance and restore. Consequently, Abrams's version of Keble's theory tends to reduce literature to an emotional purgative, when it is perhaps more accurate to read Keble as offering literature as a therapeutic form of mental discipline – the object of which is not simply the elimination of emotional energy, but the tempering and regulation thereof.

This reading of Keble's theory is supported by the range of therapeutic functions Keble conceives for poetry in the *Lectures*, which far exceed those captured by the metaphor of the safety-valve. To begin with, Keble makes it clear that his notion of literary production is not exclusively focused on "vehement passions", but speaks to more subtle forms of emotion – structures of feelings which have "grown up with the character, silent and unnoticed, interpenetrating a man's whole life" (90). Further, in addition to tempering the "over-restless emotions" (321) of both writers and similarly distressed readers by facilitating the externalization of such feelings, literary discourse also affords relief by stimulating "those whose minds are listless and idle through

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[6] Interestingly, even the image of poetry as a safety-valve occurs in a passage which hints at the importance of structure and form to Keble's theory of literary therapy. Discussing the traditional association between poetic inspiration and madness, Keble recognizes the validity of this relation, but also complicates it by implying that there is some principle of order in "poetic frenzies" which distinguishes them – and enables them to "preserve" men – from "actual madness" (55; lecture 4). While in the same lecture Keble acknowledges that neither "perfect imitation" nor "exquisite harmony of subject and expression … simply and of itself, carries with it the whole power of Poetry," he emphasizes that the true poet must "skillfully and forcefully use [such formal elements] as means to give healing and relief (55; lecture 4).

abundance of leisure" (66). Poetry is conceived not only as giving vent to excess emotion, but as augmenting and activating latent inner energies. In particular, Keble emphasizes how reading literature provides many who "would [otherwise] have remained unworthily silent" with the rhetorical resources to articulate their own subjectivity. "Truly," he remarks, "it is past belief how powerfully single words or phrases, even perhaps the cadences of syllables falling on the ear in happy hour, call forth the hidden fire [of poetry]" (322; lecture 16). This notion of literature as a form of mental discipline, enabling individuals more effectively to channel and focus their emotions, accords with the stated aims of Keble's own poetry, which he offered as an aid to acquiring "discipline" of mind and temper – specifically, "a sober standard of feeling in matters of practical religion" ("Advertisement" to *The Christian Year* iii).

In an effort to give the reader a sense of the wealth of discourse and ideas available to Victorian thinkers interested in the notion of literacure, this section has focused selectively on a number of nineteenth-century texts which either gesture towards the possibility of literary intervention or actually elaborate some theory of literature's therapeutic powers. In the case of the theoretical writings of Baillie, Wordsworth, and Keble, it must be remembered that such explicit meta-literary statements were not the only – or even the most important – venues for their ideas about literature's fortifying power. Certainly, the fact that Keble's *Lectures* were delivered and published in Latin would have restricted their readership, but then nearly every Victorian reader of poetry would have encountered his notion of poetry's healing power through *The Christian Year.* Likewise, if Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" failed to make its point, her plays

were deliberately crafted to offer the psychological aid she believed literature could provide. *De Monfort* (1798), for example, provides a vivid representation of the "gradual steps" and "less obtrusive, but not less discriminating traits" whereby passion attains "its full-blown strength" ("Introductory Discourse" 91). In short, ideas about literary therapy circulated in a much wider discursive network in the nineteenth-century than my limited selection of critical prose suggests – and this is to say nothing of the innumerable readers who came to an awareness of language's psychological power through Wordsworth's poetry.

Finally, the rich sense of possibility surrounding literariness was further enhanced by the fluidity with which many of these writers treated generic categories, which meant that apparently genre-specific claims could readily be extended to other kinds of writing. Neither Wordsworth nor Keble restricts poetry to verse, and even Baillie discusses the special power of drama in terms of an anthropomorphic appeal ("still are we upon the watch for every thing that speaks to us of ourselves" ["Introductory Discourse" 79]) which could easily be generated by other genres. Although they generally use "poetry" to refer to distinctly literary language, these creative writers shared a fluid, genre-crossing notion of literariness, which is nicely captured by Trench's comments on poetry: "Nothing in language is too small, as nothing is too great, for it to fill with its presence" (*On the Study of Words* 48). This highly elastic concept of literature as a super-generic vector partially motivates my broad, inclusive use of the "literary" here, and illustrates again the fecundity of the intellectual soil which nurtured Mill's and Arnold's literary

theorizing. It remains to be shown how they availed themselves of – and mobilized – these resources.

Civilizing Magic: J. S. Mill and the Possibilities of Literary Form

To situate Mill in a tradition of writing which celebrates the "marvels" of language and the "wonderful" healing powers of literature might at first seem highly questionable. For those who come to know Mill through his monumental contributions to logic and political economy, Mill is probably one of the last Victorian writers one would associate with any variety of magical thinking. Consistent with his reputation as one of the leading intellectuals of "this most grown-up and unchildlike age" (Mill, "What is Poetry?" 7), "magic" and its collocating terms usually carry negative connotations in his writing, and are typically associated with irrationality, charlatanry, the absence of critical thought, and political backwardness. For instance, he notes approvingly that the "spell" of "ancient constitutional texts" has lost its "charm" over the English people ("The Spirit of the Age" 5), and blames the "magical influence of custom" for the "illusion" that social norms are "self-evident and self-justifying" (*On Liberty* 45).

In spite of this skeptical turn of mind, Mill was a fervent believer in the power of poetic language and arguably one of the Victorian period's most articulate champions of poetry and linguistic creativity. Not only did this influential thinker assert the "complete equality" of poetry with philosophy and science ("Inaugural Address" 190), he famously attributed to poetry his recovery from crippling depression in his *Autobiography* (1873). Mill's account of how poetry served as "medicine for [his] state of mind" (121) clearly

aligns him with such nineteenth-century writers as Wordsworth, Baillie, Keble, and Arnold, who invested poetry with almost magical redemptive powers.

This section will show that Mill's ideas about the healing powers of poetry were grounded in a sophisticated understanding of the "powers of language" (Wordsworth, "Preface" 741) and the possibilities of engaging socio-cultural processes through literary form. Focusing on Mill's reflections on poetry in his *Autobiography* and literary essays, I argue that Mill's faith in the therapeutic powers of literary language is best understood in terms of what I call the special civilizing function of literature in his theory of literature – a model of the workings of literary form which develops, I suggest, in response to Mill's insights into the characteristics and weaknesses of modern civilization. As shown in the previous chapter, the discourse on civilization in which Mill actively participated viewed the civilizing process as a "structural transformation of society" in the direction of material comfort, increased efficiency of travel and communication, reduced physical violence, increased co-operation, and a greater sense of individuality. Of these various interrelated indicators of civilization, Mill makes individuality the special province of literature. Literature's specific task, according to his reasoning, is to cultivate and strengthen the individual against the potentially negative effects of the other tendencies of the civilizing process – without jeopardizing their palpable benefits. For Mill, then, literature is "healing" in the context of the potential hostility of modern industrial civilization to the individual psyche. And it was to perform this function, I suggest, by means of its artfully cultivated form. Paying attention to form, therefore, not only enables us to accommodate disparate interpretations of Mill's theory (e.g., affective versus social

readings), but provides the crucial link between Mill's ideas about literature and his theory of civilization, thereby illuminating the unsuspected rhetorical sophistication of his literary theory.

One of the reasons why Mill's sophisticated ideas about literary form have often been overlooked is the puzzling mixture of affective and analytical registers in his writings about the literary. I begin, therefore, by showing how critics' efforts to deal with this troublesome element of the personal in his theory have led them to focus on either the expressive or social function of poetry, resulting in an unwarranted neglect of Mill's ideas about the workings of poetic form. In order the better to come to terms with Mill's critical engagement with form and feeling in his conceptualization of poetry, I propose to read the *Autobiography* as a key statement of his literary theory. Bringing this text into dialogue with Mill's critical writings, the second part of this section treats the *Autobiography* not simply as a documentary transcription of personal experience, but as a carefully crafted artifact that performs the literariness it reflects upon. In the final part, I juxtapose Mill's conceptualization of literary language with his ideas about modern civilization to show that he conceives the distinctive features of literary language as a powerful means of counterbalancing the undesirable tendencies of modern discourse practices. Mill imagines literature, I suggest, to work its "literacure" for the civilized mind by introducing it to a different kind of mental language – a language that draws on both civilized and pre-civilized discourse forms to deal with the challenges of modern subjectivity.

The importance of form in Mill's literary theorizing. Mill's relatively small output of literary-critical writings has always seemed something of an anomaly – requiring some apology, if not representing an area of intellectual confusion. Faced with his unqualified belief in poetry's healing powers and the enthusiastic tone which characterizes some of his writings on the topic, students of Mill's poetics have, generally speaking, tended to adopt one of two kinds of responses. On the one hand, some critics choose to foreground the affective dimensions of the theory, and typically conclude that Mill's notions about the literary were insufficiently theorized. M. H. Abrams, one of the earliest scholars to recognize Mill's contributions to literary theory, reduces his theory to "[t]he primitive proposition" that "Poetry is 'expression or uttering forth of feeling'," and claims that "whatever Mill's empirical pretensions, his initial assumptions about the essential nature of poetry remains continuously though silently effective in selecting, interpreting, and ordering the facts to be explained" (23). It is no surprise, therefore, that in her efforts to expose the contradictions" in Mill's thinking (26), Nancy Armstrong should focus on the importance he attaches to the "culture of feelings" through literature (30). Describing his turn to poetry as a "retreat" to the realm of personal feeling and a "betrayal" of his earlier democratic ideals, Armstrong effectively applies Abrams's "expressive" reading of Mill's theory to the theory itself, treating it as an expression of his "elitist" anxieties about the "specter of mass culture" (30).

On the other hand, John Robson, Edward Alexander, and others have recognized the intellectual worth of Mill's literary theory, and have studied his writings closely to demonstrate the careful reasoning underpinning it. These critics usefully show how Mill's

poetics elaborates on, for instance, the importance of literature in a "complete moral and social theory" (Robson 420), the special value of poetry to democratic culture (Alexander, "Mill's Theory of Culture"), or the "role of poetry in developing [social] sympathy" (Green 452). However, in their efforts to establish Mill's literary theorizing as a serious object of study, these critics have tended to distance themselves from his potentially embarrassing focus on personal feeling, moving a little too quickly to emphasize how Mill's theory instrumentalizes poetry for social or philosophical ends. Bent on explaining poetry's functions in relation to some larger socio-cultural context, their accounts of Mill's literary theory not only seem reluctant to acknowledge the importance he attaches to poetry as a means of externalizing one's subjectivity, but devote little attention to what his theory tells us about poetry as literature – that is, writing which regards linguistic creativity and formal patterning as an integral part of its meaning.

Even scholars who adopt rhetorical approaches have produced readings which do not adequately capture the complexity and suppleness of Mill's thinking about form and its possibilities. While Timothy Gould and Jason Camlot correctly highlight and elaborate on the significance of Mill's distinction between poetry and eloquence, both are led, by Mill's emphasis on the anti-rhetorical formal qualities of poetry, to characterize his notion of poetic language in ways which come close to replicating the anti-formalist, "expressivist" position of earlier critics. Gould's rigid sense of Mill's conception of poetic utterance emerges clearly when he attempts to apply the theory to actual poems – he assumes that Mill's category of poetry is limited to utterances which represent the

"immediate expression of feeling ('for its own sake')" (143). Meanwhile, Camlot's hypothesis that Mill conceives poetic language as "an antidote" to the "banalizing" effects of periodical writing leads him to interpret Mill's understanding of literary form in highly restrictive terms (195). When literary language is conceived – as Camlot suggests – as "nonrhetorical", "nontropological" discourse (201), free from the "corruptive attributes of figurative language" (200), it is difficult to imagine it as having form at all – at least not in the sense of artfully cultivated design, involving skilful, deliberate manipulation of the medium and all its resources.

To be sure, it is the need to distance themselves from Abram's expressive reading that partially motivates these critics' overwhelming focus on poetry's social or philosophical functions, yet the net effect of this is a lack of attention to personal feeling and form – as well as how these terms are connected – in Mill's poetics. Indeed, subjectivity and form are two concepts that no account of Mill's theory can afford to neglect. Personal feeling constitutes one of poetry's most clearly signaled concerns in Mill's literary writings. If one had to isolate a single thread of continuity across Mill's various writings on the literary, it would be his insistence that poetry is intimately connected to interiority, and offers an important resource for externalizing personal feeling – or, as he puts it in "What is Poetry" (1833), "the delineation of the deeper and more secret workings of the human heart" (8). Amidst the several distinctions he introduces to make sense of the literary – for example, poetry versus science ("What is Poetry" 6), poetry versus eloquence ("What is Poetry" 12), the poet of nature versus the poet of culture ("Two Kinds of Poetry" 31), and the Conservative poet versus the Radical

poet ("Poems and Romances of Alfred de Vigny" 79-84) – this idea forms the common substratum of Mill's literary theorizing, and runs through all his essays on poetry.

The neglect of form among students of Mill's poetics can no more be justified than the lack of interest in its affective dimensions, for explicit claims about the importance of literary form are readily found in his writings. In an important statement of his educational philosophy, his "Inaugural Address at St. Andrews" (1867), Mill offers its "perfection of form" as one of his strongest arguments for studying classical literature. Recognizing that, in terms of substance, ancient literature cannot rival the capacity of modern writers to address the psychological complexity of their age, he nonetheless maintains that, on the level of form, classical models of "purely literary excellence" remain an invaluable resource for modern intellectual culture (153). Even his early attempts to define the literary, which tend to stress its affective dimensions, suggest that poetry does not simply provide a direct outlet for emotional expression, but, rather, serves to mediate feeling in verbal form. Significantly, the famous line that "Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself" is followed by a sentence which highlights this process of mediation – the "bodying … forth [of feeling] in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind" ("What is Poetry" 12).

In "Tennyson's Poems" (1835), Mill similarly frames "the highest object of poetry" in a way which highlights the centrality of "form" to his conception of poetry: "to incorporate the everlasting reason of man in forms visible to his sense, and suitable to it" (73). As Mill's quotation suggests, this essay emphasizes that literary excellence involves

much more than emotional engagement, demanding that the writer simultaneously develop his intellectual powers as well as the "merely mechanical parts of his craft" (74). Since he must generally address an audience whose mental organization differs significantly from his own, the poet cannot rely on the "intrinsic value of his thoughts", but must artfully manipulate form to "plac[e] … those thoughts in a strong light before the intellect and impress … them on the feelings" (73). Thus, even as his theory puts considerable emphasis on natural talent, Mill points out that the power of the literary depends crucially on formal workmanship – which, "like every other adaptation of means to ends, is the work of cultivated reason" (68).

There is considerable evidence, then, that form played a central role in Mill's literary theorizing. Indeed, he indicates in the *Autobiography* the foundational status of rhetorical form to his thinking by highlighting his early, intimate acquaintance with Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: "as the first expressly scientific treatise on any moral or psychological subject which I had read," he writes, "my father made me study [it] with peculiar care, and throw the matter of it into synoptic tables" (32). Given the prominence of the expressive model in Mill's writings about poetry, to claim equal importance for form might at first seem odd, yet these two elements are not as incompatible as Abrams's treatment of Mill implies. In fact, Mill's comments on the poet's reliance on form suggest that form provides him with a theoretical category for bridging the conceptual division between affect and reason. If his theory is interested in poetry as a vehicle for personal feeling, it regards the form of expression as crucial to distinguishing literature from other modes of externalizing emotion. Human beings, after all, express emotion in myriad

ways – including ejaculations, cursing, and violence – even infants, with "no language but a cry" (Tennyson, *In Memoriam* 34), are capable of rudimentary forms of emotional expression. None of these would Mill consider "poetic" or "literary" – it is only by virtue of its artful, deliberately cultivated form that the externalization of feeling in writing acquires literary value. For Mill, literary form externalizes personal feeling in textual patterns that are not only intelligible to others, but engage with a certain level of sophistication with shared norms about what is right, admirable, and pleasing. It is his recognition of poetry's power to shape subjectivity through form that makes Mill's theory more than simply a poetics of self-expression or an "empty" formalism, and enables it to move towards a poetics of self-formation that remains firmly grounded within a larger understanding of the civilizing process.

The Autobiography *as literary theory.* This poetics of self-formation is most powerfully developed, I suggest, in the *Autobiography*, the fifth chapter of which very strikingly establishes poetry as a crucial aid to the civilized mind. Before attempting to analyze further the *Autobiography*'s poetics, however, one might well ask, on what grounds is such an interpretive move justified? Why should we read the *Autobiography* as I propose to do here – as a statement of his literary theory that reflects his mature thinking on the subject?

First, although this may at first sound like a novel proposition, it actually represents an effort to read with greater self-reflexivity and analytical rigor a text that is already much used as a source for understanding Mill's poetics. In practice, most scholars assume

that the *Autobiography* is a useful document for understanding Mill's thinking about poetry, and draw freely from it to support their accounts of his theory. Of the seven scholars cited earlier, five – Alexander, Armstrong, Camlot, Green, and Robson – make substantial use of the *Autobiography*, moving freely between this text and Mill's critical writings to find evidence for their interpretations of his poetics. Symptomatic, however, of the neglect of Mill's interest in literary form is the way in which students of his poetics have overlooked the status of the *Autobiography* as a literary artifact. In spite of the fact that important critical work on Victorian autobiography over the last few decades "has made the point, one way or another, that memoirs and autobiographies, like novels and poems, are the products of art and imagination and not just the documentary transcription of reality" (Peltason 370),[7] critics tend to treat it as a transparent statement of Mill's beliefs. As a result, little attention has been devoted to the questions that this part of my essay will focus on: how might Mill's deliberate deployment of style and imagery in the *Autobiography* serve to communicate important ideas about poetry? What does the *Autobiography*'s own literariness tell us about the workings of poetic language? To read Mill's Memoir as poetic theory, then, is to build on the intuition of earlier critics, but also to tap its resources more fully.

The second reason why we might look to the *Autobiography* for important insights into Mill's poetics is that it is one of the few texts written late in his career in which he discusses poetry at length. After the appearance of several well-known critical essays during the thirties, Mill published no further essays on poetry, nor did he ever expand his

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[7] On autobiography during the Victorian period, see also Landow; Fleishman; Gagnier; and Machann.

views of the subject in, say, a treatise on poetry. Rather than relegating his statements about poetry to the "merely personal," Mill's decision to embed his mature thoughts on poetry in his Memoir bespeaks, I suggest, his understanding of genre, and his conviction that this autobiographical genre would facilitate the presentation of his ideas about poetry most effectively. Like another great Victorian thinker, John Henry Newman, Mill was aware that the medium of transmission is often critical to the successful communication of certain truths, and recognized the difficulties of explicating, in "objective" theoretical language, his ideas about the inwardness of literary language and its importance to "the internal culture of the individual" (138). Mill could hardly have overlooked the potential rhetorical obstacles to theorizing the literary, since he had himself devoted considerable attention in "What is Poetry?" to characterizing the distinction between literary language and the language of "matter of fact or science" (6). The inwardness of literary language is clearly established in this essay: while the naturalist aims to describe things "as they *are*" in their "bare and natural lineaments", often concentrating on the "delineation of the dimensions and colours of external objects," the poet represents reality "arranged in the colours and seen through the medium of the imagination and set in action by the feelings" (10).

Moreover, from his own gradual awakening to the value of literary art, Mill was deeply convinced that "personal experience" was crucial to realizing "the importance of poetry and art as instruments of human culture" (*Autobiography* 118). Hence, he chose to present his theory of poetry's healing powers though the medium of his own personal experience – in autobiography, a narrative genre which offered, as we shall see, an

elasticity and subtlety not available in conventional modes of theoretical discourse. Mill's decision to clothe his mature understanding of the literary in autobiographical form also indicates his acceptance of the rhetorical limitations imposed by the nature of his subject – as Newman puts it in his *Grammar of Assent*, "due formation" is required before the mind can enter into certain modes of thinking (358). The autobiographical guise of his mature views on poetry acknowledges, therefore, that the workings of literature cannot satisfactorily be demonstrated according to the same standards of proof demanded by science, and signals that, in order to make sense of his theory, the reader must already have a minimal degree of faith in Mill's *ethos* – and an openness to learning something from his writings. Considerations of genre, therefore, would have favored the embedding of ideas about poetry in the *Autobiography*, further confirming the value of reading this text as poetic theory.

What, then, does the *Autobiography* tell us about the workings of literary language? How does Mill represent the place of poetry in his *Bildung*? Clearly, the larger point of the Memoir, particularly its pivotal fifth chapter, is to establish literary language as a crucial aid to Mill's mental well-being – and, since he invites us to treat his personal crisis as representative (p. 116), to the modern mind in general. The critical role played by poetry in this life-story imbues it with great educational significance, for, more than a straightforward recording of an individual life, the *Autobiography* is a narrative that is very much focused on education, and engages with the concept on multiple levels. As Mill explicitly indicates on the very first page, two of his three stated purposes for writing

his Memoir are intimately connected with education, and the text is very much directed at readers interested in the topic.[8]

The basic storyline of this narrative of education is clear: it depicts the implementation of an intellectually rigorous yet flawed educational program (chs. 1-4), and the subject's struggle to recognize and remedy the – now internalized – inadequacies of his education (ch. 5). Neither does Mill leave readers in doubt as to the larger message his narrative is designed to convey. Besides its reference to pathology – which creates a need for a cure – the title of Chapter 5, "A Crisis in My Mental History", clearly indicates that the chapter contains a significant turning-point in Mill's story. As a structural marker, the term "crisis"[9] underscores the special significance of the chapter within a larger, deliberately crafted structure, announcing that it is critical to understanding the text's central message. Within this marked chapter, Mill emphatically signals poetry's key role in saving him from prolonged depression – the question, then, is, how does poetry achieve this "literacure"? How does Mill represent the redemptive language – the new way of thinking – that he learns from poetry?

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[8] In the opening paragraph of the *Autobiography*, Mill makes it fairly explicit that, besides acknowledging his personal debts, his main reasons for relating "so uneventful a life as [his]" are intimately related to education: "I have thought that in an age in which education, and its improvement, are the subject of more, if not of profounder study than at any former period of English history, it may be useful that there should be some record of an education which was unusual and remarkable … It has also seemed to me that in an age of transition in opinions, there may be somewhat both of interest and of benefit in noting the successive phases of any mind which was always pressing forward, equally ready to learn and to unlearn from its own thoughts or from those of others" (p. 25).

[9] While in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, the various meanings of "crisis" almost always refer to a critical point in a larger trajectory, since the mid-twentieth century, the use of the term to refer to a state of difficulty, insecurity, and suspense has become increasingly dominant, as suggested by the fact that two major entries under "crisis" in the *Merriam-Webster Online* are "identity crisis" and "midlife crisis". Interestingly, many modern critics seem to read Mill's use of this term in ways which seem to be shaped by this lexical trend (see, esp., Armstrong 20; 44), focusing on its connotations of conflict and confusion rather than on its use as a structural marker in a larger pattern of order.

In order to answer these questions – and to appreciate how Mill employs literary language to engage them – let us turn to a passage that very dramatically attributes to poetic language Mill's recovery from crippling depression:

> I was reading, accidentally, Marmontel's *Memoirs*, and came to the passage which relates his father's death, the distressed position of his family, and the sudden inspiration by which he, then a mere boy, felt and made them feel that he would be everything to them – would supply the place of all that they had lost. A vivid conception of the scene and its feelings came over me, and I was moved to tears. From this moment my burthen grew lighter. The oppression of the thought that all feeling was dead within me, was gone. I was no longer hopeless: I was not a stock or a stone. I had still, it seemed, some of the material out of which all worth of character, and all capacity for happiness, are made. Relieved from my ever present sense of irremediable wretchedness, I gradually found that the ordinary incidents of life could again give me some pleasure. … [T]hough I had several relapses, some of which lasted several months, I never again was as miserable as I had been. (117)

Significantly, it is not a poem, but the reading of another autobiographical text that produces the chapter's first powerful example of poetic language's therapeutic effects. Even as it testifies to Mill's readiness to extend the concept of poetic language beyond verse, the first impression he creates is that the workings of this language are nothing short of miraculous, and cannot rationally be explained. As if by magic, the "sudden inspiration" of Marmontel's literary persona is transferred to Mill, dissolving his inner numbness and moving him "to tears." Mill represents literary emotion as kindling, to use Arnold's phrase, a "natural magic" ("Maurice de Guérin" 111) whose effects are immediate, irreversible, and absolute. In a manner reminiscent of Hans Christian Anderson's "Sneedronningen" (1845; English trans. 1846), in which Kay's weeping washes away the splinter of glass which sustains the Snow-Queen's baleful enchantments, Mill's tears permanently dispel his "irremediable wretchedness", restoring him, in a twinkling of an eye, to life, hope, and humanity. The miraculous efficacy

attributed to literature is further reinforced by the extreme oppositions which Mill employs to figure his radical transformation – a change marked by the absolute difference between life and death (e.g., "the thought that all feeling was dead … was gone"), presence and absence (e.g., "I had still … some of the material"), a sentient being and an inanimate object ("I was not a stock or a stone").

If the passage seems to portray the magic of poetic language as defying rational inquiry, it also suggests that literature's power lies precisely in its capacity to free us from the burdens of rationality and civilized culture. On one level, then, it appears to confirm anti-formalist, expressive readings of Mill's theory – the idea that literature cures Mill not by offering new ways of thinking or using language, but by liberating him from the cold, sterile intellect, and facilitating the expression of deeply submerged feelings. The actual "speech act" that Mill is represented as performing in response to Marmontel's *Memoirs* – if his weeping can be described as such – strongly reinforces the tendency to identify literature's healing properties with its capacity to unleash strong emotion. If literature heals Mill simply by moving him to tears – the spontaneous utterance of "[a]n infant crying in the night … with no language but a cry" – then one can hardly claim that poetic language provides access to highly sophisticated ways of manipulating linguistic form.

A closer examination of Mill's style, however, complicates the assumption that Mill's notion of literariness merely involves a return to nature, or a rejection of Victorian notions of polite form. For a passage that appears to privilege spontaneous expression and freedom from habitual restraint, it is meticulously patterned, and pays a great deal of attention to literary form and tradition in practice. Mill's careful attention to stylistic

detail is evident in the dense network of imagery and allusion that he constructs in and around the climactic fifth paragraph of the chapter. No less than seven literary references occur in as many paragraphs (pars. 3-9), with specific lines and texts by Shakespeare, Marmontel, Coleridge, Swift, Wordsworth, Byron, and Carlyle woven into the narrative so as to shape its meaning in significant, and not merely ornamental, ways. The densely literary quality of the passage is further intensified by Mill's artful diction, which ensures that key words and images resonate within a larger system of tropes operating in the surrounding text. For instance, the central image of Mill weeping replies not only to the lines from Coleridge's "Dejection" ("Which finds no natural outlet or relief/ In word, or sigh, or tear" [112]), but to a series of metaphors in the preceding text which evoke aridity and thirst – he speaks of "fountains of vanity and ambition [that] seem to have dried up within me" (115); of "dry heavy dejection"; and uses the image of "draw[ing] nectar in a sieve" (116). Similar patterns of figurative language can be traced around images of weightlessness and light in this passage.

Indeed, further analysis reveals that Mill's diction and imagery are not just meticulously patterned, but highly purposeful in several ways. From a rhetorical perspective, these subtle patterns of figurative language are calculated to convey more fully the miraculous, life-giving qualities of Mill's literary experience. The three main strands of imagery that I have located (water, ease of movement, and light) interact and converge in the passage to form a larger pattern of significance that activates powerful, inchoate symbolic associations from the reader's earliest encounters with fairy-tales and biblical narrative, gesturing towards relief, regeneration, and new life. Applying his

holistic conception of style, Mill taps these deep-seated reservoirs of symbolic meaning to make the reader feel – and not merely to tell her about – his profound sense of literature's therapeutic power. On another level, certain phrases and images in the passage combine to produce further intertextual references. The most important allusions produced in this manner revolve around the image of Mill's redemptive tears in conjunction with the phrase "not a stock or a stone," and provide further clues as to the alternative ways of thinking that Mill presents as critical to his recovery. As mentioned earlier, the revivifying transformation triggered by the "natural magic" of tears suggestively resembles the dénouement of Andersen's "Snow-Queen". Besides linking the redemptive language of literature with children's stories, this turns out to be highly significant reference, for "The Snow-Queen" is, as Andersen himself acknowledged, a sophisticated allegory about "the victory of the heart over cold intellect" (qtd. in Conroy and Rossel: 257). The story, moreover, explicitly endorses the romantic valorization of childhood faith and love – it concludes with the grand-mother "read[ing] aloud from the Bible: "Unless ye become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven," and emphasizes that Kay and Gerda enjoy their happy-ending by virtue of the fact that although "grown up," they are "yet children; children at least in heart" (Anderson 156).

"Stocks and stones" is also a reference to false gods and idols (*OED*, def. 1d), and together with the way in which his tears serve to "quench" the various images of thirst in the text, Mill's use of the phrase links literature's healing action to Biblical texts that frame redemptive healing in terms of baptism and the regeneration of religious faith. Particularly strong is the resonance of the passage with several verses from the Book of

Ezekiel, in which God promises to "sprinkle clean water upon" the Israelites and "cleanse" them "from all [their] idols": "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekial 36:25-26).[10] In fact, Mill's figuring of his literary redemption in terms of a new baptism of faith – a return to religious modes of thought – is already anticipated in the second paragraph of the chapter, where Mill likens the onset of his depression to "the state … in which converts to Methodism usually are, when smitten by their first 'conviction of sin'" (112). It would seem, therefore, that the image of Mill's tears serves to generate a complex system of allusions that locates the healing potential of the literary in its ties to childhood and an earlier age of faith.

While the passage resists the idea that literariness involves the abandonment of language for an amorphous emotionalism, it certainly seems as if Mill associates the healing power of poetry with a return to a simpler, more innocent language. In its tacit affirmation of childhood and religious tradition, the metaphorical weight of the passage is stacked against the discursive norms of modern intellectual culture, and seems quite consistent with Colin Martindale's idea that poetic language involves regress to "more primordial states of cognition" (149). Yet if Mill's tears serve as an emblem for the "regressive", deviant character of poetic language, it should be remembered that these are not simply a reference to actual tears, but are highly overdetermined, *literary* tears. As analysis of their figurative and allusive significance has suggested, they point to a variety of other texts and positions, effectively constituting an alternative site for performing sophisticated conceptual work. The passage might figure literariness as deviant language,

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[10] Here I cite the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible.

but Mill's stylistic design emphasizes that it involves carefully ordered linguistic deviation – artfully cultivated, Mill suggests, to induce a similar sense of balance in those who engage in such discourse.

This is supported by the reference to Marmontel, which hints at the harmonizing potential of apparently regressive, "deviant" forms of behavior. More than in any direct psychological resemblance between the two autobiographers, the substantive connection between the two passages seems rather to be that both describe scenes of healing. Even as his own paragraph narrates how literature cures his mental malady, Mill's gloss draws attention to Marmontel's efforts to assuage the grief of his "distracted family" (45). Marmontel's passage, in fact, is a scene of multiple healings, in which the roles of healer and patient shift back and forth several times. It thus compares different methods of restoring emotional balance and suggests the harmonizing power of apparently regressive forms of discourse – not merely as a crude "safety-valve" for excess feeling, but as an imaginative resource that might artfully be exploited to "divert" potentially destructive emotional energy into more creative channels of expression (46).

The first method of emotional healing explored at the beginning of the episode is to "act grown up." As Mill notes, Marmontel, "then a mere boy" (*Autobiography* 116-17), initially attempts to console his family by prematurely assuming his father's role:

> My mother, my brothers, my sisters …we are suffering the greatest of calamities; but let us not sink under its pressures. My children, you lose a father; you find one again. I will supply his place; I am, I will be, your father. I take upon myself all his duties, and you are orphans no more. (*Memoir* 46)

In this melodramatic, yet poignant, speech, the text highlights Marmontel's determined efforts to embody the father-figure – and the assumption that the best way of restoring domestic order is to replicate conventional forms of paternal authority. This assumption is quickly called into question, however, as Marmontel's efforts succeed only producing further displays of grief ("a flood of tears"), and a restless night haunted by the "image of [his] father" (46). More of the same is not, it seems, the best way of alleviating the painful sense of absence experienced by the family. The limitations of trying to re-establish order simply by imitating its conventional forms is further underlined by the fact that the strain of acting grown up proves too great for "the mere boy". In a bizarre twist, Marmontel's suppressed grief erupts in a physical malady ("my skin seemed to have been dyed in saffron" [46]), so that he not only becomes the patient, but the child who must be beguiled into taking his medicine – as the physician says to the family, "We must, without his knowledge, seek to withdraw him from his sorrow; we must deceive, in order to cure him" (47). Paradoxically, by playing the child, Marmontel unwittingly discovers a far more efficacious method of assuaging his family's distress. Amidst the bustle to attend to the "sick child", the family's attention is all but diverted from their grieving – the father, whose presence looms oppressively in the paragraph following Marmontel's "heroic" speech, virtually disappears from the remaining paragraphs of the chapter. The unexpected way in which order returns to the household illustrates on yet another level the physician's principle of curing "deep distress" by strategic diversion (46), and suggests that culturally "regressive" roles and discourses (e.g, fiction and make-believe) offer an crucial resource to this art of restoring balance to "distracted" minds.

To sum up, then, extended consideration of this passage suggests that Mill identifies literary language and its healing effects with its dynamic powers of balance – and not simply with its capacity to unleash the spontaneous or "natural" expression of strong emotion, or its peculiar, deviant qualities. Chapter 5 of the *Autobiography* offers, therefore, a valuable clue to understanding Mill's characterization of the literary elsewhere in his writings. It suggests that we seek to understand poetic language in terms of its capacity to create a sense of balance and order – in spite of, in fact, by virtue of – its traffic in extreme, childish, or regressive forms.

Theorizing the special civilizing function of literary language. In the final part of this section, I would like to suggest that the socio-cultural dimensions of this deviant, yet harmonizing, quality of literary language can best be understood in the context of Mill's writings on civilization. As shown in the previous chapter, Mill, together with many other Victorians, conceived of "civilization" as a systematic transformation of society in the direction of increased co-operation, democratization, and reduced violence. To Mill and many of these thinkers, language and discourse-related phenomena like public opinion played a vital role in this process, and while he certainly appreciated the benefits of civilization, he also recognized that they came at a price – for instance, "the decay of individual energy, the weakening of the influence of superior minds over the multitude, … and the diminished efficacy of public opinion as a restraining power" (135).[11]

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[11] Mill was so familiar with arguments for and against modern civilization that he used this debate in his essay on "Coleridge" to exemplify how disagreements often arise because conflicting parties focus on different aspects of a particular issue (123).

Hence, the perversely "unprogressive" aspects of literary form as described by Mill should not simply be thought of as an attempt to express difference or generate novelty for its own sake – this is not merely a Victorian version of the idea that literariness inheres in linguistic deviation.[12] Rather, Mill's conceptualization of poetic language in his critical writings may be read as an effort to counteract the debilitating effects of modern discourse practices – as modeling a rhetorical program that supports a "special" civilizing function in the sense that it that compensates for "[t]hose advantages which civilization cannot give – which in its uncorrected influence it has even a tendency to destroy" ("Civilization" 135). Assimilating the workings of literature into a modern economy of specialization, he represents literature as bringing its powers of balance to a specific area that modern civilization, in its tendency towards democratization and large-scale social improvements, has failed to make provisions for – individual development. Hence, the double meaning of "special": as we shall see, the most salient features of literary language in Mill's writings are closely related to its resources for "making special" – for externalizing, exploring, and developing individuality in ways that do not conflict with those larger, "irresistible tendencies" of the civilizing process ("Civilization" 136). Thus, to describe core elements of Mill's literary theory in terms of

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[12] As literary linguists often remark, "deviation" or "foregrounding" has long been important to linguistically-oriented projects to describe the nature and functions of literary language. From Aristotle to, more recently, Guy Cook's theory of schema refreshment and empirical work by Willie van Peer and others, students of literary language have treated strangeness and novelty as its defining characteristic. Mill's theory confirms that modern literary linguists are right to focus on deviation, yet he also makes this crucial point – that in literary language as he and other Victorians understand it, such deviation is always tempered by a consideration of order and harmony – not only on the level of abstract textual patterns, but in a wider sociocultural context, in circuits of rhetorical energy that include both texts and their users.

literature's "special civilizing function" is not only to acknowledge the political-economic logic that informs Mill's thinking about literature, but also to emphasize that his focus on cultivating the individual's feelings of specialness is never forgetful of the larger civilizing trends that make this cultivation so critical.

The vital role that Mill assigns to literature in reforming civilization in the mind – and so realizing more fully the promise of modern civilization – attests to the linguistic faith that he shared with many of his contemporaries – his conviction that linguistic form exerted a profound influence on mental culture.[13] As we have seen in Chapter One, Mill readily acknowledged the advantages of civilized language and its capacity to promote social combination, efficiency, and analytical thought. However, he was also aware that its very strengths could debilitate the mental powers of its users in systematic ways[14] – that the civilized mind was in danger of internalizing its norms *too* well. The distinctive features he attaches to literary language in his critical writings may be understood, therefore, as an attempt to exploit the controlled deviation allowed by literature by counteracting the tendency of modern discourse culture to over-privilege co-operation, efficiency, and analysis.

Consider, for a start, Mill's insistence on the self-directed, pre-social, "spontaneous" character of poetic utterance. He goes out of his way to emphasize how

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[13] In his "Inaugural Address", for example, he figures language as "glasses coloured" by the cultural assumptions of its speech community, emphasizing the intimate connection between the "language of a people" and "their thoughts, their feelings, and their type of character" (146-47).

[14] A similar mode of dialectical thinking informs Mill's ideas about other kinds of relationships. In much the same way that he perceives the outstanding qualities of civilized language as rendering its users vulnerable to certain systematic mental weaknesses, he notes, for example, that "the children of energetic parents frequently grow up unenergetic, because … their parents are energetic for them" (*Autobiography* 48; ch. 1), or, again, that "the absorption of all the principal ability of the country into [a bureaucratic] governing body is fatal" to its political development (*Liberty* 129).

poetic language seems determined to disengage itself from the realm of social communication. In his famous opposition of poetry and rhetoric in "What is Poetry?", he writes, "eloquence is *heard*, poetry is over*heard*. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude" (12). Throughout this early essay, one notices Mill's unrelenting emphasis on the self-absorption of literary discourse, its apparent innocence of a larger social world. According to Mill, poetic performance betrays "no trace of consciousness that any eyes are upon" the writer (12), and "though there may be by-standers, it is not thinking of them" (15).

Rather than viewing Mill as endorsing an anti-social, solipsistic, and ultimately autistic conception of poetry, I suggest that we read his insistence on the self-directed *form* of poetic language as a response to the mentally debilitating tendency in civilized language to over-privilege the "spirit of combination". While Mill ranks public opinion among the most important manifestations – and means of developing – the "power of co-operation" ("Civilization" 125), he writes in "De Tocqueville on Democracy in America" (1835) and *On Liberty* (1859)about the peculiarly modern malady that results from internalizing the voice of opinion too effectively. Dominated by the print-mediated voice of the collective, the mind becomes enervated by its over-reliance on combination – the result is a "collective mediocrity" whose "thinking is done for them by men much like themselves, addressing them or speaking in their name, on the spur of the moment, through the newspaper" (*On Liberty* 92). As his references to the stage in "What is Poetry?" suggest, Mill understands poetic language as a mask of "childish" discourse,

deliberately assumed to resist "the tyranny of public opinion over the individual mind" (,
"De Tocqueville on Democracy in America" 85). Such language projects an imaginary
verbal autonomy, temporarily bracketing out the pressures of inter-subjective discourse in
order to wrest for the individual a measure of intellectual freedom from the pervasive
influence of opinion. The poetic license to soliloquize thus enables writers to explore
eccentric and marginalized ideas and positions within the realm of public discourse.

Other features of poetic language as Mill conceptualized it can similarly be shown
to respond to the potentially debilitating conditions of modern discourse culture. For
example, how the labor-intensive, pre-rationalized nature of literary discourse enables
Mill to extend language's resources for innovation and creativity without sacrificing the
wide accessibility of standardized language, or how such inherent difficulty works to
counter the deleterious impact on reading and writing of the ever-increasing pace of
modern discourse culture – a culture in which readers "read … too much and too quickly
to read well" and the writer "who should and would write a book, … now dashes down
his first hasty thoughts, or what he mistakes for thoughts, in a periodical" ("Civilization"
134).

Literary discourse is thus conceived as a potent remedy for the mind infected by the
frenetic hyper-speed of civilized language. But what of the mind "irretrievably analytic"
(*Autobiography* 116), whose interior world is possessed by the restless, critical energies
of modern intellectual discourse? This is the mental malady that reflects most strikingly
the excessive tendencies of what William Cooke-Taylor and others Victorian theorists of
civilization defined as its leading characteristic – namely, "progress … from one

condition to another, and always in advance" (Taylor, *Natural History* 1: 4-5). As the suggestive resemblance of this phrase to Mill's description of his mind on the first page of his *Autobiography* indicates (a "mind … always pressing forward, equally ready to learn or unlearn either from its own thoughts or from those of others" [25]), this is also the malady of civilization to which Mill recognized his own mind to be most vulnerable. Although he saw that his exceptional education had "made precocious and premature analysis the inveterate habit of [his] mind", and this gave a "special character" to his experience of this mental disorder (114 -115), Mill believed that "many others had passed through a similar state" (116). Hence, the *Autobiography* suggests that Mill's seemingly idiosyncratic problem is in fact symptomatic of "a flaw in [modern] life itself," emphasizing that its literary solution is highly relevant to "the destiny of mankind in general" (120).

In his richly evocative description of the pathological extremes to which "the power of analysis" tends (114), Mill represents this peculiarly modern state of mental dis-ease in the form of a mental dialogue, thus affording a concrete sense of the specific qualities of poetic language that enable it to soothe the mind "irretrievably analytic". Unlike the mind atrophied by the weight of opinion, there is no lack of rhetorical activity in the hyper-analytic mind. Indeed, the problem is quite the reverse: to use Arnold's famous phrase, the "dialogue of [this] mind with itself" has commenced – with a vengeance ("Preface" 598). Having internalized the analytical language of modern intellectual culture a little too well, the mind finds itself embroiled in a particularly "fatal" pattern of "self-interrogation" (118):

In this frame of mind, it occurred to me to put the question directly to myself, "Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in the institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, "No!" At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for. (112)

The destructive impact of this internal conversation is not exhausted by the devastating negative on which it concludes. Rather, as the remainder of the paragraph hints, its corrosive action on Mill's morale is realized in the way it relentlessly confronts him with the question, "What, then, remains 'to make [your] life desirable'"? (115) In rhetorical terms, therefore, Mill's sense of despair is not simply the inevitable fate of the hyper-active modern mind, tormented by its ingrained "habit of analysis" and "fatal questioning[s]" (118). Equally importantly, it must be understood in terms of rhetorical failure: Mill's inability to formulate a persuasive answer to his own question – to satisfy himself that life is indeed worth living.

In the *Autobiography*, Mill represents poetic language as tempering the self-destructive tendencies of this unhappy state of mind – but not by damping its intra-subjective rhetoric or silencing its incessant questionings. Instead, it does so by introducing a different kind of mental language to the inner world – one which better equips the mind to reply to such pressing existential questions. In contrast to the moral language of utilitarianism, which locates "the object of existence" in such large, abstract concepts as the "good of others, and especially of mankind on a large scale (115), poetic language helps Mill rediscover a sense of delight in small, seemingly trivial things – for

instance, "in sunshine and sky; in books; in conversation" (117). As suggested by his use of the verb "tinge" and "color" to figure its rhetorical effects, Mill imagines literary language as dispersing meaning, returning meaning to a smaller, more human scale. Because it attaches value to small things – the concrete, the local, and the transient – meaning is much more finely, but also more widely, distributed in poetic language.[15] Offering a more delicate, elastic medium of thought and perception, poetic language therefore radically expands the set of objects that the mind can appreciate as "real". The result is a "thickening" of images in the mental world – mental objects from which, unlike the ideal but unattainable objects in Coleridge's "Work Without Hope" ("amaranth" and "streams of nectar"), the individual might actually derive pleasure and moral sustenance. However inconsiderable these multiple sources of meaning may seem individually, their cumulative effect is to enable the mind to perform a series of micro-speech acts affirming the value of its mental world. Thus, for Mill, poetic language provides a buffer against the fierce "dissolving influence of analysis" (115) and stabilizes the world within. Against chilling doubts to the contrary, it serves to renew the mind's capacity to affirm, at least on this psychological level of reality, the meaningfulness of existence.

It is no surprise, therefore, that Mill treats the characteristic rhetorical impulse of poetic language as essentially affirmative – not in any crude, unqualified sense, but on the

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[15] Mill's initiation into this language therefore allows him, unlike his fellow-debater John Arthur Roebuck, to treat elusive imaginative experiences – such as the "intensest feeling of the beauty of a cloud lighted by the setting sun" – "not [as] … illusion but … fact, as real as any of the other qualities of objects; and far from implying anything erroneous and delusive in our mental apprehension of the object, is quite consistent with the most accurate knowledge and most perfect practical recognition of all its physical and intellectual laws and relations" (123-24).

subtle level of form. As he writes in his review of de Vigny, "[Poets] are not poets by virtue of what is negative or combative in their feelings, but by what is positive and sympathising" (80) – by modeling a micro-rhetoric of affirmation, poetic language enhances the subject's capacity to perform internal speech acts that tend to create affective bonds, thus countering the disorienting, restless critical energies of modern intellectual culture. This enables poetic language to sustain the modern subject against what Mill thought would eventually become the greatest hazard of civilization – that is, the tendency of the civilizing process, as it gradually removes "all the greater [material] evils of life" (*Autobiography* 121), to destroy the individual's capacity to find meaning in existence. More interestingly, by virtue of its capacity to enhance the specialness of the world within, poetic language plays a crucial role in re-enchanting the external world – and the society of others – for the individual. Mill implies that literature's role in sustaining the "fountains [of passion and life] within" (Coleridge, "Dejection" line 46) is no less crucial to the cultivation of a higher civilization than the greatest material improvements, for, as his reference to "Dejection" suggests, the individual cannot develop a real sense of value for others and the world around him without a measure of psychic integrity in the inner world. Thus, Mill's argument about the revitalizing effects of literary language on interiority explains how Wordsworth's poetry could make Mill simultaneously feel a sense of the "real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation" as well as "a greatly increased interest in … the common feelings and common destiny of human beings" (*Autobiography* 121). Literary form, therefore, represents for Mill a vital linguistic technology of civilization – and offers a specific example of the way in which

Amanda Anderson has described Mill as "try[ing] to imagine" how "modern practices" might recover "the force of tradition" (20). Mill's poetics of self-formation imagines a poetic language that performs its civilizing "magic" by stabilizing the affective foundations of the self and compensate for the alienating effects of modern intellectual culture – without, however, impairing the critical faculties required to cope with the flux of modernity.

Like John Keble and Matthew Arnold, Mill's writings about literature reveal his deeply felt commitment to the idea that literary representation should "not only … interest, but also … inspirit and rejoice the reader" (Arnold, "Preface" 599). All these writers were interested in how poetry's powers of balance might recover some of the moral and intellectual authority lost to the pervasive skepticism of their age, and locate these harmonizing effects not in abstract patterns of language but in circuits of rhetorical energy that include readers and writers. Mill's distinctive contribution lies in the way his theory highlights how poetic language might serve to make individuals "better and happier" under a specific set of rhetorical and psychological conditions created by modern civilization. Mill may set high standards for this exemplary literature of civilization, but then he makes equally rigorous demands of his own writing in the *Autobiography*. Indeed, his reference to Marmontel is self-reflexive in yet one further way, for the scene of healing centered on the *Memoirs* is projected, beyond the diegetic level of the narrative, on to the reading of the *Autobiography* in the extra-textual world. Ultimately, his paean to poetry in his Memoir aims to make the high purposes he conceives for literature his own, as it strives to provide emotional relief and intellectual

clarity – Arnold's "sweetness and light" – to minds burdened by modernity. If Mill's emphasis on poetry's special affinity to individuality anticipates the routine assumption that literary discourse always raises innumerable questions, his theory makes it clear that it answers just as many – and those that truly matter.

Turning on the Political Self: Re-reading Arnold's Innocent Language

As an instrument of political engagement, the superiority of modern discourse culture over earlier methods of negotiating ideological differences was often celebrated by early Victorian writers about civilization. Compared, for example, to war – "the bloody exchange of ideas made at the point of the sword, and at the cannon's mouth" (Taylor, *Natural History* 1: 129) – there seemed little question that civilized language offered far more sophisticated – and humane – channels for resolving political conflict. Facilitating "free discussion" on a hitherto unimaginable scale, and offering "opponent[s] … equal facilities for the publication of their opinions" (Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 260), modern print culture is represented as a sophisticated organ of political organization (Mill, "Civilization" 125), providing a pacific means of checking the abuse of power, and enabling "great constitutional changes [to be] effected" with "tranquility" (Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 259). In spite of his criticism of public opinion, Mill's work – especially his earlier writings on civilization – shares this appreciation of modern rhetorical culture's capacity to mediate "the political life of a people" (Taylor, *Natural History* 1: 128). Insofar as it emphasizes literature's special civilizing function, moreover, his theory does not treat the larger discourse system as inherently dysfunctional, but

rather imagines how literary language might supply specific advantages that modern rhetorical culture fails to provide the individual. As I discussed in the previous section, therefore, his articulation of the special civilizing function of literature leaves largely intact the value he placed on the political efficacy of civilized language.

By the mid-Victorian period, however, the assumption that the modern system of political discourse was operating, on the whole, to promote social improvement was increasingly called into question. The growing skepticism about the politically progressive character of civilized discourse practices (and, indeed, modern civilization in general) is well illustrated by a memorable passage from John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), in which he traces the "national faults or miseries" of Victorian society to its regressive reading practices – "conditions of childish illiterateness, and want of education in the most ordinary habits of thought" (89). Typically regarded as one of the most impressive institutions of modern rhetorical culture, public opinion is clearly implicated by Ruskin in this lamentable lack of rhetorical sophistication. Ruskin's anecdote in the same passage effectively reduces public opinion to collective babbling, which, instead of facilitating the political development of society, infantilizes it.: "Chalmers, at the end of his long life, having had much power with the public, being plagued in some serious matter by a reference to 'public opinion,' uttered the impatient exclamation, 'The public is just a great baby!'" ("Of Kings' Treasures" 88-89).

Arnold, too, questioned the large-scale effects of modern rhetorical culture as an organ of political discourse. Although he shared Mill's concerns about the failure of modern discourse culture to provide for individual development, and professed ideas

about literature that are largely in sympathy with Mill's notion of its special civilizing

function, Arnold goes considerably beyond Mill in exploring the undesirable impact of

modern discourse practices on society as a whole – not only on the individual. What

makes his ideas about the value of the literary highly useful for my purposes is his

consideration of the workings of modern political culture in rhetorical terms – and his

views about how literary language might provide a valuable resource for reforming the

language of politics. In this section, I suggest that the great importance Arnold attaches to

literary culture is not, as has often been argued,[16] an attempt to mystify the literary in the

interest of the dominant classes, but is much more profitably read as an effort to think

through the ways in which literary language might contribute to the development of a

more functional, effective system of political discourse. Instead of treating his writings

about literature's social relevance as an ill-advised attempt to thrust aesthetic ideals on

the political realm, I treat Arnold's literary theorizing as a rich site for exploring

Victorian articulations of the "general civilizing function" of literature – how literature

might support the ideals of modern civilization by shaping its political culture at large.

My treatment of Arnold's literary theorizing here focuses specifically on how

Arnold imagines literary language might contribute to a particular aspect of public culture

– namely, its rhetorical resources. This does not mean that Mill's theory merits greater

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[16] Attacks on Arnold as the "principal villain in the capitalist and aristocratic struggle" (Mazzeno 97) to control the working classes through literature have already been highlighted in the Introduction. Evaluating critical responses to Arnold since 1849, Lawrence Mazzeno noted in his 1999 survey that, in spite of the continued output of outstanding work by established Arnoldians, the critical tide driven by poststructuralism seems to be against him. The assumption "that Arnold is no longer relevant," or at least that his bold claims about the literary are "simply wrongheaded" (137), is still very entrenched in contemporary criticism.

attention than Arnold's or that Arnold's ideas about how literary language might facilitate individual development are unimportant. Rather, the significant degree of overlap between the two writers means that my account of Mill's theory earlier actually provides a good idea of Arnold's very similar ideas about literature's special civilizing function. As suggested at the end of the previous section, both thinkers attach a great deal of importance to literary language as a resource for building up individuality – by developing creative, rigorous textual practices; offering a temporary, fictional respite from the "mind-forg'd manacles" of social convention; and by providing the subjective construct of the self "an ever surer … stay" ("The Study of Poetry", *Essays in Criticism* 2:1) against the "dissolving" skepticism of modern intellectual culture. Because of these considerable similarities, Arnold's work on the political applications of literary language therefore affords an economical means of exploring how Mill's concept of the special civilizing function of literature might be expanded to imagine ways in which literary language, by acting on a society's rhetorical resources for conducting its public life, might serve to shape the course of the civilizing process on a larger scale.

In his *Social Mission of English Criticism* (1983) – whose role in discrediting Arnold's advocacy of literature I have already mentioned in Chapter 1 – Chris Baldick argues that Arnold conceives literary language as a kind of sedative for containing the radical energies of "contemporary political and religious partisanship" (22).[17] According

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[17] I take Baldick as an interlocutor here because of the important role of his book in establishing Arnold as a key figure shaping (basically conservative) twentieth-century notions of the literary. In foregrounding Baldick's argument, I do not wish to suggest that his is the only or most important treatment of Arnold's literary theory. Major book-length studies of Arnold's concept of literary language include David Riede's *Matthew Arnold and the Betrayal of Language* (1988) and Mary Schneider's *Poetry in the Age of*

to this rather cynical reading, Arnold's notion of literary language serves to "substitute",

"postpone", "conceal", and "quarantine" critical thinking (42), effectively blocking both

thought and action to maintain a specious sense of "social and cultural harmony" (22).

Reducing Arnold's mobilization of literature's "innocent language" to a ploy for

legitimizing the dominant ideology, Baldick suggests that the "intellectual deliverance"

promised by Arnold's notion of the literary amounts to little more than "a deliverance

from intellectual – let alone practical – activity" (42). In fact, Arnold's aspirations for the

literary could not be more opposed to the quietist tendencies of which Baldick accuses

him, and his model of the general civilizing powers of literary language effectively

anticipates and replies to both charges of anti-intellectualism and impracticality. If

Arnold's critical writings have been put to more conservative uses than he intended, this

only reinforces the importance of practicing those rigorous, holistic methods of reading

that both Mill and Arnold promoted, for more careful consideration of Arnold's key

writings on the political importance of the literary reveals that, far from a rhetorical

soporific, his concept of literary language is deliberately designed to activate and

revitalize public discourse.

Democracy (1989). Riede's evaluation of this aspect of Arnold's thinking is perhaps even bleaker than Baldick's – he presents Arnold as a writer who "*assumes* the power in words to cultivate the mind" (21) but who lacks the strong faith in language possessed by an earlier generation of Romantic poets. According to Riede, Arnold is torn between "the competing language theories of his age" (7), and that his "demystifying of language leaves him with no possible arguments – no possible arguments – for setting forth the faith in poetic language he nevertheless clings to" (24). More damningly, Riede claims that Arnold "never presents a sustained analysis of how language may have power, never even analyzes the language of literary texts" (21) – a charge that this section of my chapter will emphatically refute. Schneider's argument about the democratic, participatory character of Arnold's literary model is refreshing and convincing, but her evaluation of Arnold's literary theory avoids confronting its rhetorical character – for instance, she assumes that "little about critical theory can be found in *Culture and Anarchy*" (ix), thus omitting a key work in which Arnold unfolds his ideas about the broader social functions of literary discourse.

While Baldick reads Arnold's "innocent language" as a ruse for "soften[ing]" the "stridency" (22) of the "realm of polemical reasoning" (37), I propose to show how Arnold conceives literary language as a key resource for energizing and, indeed, turning on political language in multiple senses of the phrase. But why, one might ask, would the already feverish pitch of rhetorical activity in the political arena require further stimulation? After all, as the previous section has suggested, the sphere of Victorian political discourse was tending, if anything, towards hyperactivity – Arnold himself draws attention to the "rush and roar" and "powerful" energies of contemporary political culture ("Function of Criticism at Present Time" 25). However, as Mill points out in various places, *more* in this case does not necessarily mean *better* – on the contrary, the increased volume of political discourse intensifies the dangers of slipping back into cruder, more primitive forms of doing politics. Like Ruskin, Arnold was deeply disturbed by the regressive influence of modern political discourse on the public mind. In spite of his self-depreciating claims to be "a plain, unsystematic writer" (*Culture and Anarchy* 66), *Culture and Anarchy* (1869)[18] actually represents a highly focused analysis of the language of contemporary politics, and its vicious effects on political thinking and practice. No social class is exempt from criticism – the rhetorical practices of the three major social classes – aristocratic, middle- and working-classes – have all contributed to the "Thyesteän banquet of claptrap which English public life for these many years has been" (139). By yoking the debased language of contemporary politics ("claptrap") to the cannibalistic atrocities in the Greek myth of Thyestes and Atreus, Arnold's formulation

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[18] In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold brought together in book form a series of essays that were originally published in the *Cornhill Magazine* from 1867 to 1868.

vividly emphasizes that the degradation of political language is not without consequences. One of Arnold's main points in *Culture and Anarchy* is that the kind of language people use in public life matters, and politicians are now in danger of internalizing the demotic system of political discourse that their claptrap has served to generate. Regressive political language, Arnold emphasizes, will only serve to harden "Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace" in the "bad mental habit[s] to which [they] are already too prone" (76), trapping all parties in the "raw", pre-civilized state to which Arnold's unflattering nomenclature relegates them.

Arnold's efforts to revitalize political language via the literary must therefore be understood in the context of his diagnosis of the decivilizing trends in Victorian rhetorical culture – a topic that he elaborates at length in *Culture and Anarchy* and other essays. To Arnold, the language of Victorian politics is in danger of becoming moribund mainly because political practitioners habitually rely on "a sort of conventional language, or … clap-trap, which [they regard as] essential to the working of representative institutions" (78). Basically, clap-trap reduces language to a crude machine in the service of already determined political ends. Political language is then limited to performing a very narrow range of functions – either to glorify one's own party, or to attack one's opponents. Not only does this tend to degrade, among other things, language's precision and heuristic potential, it tends to lock the various parties into ossified ideological positions. By "overstepping, by a long stride, the bounds of truth and soberness" in his political rhetoric, the middle-class politician "intoxicates and deludes himself as well as his brother Philistine," just as the aristocratic politician, by pandering to the self-love of

his own class, risks getting "himself ensnared by his own smooth words" (78). In its tendency to "make men blind even to the ideal imperfection of their practice" – to "make … them willingly assert its ideal perfection, in order to secure it against attack"– this mode of political rhetoric thus comes to exert a "retarding" and "vulgarizing" effect on political culture in general ("Function of Criticism at the Present Time" 21).

Both individual parties and society at large suffer from the retarding effects of modern political rhetoric. Even that which is truly of value in the beliefs of the ideologically divided parties is at risk of being degraded by this crude instrumentalist approach to language. The "mechanical" affirmation of these partial truths threatens to turn them into "something talismanic" (*Culture* 106), eroding genuine understanding of the principles involved and making "our hold upon the rule or standard to which we look for our one thing needful … more and more mechanical, and unlike the thing itself as it was conceived in the mind where it originated" (*Culture* 101). At the same time, such a rhetorical climate encourages participants to treat language as a weapon, normalizing a state of "sterile conflict" ("Function" 24; *Culture* 81-84) and diverting intellectual energies which might otherwise be directed towards achieving genuine dialogue – and, possibly, discovering shared goals and solutions. In the turbulent years leading up to the passage of the Second Reform Bill in 1867, it is likely that the willingness of social reformers to employ physical modes of political expression – for example, in mass demonstrations – lent an added sense of urgency to Arnold's concerns about the regressive tendencies of modern political discourse. "Intemperance in talk makes a dreadful havoc in the heart" (*Culture* 85) – Arnold's quote from Bishop Wilson reminds

us that the extravagant gestures of extreme political rhetoric can distort one's sense of judgment, and can all too easily degenerate into meaningless violence.

It is with the aim of disrupting this vicious economy of claptrap – of liberating political practitioners from their "petrified" ideological positions – that Arnold mobilizes the "innocence", "sweetness and light", "flexibility" (*Culture* 41), and "free play of ideas" found in literary language. Rather than calculated to return participants to a false unconsciousness, Arnold's notion of literary language self-consciously grafts elements from the discourse of childhood (e.g., innocence, freedom, spontaneity) in an attempt to develop a new language that is not always already determined by "sterile [ideological] conflict." So far from producing an uncritical state of unknowing, Arnold's "innocent language" strives to achieve a knowing innocence that is precisely opposed to – and therefore committed to raising awareness of – the "hideousness and rawness" of modern political life (*Culture* 47). Thus, the first important way in which Arnold's notion of the literary serves to turn on political language is, quite literally, by re-forming it. By flooding political discourse with the intellectual energy of literary form, literary discourse re-sensitizes interlocutors to the dynamic significance of words, figures, and images, thereby working to counter the degeneration of public language into claptrap. "Turning on" political language in this sense involves, therefore, a turning on the petrified ideological formulae to which the "ordinary self" habitually clings.

The most effective way of illustrating Arnold's understanding of literature's dynamic critical energies – and of assuaging anxieties about the conservative tendencies of his notion of the literary – is to examine how he elaborates his ideas about the general

civilizing function of literary language by example – in the writing of others, as well as in his own rhetorical practices. His is no "crude vitalism" that finds expression only on the level of his theoretical language (Baldick 41), for he supplies very concrete examples of how the creative, "literary" use of language generates a "movement of ideas" (*Culture* 57) that opens up political discourse to different viewpoints, new possibilities, and change. One of the best examples of how the animating effects of literary language compel, for Arnold, an openness to new ideas is provided by his encomium on Edmund Burke's conclusion to his *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791) – a passage which Arnold celebrates as "one of the finest things in English literature":

> But Burke is so great because, almost alone in England, he brings thought to bear upon politics, he saturates politics with thought. … it is his characteristic that he so lived by ideas, and had such a source of them welling up within him, that he could float even an epoch of concentration and English Tory politics with them. … So far is it from being really true of him that he "to party gave up what was meant for mankind," that at the very end of his fierce struggle with the French Revolution, after all his invectives against its false pretensions, hollowness, and madness, with his sincere convictions of its mischievousness, he can close a memorandum on the best means of combating it, some of the last pages he ever wrote,– the Thoughts on French Affairs, in December 1791,– with these striking words:–
>
> "The evil is stated, in my opinion, as it exists. The remedy must be where power, wisdom, and information, I hope, are more united with good intentions than they can be with me. I have done with this subject, I believe, for ever. It has given me many anxious moments for the last two years. *If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it; the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope will forward it; and then they who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs, will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself, than the mere designs of men. They will not be resolute and firm, but perverse and obstinate."* ("Function" 14-15)

What exactly is it about this passage that Arnold finds so remarkable – what distinctive qualities elicit such enthusiastic remarks as "I know nothing more striking" (15)? Although Arnold pays tribute to the "profound, permanent, fruitful, philosophical truth" of Burke's writings (13), this extract was obviously not chosen for the originality

of its substantive claims – in fact, the French Revolution was a topic on which Burke was by this time regarded as "superannuated and conquered by the event" (13). Neither does Arnold's quote celebrate Burke's political eloquence in conventional terms – it does not depict Burke deploying his powers of persuasion to move his readers to a specific end. Rather, Arnold singles out for praise the dynamic energy of Burke's language – its power to unleash a "stream of fresh thought" on a vexed political question (*Culture* 143). Arnold's choice of verbs ("saturates"; "welling up"; "float") figures Burke's language as a source of hydraulic energy that is capable of animating ideas, and of carrying the writer beyond the limitations of his ideological situatedness towards a glimpse of a higher truth. Thus, it is not Burke's rhetorical impact on others that Arnold celebrates, but rather the way in which his literary practices prompt Burke's "return … upon himself" (15). Significantly, in his commentary, Arnold emphasizes the linguistic dimension of Burke's achievement – and his ability to trust himself – if only momentarily – to the force of literary form:

> That is what I call living by ideas: when one side of a question has long had your earnest support, when all your feelings are engaged, when you hear all round you no language but one, when your party talks this language like a steam-engine and can imagine no other,– still to be able to think, still to be irresistibly carried, if so it be, by the current of thought to the opposite side of the question, and, like Balaam, to be unable to speak anything *but what the Lord has put in your mouth*. (15)

Clearly, then, Arnold locates the literary excellence of Burke's political language not in its capacity to compel its audience to accept his opinions, but in its power to open up the rhetor himself to the truth of "other" languages – even if they articulate positions to which the speaker is bitterly opposed.

In the same way that Mill's prose exemplifies his notion of literature's special civilizing function, Arnold demonstrates the political applications of literary language by means of his own rhetorical practices. Just as he celebrates the manner in which Burke's rhetorical reversal temporarily frees him from his ingrained opposition to the French Revolution, Arnold similarly employs literary techniques to counter the tendency of contemporary political discourse to produce a complacent, triumphalist mentality in both politicians and their supporters. Rather than opposing a specific class ideology, his distinctly literary method of political critique targets the claptrap in which politicians from all classes – including his own – trade, and exploits patterns in language to dislodge public language from the narrow channels to which class-based politics has confined it. A good example of how Arnold uses verbal repetition and play in order to "float" political discourse out of the crude ways in which partisan discourse has instrumentalized it (*Culture* 132) is afforded by his ironic treatment of rhetorical performances by Sir Charles Adderley and John Roebuck in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864). Setting himself the task of turning Adderley's and Roebuck's "dithryamb[s]" and "absolute eulogies" against them (23), Arnold artfully manipulates their words in order to expose the demotic quality of their political rhetoric, hoping to "induce" them "to moderate [these songs of triumph], to get rid of what in them is excessive and offensive, and to fall into a softer and truer key" (24-25). By strategically repeating and combining the most blatantly self-congratulatory lines from these politicians' speeches, Arnold compels the reader to consider their triumphalist rhetoric from an ironic distance, and to think more carefully about the implications of their language: "Such a race of people as

we stand, so superior to all the world! The old Anglo-Saxon race, the best breed in the whole world! I pray that our unrivalled happiness may last!" (22)

Arnold's parody of this discourse not only exaggerates the unreflective self-satisfaction it breeds, his multiple repetitions of the phrase "the best breed in the whole world!" gradually prompt the realization that Adderley's "absolute" words of praise are not as flattering as he intends them to be – for even as Adderley's accolade elevates the English to global supremacy, the term "breed" effectively reduces them to the level of livestock. The ironic turn given to this phrase very economically gestures, therefore, to the way in which debased political language serves to degrade and brutalize its users. At the same time, Arnold's witty textual play highlights the possibilities of a political language capable of making "fine distinctions" (25) – inconvenient details that, as the newspaper report on Wragg demonstrates, claptrap egregiously fails to capture. By juxtaposing Adderley's and Roebuck's grandiose and self-congratulatory rhetoric with the stark, sobering report of infanticide, Arnold reveals the callousness with which such claptrap effaces the sufferings of the disenfranchised, underscoring the glaring inadequacy of this language as a medium for representing social realities. By means of irony and realist detail, Arnold shows political practitioners that their "light" might actually be closer to "darkness" than they have persuaded themselves (*Culture* 86), urging them to use language in more honest and responsible ways, and to develop a greater respect for its capacity to represent more complex, subtler truths. So far from discouraging critical thought, his method of political critique aims to get politicians "to make a return on their own minds" (138), and to cultivate rhetorical practices that will

prevent them from blindly adhering to their "stock notions" (137). Ultimately, Arnold's political criticism seeks to re-instate thinking as a vital form of political activity, so that one of the most important functions of literary language is to render public discourse more supple and open to change, thereby developing a more adequate rhetorical organ for the intellectual challenges of public life.

Charged with dynamic, critical energies, literary language is, for Arnold, thought-provoking in ways that are highly valuable to political discourse. But is there a danger of literary language eroding our capacity for political action, precisely because of its thought-provoking qualities?[19] Is literary language capable of supplying a more constructive principle of action, or is it merely a source of "restless negative energy" (Anderson 92)? These are questions that Arnold himself undoubtedly anticipated, and, in his attempt to reform political language via the literary, he clearly registers his awareness of arguments against literary culture and "spirit of cultivated inaction" it produces (*Culture* 49). Indeed, *Culture and Anarchy* is explicitly framed as a reply to Frederic Harrison's charge that the "man of culture is in politics … one of the poorest mortals alive" – an effete figure who brings to politics little more than a "turn for small fault-finding, love of selfish ease, and indecision in action" (qtd. in *Culture*: 28; 47). Throughout the text, Arnold emphasizes that literary culture can provide an intelligible principle of order to replace those "old rules" (106) – for example, biblical precepts – whose cultural and moral authority is declining (64), and his model of the literary is

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[19] Riede offers a literary-linguistic version of this argument about the effects of Arnold's linguistic sophistication on his poetry when he claims that Arnold's poetry is constantly "subverted", "undercut", and "undermined" by his doubts about language and the poetic tradition (28-29).

capable of meeting these challenges because of the way in which he understands literary language to involve carefully crafted forms of subjectivity. For Arnold, literary language is *empeopled* – literariness inheres not only in the creative use of words, phrases, and images, but in the distinctively literary ethos woven into this language – in the particular kinds of voices, sensibilities, and imaginative roles that it invites readers and writers to assume.

Bearing in mind this characterological dimension of Arnold's concept of literary language, one can much better appreciate Arnold's emphatic claims that literary discourse might provide "a clue to some sound order and authority" (96) by developing our "best self" in us (64). More than a rhetorical practice that simply produces a negative freedom from the situated biases of the habitual self, Arnold's political application of the literary must be read primarily as a project of rhetorical formation – an attempt to activate, or turn on, a vision of a more harmoniously developed, many-sided political persona. Such an understanding of Arnold's political mobilization of the literary goes some way towards resolving the potential contradictions that Anderson, for example, perceives in the ideal of detachment enabled by his notion of literary language – how, that is, this detachment seems inevitably to lead to the cultural and moral "groundlessness" that Arnold himself struggled so hard to remedy (Anderson 113). This is because Arnold's attempt to imagine more fully realized literary selves as political agents enables us to situate Arnoldian disinterestedness as only one attribute of a literary ethos cultivated through "reading, observing, and thinking" (*Culture* 60) – and not the sole, or even the most important, attribute developed by literary culture. In this model of

rhetorical formation, "disinterestedness" is not an essential characteristic of the political man of letters, but represents a critical stance that literary language invites the subject to occupy under the appropriate circumstances. Arnold's ideal of detachment is not, therefore, the end-product of a deracinated, disembodied subject (the "view from nowhere" [Nagel, qtd. in Anderson: 5]), but an important rhetorical role within the much wider rhetorical repertoire of a "full and harmonious" subjectivity. The circuit of "reading, reflection, and observation" (*Culture* 119) that forms around literature is, in turn, vital to the formation of such a well-rounded critical persona. Conceived by Arnold as the "criticism of life" ("Joubert" 303), every work of literary merit constructs, with varying degrees of explicitness and success, a balanced subject-position from which to contemplate it, effectively interpellating an idealized figure of the critic-artist. Thus, fears of literary culture producing extreme forms of detachment turn out to be unfounded, for the disinterestedness it promotes demands not an "abstract universalism" (Anderson 110), but, rather, "the full and harmonious development of our humanity" (*Culture* 104).

The manner in which Arnold imagines the figure of the critic to inhabit literary language enables his theory to deal with another complication created by his notion of literature "being from its very nature … forced to talk and think" ("Introduction to Poetry" 238) – the possibility that the thought-provoking qualities of literary language might result in too much thinking, and, consequently, "indecision in action" (*Culture* 28). While it is certainly true that Arnold's efforts to graft literariness on to political discourse are intended to produce a language that will greatly expand the range of ideas that the statesman must consider, importing features from the literary-critical situation to the

political field might actually serve to enhance the politician's sense of personal agency. Just as Mill conceives literary language as returning meaning to a scale better adapted to the affective economy of the human mind than large philosophical abstractions, Arnold's "literarization" of political language similarly involves a "magical" adjustment of scale. Like the potion labeled "DRINK ME" in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), the deployment of literary language in this context tacitly invites the subject to assume the role of critic in relation to the "book" of society, effectively magnifying the political agent's imagined stature, while reducing the political "text" to a relatively manageable size. By imaginatively transferring features of the literary encounter to the political context, Arnold's literarization of political language generates for the individual a psychological largeness to match the massive scale of modern politics. This breadth of critical vision is supported, moreover, by the "intellectual deliverance" offered by the literature Arnold describes as "modern" – texts that develop structures of meaning capable of relating the "vast multitude of facts awaiting and inviting … comprehension" in a highly developed society to its "copious and complex past" ("On the Modern Element in Literature" 5). Thus, even as it tends to defer political action by creating space for reflecting on more complex representations of political reality, the critical ethos inhabiting Arnold's notion of the literary effectively develops "a large vision of relations" (Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 273), thereby empowering the political subject to act with confidence and resolution amidst the myriad complexities of public life.

Even if, as conceived by Arnold, the critical energies of literary language do not inhibit – and might even enhance – political agency, how can it supply a consistent

principle of action – "a clue to some sound order and authority" (*Culture* 96)? Again, the notion of literary language as "empeopled" – inhabited by the figure of the exemplary literary practitioner – helps us understand Arnold's answer to this central question raised by *Culture and Anarchy*. In essence, Arnold's theory generates the moral "motive-power" (*Culture* 106) of literary discourse by establishing the "love of perfection" (31) as a fundamental attribute of that critical subjectivity encoded into its texture. Strongly committed to developing human potential to the fullest, this literary ethos provides the general principle of action claimed by Arnold for the literary. Intricately woven into literary discourse, the image of this exemplary character animates the language of literature on various levels of textual meaning, making it a powerful means of motivating the political subject to change both the self and society.

Because the love of perfection that defines this literary ethos consists, in practice, "in growing and becoming, in a perpetual advance in beauty and wisdom" (61), and because no end-point can be determined for this "whole evolution of humanity" (92), the image of Arnold's exemplary literary practitioner remains necessarily incomplete, shadowy, fluid in outline. Contrary to Baldick's assertions, Arnold's theory holds up no "single exalted model" for imitation (47), insisting instead that the political subject avail himself as fully as possible of the diverse range of resources offered by literary culture – even to the extent of declaring that, "No man, who knows nothing else, knows even his Bible" (*Culture* 103). On the methods of pursuing excellence, Arnold's exemplary literary persona is far from prescriptive, establishing only that "books and reading" (109) – and the circuit of "reading, observing, and thinking" built around them (60) – are vital

to this process. In spite of the stress on perfection, the principle of authority embodied in Arnold's notion of the literary is also far less elitist, or individualistic, than critics like Eagleton have claimed. Although Arnold explicitly locates the perfection towards which his literary ethos is oriented in an "*internal* condition" – "in the general harmonious expansion of those gifts of thought and feeling which make the peculiar dignity, wealth, and happiness of human nature" (32-33), his understanding of perfection also emphasizes that the development of self and society are intimately connected. Indeed, Arnold makes it clear that one cannot pursue individual perfection without also attending to the improvement of others:

> [B]ecause men are all members of one great whole, and the sympathy which is in human nature will not allow one member to be indifferent to the rest, or to have a perfect welfare independent of the rest, … [p]erfection, as culture conceives it, is not possible while the individual is isolated: the individual is obliged, under pain of being stunted and enfeebled in his own development if he disobeys, to carry others along with him in his march towards perfection, to be continually doing all he can to enlarge and increase the volume of the human stream sweeping thitherward. (33)

By making social improvement a necessary condition of individual development, Arnold prevents the inwardness of literary language and its ideals from being limited to nourishing a narrowly personal – and ultimately selfish – vision of perfection. The love of perfection cultivated by this literary ethos is thus transformed into a powerful source of political motivation, since Arnold's principle of authority effectively compels us to realize that larger social problems have deeply personal implications. Notions like the "best self" and "perfection" might sound elitist, but the impulse of Arnold's exemplary literary persona to humanize political issues – to insist on reckoning what is at stake in human terms – can in fact become a vital principle driving the discourse of social reform.

Arnold's literary ethos animates a political language that eloquently calls for social policies that are more attentive to humanitarian concerns – that do not efface those most in need of political representation.

A good illustration of how Arnold mobilizes the micro-textual features of literary language to realize this ethos for humanitarian purposes can be found in his critique of liberal discourse in *Culture and Anarchy* – in particular, the Liberals' fetishization of free-trade (ch. 6). As in the earlier examples, Arnold's primary aim is to reform a particular strain of political rhetoric, which, even on a micro-linguistic level, instantiate values that his literary ethos rejects as unprogressive and dehumanizing. What he shows clearly here is that literary language offers more than a mode of ironicizing, negative criticism – it also provides, in the form of its exemplary ethos, a coherent set of values, and is fully capable of balancing its critique of "things as they are" with a more hopeful vision of things as they might, and should, be. Both micro- and macro-textual dimensions of the literary serve Arnold well as he strives to expose the tendency in liberal discourse to naturalize free-trade – and its moral consequences (126). Arnold's literary methods of analysis enable him to demonstrate precisely how very specific word-choices metaphorically transform the workings of free-trade into "self-acting laws which will put themselves into operation without trouble or planning on our part" (125) – the passage he transcribes from *The Times* convincingly demonstrates this:

> "The East End is the most commercial, the most industrial, the most fluctuating region of the metropolis. It is always the first to suffer; for it is the **creature** of prosperity, and falls to the ground the instant there is no wind to bear it up. The whole of that region is covered with huge docks, shipyards, manufactories, and a **wilderness** of small houses, all full of life and happiness in brisk times, but in dull times **withered** and **lifeless**, like the **deserts**

we read of in the East. Now their **brief spring** is over. There is no one to blame for this; it is the result of **Nature's simplest laws**!" (qtd. in *Culture*: 126, emphasis added)

Arnold's very deliberate quotation of *The Times* clearly shows the systematic way in which public language is determined by political and economic doctrine – and how, in turn, such naturalizing metaphors systematically efface the human beings in whose fate the lover of culture is so interested. Curiously, in spite of the fact that it is describing an urban area, there are no human actors represented in this passage. There is not even a single pronoun with a human referent – although it can "suffer", the East End remains a depersonalized "it", and when images of human life appear in the text they are immediately transformed by figurative language into a species of desert flora, flourishing and fading according to "Nature's simplest laws". As in the case of Wragg, Arnold's appropriation of this passage is calculated to expose the moral cost of this kind of language – the callous indifference towards human suffering that it normalizes. In this passage, however, Arnold's intervention does not rely solely on the reader's spontaneous sense of sympathy for those effaced by the discourse of liberalism, but uses the macro-textual construct of his ideal literary persona to make explicit the grounds on which such practices are not only morally reprehensible, but directly contradict overt political goals of social improvement. Reminding the reader that the commitment of his literary ethos to a "*general* perfection" entails the recognition that "if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (128), Arnold shows that there is a principle of order internal to his notion of literary discourse that is capable of authorizing rational opposition to such dehumanizing liberal doctrines. The same commitment to human perfection supplies the

principle on which Arnold gives a bathetic turn to Robert Buchanan's use of the quotation, "'Tis the old story of the fig-leaf time" (127). While Buchanan alludes to "divine philoprogenitiveness" in the Book of Genesis, Arnold wittily highlights a rather different aspect of the Biblical creation narrative, raising instead the image of the multitude of poor "people one meets [in the East End] having hardly a rag to cover them" (127). As in the previous example, the immediate effect of his textual intervention is to re-insert the image of suffering human individuals into political discourse. Far from producing a state of moral relaxation (104), therefore, Arnold's political mobilization of the literary ethos is designed to wrest public language away from too high a level of abstraction – in order to render it more responsive to basic human needs, and, in particular, a more effective organ of social justice for the more vulnerable, marginalized members of society.

While Arnold's imagined literary statesman supplies the principle of authority that empowers Arnold to stand up for the disenfranchised and call for social reform, it is also the passionate commitment of this macro-textual construct to perfection that enables him resolutely to resist those methods of effecting social change that threaten the fundamental conditions of human improvement, and jeopardize the possibility of "bring[ing] to maturity anything precious and lasting now, or to found anything precious and lasting for the future" (*Culture* 135-136). Thus, unlike the Philistine politician, whose attachment to "doing as one likes" prevents him from opposing social unrest with a real sense of moral conviction (62), Arnold's literary ethos unambiguously authorizes his rejection of "monster processions in the streets and forcible irruptions into the parks, even in

professed support of [politically progressive causes]" (135). His literary ethos recognizes that "far more is lost than is gained by permitting [such forms of social resistance]" (135), for by using even the threat of physical force as an instrument of political engagement, they not only exert a decivilizing influence on public discourse as a whole, but disrupt the "profound sense of settled order and security" which society requires in order to "live and grow" (55). Having valorized thinking as a valuable political activity which literary discourse can support in important ways, *Culture and Anarchy*'s most immediate political message is one of restraint. But the force of this message is not to trap the marginalized in a servile state of passivity, but to reclaim restraint as a highly purposeful form of political action, opening up a space for genuine dialogue, and for developing a more sophisticated, functional organ of public discourse. Such a rhetorical organ, Arnold believed, would not only be more adequate to the manifold complexities of modern industrial civilization, but would offer the less powerful members of society a more effective and sustainable form of political agency. After all, to adapt Mill's citation of Carlyle for the political realm, true rhetorical "strength … does not manifest itself in spasms" ("What is Poetry?" 19).

This chapter has studied in considerable detail the theorizing of two prominent Victorian thinkers about the civilizing power of literary language – theories that stand out for their intellectual breadth and rhetorical sophistication. However, these models should not be regarded as isolated products of theoretical genius, for they tap into a current of ideas that enjoyed a wide circulation during the Victorian period, and to which a wide range of writers – creative as well as critical – had access. Much has been said, in this chapter, about the functions of literary discourse as conceived by Mill and Arnold, but

while I have tried to show how these thinkers mobilize the literary in their own prose, little attention has hitherto been given to the most important cultural sites where literary language is cultivated – namely, in writing classified as "creative" or "imaginative". How did primarily "creative" writers respond to such theoretical claims made on behalf of their art? To what extent did the period' genres of fiction succeed in wielding that subtle power imagined for language by Mill and Arnold? And do they recognize, and respond to, the limitation of Mill's and Arnold's theories – for instance, how the civilizing functions of the literary they emphasize might be more relevant to a particular kind of subject (say, an educated, middle-class Englishman) than to others? These are some of the questions that the following chapters will attempt to address.

CHAPTER 3

The Language of Improvement: Civilization in the Literary Text

A great deal of attention has been devoted in the foregoing chapters to the relationship between the Victorians' concept of literariness and their understanding of civilization: arguing for the prominent position of language and the literary in Victorian discourse on civilization, Chapter 1 established this discourse as a rich interpretive context for studying the workings of literary form, while Chapter 2 focused on the ambitious claims made by Victorian literary theory about the civilizing powers of literary language. In these arguments relating "civilization" to literary discourse, however, one crucial body of nineteenth-century writing has been conspicuously absent: what of the texts that must immediately support the idea of literariness – the actual fictional writings produced by Victorians? How do the creative, imaginative genres of the period contribute to the argument hitherto unfolded?

In this chapter, I will show that primarily creative writers participated actively alongside the more theoretically-oriented writers of the last two chapters to produce a discourse rich in interimplications for literature and civilization. Considering a wide range of Victorian poetry and fiction that engage in significant ways with discourse on the civilizing process, I start by revealing the "literature of civilization" to be a much larger category in this period than the gloomy prognostications of Victorian critics might lead one to imagine, encompassing a much wider range of authors and genres than those conceived of, for instance, by Mill and Arnold. *Contra* Norbert Elias's claim that Western nations in the nineteenth century "consider[ed] the *process* of civilization as

completed within their own societies" (*The Civilizing Process* 43), these literary texts show that the desirability of modern civilization was never a moot question for the Victorians. Just as the impulse to vindicate modern civilization as a way of life strongly motivated the writings of Richard Whately and William Cooke-Taylor, the question of whether "Rousseau might be justified in maintaining that art and science had done a poor service to mankind" (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 5) remained a vital, productive topic of discourse for creative writers from Sir Walter Scott to Mrs. Humphry Ward. Beyond engaging in polemics for or against civilization, however, many Victorian literary narratives are interested simply in exploring the objective nature and human consequences of the civilizing process. Vividly realizing the losses and gains on both sides of the question, these texts subject the concept of civilization to a salutary critical pressure, at the same time challenging the assumption that imaginative literature is hopelessly backward-looking, and necessarily at odds with modern civilization.

But Victorian literature did not simply debate the question of civilization on a macro-textual level (e.g., in terms of argument, plot, or setting). It also engaged with issues raised by the civilizing process on a micro-linguistic level, considering the loss and gain of modern civilization in rhetorical terms. Different aspects of civilizing language change – and its broad range of cultural implications for, among other things, class, gender, and religion – are explored by these texts in a variety of genres and styles, yet always illustrating the larger point that patterns of discourse exert a powerful influence on the course of the civilizing process, and can ameliorate or exacerbate civilizing pressures on the individual and her community in critical ways. While a diverse range of the period's literary productions usefully illuminate ideas about the civilizing potential of

linguistic form, the Victorian narrative of *Bildung* engages particularly clearly and consciously with the relationship between literary language and the civilizing process, and therefore provides the main focus of the second half of the chapter. With its sustained attention to the development and socialization of its protagonist – in particular, his formation as a rhetorical agent – the narratives of writers' *Bildung* studied in this section offer an excellent opportunity for studying the kind of rhetorical formation that literary discourse is imagined to offer. By considering how the *Bildungsheld*'s rhetorical evolution is integrated into the plot, I suggest that texts like *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Alton Locke* (1850), *Aurora Leigh* (1856), *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), and *Robert Elsmere* (1888) develop parables of language that help make sense of how creative writers imagined the "improving" language of literature to mediate between individual aspirations and social needs. In turn, studying the Victorian *Bildungsroman* in the context of the discourse on civilization enables us to revise dominant critical arguments about the genre, and, more specifically, its English variations.

Modeling a rhetorical program for coordinating individual development and socialization in such a way as to escape excessive inwardness, but also to enable critical resistance against banal models of *bourgeois* subjectivity, the novel of formation represents, as we shall see, a particularly important fictional genre for understanding how Victorian literary practitioners conceived the civilizing functions of literary language. Yet, in its efforts to communicate the empowering effects of literary formation on the individual – and, conversely, the rhetorical possibilities of character – the *Bildungsroman* availed itself of the rich diversity of stylistic models cultivated in other kinds of writing, as well as the complex structures of meaning crystallizing around prominent literary

genres like poetry. As a vital interpretive context for studying the meta-literary narratives of the *Bildungsroman*, it is the wider world of civilizing Victorian literature that must first claim our attention.

Following Norbert Elias and the Victorian thinkers studied in Chapter One, this chapter continues to use "civilization" and its cognates to refer both to a "structural transformation of society" in systematic ways (Elias 421) – in the direction, for example, of material wealth, pacification, and democratization – as well as to the process of education and acculturation whereby individuals acquire the requisite language practices, mental structures, and social knowledge for functioning in this changing society. These should not be regarded as disparate senses of the term, but, rather, different aspects of the same process. Drawing on a broad cross-section of poetry and fiction written and read by the Victorians, I show how literary texts valorized the idea of civilization by means of a wide array of strategies that can nonetheless be aligned with two basic rhetorical modes. Well summed up by Arnold's "sweetness and light", the mode of civilizing rhetoric elaborated in the first section reflects much more directly civilized ideals in its emphasis on order and harmony, while the second section uncovers the surprisingly congruent effects its apparent antithesis, a rhetorical mode characterized by romantic *topoi* and hyperbolic language. In spite of their diverse ways of engaging the concept of civilization, these texts consistently support the concept of civilization as explicated in Chapter One, employing plot, characters, and their modes of using language to suggest the importance of developing and coordinating such civilized values as self-control, efficiency, information, individuality, and social feeling. As described in Chapter Two, Victorian writers had great faith in the social and psychological powers of language, and

imaginative literature provided an important site for cultivating its civilizing potential. Artfully harmonizing medium and message to reflect on how the civilizing process might be facilitated – or hindered by – linguistic practices, these texts ultimately represent civilization as "an object not to be gained without books and reading" (Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 109). Taking a more critical turn, the third section then focuses on the problematic aspects of civilization revealed in these texts, suggesting why, in the final section, the *Bildungsroman* must mobilize both "quiet" and colorful modes of civilizing rhetoric in its improving designs.

"In Quietness and in Confidence Shall Be Your Strength": The Soothing Powers of Victorian Literature

As detailed in Chapter 1, the "unprogressive" character of imaginative literature was a commonplace of Victorian writing on civilization: works of fiction were often criticized for idealizing "savage" existence, and undermining the value of civilization. In a curious reversal, modern critics have frequently condemned Victorian literature for its uncritical support of civilization, reducing its "civilizing mission" to a project of empire. Both charges are persuasively refuted by *Mansfield Park* (1814), which, although published a few decades earlier, anticipates crucial challenges facing many Victorian poets and novelists who sought to engage with the concept of civilization in constructive ways. Beyond developing plausible arguments about much larger, complicated social processes, these texts also had to respond to an important rhetorical challenge – how to represent the quiet efficacy of civilized values, and to do so in a sympathetic, imaginatively appealing manner. In "Civilization", J. S. Mill had suggested that the "amiable and the humane" elements of human nature favored by modern civilization were incompatible with poetic,

"heroic" representation (131) – could literary art, then, teach readers to appreciate such low-key, understated virtues as self-restraint, communication, and co-operation, and still retain its other traditional functions, since classical times, of moving and delighting its audience? In *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen shows that it is possible to construct an engaging narrative centered on a heroine who embodies the quiet virtues of civilization – whose mild, principled ways Austen reveals to be a subtle yet effective source of moral and social strength. In the process, not only does the novel manage to affirm the enabling aspects of civilized order without merely endorsing the *status quo*, it suggests that adopting a more conciliatory approach to authority might not only be compatible with – but offers an effective way of realizing – a progressive commitment to social change.

With its famously "insipid" protagonist, Austen's novel provides an easy target for those who accuse nineteenth-century fiction of rewarding – and producing – compliant *bourgeois* subjects. It is no surprise, therefore, that Edward Said should read Fanny Price's quiet support of domestic order as complicit with Sir Thomas's colonial authority (*Culture and Imperialism* 89). However, a reading which takes more seriously Austen's careful attention to Fanny's rhetorical abilities – in particular, the delicate awareness of verbal and social forms shared by Fanny and the narrator – reveals that the novel favors neither colonial oppression nor its domestic equivalent. Rather, Fanny's story illustrates Richard Trench's claim that "the power of exactly saying what we mean" is not "merely a graceful mental accomplishment" but "is nearly allied to morality" (*On the Study of Words* 255-56), demonstrating that civilized mental acquisitions such as verbal discipline and precision are crucial to the effective resistance of oppressive authority.

In Fanny's development of such mental and verbal powers, the narrator deliberately assigns the kind Edmund a key role, so it is much to the credit of his thoughtful, gentle pedagogical practices[1] – and not to Sir Thomas's strict methods – that Fanny alone analyzes accurately the moral stakes surrounding verbal behavior when a performance of Mrs. Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* (first performed 1798) is proposed. To transgress domestic rules in Sir Thomas's absence would not merely constitute a breach of protocol, but would be effectively to acknowledge one's need of constant supervision. Far from servile obedience, Fanny's silence, in fact, tacitly asserts her moral autonomy, and arguably offers the most effective – if non-confrontational – critique of Sir Thomas's authoritarianism at Mansfield and in Antigua. In contrast, Maria and Julia Bertram's increasingly egregious violation of domestic and social norms underline that the fact that, as a form of domestic government, their father's strict authoritarianism is ultimately inadequate, and as self-defeating as his daughters' thoughtless acts of rebellion. Austen's subtle representation of Fanny's moral heroism entails that, in order to read accurately the significance of her silence within the novel's complex chain of implied meanings, readers, too, must engage in delicate verbal balancing. Thus, the value of cultivating an attentive, disciplined attitude towards one's language and behavior is not only demonstrated in the novel, but incorporated into the reading practices promoted by the text.

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[1] Significantly, Austen emphasizes the role of literary activity in the cousins' relationship – Fanny's special friendship with Edmund begins when he assists her in writing a letter to her brother William (vol. 1, ch. 2). Reading and literary-critical discussion likewise form the basis of Edmund's method of "assisting the improvement of her mind, and extending its pleasures": the narrator informs us that "he recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment; he made reading useful to her by talking to her of what she read, and heightened its attraction by judicious praise" (24-25).

One important reason why texts like Austen's have nevertheless been dismissed as "imperialist" is that, as suggested in the Introduction, powerful critical voices over the past three decades have tended to instrumentalize literature for specific political ends. Focusing on political issues, influential critics like Said effectively endorsed a practice of reading that separated the ideological affiliations of a work from its formal achievements – as a result, he could praise Austen's "taste and irony" (*Culture and Imperialism* 97) while indicting Mansfield Park for supporting "the practice of empire" (14). In fact, if one pays closer attention to the surprising formal engagements of their work, one realizes that many Victorian writers were keenly aware of civilization's "dark spots" and problematic tendencies, yet, like Austen, kept faith with the idea that modern civilization might underwrite a more humane and progressive set of values. Hence, a wide variety of the period's imaginative writings can be shown to support the idea of civilization in ways not reducible to imperialist ideology. Mansfield Park nicely illustrates the efforts of these texts to demonstrate the quiet efficacy of civilized forms of power and to discover, in Mill's terms, their sympathetic and aesthetic aspects.[2]

In the project to develop a more sympathetic and imaginatively appealing vision of the civilized character and style, the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of formation, played a particularly important role. The Introduction has already shown, for example, how *Jane Eyre* (1847), a novel generally celebrated for its "rebellious feminism" (Gilbert and Gubar 378), in many ways shares Austen's value for "civilized" verbal discipline. Fanny's prudence demonstrates that critique might find expression in verbal restraint –

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[2] In his essay on "Bentham" (1838), Mill writes that "[e]very human action has three aspects: its *moral* aspect, or that of its *right* and *wrong*; its *aesthetic* aspect, or that of its *beauty*; its *sympathetic* aspect, or that of its *loveableness*. The first addresses itself to our reason and conscience; the second to our imagination; the third to our human fellow-feeling" (112).

even silence; Jane learns early on that verbal discipline is essential to any act of rhetorical resistance. In contrast to Jane's wildly hyperbolic similes during an early encounter with John Reed (e.g., "You are like the Roman Emperors!" [67; ch. 1]) – which only serve to provoke further violence – Jane's invective against Mrs. Reed a few chapters later evinces a considerable degree of verbal restraint. Free from figurative language, it takes the form of a "blunt sentence" which succeeds in piercing Mrs. Reed's conscience (95: ch.4), shocking her into speaking to Jane "in a tone in which a person might address an opponent of adult age" (96-97). Taken together, then, these two childhood episodes suggest that, in order to be effective, even a vigorous rhetoric of resistance must be tempered by self-control and precision. By means of careful attention to her characters' use of language, Brontë thus affirms the possibilities of civilization taking the form of rhetorical practice – and an invaluable resource for those seeking social justice.

One particularly important literary strategy for valorizing the idea of civilization was, as the final section will suggest, developed in especially sophisticated ways in the *Bildungsroman*, but was widely utilized by the nineteenth-century novel at large. This was the systematic use of literary characters to embody certain principles, values, or modes of being, enabling the novelist to employ her cast of fictional personalities as a secondary meaning-making system. More will be said about this in connection with the *Bildungsroman*, but for now, I shall simply style this formal device the "language of character". Together with another favorite Victorian literary device, the marriage plot,[3] this language was employed by countless novels to affirm the idea of civilization. In novel after novel, heroines are paired off with men who embody modern, civilized values

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[3] See Joseph Allen Boone's seminal *Tradition Counter Tradition* (1987), which usefully traces the workings of the marriage plot in a wide variety of Anglo-American fiction.

– even if these images of masculinity deviate considerably from the traditional heroic mold. A clear example of how the nineteenth-century novel endorses civilized values by favoring the "worthy" over the "wild" man is provided by *Mansfield Park*, where Fanny, in spite of Henry Crawford's persistent wooing, remains unswervingly faithful to the studious Edmund Bertram. Compared to the attractive (if unreliable) Crawford, Edmund hardly seems a likely romantic hero – in fact, to the very end, he remains very much a tutelary figure – one by whose care Fanny's "mind [has] in [a] great … degree [been] formed" (544). Beyond suggesting Fanny's "nice" taste in men, however, Fanny's constancy to her mild-mannered, highly principled cousin is clearly designed to signal, on another level, her enduring attachment to civilized order and rationality. Hence, their marriage serves formally to confirm the text's allegiance to the civilized ethos of Mansfield Park as Fanny understands it – a vision of enlightened order that the young couple preside over by the novel's end.

Although not all Victorian novelists could share Austen's unequivocal endorsement of civilized masculinity in *Mansfield Park*, this method of valorizing civilized values can nevertheless be observed to shape the marriage plot in much of the period's fiction, and certainly in many of its best-known works – take, for instance, the long-suffering figure of Major Dobbin in William M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847-48). The phenomena described as the "hero in eclipse" (Praz) or the "passive hero" in Victorian fiction (Levine) testify to novelists' efforts to develop a language of character that might promote a greater appreciation of the quiet, understated virtues of civilization.[4] Even the

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[4] The discourse of civilization, as the following pages make clear, had profound implications for ideas of masculinity during the Victorian period. For useful accounts of changing ideas of masculinity during the period, see, for example, Martin Danahay's *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture* (2005) and John Tosh's *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class home in Victorian England* (1999).

Brontë sisters, criticized in their time for the "rudeness" and "coarseness" of their language,[5] register their support for the idea of civilization by contriving romantic relationships for their heroines that are ultimately tempered by civilized notions of restraint and order. Thus, Jane only marries Rochester when physical suffering has curbed his antinomian tendencies and quite literally scaled down the "volcanic" energies that had earlier created an insurmountable power differential between them (267). Likewise, marriage – even in the strange fictional world of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) – is out of the question for Catherine and Heathcliff until the "savage" intensity of their passion has been diluted through intermarriage with the more civilized Lintons. Only then – in the promised union of their descendants – can their passionate attachment to each other be accommodated in marriage, and integrated into the wider networks of sociability that civilization entails.

In Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1849), Helen Graham actually marries the "wild" man – then discovers to her dismay that her husband's "wildish" reputation (135) has far more serious implications for their domestic existence than initially imagined. Like Grandcourt in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), whose atavistic qualities George Eliot emphasizes by means of reptilian imagery (115; 502), Arthur Huntingdon is another "fascinating" aristocratic figure(156) whose attractive appearance and refined manners conceal a pitiful lack of civilized mental resources. Marriage to such a man proves so unbearable that Helen flees her marriage under an assumed identity. The text,

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[5] Although the critics of *Atlas*, *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, and *The Examiner* all appreciated the "rugged power" of *Wuthering Heights* (*Atlas* review, rpt. in Dunn: 282), for example, they also criticized its "savage" qualities. "In the midst of the reader's perplexity," wrote the *Douglas Jerrold* reviewer, "the ideas predominant in his mind concerning this book are likely to be – brutal cruelty, and semi-savage love" (rpt. in Dunn: 284-85), while the *Examiner* reviewer described the characters as "savages ruder than those who lived before the days of Homer" (rpt. in Dunn: 285).

however, takes care not to demonize the wild man as essentially evil – as Helen says, "Arthur is not what is commonly called a *bad* man" (244). Rather, Brontë represents his vices as the result of a deficient education (226) – specifically, the failure to acquire civilized habits of mind such as "self-restraint" and a wider sense of purpose (244). Ill-equipped to cope with the constraints of domesticity, he is driven to seek excitement in drink and sexual intrigue, entering into a vicious cycle of dissipation that eventually results in his premature death. Brontë's treatment of Arthur's illness is deliberately designed to strip the term "wildish" of its sense of danger and rebellious energy, emphasizing instead Arthur's psychological vulnerability – as death approaches, he clings to Helen in a state of "childish desperation" (445). The novel, therefore, is much more than a *bourgeois* cautionary tale about the rakish aristocrat. By showing the self-defeating nature of rebellion for its own sake, Brontë makes a strong case against the impulse to reject civilized values in an unconsidered, absolute manner. In this respect, she and her sisters prove themselves, as we shall later see, shrewd readers of Byron.

Like Anne Brontë, Anthony Trollope thoroughly deflates the romantic appeal of anti-civilization figures in *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864-65), but in the characters of John Grey and Plantagenet Palliser he goes much further to imagine how – within the social and political milieu of Victorian England – the quiet, understated virtues of civilization might sympathetically be embodied. Trollope makes Alice Vavasor the object of the novel's titular question, but early on in the novel, Alice herself touches on the real question that the novel is interested in exploring when she remarks that "The worthy man and the wild man must fight it out between them" (55). Indeed, in order for the reader to decide whether or not Alice's vacillating behavior is pardonable, it is precisely the

strengths and weaknesses of these opposites – and the relative difficulty of perceiving these qualities – that must be weighed and ascertained. For this purpose, Trollope develops a sustained, doubled comparison of wild and worthy men in romantic triangles centering on Alice and the Lady Glencora, working slowly, but surely, to reconcile them to their worthy – if unexciting – partners.

Although the two women are, respectively, engaged and married to refined, highly accomplished men, they find their "worthiness" – the high level to which they have internalized civilized notions of order and discipline – a serious obstacle to emotional engagement. While John Grey is "noble", "clever" (60), "constant", and "firm" (138), his refined "goodness" verges on the point of blandness, leading George Vavasor to figure Alice's impending marriage to Grey in these terms: "It was as though one who had lived on brandy should take himself suddenly to a milk diet, – and enjoy the change!" (86) Indeed, Grey's finely-balanced personality creates an impression of self-sufficiency and completeness that disturbs Alice herself, prompting the following mental outburst: "Would that he had some faults! Would that he had! Would that he had!" (60). Similarly, Palliser is "very steady by nature", but so "dull", "laborious" (267-68), and unexpressive that Glencora feels that "he requires no loving, either to take it or to give it" (288). In contrast, George, one of the novel's "wild men", possesses a bold recklessness (323) that lends his company "something sweet, undefinable, and dangerous" (82). However, in spite of its *frisson*, the reckless daring of the wild man is revealed, in George's case, to be fuelled by that "irrational spirit of sadness which … drives men to madness and destruction" (145). Trollope shows this wild man to be little better than a "wild beast" (602) – one capable of violence towards not only his rival, but his own sister. Meanwhile,

the crises in their relationships, aided by the expansive time-scale of the novel, provide the two worthy men with an adequate platform on which to demonstrate the authenticity of their feelings. Eloquent testimony to the strength of Grey's feelings for Alice is provided by his patient forbearance and fidelity to her over the course of the novel, while Palliser treats Glencora's indiscretion with Burgo Fitzgerald with "genuine, true nobility" (617), sacrificing the chancellorship of the Exchequer to mend their marriage. Thus, the novel resolves its two main plots in favor of the civilized type, effectively humanizing the quiet, unglamorous virtues of civilization in heroes who make no dramatic conquests, but prevail on the strength of self-restraint and "modest love" (398).

The use of the marriage plot to valorize the civilized type is seen, too, in works of a more ambitious scope – novels of social change such as *North and South* (1855) and *Middlemarch* (1871-72), in which the heroine's choice of husband functions as a means of articulating the "new" values that the changing community needs to adopt in order to develop in desirable ways. The rejection of refined, highly educated characters like the lawyer Henry Lennox and the scholar Edward Casaubon appears at first to contradict this claim, but, then, the marriage problems in these novels are designed not so much to exhibit the superiority of the civilized type over his antithesis, as to distinguish the idea of a truly progressive civilization from its simulacra. Which character, they invite us to consider, truly embodies the kind of values that might form the basis of a "happier, nobler, wiser" civilization (Mill, "Civilization" 119)? Why does Margaret Hale, Mrs. Gaskell's strong-minded heroine, choose the manufacturer Thornton over his more refined, professional rival? In comparison to the self-made Thornton, Lennox might possess an equal – or even higher – degree of the self-control, foresight, and technical

expertise that distinguish the civilized mind, but these are not the only civilized values that matter. Of equal importance, Gaskell reminds us, is social feeling – an awareness of one's relationship, and obligations, to the larger social aggregate that constitutes civilization. Accordingly, the urbane Lennox fails to engage Margaret's feelings because, too absorbed by professional ambitions and narrowly personal concerns, he is wanting in social sympathy. Thornton, by contrast, combines civilized notions of order and discipline with a far greater sense of fellow-feeling for the industrial working-classes – people towards whom Margaret has become increasingly sympathetic since befriending several factory-workers in Milton. Likewise, George Eliot uses Dorothea's disastrous marriage to Casaubon to show that, without a wider sense of social awareness, imposing knowledge and "vaunted laboriousness" (*Middlemarch* 206) are as ineffectual as "the surplus stock of false antiques kept in a vendor's back chamber" (202). While poor Casaubon's lack of social awareness doom him to "futile scholarship" (417), Will Ladislaw's poetic sensibilities and strong sense of social sympathy promise to aid him synthesize – and give a wider social relevance to – the intellectual resources of civilization. By marrying Dorothea to the poetic Will, Eliot not only emphasizes the centrality of social awareness to her notion of civilized values, but suggests the importance of literary and political culture to developing such values.

One of the most striking instances of how the rhetoric of character is employed to demonstrate the unobtrusive – yet no less efficacious – power of civilized values is afforded by Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), a novel in which the triumph of modern, civilized values is dramatized in the struggle between two men not (only) over one woman, but over an entire town. A powerful, swarthy, "leonine" man

(89), Michael Henchard is a boldly drawn character who achieves political ascendancy in Casterbridge by virtue of his imposing personality and "amazing energy" (114). However, he is also egoistic, extravagant, vulnerable to "strong impulses" (65), and superstitious – and so loses everything, in the course of the novel, to the slim, fair, bright-eyed Donald Farfrae. Henchard's antithesis in terms of appearance, personality, and mental capacities, Farfrae's success in Casterbridge is built on a very different set of strengths – civilized virtues such as learning, discipline, foresight, and organization.

But Hardy does not simply manipulate the language of character in order to insist on the material advantages of adopting *bourgeois*, civilized values in a modern capitalist economy. In an interesting – and more neutral – manner, the novel explores the source of Donald's strength – and Henchard's difficulties – in their very different ways of using language. Donald's rhetorical practices gesture to the possibilities of cultivated, literary language, exemplifying how linguistic resources might prudently – and creatively – be exploited to meet social and psychological needs. It is not just that Donald is by far the more literate of the two – Henchard asks him to compose his letters for him – in Donald's hands, language simply becomes a more sophisticated instrument, capable of serving self and community in valuable ways. For instance, not only does his singing at The Three Mariners soothe his own homesickness, his literary ballads also move his rustic listeners (including Henchard) powerfully, evoking a shared sense of elevated feeling that makes the breaking of the "deep silence" following his performance seem "a harsh and irreverent act" (52). Whereas Donald's creative use of language establishes affective bonds with – and among – his audience, Henchard's modes of linguistic play are consistently destructive to himself and others. His vaunted "practical jokes" decivilize

language, reducing it to a means of debasing himself and wounding others – as, for example, when he auctions his wife (ch. 1), forces the Casterbridge choir to sing a curse on Farfrae (ch. 33), or lies to Newson about his daughter's death (ch. 41). In contrast to the sense of social cohesion created by Donald's literary diversions, Henchard's ill-conceived jokes produce pain and estrangement, quite literally separating those bound by the closest ties of kinship. Far from serving as an ideological vehicle for *bourgeois* values, the tale of Henchard's fall offers, then, a sophisticated parable about language. Combining its skilful rhetoric of character with meticulous attention to its characters' discourse practices, the novel affirms the civilized cultivation of linguistic power – and warns against the dangers of abusing it.

Given the genre's well-established connections to modern capitalist culture[6] – and its own status as a relatively recent literary innovation – one might be less than surprised to find a more sympathetic understanding of civilization and civilized language in the realist novel. Yet literary interest in – and support of – the idea of civilization was not confined to the novel, but developed in various other genres – and sometimes in the least expected. While its detractors dismissed nineteenth-century poetry as barbarous and childish (see ch. 1), some of the period's most widely-read poetry was, in its own ways, strongly committed to promoting civilized restraint, verbal discipline, and social feeling. Probably the single most influential book of poetry to advocate such civilized values to Victorian readers was John Keble's *The Christian Year* (first publ. 1827), which, by the time copyright expired in 1873, had gone through no less than 158 editions (Butler 3). Informed by the widely-shared – though not uncontroversial – view that Christianity was essential to the civilizing process (see Ch. 1 – page ref), Keble's poetry provided readers

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[6] See, for example, Michael McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (1987).

and writers with a powerful example of how Christian discourse might be mobilized to valorize – and instill – the self-restraint, emotional discipline, and tolerance attached to the idea of modern civilization. Although one of Keble's stated aims in his "Advertisement" was to promote "a sober standard of feeling in matters of practical religion" (iii), the poems of *The Christian Year* are by no means prescriptive in any crude sense of the term. Rather than imposing some form of external control on the individual, many poems offer the "*soothing* tendency in the Prayer Book" (iv) as an aid to regaining control over the turbulent inner world.

Surrounding the modern individual might be an impressive level of external civilization, "[b]ut," as the speaker of "Fourth Sunday after Epiphany" points out, "there are storms within/ That heave the struggling heart with wilder din" (lines 17-18). Alluding to St. Mark's account of Christ healing the madman (*KJV*, Mark 5.2-20), Keble assures readers of Christianity's capacity to restore order to the "wildness" of the human mind, emphasizing the psychological dimension of Christ's miraculous powers:

> And there is power and love
> The maniac's rushing frenzy to reprove,
>   And when he takes his seat,
> Clothed and in calmness, at His Saviour's feet,
> Is not the power as strange, the love as blest,
> As when He said, Be still, and ocean sank to rest? (19-24)

In fact, a greater need for this inward civilizing exists in modern civilization, because, as many of the poems recognize, the banalizing routine of modern existence[7] – and especially the material comforts and abundance of leisure enjoyed by certain classes of

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[7] A passage that powerfully registers the Victorians' latent sense of "unreasoning rage" against the "dreary mechanism of [modern] life" – "the unflinching regularity in the smaller wheels and meaner mechanism of the human machine" – is afforded by Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861-62), in which the narrator notes the pressures of a highly organized society on the individual psyche: "Madhouses are large and only too numerous; yet surely it is strange that they are not larger, when we think of how many helpless wretches must beat their brains against this hopeless persistency of the orderly outward world, as compared with the storm and tempest, the riot and confusion within" (227).

Victorian readers (Keble, "Advertisement" iii) – tend to exacerbate such internal storms. As in the case of Trollope's Alice Vavasor, a surfeit of civilized order breeds a "wayward" longing for disruption and chaos,[8] if only to break the deadening "monotony of civilised life" (Braddon 285). In several poems, Keble seeks to counter this suffocating banality not by dismissing these feelings as irrational, but by acknowledging their demoralizing effects, and teaching readers to find modest sources of moral and emotional sustenance in the quotidian and the familiar: for example, the "trivial round" and "common talk" ("Morning" 53); domesticity ("First Sunday after Easter"); and even middle age – a phase of life which poets have typically neglected as too mundane and unglamorous for "Fancy's wing" ("Saint Philip and Saint James" 6).

In this manner, these poems not only serve to calm the "storms within", but develop a more just sense of appreciation for the privileges and relationships that civilized order makes possible in the external world. One of the important civilizing effects of these poems, therefore, is to enhance the reader's sense of social feeling and consideration for those around him. By learning to "espy" "more of heaven in each we see" we find "old friends" "lovelier", leading to a renewed sense of interest in – and feeling for – the human beings whose very proximity causes us to take for granted ("Morning" 43; 33-34). In general, the poems also develop a vision of Christianity compatible with notions of civilized sociability. To live a Christian life in a highly civilized society does not, Keble emphasizes, call for dramatic, extravagant sacrifices, cautioning against the kind of exaggerated gestures that, in practice, tend to isolate the individual from his community – there is no need to "bid, for cloister'd cell,/ Our neighbour and our work farewell"

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[8] Glencora articulates this longing much more explicitly when she tells her cousin, "Do you know, there are moments when I almost make up my mind to go headlong to the devil, – when I think it is the best thing to be done. … I do feel so tempted to rebel, and go ahead, and care for nothing" (710).

("Morning" 49-50). Instead of "shun[ning] our daily task,/ And hid[ing] ourselves for calm" ("First Sunday after Easter" 44-45), *The Christian Year* suggests that "[t]he herbs we seek to heal our wo" are to be found in harmonious relations with one's fellow-beings (46). Just as emotional balance enhances one's sociability, conversely, developing a greater sense of social feeling can similarly contribute to one's internal sense of harmony. In "Saint Philip and Saint James", moreover, the text situates itself within a rhetorical circuit centered on the Anglican Church, which, by virtue of its capacity to help individuals balance and regulate their emotions, draws them together to create a sense of community:

> Thus souls, by nature pitched too high,
>   By sufferings plunged too low,
> Meet in the Church's middle sky,
>   Half way 'twixt joy and woe,
> To practice there the soothing lay
>   That sorrow best relieves. (45-50)

In the "soothing" verbal economy that Keble identifies with Anglican teachings, therefore, those civilized values of emotional discipline and social feeling mutually reinforce each other, fostering individual happiness and stronger communities.

Keble's project to adapt Christian discourse to the demands of modern, civilized life offers, then, much more than an edifying source of verbal recreation for a privileged class of readers. As described by himself, "the chief purpose of these pages [is] to exhibit" that "soothing tendency in the Prayer Book" ("Advertisement" iv), and, indeed, *The Christian Year* represents a sustained attempt to realize in contemporary poetic form that harmonizing potential of language so powerfully present to him in the Christian liturgical tradition. Fundamental to civilization both within and without, this is the power of language not only to create a sense of order, but structures of meaning that fortify,

comfort, rejoice – and, ultimately, bless – humanity. Keble's verse exercises language's powers of harmony on various levels – from his use of iambic meter to frame the "lawless cries" of "wayward hearts" ("Fourth Sunday after Epiphany" 56; 25) to his deft adaptation of Old Testament subject-matter to "new" romantic poetic forms (e.g., "Second Sunday in Lent"). But the poems also self-reflexively thematize the importance of cultivating this harmonizing power of language in literary practice. Thus, Keble chides those writers who neglect "the silent growth of grace and light" ("Fourth Sunday after Epiphany" 28) and "[w]aste their impassioned might on dreams of earth" (52) by dwelling on "the shuddering start/ Of passion in her might" (26-27) and the gothic thrills of "charnel-house and chain" (42). Opposed to this morbid literariness is the image, in numerous poems (e.g, "Morning"; "Saint Philip and Saint James"), of a redemptive poetic language infused by the Word – "melodies" of "the everlasting chime" ("Saint Matthew" 27-28), by whose "chords … [the] lawless cries of humanity [might be] tun'd to hymns of perfect love" ("Fourth Sunday after Epiphany" 55-56).

Keble's idea that literature, drawing on Christian discourse, might support the concept of civilization by modeling more considered, disciplined ways of using language – a verbal mode of ethics, if you like – was developed with particular clarity by another much-loved Victorian genre, the novel of school-life. This juvenile variation of the *Bildungsroman* reflects the increasingly microscopic scale of the Victorians' fascination with the civilizing of individuals – a fascination taken to the extreme with Pater's notion of "brain-building" ("The Child in the House" 223) – and typically defines the ideal of "Christian manliness" in terms of a certain ethics of language use. Tracing in miniature a basic rhetorical pattern that is elaborated by the *Bildungsroman*, Thomas Hughes's *Tom*

Brown's Schooldays (1857) and Frederic Farrar's *Eric: or, Little by Little* (1858) very deliberately map their protagonists' moral growth (or degradation) on to their rhetorical development, laying out clear models of rhetorical formation for their impressionable readers to emulate (or avoid). Claudia Nelson has written persuasively about the feminine ethic of boys' moral education in such stories, but if we take into account the Victorians' concept of civilization, this "feminization" can more accurately be described in terms of a process of initiation into civilized language – their realization of Keble's epigraph to *The Christian Year*, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (Isa. 30.15). Hence, crucial turning-points in the careers of Tom Brown and Eric Williams are marked by trials that are fundamentally rhetorical in nature. The pivotal moment in Tom's story occurs when he defends the newly-arrived Arthur's praying – a practice that has long been stigmatized in the dormitories – and resolves to defy peer-pressure in order to engage the inward language of prayer:

> Next morning he was up and washed and dressed, all but his jacket and waistcoat, just as the ten minutes' bell began to ring, and then in the face of the whole room knelt down to pray. Not five words could he say – the bell mocked him; he was listening for every whisper in the room – what were they all thinking of him? He was ashamed to go on kneeling, ashamed to rise from his knees. At last, as it were from his inmost heart, a still small voice seemed to breathe forth the words of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner! He repeated them over and over, clinging to them as for his life, and rose from his knees comforted and humbled, and ready to face the whole world. (228)

Although his determined efforts to pray take the unassuming form of a "still small voice", Hughes clearly presents Tom's discovery of his inner voice as a critical – and empowering – rhetorical breakthrough. Initially, internal doubts threaten to stifle Tom's attempts at inner speech, but recollecting an appropriate Biblical text enables him to overcome his verbal paralysis. Repeating it like a mantra in order to make it his own, Tom's realization of this more abstract, inward mode of using language opens up for him

a new source of moral power that is superior to physical force: "he went down to the great School," the narrator tells us, "with a glimmering of another lesson in his heart – the lesson that he who has conquered his own coward spirit has conquered the whole outward world" (228). Indeed, the novel goes on to chart Tom's steady acquisition of an ethics of language shaped by Christian values, as he begins reading the Bible together with his friends (Part 2, ch. 2) and even gives up using vulgus-books and cribs (Part 2, ch. 7). Interestingly, while the moral superiority of Christian rhetorical practices is emphasized, Tom's civilizing does not involve the renunciation of physical force. Hughes suggests that in reality – and certainly in the "School world" – such refined, ethical ways of using language must be cultivated alongside physical strength. Thus, Tom's physical prowess is never undervalued, but co-exists and supports the development of civilized language in important ways – for example, when he stands up for Arthur in the dormitory, or takes on "Slogger" William in defense of Arthur's literary sensibilities (Part 2, ch. 5).

In *Eric*, Farrar charts a very different trajectory for his eponymous protagonist, but Eric's problematic *Bildung* is similarly linked to his verbal behavior – in particular, his failure to acquire civilized modes of using language. Eric's crisis also occurs at night in the dormitory, when one of his roommates attempts to draw the others into "indecent" language (98). At this point, the narrator rather histrionically apostrophizes Eric, urging him to counter "the poison" of the storyteller's "polluting" tales (98):

> Now, Eric, now or never! Life and death, ruin and salvation, corruption and purity, are perhaps in the balance together, and the scale of your destiny may hang on a single word of yours. Speak out, boy! Tell these fellows that unseemly words wound your conscience; tell them that they are ruinous, sinful, damnable; speak out and save yourself and the rest. Virtue is strong and beautiful, Eric, and vice is downcast in her awful presence. Lose your purity of heart, Eric, and you have lost a jewel which the whole world, if it were "one entire and perfect chrysolite," cannot replace. (99)

In spite of the narrator's frantic exhortations, Eric, unlike Tom Brown, fails this rhetorical trial – he remains silent, "[t]he moment passed by for ever … and irreparable harm was done" (100). Thereafter, Eric's relationship to language is hopelessly skewed. Whereas Tom Brown's evolving rhetorical powers enable him to channel his fighting prowess for ethical purposes, Eric's physical advantages, in combination with his rhetorical weakness, render him particularly vulnerable to the corrupting influences of school-life. Learning to abuse language himself, he swears, forgets to pray, and develops an entire host of schoolboy vices that contribute, "little by little," to his tragic death. It is as if, once abused, language itself becomes Eric's nemesis, relentlessly recording – and accusing him of – his various transgressions. Thus, in the final movement of the novel, a series of texts hound Eric with the inevitability of a curse – for example, a bill for illicit revelries at a local pub (307), and a printed notice for pigeon-theft (311) – precipitating his disastrous attempt to run away to sea. Even Eric's death-blow is unintentionally delivered by letters from his parents – in his weakened condition, his remorse literally kills him.

If this brief sketch warns young readers to exercise greater caution in their use of language, it hardly seems, in other respects, to promote civilized ways of thinking about language – instead *Eric* appears to mystify language, investing it with occult power. Yet in spite of the narrator's florid efforts to pathologize the "polluting" effects of Bull's "indecent words" ("[the words] burnt within [Eric] like the flame of a moral fever" [100]), the text does not turn language into an object of irrational fear. Rather, it is because Eric fails to conceive language as an organ of civilized rationality that it degenerates, for him, into a more primitive vehicle of superstition and malevolent

sorcery. The narrative makes it clear that Eric's fatal running away is not so much determined by external events as by the desperate state of mind to which his extreme and self-isolating rhetoric reduces him – a good illustration would be his compulsive repetition, towards the end for the novel, of the Lady of Shalott's fatal exclamation ("The curse is come upon me" [318; 322]). The greatest danger to which his rhetorical incapacity exposes him is not some diabolical "corruption" from without, but his wild language, which exaggerates his troubles and portrays him as mysteriously singled out for destruction. Through Eric's negative example, then, Farrar suggests that desperate language can only help to fulfill its dismal prophecies, and emphasizes the importance of cultivating more moderate, civilized language – a language tempered by hope for oneself, and faith in others. Like Keble and Hughes, Farrar explicitly enlists Christian discourse to set the civilized forms of power found in self-restraint, independent thought, and social relationships in an imaginatively appealing light. Even as they availed themselves of Christianity's cultural prestige to valorize the quiet virtues of civilization, these texts also served to enhance the status of the religion – not least by showing its compatibility with modern, progressive values.

The Road of Excess: Civilizing Romance

Thoughtful, sympathetic engagement with the idea of civilization was found, however, in even unlikelier places than religious poetry and the schoolboy novel. Even works that ostensibly turn away from modern civilization – self-styled "romances" such as Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) and Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861) – can be shown to adopt a far more progressive position in relation to the civilizing process than their

subject-matter might lead us to expect. Even as their fictions implicitly acknowledge the imaginative appeal of civilization's other, these novels deliberately choose not to veil the uglier aspects of the "barbarous", colorful worlds that they depict in such loving detail. In *Ivanhoe*, for instance, the narrator frames the "singularly romantic" character of the medieval tournament with several paragraphs detailing the miserable condition of England during the period – a tacit comment on the state of society that sponsors such forms of entertainment:

> … amidst these accumulated distresses, the poor as well as the rich, the vulgar as well as the noble, in the event of the tournament, which was the grand spectacle of that age, felt as much interest as the half-starved citizen of Madrid, who has not a real left to buy provisions for his family, feels in the issue of a bull-feast (66)

Scott's comparison of medieval society to the "half-starved" Spaniard is telling. That a society must seek amusement in such violent spectacles, he implies, is indicative of its degradation and social ills – amidst so many troubles and material wants, any less intense forms of excitement would be incapable of stimulating the people's interest.

Ivanhoe extends Scott's critique of pre-civilized cultural forms to the language of chivalry – the cultural code to which the hero so ardently adheres, and which Edmund Burke had famously lauded as one of the key agents of European civilization in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).[9] Immediately following a "live" report of one the most dramatic battle scenes in the novel – the siege of Torquilstone (Vol. 2, ch. 7) – Scott stages a debate between Sir Wilfred Ivanhoe and Rebecca that subjects "chivalry" and its collocating terms to critical interrogation. Impatient with Rebecca's

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[9] In his *Reflections*, Burke's encomium on Marie-Antoinette is followed by a lamentation on the passing of chivalry, which Burke describes as "[t]he unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise" (170). Burke claims that it is chivalry "which has given its character to modern Europe. It is this which has distinguished it under all its forms of government, and distinguished it to its advantage, from the states of Asia, and possibly from those states which flourished in the most brilliant periods of the antique world" (170).

remonstrations with him to control his "yearning after action" (248), the injured Wilfred launches into an extravagant encomium on chivalry, hailing it as "the nurse of pure and high affection – the stay of the oppressed, the redresser of grievances, the curb of the power of the tyrant" (249). While Wilfred insists that it is "the pure light of chivalry … which alone distinguishes the noble from the base, the gentle knight from the churl and the savage" (249), Rebecca's eloquent replies expose the cruel, barbarous practices that the laws of chivalry entail. Underscoring "all the blood [that is] spilled," "all the travail and pain … endured", and "all the tears which [such] deeds cause," she challenges Wilfred's uncritical investment in the absolute value of chivalric notions of "honour" and "glory":

> "Glory?" continued Rebecca; "alas, is the rusted mail which hangs as a hatchment over the champion's dim and mouldering tomb – is the defaced sculpture of the inscription which the ignorant monk can hardly read to the inquiring pilgrim – are these sufficient rewards for the sacrifice of every kindly affection, for a life spent miserably that ye make others miserable? (249)

Even as her own speech highlights the unacknowledged human costs of chivalry, Rebecca mocks the crude forms of verbal memorialization that, she suggests, contribute to the "wild" pursuit of glory. "[I]s there such virtue in the rude rhymes of a wandering bard," she demands, "that domestic love, kindly affection, peace and happiness, are so wildly bartered, to become the hero of these ballads which vagabond minstrels sing to drunken churls over their evening ale?" (249)

If Rebecca graciously defers to Wilfred's authority on such martial matters, Scott subtly undermines his position by highlighting the contradictions in his lofty rhetoric – not only is there an un-Christian ring to his bloodlust, his efforts to defend chivalry lead him to make some decidedly unchivalrous pronouncements about Rebecca's incapacity to understand such high sentiments. On another level, the text distances itself from the

"rude" ballads that Rebecca implicates in the fanatical devotion to chivalry by elaborately framing its own representation of the battle that fuels this debate. Rather than reporting the action directly to the reader, the narrator carefully positions Rebecca so that she can relate the events on the battlefield, deliberately foregrounding the elaborate process of literary mediation that must be performed in order for its sense of romance and adventure to be appreciated as such – the "refining", distancing effects of literary language, Scott suggests, play a crucial role in rendering such extreme forms of excitement pleasurable. It is not, after all, as a combatant that Wilfred waxes eloquent about chivalric deeds of "derring-do" (248). He is in fact twice removed from the action – experiencing the battle, with the reader, through the vivid descriptions of a highly-cultivated woman observing the fighting from a window. In this manner, Scott implies that battle and war can only inspire such enthusiastic rhetoric as Wilfred's – language that itself idealizes chivalry and glosses over its less savory implications – when filtered through the artfully-wrought medium of civilized language. By placing them in inverse relation to one another, Mill had suggested that the heroism of earlier epochs was incompatible with the "softer", more refined manners of modern civilization ("Civilization" 131). Scott suggests instead that our very capacity to appreciate the romantic appeal of the pre-civilized depends considerably on the "refining" language of literature, which accommodates the coarse and violent realities of "ruder" ages to the delicate sensibilities of the civilized subject.

The important extent to which it is the inherently "improving" effects of literary form that make it possible to enjoy the fictional experience of ruder ages is also foregrounded in *The Cloister and the Hearth*, albeit in a rather more comic fashion. Traveling through the forest at night, the novel's hero is initially delighted to stumble

across an inn. However, Gerard – a stand-in for the modern reader with his artist's "sensitive organs" (128) – is soon dismayed at the lack of civilized comforts that he (and the Victorian reader) have come to take for granted. In several paragraphs rich with olfactory and tactile imagery, Reade treats the reader – at Gerard's expense – to a humorous description of medieval hospitality and standards of hygiene. For instance:

> … Gerard crept into a corner close to the door. But though the solidity of the main fetors isolated them somewhat, the heat and reeking vapours circulated, and made the walls drip; and the home-nurtured novice found something like a cold snake wind about his legs, and his head turn to a great lump of lead; and next, he felt like choking, sweetly slumbering, and dying, all in one.
>
> He was within an ace of swooning, but recovered to a deep sense of disgust and discouragement; and settled to go back to Holland at peep of day. (129)

Besides highlighting a highly unromantic aspect of the middle ages – and perhaps heightening our appreciation of modern hygiene – Reade's bathetic treatment of the ironically-named "Star of the Forest" also illustrates how such humor depends on the "sanitizing" effects of literary representation. It is because fiction enables us to imagine – without actually having to smell – the "potent effluvia" (128) that we can laugh at poor Gerard's predicament. Taken together, these romances suggest that our very capacity to find amusement – no less than inspiration – in "ruder", pre-civilized ages relies to a significant extent on the inherently "refining", civilizing effects of literary language.

To many Victorian writers, the poetry of Lord Byron represented the very antithesis of civilized language and the apotheosis of what may be termed the "wild style". Used by Thomas Carlyle to exemplify the literary trend towards the "maximum of the Barbarous" ("Signs of the Times" 21), Byron's poetry was both celebrated and vilified for its mobilization of "wild" language and strong emotion.[10] Yet in spite of the objections of

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[10] In an unsigned review of *The Corsair* and *The Bride of Abydos* (1814), Francis Jeffrey attributed Byron's widespread popularity to his unrivalled ability to supply the "growing appetite" for the "primitive wildness" of the "stronger and deeper passions" – a literary trend that he described as "the true

many Victorians who were themselves strongly committed to the civilizing potential of literature – including Mill and Keble – Byron's poetry can be shown to engage in highly constructive ways with the concept of civilization, and to support – albeit in a more indirect fashion – civilized ways of using language. In fact, the very clarity with which Byron's poetry distills the rhetorical qualities of the wild style enabled "Byronism" to provide a crucial stylistic vector exploited by many Victorian writers – and certainly the *Bildungsroman* – in their civilizing literary designs. The wild rhetoric of the Byronic hero not only modeled a stylistic extreme and its perils – a technique that Victorian poets like Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson would later put to good use – it also embodied a kind of linguistic and imaginative vitality that the subject of civilization was not to forsake, but to learn how to regulate and employ more wisely. In order to enact the "rise on stepping-stones/ Of … dead selves to higher things" (Tennyson, *In Memoriam* 4), the *Bildungsroman*, as we shall see, found a vital source of rhetorical energy in Byron's "wild siren charming" (Carlyle, "Signs of the Times" 21).

More than simply proclaiming its excesses, Byron's wild style self-reflexively supplies a critical impulse leading away from such reckless ways of using language. In his wildly popular verse-tale, *The Corsair* (1814), for example, considerable irony is directed towards the ideal of the "rugged", uncivilized sea-faring existence that the pirates' opening song appears to glorify:

> "O'ER the glad waters of the dark blue sea,
> Our thoughts as boundless, and our souls as free, […]
> These are our realms, no limits to their sway –
> Our flag the sceptre all who meet obey.
> Ours the wild life in tumult still to range

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characteristic of this age of the world" (56-57), and explained by developing a cyclical theory of literary taste. In contrast, George Ellis's unsigned review in *The Quarterly Review* dismissed Jeffrey's notion of the "poetical cycle" (456), and declared Byron least appealing as the "searcher of dark bosoms" (457).

      From toil to rest, and joy in every change. (lines 1-2; 5-8)

Dismissing civilization as enfeebling (9-12), "dull" (24), and hypocritical (34-35), the pirates' song represents the "wild life" as a fantasy of unlimited freedom and power, but are the pirates really as free – as self-determining – as they believe themselves to be? Almost immediately after the song ends, Byron's narrator begins to deflate their anti-civilization rhetoric by hinting at their simple-mindedness – the very "notes" that privilege wildness over civilization, he wryly remarks, only resemble music "unto ears as rugged" (43-46). Sure enough, the pirates' simplistic mentality is swiftly confirmed in the second stanza – first, their successful buccaneering is not simply the result of freedom and physical daring, but is sustained by Conrad's meticulous planning and organization (76-82) – his "power of Thought – the magic of the Mind" (182); second, they are hardly as free as their song suggests, being very much under Conrad's dominion (177-78). Far from a free spirit, Conrad himself represents a figure of ascetic self-restraint, not only bearing the "splendid chains" of his authority (191), but assiduously "shun[ning] the grosser joys of sense" (75).

    The Corsair does not merely expose the contradictions underlying the pirates' vaunted "wildness", it also dissects the ramifications of the wild style on a more sophisticated level, for, notwithstanding his asceticism, Conrad is extravagant in one important respect – his language. As in several of the Victorian texts discussed earlier, the poem suggests that Conrad's hyperbolic rhetoric plays a critical role in his unhappy end. A good illustration of his extreme language is afforded by his peculiar method of amplifying his claims to love Medora. When she remonstrates with him over his "languish[ing] for strife" (395), and draws attention to the "strange" contrast between his tenderness to her and his openly-declared misanthropy (397), he replies:

> Yea, strange indeed – that heart hath long been changed;
> Worm-like 'twas trampled, adder-like avenged,
> Without one hope on earth beyond thy love,
> And scarce a glimpse of mercy from above.
> Yet the same feeling which thou dost condemn,
> My very love to thee is hate to them,
> So closely mingling here, that disentwined,
> I cease to love thee when I love mankind. (398-405)

Not only extreme in its vehemence, Conrad's rhetoric is at odds with the concept of civilization because of the way in which it drives a wedge between two of its core values – individuality and social feeling. Uncritically embracing "wrath['s] sacred call/ To pay the injuries of some on all" (263-64), his self-alienating rhetoric reinforces the idea that the interests of individual and society are hopelessly irreconcilable, trapping him in futile conflict with the world at large. Moreover, as with the pirates' paean to the wild life, Conrad's wild language in this scene betrays, more than anything else, a lack of critical awareness. His hatred of mankind is neither as general – nor his "strange" love for Medora as exclusive – as his words imply. As the narrator tells us, "The evil passions of his youth had made/ Him value less who loved – than what obey'd" (553-54) – a statement that is clearly borne out in the importance Conrad attaches to his crew and their pirating activities. And even dearer to Conrad than his obligations as pirate-chief is his chivalric veneration of women, which motivates the quixotic rescue of Gulnare and the Haram ladies, jeopardizing his carefully-planned attack on the Moslems.

Byron further underscores the self-defeating nature of Conrad's extreme language by dramatizing its pernicious effects even on those he professes to care for. While it purports to elevate and protect women in general, his idolizing rhetoric effectively destroys the actual women with whom he is involved. Since his self-alienating rhetoric maintains an exaggerated state of hostility with civilization, Conrad's chivalric devotion

to women requires their removal from this world, isolating them as unearthly beings with little or no practical agency. As beings who must exist in this world, both Medora and Gulnare fall victim to contradictions resulting from the tendency of Conrad's rhetoric to trap them in otherworldly roles. Thus, on the one hand, so invested is Medora in Conrad's "strange" vision of isolated love that it is no surprise that mental and physical dissolution swiftly follow the report of Conrad's capture – his imagined loss destroys her sole source of meaning in life. While Medora's death literally removes her from the world, Gulnare, on the other hand, is reduced to a social pariah by the contradictions of Conrad's extreme language when, forced by his chivalric scruples to enter the realm of action, she arouses his revulsion as "Gulnare, the homicide" (463). If, therefore, this boldly imaginative sea-faring romance represents a *tour de force* in a literary tradition that continued to fascinate, as the Epilogue will show, in the Victorian Robinsonade, *The Corsair* also exploits the romantic appeal of this "wild life" in order to critique the unconsidered rejection of civilization and probe the dangers of reckless language. To attentive readers, then, the poem renders superfluous at least the first half of Carlyle's famous injunction to "Close thy *Byron*" (*Sartor Resartus* 146). Already incorporated into his textual design is a caveat against the notoriously wild style to which he lent his name.

Imagining Civilization's Discontents

Drawing my examples from a broad array of imaginative texts that featured prominently in Victorian literary culture, I have up to now attempted to show not only that Victorian literature engaged in sympathetic and constructive ways with the concept of civilization, but that it engaged with this concept on the level of form, seeking, in general, to develop

a sense of appreciation for civilized ways of using language. Is this to say, then, that the period's creative writers were blithely oblivious to the negative civilizing pressures described by Elias (e.g., *The Civilizing Process* 377)? The preceding chapters have shown that Victorian thinkers were very much aware of – and interested in exploring – civilization's problematic consequences, and creative writers were no exception. We have already seen how, in the process of valorizing the concept of civilization, many of these imaginative works serve to articulate its discontents, taking seriously, for example, the "monotony of civilised life," or the obstacles it poses to the formation of affective ties. Instances of how Victorian poetry and fiction explore the strains, inconsistencies, and dangers of the civilizing process might be multiplied indefinitely, so in order to avoid covering the same ground as earlier chapters, I shall confine myself to three problematic aspects that are developed with particular force and clarity in these texts – namely, the tendency of civilization to generate internal resistance to itself; its highly asymmetrical effects; and its spiritual costs – thereby adumbrating some of the most serious challenges to civilization that the *Bildungsroman* had to confront.

In a sense, the widespread literary support of civilization I have shown in this chapter might be read as a response to one of the most pervasive anxieties haunting the nineteenth-century concept of civilization. Carlyle touches on this anxiety when he speaks of the destruction of "Moral Force" ("Signs of the Times" 17) – or Mill when he describes the "decay of individual energy" ("Civilization" 135) – but, perhaps because of its greater attention to matters of taste and readerly pleasure, the strange entropic tendencies of civilization are much more powerfully registered in imaginative writing than other genres. Reviewing Byron's *Corsair* in 1814, literary critics drew attention to

how poetry revealed the tendency of civilization to undermine the imaginative appeal of its existing forms, producing instead a regressive taste for "turbulent emotion" (Ellis, rpt. in Rutherford: 65). With advancing civilization, suggested Francis Jeffrey, the "pleasures of security" lose their novelty and "dangers of excessive or intemperate vehemence cease to be thought of in the upper ranks of society," compelling the literary imagination to "go back" to ruder, barbarous ages in order to satisfy a growing appetite for "strong and natural emotions" (rpt. in Rutherford: 55-57). Jeffrey's so-called "poetical cycle" – the notion that civilization generates structures of feeling that lag behind, and even militate against, its forms and purposes – may have been contested at the time, but countless fictional voices lend weight to his observations. From Goethe's poet's fervent wish – "Oh, give me back those driving passions – the deep happiness that hurts, the force of hate, the power of love. Oh, make me young again" (Faust, Part One, 756) – to Blanche Ingram's declared preference for the "wild, fierce, bandit-hero" (*Jane Eyre* 257), one finds evidence of the tendency in civilization to generate – at least on an imaginative level – a counter-impulse to reverse itself.

Notwithstanding their commitment to the idea of civilization, many Victorian texts confess the allure of the more primitive other in subtle ways. Blanche's romantic primitivism may be exaggerated, but her taste in men is shared, in less extreme form, by strong female characters like Jane herself, and Margaret Hale. While Jane and Margaret might "civilize" their lovers in the course of both novels, one might argue that the attraction of men like Rochester and Thornton lies, in the first place, in their untamed, primitive energy – derived in one case from the wild Byronic mold, and in the other from the new sense of power associated with the modern industrial technology. In the absence

of some compensatory element of primitive energy, the dismal affective economy of the civilizing process seems doomed to produce – with the inevitability of mortality – "weary tasks", "listless hearts", and "wandering glances" for "some [lost] pleasant dream" (Keble, "Saint Philip and Saint James" lines 14-17). Hence, the lingering sense of dissatisfaction at the end of *The Cloister and the Hearth* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* – where civilizing forces prevail at such a cost to creative vitality as to render the "victory" of modern civilization at best a pyrrhic one. At the conclusion of Reade's novel, the odd sexless union of Gerard and Margaret – who, by this point, thoroughly embody the civilizing agencies of religion (the cloister) and domesticity (the hearth) respectively – is a pale mockery of their spontaneous affection at the beginning of the novel. As might be expected, Reade's fictional account of the adventures of Erasmus's parents mostly emphasizes their modernity relative to their times, yet the dynamics of the narrative suggest that the creative energies that produce Erasmus and set the plot in motion are, rather, to be located in the "medievalness" of Gerard and Margaret – when they are representatives of an age when "manners were somewhat freer … [and] of prudery and artificial coquetry there was little" (37). Similarly, Hardy's narrator articulates his ambivalence about the success of Donald's modernizing improvements and Elizabeth-Jane's prudence by representing their "happy-ending" in terms of a highly dilute species of contentment:

> Her position was indeed, to a marked degree, one that the common phrase afforded much to be thankful for. That she was not demonstratively thankful was no fault of hers. Her experience had been of a kind to teach her, rightly or wrongly, that the doubtful honour of a brief transit through a sorry world hardly called for effusiveness, even when the path was suddenly irradiated at some half-way point by daybeams as rich as hers.

Built on a philosophy of "making limited opportunities endurable" (334), this is a version of "happiness" so heavily qualified that it almost loses its character as a positive feeling,

tending instead to be conceived as a negative state – as the book's closing lines suggest, "the occasional episode in a general drama of pain" (335). By contrasting the muted outlook produced by this niggardly emotional rationing to Henchard's far more spontaneous, generous temperament, Hardy invites the reader to mourn – for all his faults – the displacement of this tamer of bulls and his "amazing energy" by the forces of modern civilization.

Whether or not we choose to accept the suggestion in these texts that modern civilization is somehow colder, less vital, and unsympathetic, these examples clearly point to a residual sense of dividedness about civilization within the narrative consciousness itself. Even as they clearly present the benefits of civilizing change, these narrators remain emotionally drawn to that which civilization displaces, demonstrating the influence – even on the level of narrative voice – of civilization's tendency to produce structures of feeling that lag behind and resist its existing forms and purposes. Victorian creative writers went beyond registering this perverse element in civilization, however, to explore the wider ramifications of these internal civilizing conflicts – and nowhere more poignantly than in the marriage problems represented in fiction, where the implications of such dissonant impulses are made painfully visible in the relations between the sexes. Not everyone can be like Fanny Price, whose taste and desires are in perfect accord with the ideals of civilization embodied in the text, and many Victorian novels consider how the internal resistance against civilization degrades human vitality and creative energy. That Trollope devotes the entire novel to working out the merits of the worthy men over his wild counterpart in *Can You Forgive Her?* is indicative not only of the seriousness with which he regarded the gap between taste and the forms of civilized virtue, but offers a

tacit comment on the amount of emotional and intellectual energy consumed by such internal conflicts. And, at least in the case of Plantaganet and Glencora, her internal resistance to the civilized values he embodies seems to create a permanent impediment to an emotionally satisfying relationship. Even after she has come to recognize her husband's feelings for her, Glencora's attitude is one of resignation rather than reconciliation: "She knew that he had conquered her," the narrator tells us, "However cold and heartless his home might be to her, it must be her home now" (618). To the very end, a significant measure of the lack of sympathy between the couple is Glencora's determined refusal to participate in Palliser's favorite conversational topics, which center on demographic and economic information. With its massive scale and high level of abstraction, the discourse of modern civilization leaves Glencora completely cold: "I never believe it all. My mind isn't big enough" (707).

While in Trollope's novel it is feminine taste that bears the burden for estranged relations and "vain strife" between the sexes, Eliot's *Middlemarch* traces how a promising young doctor's retrogressive taste in women wreaks havoc on his personal life and extinguishes his scientific aspirations. In the career of Tertius Lydgate, the novel demonstrates the far-reaching, insidious effects of something as subtle as sexual preferences, vividly imagining how an appetite for the regressive in the private realm can degrade human potential and defeat larger visions of social improvement. At first, it is difficult to see how Lydgate's attraction to Rosamond Vincy can be described as regressive. Consistently represented as the very embodiment of refinement (156), Rosamond is, after all, regarded by Middlemarch as "perfectly lovely and accomplished" (92), and "[t]he best girl in the world" (165), so that Lydgate's taste in women seems at

worst merely conventional. Eliot's point, however, is such "common" taste has a strong element of the regressive – the more fatal to Lydgate because these "spots of commonness" (148) are in stark contradiction to his highly progressive intellectual and social ideals. In direct contrast to his commitment to intellectual and social improvement, Lydgate's preferred "style of woman" (92) implicitly devalues strong-minded and articulate women – he is inwardly repelled, for example, by Dorothea Brooke, figuring "the society of such women [as being] about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form" (93). Instead, in the "picture-writing of [his] mind" (Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," *Selected Critical Writings* 107), Lydgate's ideal woman is captured in the image of "reclining in paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for heaven" (*Middlemarch* 93). His preferred mental language for relating to women figures them in terms of some prelapsarian idyll, but also dehumanizes them by relegating them to benevolent forms of nature: a pleasurable background or lovable creatures that sing but – unlike the second form – do not speak.

In a wicked twist of verbal humor, Eliot shows the dangers of such decivilizing language – even if only indulged in one's private fantasies. The woman whom Lydgate's regressive tastes lead him to marry turns out indeed to be a figure of nature – but not the benevolent nature that he imagines. Rather, Eliot's imagery suggests that such regressive discourses of femininity have fashioned Rosamond, in spite of appearances, into a much more brutal version of nature – at best indifferent to Lydgate's high ideals, and at worse ruthless in its tenacious, unreflecting pursuit of a narrow set of purposes that run counter to his own. In an increasingly sinister series of botanical images, Eliot suggests that the ornamental role foisted on to women barbarizes them, turning them into parasitic

monsters that feed on the vital energies of men. Thus, the apparently conventional floral imagery surrounding Rosamond in the earlier sections of the novel (e.g., "She was admitted to be the flower of Mrs. Lemon's school" [94; 157]) takes on a more threatening aspect when she is compared to that "white soft living substance to make its way in spite of opposing rock" (341), and eventually reveals its full gothic significance when Lydgate identifies her with the basil plant in Keats's *Isabella* (publ. 1820) – "a plant which had flourished wonderfully on a murdered man's brains" (819). If Lydgate's allusion casts himself a victim, Eliot makes it clear that his own regressive taste in women is heavily implicated in the cultural discourses that reduce women – like the toy-dog Dorothea rejects – to "parasitic" creatures (30), thus unwittingly contributing to the degrading domestic economy that "swallow[s] and assimilate[s]" his idealistic energies (152).

Another problematic aspect of the civilizing process that Victorian fiction and poetry brought sharply into focus was its highly uneven effects. In discussing the conflicts that arise because of the imaginative resistance to civilization, the differential impact of civilization on men and women has already been suggested, but Victorian literature also revealed the asymmetrical effects of civilization along class lines. While J. S. Mill's essay on "Civilization" had already drawn attention to the divergent ways in which the civilizing process was affecting the various social classes, fiction provided more richly contextualized, internal perspectives on these phenomena. Treating class-based problems and possibilities in greater psychological depth, the imaginative writings of the period reflect on the linguistic dimensions of such civilizing effects – exploring, for example, the rhetorical symptoms of civilizing pressures, or the asymmetrical influence of civilization on the rhetorical agency attached to class identity. Whereas

civilization had facilitated a "wonderful development of physical and mental power" in the working classes (125), Mill claimed that the same process had demoralized the higher and middle classes by reducing the scope for heroic individuality (131) and breeding a narrow preoccupation with "money-getting" (130). The "unheroic" tendencies of the civilizing process therefore posed special challenges to the upper-class Victorian male, and many of Tennyson's poems dramatize the struggle to cope with the pressures exerted by modern civilization on traditional models of masculinity. In "Ulysses" (1842), for example, the ageing hero clearly finds domesticity and the work of civilization ("met[ing] and dol[ing]/ unequal laws unto a savage race" [lines 4-5]) stifling – far more of a strain than his earlier life of heroic activity. To devote himself to domestic and political governance at home in Ithaca represents stasis, a kind of living death. According to Ulysses, to confine one's energies to such sedate duties would be "to store and hoard [himself]" (29) and "[t]o rust unburnished" (23): "As though, he remarks indignantly, "to breathe were life. Life piled on life/ Were all too little" (24-25). While Ulysses emphasizes his affection for his "[w]ell-loved" son and accords due praise to his civilizing labors (36-42), he also makes it clear that he has little sympathy with Telemachus's vocation: "He works his work, I mine" (43). Not only is civilized existence unendurably "dull" to the aged hero (22), the narrowly mundane concerns of his society make it impossible for him to inhabit the heroic "name" he has become in the course of his adventures (16) – his heroic identity is completely lost upon unimaginative people "[t]hat hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not [him]" (5). Although Tennyson clothes Ulysses' rejection of civilization in glowing eloquence, he – like Byron before him – turns his speaker's verbal facility against him to suggest that this rhetorical assertion of

strength (32) is really a sign of weakness, registering a failure to cope with the cramping effects of civilization on heroic masculinity. In spite of the speaker's lofty words and conviction, the intertextual reference to Dante's *Inferno* reminds the reader that Ulysses is not only deluding himself, but fatally misleading his listeners by representing the life of incessant action as the "heroic" choice. The poem, as it were, captures a rhetorical performance that quite literally leads to perdition. Far from endorsing Ulysses' defiant rejection of civilized existence, the poem enacts a desperate attempt to revive the memory of heroic potency, articulating the severity of civilizing pressures on the masculine subject.

Like Ulysses, the modern-day speakers of "Locksley Hall" (1842) and *Maud* (1855) are similarly disenchanted by the narrowness of their society, railing against the "peace" of their mercenary age as a species of "[c]ivil war" – only "viler, as underhand, not openly bearing the sword" (*Maud* lines 27-28). For the speaker of *Maud*, the "blood-red blossom of war" (385) seems the only way of purifying such a corrupt state of civilization. His battle-lust expresses a fervent wish that a more heroic sense of masculine identity might be recovered through martial action – that by "fight[ing] for the good" (389), Victorian men might "prove … [they] have hearts in a cause, [and] are noble still" (387). These poems, however, show that it is not simply to protest the external state of an unheroic, "Mammonite" civilization that these men embrace the decivilizing effects of war (*Maud* 45). Tennyson's troubled protagonists help us to understand that the rejection of civilized existence and the glorification of physical action are not just motivated by a desire to recover a sense of masculine potency, but also by the inability of these men to cope with the greater sense of interiority awakened by the civilizing process (see ch. 1).

Lacking the resources for spiritual discipline offered, for example, by *The Christian Year*, the speakers of these poems are forced to seek refuge in physical action from the restless, intractable forces of subjectivity that threaten to overwhelm them. Thus, in "Locksley Hall", the forsaken lover cries out to be delivered from his "deep emotion" (line 108) and "jaundiced eye" (132), turning to the violence of a military career to escape the disturbing energies of modern inwardness: "I myself must mix with action, lest I wither by despair" (114). Various rhetorical strategies for escaping the self are devised – in fantasies of primitive freedom (157-172), where "the passions cramped no longer shall have scope and breathing space" (167), or even in the prospect of losing one's individuality in the vast collective of mass society (142). At the same time, the speaker continues to be disturbed by the loss of heroic stature, and attempts to compensate for the diminished status of his individuality by repeated, vehement assertions of superiority – personal, sexual, and racial. In spite of their ravings – and the doubtful conclusions to which these passionate performances led them – there is nevertheless a sense that, in such extreme language, these men actually find outlets that preserve them from total mental dissolution, even becoming aware of their own mental instability ("but I *know* my words are wild" ["Locksley Hall" 173]). By enacting how such frenzied poetic discourse gradually "awake[s]" these men to "the better mind" (*Maud* 388), Tennyson demonstrates how literary discourse might relieve the particularly severe strains of civilization on upper- and middle-class men, but also suggests that the therapeutic functions of literature discussed in the previous chapter might be far more relevant to certain classes of readers than to others.

For even as the civilizing process created daunting – and intensified – mental pressures for some, Victorian literature recognized that it was simultaneously opening up new intellectual horizons and possibilities for others. Both Mill and W. Cooke-Taylor, for instance, had argued that the shift towards increased co-operation – the most "accurate test of the progress of civilization" ("Civilization" 122) – had greatly enhanced the mental culture of the working classes. As a highly visible manifestation of this civilized capacity for co-operation, the factory system was hailed as one of the "wondrous … new agent[s] … of civilization" (Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 261), which would enable working people to develop, among other things, a sense of the superiority of moral over physical force (Taylor, *Natural History* 2: 274), "a power of self-restraint" and "confidence" in one another (Mill, "Spirit of the Age" 22). These enabling effects of civilization on the working classes are suggested at the beginning of *Mary Barton* (1848), where the narrator remarks about a group of Manchester factory girls: "The only thing to strike a passerby was an acuteness and intelligence of countenance, which has often been noticed in a manufacturing population" (35). Gaskell's novel goes on construct a plot that subtly reveals the empowering effects of modern civilization on working-class women – in particular, by augmenting their rhetorical agency. The daughter of a Manchester factory operative, Gaskell's eponymous protagonist may not be highly educated, but "she had seen a terrestrial globe, and knew where to find France and the continents of the maps" (68), and possesses a wider sense of modern civilization and her place within it. The cognitive and literacy skills that the diffusion of knowledge has afforded Mary are put to the test when Jem Wilson is falsely accused of murder. With the help of friends, Mary is able to cope with the mental strain of the situation, and decide on the best course

of action to save her beloved – a plan in which Mary plays an unusually active role. Availing herself of the increased mobility offered by modern transportation networks – and not bound by the social constraints on women from the more affluent classes – it is the heroine who goes questing for a change, traveling unaccompanied by rail to Liverpool in order to find an alibi for Jem. Once in Liverpool, Mary again relies on the mental resources with which modern civilization has equipped her to track down Will Wilson, adroitly finding her way about this unfamiliar city with "the *savoir faire* of a town-bred girl" (357). Thus, Gaskell shows that mental capacities developed by the civilizing process in her working-class heroine play a critical role in saving Jem. Not only do her efforts succeed in recalling Will, Mary proves her mental discipline and rhetorical ability in court, where her moving speech, while not directly responsible for Jem's acquittal, buys precious time for Will to get to court, and provides Jem the moral support that he badly needs at this point.

If Victorian creative writers highlighted the disparate effects of modern civilization on different classes, they did not believe the effects of the civilizing process on a single class to be uniform either. While Mill and Taylor had identified the increasing power of combination as one of the best indices of civilization, Victorian creative writers also recognized a darker side to this civilizing trend. Taylor had figured the urban masses as a force of nature (*Natural History* 2: 274), and mob scenes in countless Victorian novels – from *Oliver Twist* (1837-38) to *The Mayor of Casterbridge* – point to fears that the power of combination might serve not civilize but to dehumanize working people, transforming them into a powerful corporate body that, like Frankenstein's creature, is incapable of controlling its terrible strength (*Mary Barton* 226). As the narrator of *Mary Barton* points

out, "Combination is an awful power. It is like the equally mighty agency of steam; capable of almost unlimited good or evil" (230). Without a sufficiently authoritative "high and intelligent will," the power of combination is all too easily "misled by passion or excitement" (230), and degenerates into a means of magnifying the strength of the individual not for civilized purposes but to wreak senseless violence. The dehumanizing effects of combination in this novel are dramatized not in a mob scene, but rather in the way that the Trade Union that John Barton joins turns him into a ruthless instrument of its murderous intentions. Significantly, the decivilizing effects of combination on the individuals that make up such atavistic aggregates of humanity are often realized by the loss of human speech. Not only do the Union members draw lots to decide who will assassinate Henry Carson "without saying a word" (250), Gaskell signals the threat to John Barton's humanity in his stony silence towards Mary and his friends. In mob scenes, the rhetorical devolution that accompanies such degenerate manifestations of combination affects everyone involved – not only those infected by bloodlust. Thus, Margaret Hale discovers her own powers of speech are impaired by the "stormy passions" sweeping through the "angry sea of [working-class] men" threatening Thornton's factory (176). When she pleads with them to abandon violence, her voice emerges first with "no tone," "d[ying] … away" as "a hoarse whisper" (176), and her second attempt is little better: "now her voice was like a cry" (177). By depicting the highly uneven effects of the civilizing process even within the same socio-economic class, Victorian creative writers emphasized that the impact of the civilization on mental culture – and rhetorical agency – could be dangerously unpredictable.

In their willingness to explore the problematic aspects of civilization, Victorian creative writers were prepared, too, to entertain the possibility that this process might entail irremediable losses – specifically, ones involving fundamental changes in religious culture. Thomas Carlyle had written in "Signs of the Times" (1829) that civilizing changes were making the Victorian era "not a religious age" (17) (see ch. 1), but Victorian poets and novelists went much further to explore the subtle, inconspicuous ways in which the civilizing process was undermining existing religious traditions. Many writers recognized that modern civilization threatened to neuter the potency of religious beliefs not because of its hostility to traditional creeds, but, rather, by virtue of its emphasis on – and talent for – compromise. Passionate believers like John Henry Newman, for example, employed both poetry and fiction to warn against civilization's accommodation of religion and the dangers of civilized peace to the Christian soul. In "Liberalism" (1833), written before his conversion in 1845, Newman was already highly critical of Liberal attitudes towards Christianity, arguing that these proponents of civilization only wanted to assimilate Christianity for their own secular purposes, thereby vitiating the purity and force of religious ideals. The "[m]en of presumptuous heart" whom he apostrophizes are clearly supporters of civilization (line 2) – they are identified as "those who plan that we should dwell,/ Each in his tranquil home and holy place (3-4), who, "[s]eeing the Word refines all natures rude,/ And tames the stirrings of the multitude" (5-6), recognize the value of Christianity as an instrument of civilization. Newman's persona accuses these would-be civilizers of deploying Christianity in a highly selective and opportunistic manner, and attempting – at the expense of the religion – to "halve the Gospel of God's grace" (1):

Ye mark'd it spoke of peace, chastised desires,

Good- will and mercy, – and ye heard no more;
But, as for zeal and quick-eyed sanctity,
And the dread depths of grace, ye pass'd them by. (9-12)

In his historical novel, *Callista* (1856), Newman similarly suggests that together with its emphasis on material well-being, the spirit of compromise that marked the progress of civilization might be a greater threat to Christian spirituality than outright opposition. Using the Christian community in third-century Sicca to reflect on Victorian religious culture, Newman's narrator remarks that the "peace of well-nigh fifty years [about the year 236] had … not a happy effect on the Christians of the proconsulate" (16). Civilization's tendency towards pacification does not, it seems, favor the vitality of the Christian Church: as "the great body of Christians" come to be on "better and better terms … with society," they tend towards "a state of considerable relaxation," "often [verging] on the brink of deplorable sin, and sometimes f[alling] over the brink" (17). Insisting that spiritual growth and living faith are not to be attained without some form of hardship and conflict – if not great personal sacrifice – Newman's own novel offers the spiritual growth, conversion, and martyrdom of his eponymous protagonist as a corrective to the lax attitude towards religion promoted by civilized ease.

It was not only writers with strong Christian convictions who explored the paradoxical idea that the accommodating ethos of modern civilization might be more inimical to religious culture than the more overt opposition of less tolerant epochs. An important disseminator of German biblical criticism, George Eliot was no orthodox Christian, but her novels nevertheless express a sense of regret over how the civilizing process seems to be eroding our capacity to take religion seriously. In *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), for example, Mrs. Glegg's parody of martyrdom – complete with gruel and Baxter's Saints' Everlasting Rest – might be amusing, but juxtaposed against the

turbulent past of St. Ogg's – when "[m]any honest citizens lost all their possessions for conscience' sake" (117), her routinely staged martyrdom only serves to underscore the diminished possibilities for religious idealism in modern times. By depicting the progressive routinization and domestication of martyrdom, Eliot intensifies the sense of nostalgia with which the narrator harks back to a time when salvation was conceived of in loftier, more sublime terms – and certainly not reduced to the "inalienable habit of saving" in which Mrs. Glegg excels (121). Evoking a sense of longing for the "days … when people could be greatly wrought upon by their faith" (118), the novel also draws attention to the disturbing trend that those who most fully enjoy the comforts of civilization are effectively undermining the cultural language for articulating deep religious feeling, stigmatizing it as "enthusiasm" (292).

> Discourse on such topics is all but proscribed because it
>
> is apt to fall into a tone of emphasis which is very far from being the tone of good society, where principles and beliefs are not only of an extremely moderate kind, but are always presupposed, no subjects being eligible but such as can be touched with a light and graceful irony (291).

Eliot points out, however, that this affected independence of "belief and emphasis" is highly costly (291), and, indeed, sustained by the labors of less privileged, burdened masses "who have absolutely needed an emphatic belief" (292). "[L]ife in this *unpleasurable shape,"* explains the narrator,

> demand[s] some solution even to unspeculative minds … [some] *ekstasis* or outside standing-ground … something that will preset motives in an entire absence of high prizes, something that will give patience and feed human love when the limbs ache with weariness, and human looks are hard upon us – something, clearly, that lies outside personal desires, that includes resignation for ourselves and active love for what is not ourselves. (292)

While the civilizing process tends to produce in this manner an "absolute" need for an emphatic belief among the less privileged classes, the material comforts and cultural

diversions it affords the more affluent classes insulates them from this need for deep religious feeling. As a result, Eliot suggests, not only does this asymmetry form another barrier between rich and poor, it produces dominant cultural discourses that are increasingly ill-equipped to engage basic spiritual needs, thus obscuring an important resource for coping with suffering and adversity.

In spite of these serious doubts about modern civilization, we have already seen that Victorian creative writers did, on the whole, keep faith with the "onward tendency of human things" (Eliot, *Mill on the Floss* 272-73). Many of their imaginative works, moreover, are highly conscious of the impact of literary practices on the direction of the civilizing process, and foreground the civilizing – or retrogressive – influence of specific literary genres. Was there, then, any consensus among creative writers about the relative civilizing powers of the various genres? Considering the range of meanings attached to specific genres in nineteenth-century literature, it is difficult to establish any clear hierarchy between the genres in terms of their civilizing effects. As shown earlier, some of the foremost proponents of literature's civilizing powers – including Wordsworth, Keble, Mill, and Arnold – based their arguments on poetry, and there is no lack of cross-generic support for the idea that poetry had a key role to play in development of humanity. Novels like *Alton Locke*, *Middlemarch*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, for example, all link civilization to poetry, representing Alton, Will Ladislaw, and Donald Farfrae as "poet[s] of the new school" (Hardy 54). Against this general reverence for poetry, however, other writers attempted to assert the educational possibilities of their own genres. In Austen's *Persuasion* (1817), Anne Elliot cautions Captain Benwick against the power of poetry to arouse "strong feelings" and "recommend[s] a larger

allowance of prose in his daily study" (98), while, notwithstanding the "poetical" qualities that so many critics remarked in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*,[11] the text's injunction to "Close thy *Byron*; open thy *Goethe*" (146) clearly encourages readers to diversify their reading beyond poetry. And in spite of the representation of drama as a threat to domestic order in many novels – including, for instance, *Mansfield Park*, *Jane Eyre*, and *David Copperfield*[12] – Victorian fiction also recognized the pedagogical functions ascribed to the drama by Joanna Baillie. A sense of moral unease over rhetorical display and public spectacle might unite novels as different as *Can You Forgive Her?* and *Marius the Epicurean*, yet there were also novels like *The Cloister and the Hearth*, in which the civilizing possibilities of theatrical performance are repeatedly demonstrated – for instance when Gerard uses staging and make-up to defeat the "fierce" robbers besieging the inn (ch. 33), or when he employs the art of tableau to reconcile the fallen nun with her community (ch. 82). Even in *Jane Eyre*, one might argue that dressing up and pageantry during the Ingrams' visit to Thornfield do not simply indulge their "barbaric" taste for ostentation and display – Rochester's cross-dressing, after all, serves to expose the mercenary motives concealed behind Blanche Ingram's pose of aristocratic grandeur.

In sum, while poetry was widely esteemed for its improving powers, Victorian literary practitioners shared no single, consistent doctrine about which genre was most improving – or inherently more civilizing than its sister-genres. No one genre had

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[11] Reviewing *Sartor* for the *Christian Examiner* in 1836, Nathanial Frothingham, for example, declared that the text "has imagination enough to give a poet renown" (rpt. in Seigel: 42). Similarly, a reviewer of *Sartor* in the *Metropolitan Magazine* wrote in 1842 that "The man who can write poetry like this in plain, idiomatic, English prose, may be forgiven his heresies touching rhythm and verse, and his occasional indulgences in extravagances" (rpt. in Trela and Tarr: 20).

[12] See Litvak. The significance of theatricality as a cultural category is treated in more detail in the following chapter.

absolute monopoly over literature's civilizing powers in the Victorian literary imagination, and the desirability of any particular form of literary practice was often represented as contingent on situational factors. Rather than reading this state of affairs as the result of confusion – or determined by intergeneric struggle in which one genre attempts to raise its own status at the expense of another – we might interpret these varied attempts to attach specific meanings to various genres in the fictional world as emphasizing that genre – and, more generally, ways of using language – matter. As suggested in the previous chapter, the Victorians had a very elastic notion of genre; they did not attach explicit meanings to particular genres to reify them, but rather to play with generic contrasts and explore the possibilities and effects of rhetorical differences, developing a language of genre that can function as an additional meaning-making resource. The next section focuses on how a specific variety of the Victorian *Bildungsroman* – narratives of writers' *Bildung* – harnesses this and other rhetorical resources afforded by the wider literary engagement with the idea of civilization, bringing together both "soothing" and "wild" strands of civilizing rhetoric to develop a model of literary formation that attempts to compensate for some of the problematic aspects of the civilizing process outlined in this section.

The Improving Characters of the Victorian *Bildungsroman*

If the previous section has argued for the relevance of the concept of "civilization" to Victorian literature across a wide range of imaginative genres, the *Bildungsroman* contributes in especially important ways to our understanding of the relationship between literature and civilization – in particular, how literary practitioners conceived literary

language as "improving" within the larger context of the civilizing process. Throughout this study, I have been interested in how Victorian engagements with the concept of civilization might illuminate the efforts of contemporary linguists to define the nature and functions of literary language – in particular, the claim that literariness inheres in "deviation" or "foregrounding". From Aristotle to, more recently, Guy Cook's theory of schema refreshment and empirical work by Willie van Peer and others, students of literary language have treated strangeness and novelty as its defining characteristic. The *Bildungsroman*'s model of "improving" language helps explain the cultural value attached to linguistic deviation while offering a valuable corrective to the notion that the strange or deviant quality of literary language is its sole or most important feature. In order to show the workings of this improving language, I consider five of the most prominent – and popular – *Bildungsromane* of the period, all of which also happen to be narratives of writers' formation.[13] By drawing on *David Copperfield*, *Alton Locke*, *Aurora Leigh*, *Marius the Epicurean*, and *Robert Elsmere*, I do not wish to restrict my argument to the subgenre of *Künstlerroman*, for I believe that it might be expanded to accommodate *Bildungsromane* that do not focus on writers. However, the fact that the protagonists of these novels engage in great deal of textual activity facilitates my use of these texts to illustrate the linguistic dimensions of the argument.

The genre's special, multilayered concern with improvement was recognized by the earliest commentators on the *Bildungsroman*, who coined the term to describe a certain

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[13] This is perhaps a less obvious claim to make about *Marius* or *Robert Elsmere*, but, as I will shortly demonstrate, literary activity forms a vital part of the development of both protagonists. Marius is trained as a rhetorician, while Robert's exposure to critical theology is the result of his efforts to fulfill his vocation as an author – to write a book "on the rise of modern society in Gaul" (197).

kind of German novel that began to appear in the late eighteenth century. As Karl

Morgenstern put it,

> We may call a novel a *Bildungsroman* first and foremost on account of its content, because it represent the development of the hero in its beginning and progress to a certain stage of completion, but also, second, because this depiction promotes the development of the reader to a greater extent than any other kind of novel. ("On the Nature of the *Bildungsroman*" 654-55)

By far the most famous and influential of these was Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters*

Lehrjahre (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*) (1795-1821; trans. 1824), so that the

importance of Goethean thought to Elias's conceptualization of the civilizing process

supplies further argument for focusing on the *Bildungsroman*. Elias credits Goethe with

recognizing the importance of balancing inner *Kultur* with external civilization,[14] and his

own concept of civilization emphasizes how closely internal and external development

are intertwined. Building on the multidimensional concept of civilization developed by

Elias as well as by nineteenth-century thinkers considered in earlier chapters, I suggest

that the Victorian *Bildungsroman* models a language that is improving by virtue of its

capacity, on the one hand, to resist the demoralizing effects of modern civilization and

sustain a sense of individual creativity, and, on the other, to reconcile the subject to its

actual conditions and constraints.

Besides showing the significance of the concept of civilization to Victorian literary

language, studying the *Bildungsroman* under the rubric of civilization constitutes an

important step towards clarifying the rhetorical and cultural functions of the genre.

Modern criticism of the *Bildungsroman* has been divided between approaches that

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[14] See, for example, *The Civilizing Process* 28-29. Elias argues that, by emphasizing "the beneficial, human aspect of [the] moderation of individual affects" and "acknowledg[ing] something of the social value of 'courtesy'," Goethe showed himself one of the few German thinkers of his time to draw attention to the value of external *Zivilisation* to internal *Kultur* – among other things, facilitating the acquisition of "the ability to converse with all people," "knowledge of human character," and "the necessary adroitness in life" (28-29).

represent the genre as a site of imaginative freedom and those that stress its function as an instrument of social assimilation – between, for example, critics like Michael Beddow, who has claimed that the genre is "essentially an epic of inwardness, one that celebrates the imagination of the hero as the faculty which allows him to transcend the limitations of everyday practicality" (qtd. in Swales: 29), and Franco Moretti, who perceives the *Bildungsroman* – and the English variety in particular – as a basically conservative genre in relation to *bourgeois* ideology, arguing in several places that the "great achievement" of the *Bildungsroman* is the "legitimation of the social system inside the mind of individuals" ("A Useless Longing for Myself" 45). Far more in sympathy with Moretti's skeptical reading, recent work on the genre has shown itself less interested in how its powers of improvement might produce a "harmonious" compromise between the individual and society, focusing instead on its contradictions and failures. Following Martin Swales' suggestion that the attempt to mediate between the conflicting pulls of *bourgeois* society is always "shot through with irony, with narratively intimated unease" (*The German Bildungsroman* 157), the most recent generation of critics have been much more concerned with the "ironicisation and interrogation" of its conventional structures (Fraiman 126) and other symptoms of the "breaking of the *Bildungsroman*" (Esty, "The Colonial *Bildungsroman*" 416) – even to the extent of arguing that the genre itself is a "phantom formation" generated by the ideological interests of critical discourse (Redfield).

As suggested in the Introduction, this critical trend tends to confirm less than satisfactory interpretations of the genre's rhetorical function, and underestimate the art with which writers employed linguistic and literary resources in order to win their

readers' sympathy for their projects of improvement. Seeking to build on the strengths –

and correct the excesses – of libertarian and conservative readings, my own approach

aims to recover the *Bildungsroman* as a fundamentally rhetorical genre – one that not

only represents the rhetorical becoming of its protagonist, but actively invites readers'

participation in this process, offering them the intellectual and rhetorical wherewithal to

think through some of the most pressing questions of modern existence. Class and social

mobility, gender, self-cultivation, individual happiness and religion: these are only some

of the most obvious issues engaged by the texts considered in this section that create

obstacles and complications for their protagonists. My object here, therefore, is to reclaim

some of the critical and creative "tools" that the *Bildungsroman* offers for dealing with

these issues – resources that contemporary critics, preoccupied with the

"*Bildungsroman*'s unmaking" (Esty, "The Colonial *Bildungsroman*" 426), have tended to

overlook.

It is a curious fact that, while contemporary criticism routinely refers to dismantling

of the "Goethean *Bildungsroman*" and its "formal dictates" (e.g., Esty, "The Colonial

Bildungsroman" 408), one rarely finds references to the actual rhetorical strategies of

Goethe's foundational text or anything more than a rather vague notion of the textual

model that re-writings of the *Bildungsroman* are supposed to address. Assertions that the

"classic" *Bildungsroman* is "linear", "teleological", and "masculinist" are common (e.g.,

Esty 408), but little is said about the textual details that invite such a vigorous response

from so-called "anti-developmental fictions" (411). Unlike Thomas Jeffers, my own

intervention does not attempt a detailed description of how the five Victorian texts

discussed here appropriate Goethe's ideas, nor do I undertake the close intertextual

comparison with *Wilhelm Meister* suggested by Michael Hollington, but I nevertheless try to develop a more concrete textual basis for studying the relationship between the Victorian *Bildungsroman* and its German precursor by arguing for the key status of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34) in disseminating the model of rhetorical *Bildung* central to the genre. I'm suggesting, in other words, a more complex genealogy for the Victorian *Bildungsroman* than is often assumed in practice, one in which the English variation derives its distinctive patterns of rhetorical energies not directly from *Wilhelm Meister*, or even from Carlyle's 1824 translation of the *Apprenticeship*, but rather from Carlyle's highly original rendition of *Bildung* in Teufelsdröckh's compressed autobiography – in particular, the way this fragmented narrative distils the dynamics of Goethe's *Bildungsroman* into an allegory about language.

In fact, a keen interest in textuality and its own status as a verbal artifact can already be discerned in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. A striking number of letters, songs, stories, manuscripts, literary texts, and other print documents circulate in this novel, often playing an important role in its plot. Constantly aware of its own conditions of possibility, the novel thematizes reading and textual production in order to educate its reader about modes of relating to and using texts. *Sartor Resartus*, however, in addition to being much better known to British readers and writers,[15] makes the linguistic dimension of *Bildung* much more explicit. Carlyle translates each stage of Teufelsdröckh's movement towards "spiritual majority" (261) into rhetorical terms, with

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[15] To get a sense of the profound impact of *Sartor Resartus* on Victorian literary culture, one need look no further than George Eliot's essay on Carlyle. In "Thomas Carlyle" (1855), Eliot writes: "…there is hardly a superior or active mind of this generation that has not been modified by Carlyle's writings; there has hardly been an English book written for the last ten or twelve years that would not have been different if Carlyle had not lived. The character of his influence is best seen in the fact that many of the men who have the least agreement with his opinions are those to whom the reading of *Sartor Resartus* was an epoch in the history of their minds" (*Selected Critical Writings* 187-88).

the extreme poles of his trajectory marked by the basic verbal acts of negation ("The Everlasting No") and affirmation ("The Everlasting Yea"). The disillusionment that precipitates Teufelsdröckh towards the limit of "anarchy and misery" in the "Everlasting No" (235) manifests itself in the extreme, restless rhetorical energies of an internal "Sturm und Drang", or its counterpart in English romanticism – "a whole Satanic School … spouting, though inaudibly" within (228). Perceiving a stylistic congruence in cultural phenomena like Byronic poetry and the Napoleonic Wars, the Editor suggests that *Bildung* has its beginnings in the extravagant performance of romantic subjectivity – an enactment of *The Sorrows of Werter* "in one or another dialect" (234). Significantly, this extreme rhetoric is itself a response to a peculiarly modern disaffection with language, which "in these sick days" and "in a world richer than usual … in Truths grown obsolete and Trades grown obsolete," seems the worthless currency of "a Den of Lies, wherein who will not speak Lies and act Lies, must stand idle and despair" (234).

The excessive interiority of this starting-point of *Bildung* contains its own remedy, for Carlyle represents Teufelsdröckh as exorcising the Satanic School by turning their negative energies against them, vigorously rejecting the "Everlasting No" to reach the next stage of *Bildung*, the "Centre of Indifference" (241). At this point, the very extravagance of one's "Satanic" performance begins to facilitate a gradual moving beyond this extreme disenchantment: "Wretchedness was still wretched; but I could now partly see through it, and despise it" (250). No longer doomed to "eat his own heart" (243), Teufelsdröckh gradually turns away from the self, and outwards to external civilization and its achievements – of which books are regarded as the most wondrous (243). The performance of the "first preliminary moral Act, Annihilation of Self" (253) at

this centre of indifference prepares the ground for Teufelsdröckh's moral regeneration. In "The Everlasting Yea" that marks a certain degree of completeness in his protagonist's *Bildung*, Carlyle again foregrounds the literary dimension of the triumphant moment of conversion, for the "solution" that enables Teufelsdröckh to affirm his being in the world anew is summed up by an imperative that registers a decisive shift in literary allegiances: "Close thy *Byron*; open thy *Goethe*" (257). Throughout this condensed narrative of *Bildung*, then, the protagonist's development is consistently represented as a process of rhetorical evolution, one which, Carlyle implies, leads the subject towards civilization. Initially, Teufelsdröckh is purposeless, possessed by a "nameless Unrest" (233), and isolated – even "[i]n the midst of … crowded streets and assemblages" (239). He says of himself: "except as it was my own heart, not another's, that I kept devouring [I was] savage also, as the tiger in his jungle" (239). At the Centre of Indifference, he gains some respite from this "savage" interiority and becomes more open to the resources of external civilization – his vision no longer jaundiced by a morbid subjectivity, "he is now, if not ceasing, yet intermitting to 'eat his own heart'; and clutches round him outwardly on the NOT-ME for wholesome food" (242). From an internal state of "savage" isolation, Teufelsdröckh's journey brings him to the point where he can affirm his compassion for a deeply flawed civilization:

> The poor Earth, with her poor joys, was now my needy Mother, not my cruel Stepdame. Man, with his so mad Wants and so mean Endeavours, had become the dearer to me; and even for his sufferings and sins, I now first named him Brother. (255)

In Carlyle's peculiar biography, therefore, it is the development of a certain kind of rhetorical practice that constitutes Teufelsdröckh's *Bildung* – his internalization of a civilizing language that is at once deeply critical of the actual and yet capable of sustaining the individual's sense of the ideal, thus countering the dispiriting effects of

modern civilization without alienating the individual from things (and people) as they are.

This, then, is the model of rhetorical *Bildung* that is so fruitfully appropriated by the Victorian *Bildungsroman*, and that so powerfully shapes the rhetorical program for improvement developed in these texts – a program conceived to cultivate, in terms of Aurora Leigh's visual metaphor, the "double vision" that characterizes true poetic practice, enabling literary practitioners

> To see near things as comprehensively
> As if afar they took their points of sight,
> And distant things as intimately deep
> As if they touched them. (5.185-88)

Simultaneously demystifying in its fidelity to vigorous truth-telling and reconciling by virtue of its capacity to re-enchant reality, this is the supple medium of representation that Alton Locke must master as he strives to "tell the gay ones above of the gloom around [the working classes]" (96), while, by revealing "the poetry which lies in common things" (98), "bring[ing] home as it were … a wild-flower garland to those that sat in the darkness and the shadow of death" (96). In Teufelsdröckh's rhetorical evolution, therefore, lies the genesis of the duality of the *Bildungsroman's* language – its traffic both in the fierce, disruptive energies of Byronism as well as the soothing rhetoric of *The Christian Year*.

Taken out of context, however, Teufelsdröckh's injunction against Byron might appear to exclude from this rhetorical program the literary in its most iconic guises, so it is important to stress that the extreme or "wild" language Byron stands for plays an important role in the model of civilizing language crystallized in *Sartor Resartus* and developed in the Victorian *Bildungsroman*. In the first place, Carlyle's apparent rejection

of Byron is by no means absolute – in fact, the imperative, "Close thy Byron," presupposes that one is reading Byron, and the fiery imagery surrounding Teufelsdröckh's "Baphometic fire-baptism" (241) gestures to the idea that the fierce rhetorical energy of the Satanic School actually serves to fuel the professor's *Bildung* in critical ways. By suggesting that "Altercation with the Devil, before you begin honestly Fighting him" is "almost a necessity" (234), the Editor implies that the *Bildungsheld* must learn to speak the language of the Satanic School in order to counter its destructive tendencies.

Similarly, whether it be the Byronic poetry Alton encounters in Sandy Mackaye's bookshop, the Byronic style embodied by characters like Steerforth in *David Copperfield*, or the Euphuism that Marius and Flavian are drawn to in *Marius the Epicurean*, some form of literary excess or marked literariness serves to drive the process of literary formation, and supplies a crucial stylistic vector in each character's expanding rhetorical repertoire. Among the five writers discussed here, Charles Kingsley patterns his *Bildungsroman* of a self-educated poet most closely after Carlyle's model – indeed, Alton could be the fictional embodiment of Carlyle's metaphorical Sartor[16] – so it is hardly surprising that the novel should explicitly foreground the educational possibilities of extreme, "deviant" language. In his representation of Alton's relationship to the extravagant style with which Byron's poetry was, as mentioned earlier, commonly

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[16] Of all the *Bildungsromane* studied in this section, *Alton Locke* bears the stamp of Carlyle's *Sartor* most strongly. Besides containing numerous references to Carlyle's writings, the novel even has a stand-in for Carlyle in the figure of Alton's chief mentor, the Scottish bookseller Sandy Mackaye, whose "favourite books were Thomas Carlyle's works" (65). The structure of Alton's own career parallels that of Teufelsdröckh: he begins with an intense romantic infatuation with an idealized beloved (Lillian) (ch. 7), becomes progressively disillusioned until he reaches the "lowest deep" (ch. 35), and then passes through a crisis of illness and delirium to find new faith in humanity and the possibilities of poetry (ch. 37). Of course, one notable difference between Teufelsdröckh's and Alton's trajectory is the vital role that Christian discourse plays in latter's regeneration.

identified, Kingsley highlights the formative influence of Byron on Alton's literary development and his gradual realization of his aspirations to become "the People's Poet" (94). Alton's illicit reading of Byron and other contemporary poets is a doubly transgressive ("unlawful" [31]) linguistic act, not only by exposing him to the "wild" language of "Childe Harold", "Lara", and the "Corsair", but because all secular literature is proscribed as sinful by his strict nonconformist mother (31). Yet early on in the novel, Kingsley's working-class hero invokes the Christian concept of the fortunate fall to affirm the mental and rhetorical growth that results from this act of linguistic deviation:

> Bitterly have I repented [my first act of disobedience], and bitterly been punished. Yet, strange contradiction! I dare not wish it undone. But such is the great law of life. Punished for our sins we surely are; and yet how often they become our blessings, teaching us that which nothing else can teach us! (30-31)

Accordingly, Kingsley represents the wild, imaginative freedom associated with Byron's language and Alton's childhood fantasies of the South Pacific as a crucial nidus for the development of his poetic powers. His first sustained poetic effort – a blending of the "Corsair" with South Pacific missionary narrative – emerges from an imaginative chaos of private fantasies fueled by his reading (80-81), and the indignant response it provokes in Sandy Mackaye precipitates their faithful tour of the city that inspires Alton to write poetry that engages more actively with social reality (94).

"Deviant" or disruptive textual practices assume a different form in Mrs. Humphry Ward's phenomenally successful *Robert Elsmere*,[17] yet this *Bildungsroman* about a young clergyman's loss of orthodox faith likewise suggests that the controversial literary-

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[17] According to Mark Freed, "It is estimated that by November [1888] 100,000 copies had sold in America alone; that by March 1889 between 30,000 and 40,000 copies of various editions had been sold in Britain, with sales continuing at the rate of 700 copies a week. In 1909, eleven years after its publication, Ward estimated that nearly one million copies of *Robert Elsmere* had been circulated in English-speaking countries" (133). Ward's novel became the best-selling novel in English in 1888 and eventually of the nineteenth-century itself.

historical studies Robert engages in do not merely cause his undoing as an Anglican minister, but also feed the growth of a more authentic religious language. For all the suffering that Roger Wendover's writings cause Robert and his family, the narrator makes it clear that the "dry destroying whirl-wind of thought" unleashed by the Squire's texts on this "young idealist soul" (275) play a crucial role in developing his "life of thought" (270).[18] Amidst "all the revolt, all the pain", a new, more deeply felt faith forms within as Robert feels "the irresistible march and pressure of the new instincts, the new forces, which life and thought had been calling into being" (332). If initially Elsmere unconsciously speaks "the natural Christian language of [his] generation" (85), Ward suggests that the unorthodox reading to which his literary studies take him actually motivate his struggle towards a religious language that is more finely attuned to his life and modes of thinking – a "faith of the whole creature, body, soul, and intellect" (351). "Unlawful", disruptive language, then, can be deeply creative, and an important catalyst for vital change.

In *Marius the Epicurean*, Walter Pater's historical novel about the intellectual development and gradual awakening to Christianity of a young Roman nobleman, Marius and Flavian also stretch the boundaries of existing cultural forms in their devotion to Euphuism – the rhetorical counterpart of the Cyrenaic philosophy that Marius later embraces. As with Alton, Marius and his friend become intoxicated with the "idealizing power" of literary language through "truant reading" (66), but, in this case, it is the rhetorical excess resulting from the supreme value attached to "beauty in writing" (90)

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[18] As it turns out, the impact of Roger Wendover's writing on Robert bears out the fanatical Newcome's attribution of a fearsome, savage power to the Squire's books. Newcome warns Robert: "Wait, my friend, ... till you have watched that man's books eating the very heart out of a poor creature as I have. When you have once seen Christ robbed of a soul that might have been His, by the infidel of genius, you will loathe all this Laodicean cant of tolerance as I do!" (164)

that is represented as the vehicle of intellectual and spiritual development. Fully aware of the materialistic tendencies of this extreme devotion towards "the instrument of expression", Pater nevertheless suggests that it is the highly refined medium of sensibility it yields that enables Marius to intuit the inadequacy of dominant Roman values – even those of the "wise" Marcus Aurelius (170) – and prepares him to recognize the greater humanity of the early Christian Church. Drawn to the Church by the aura of "temperate beauty" (233) and "persistent fresh[ness]" (226) surrounding Cornelius and his friends, Marius's focus on stylistic perfection helps him move beyond the "sin of blindness, of deadness and stupidity" in his age, and inwardly condemn the cruel spectacle of the gladiatorial contests (170) – it is his extraordinary degree of literary and aesthetic cultivation, Pater implies, that has developed in Marius "the heart that would make it impossible to witness all this" (170). Affirming "the future [that] would be with the forces that could beget a heart like that" (170), the narrator represents Marius's extreme literary aestheticism as anticipating and laying the foundations for the more humane values that the civilizing process would gradually disseminate. A much more condensed example of how Euphuism, at the extreme limit, produces a style that approaches the inward language of Christianity, is afforded by the peculiar qualities of Flavian's writing during his fatal illness. Here, Pater suggests that Flavian's struggles to attain literary excellence in the face of death succeed in winning for the two boys "the foretaste of an entirely novel world of poetic beauty to come":

> The impression thus forced upon Marius connected itself with a feeling, the exact inverse of that, known to every one, which seems to say, *You have been just here, just thus, before!* – a feeling in his case, not reminiscent but prescient of the future, which passed over him afterwards many times, as he came across certain places and people. It was as if he detected there the process of actual change to a wholly undreamed-of and renewed condition of human body and soul: as if he saw the heavy yet decrepit old Roman architecture about him, rebuilding on an intrinsically better pattern (98-99).

Flavian's stylistic breakthrough, moreover, seems to carry with it intimations of the soul's immortality, so that co-existing with his pagan conviction that he is "losing … his freehold of a soul and body so fortunately endowed" is the notion of ebbing life as "something he was but debarred the use of for a time than finally bidding farewell to" (99). Just as he relates the extravagant pursuit of literary perfection to social improvement on the wider historical stage, Pater suggests that the microlinguistic qualities of Flavian's language captures the way in which Euphuistic stylistic practices gesture towards – and facilitate – the emergence of a more refined, inward language of spirituality.

If Pater's treatment of the moral implications of Marius's super-refined language points to the infinitesimal rate at which the growth of consciousness must occur – heart by heart, and, indeed, impression by impression – his representation of the dying Flavian's poetry emphasizes that such intense bursts of rhetorical activity are continually driving a process of linguistic evolution at work in the medium of consciousness. Extreme language, skillfully managed by literary art, remains, therefore, very much a part of the stylistic repertoire of the *Bildungsroman*'s improving language, and does not merely represent a transitional or more primitive stylistic phase. Whereas Pater's evocative description of Flavian's "prescient" style hints suggestively at the improving effects of rhetorical excess even at this subtle level of textual meaning, Charles Dickens actually demonstrates how the disruptive energies of extreme language might be harnessed to correct its own violent tendencies. The following passage from *David Copperfield* illustrates how the improving language of the *Bildungsroman* employs formal violence, on a micro-textual level, to achieve civilizing ends:

> I believe that I had a delirious idea of seizing the red-hot poker out of the fire, and running him through with it. It went from me with a shock, like a ball fired from a rifle; but the image of Agnes, outraged by so much as a thought of this red-headed animal's, remained in

> my mind when I looked at him, sitting all awry as if his mean soul griped his body, and made me giddy. (13)

The imagery of this passage is murderous, and David ruthlessly attempts to dehumanize Uriah Heep – for example, by calling him an "animal". Yet in a sense even this internal rhetorical outburst might be regarded as civilizing insofar as it allows David to vent his seething anger and restrain himself from physical violence. It also hints at David's latent feelings for Agnes – which even the enunciated "I" remains unaware of at this point. Even so, Dickens shows that any satisfaction David might derive from such linguistic violence comes at a price. His own simile reduces him to a "rifle", and his loss of mental equilibrium is underlined not only by the adjectives "delirious" and "giddy", but by the fact that this violent language seems involuntary: David is figured as an instrument – not an agent. The awkward construction of the final sentence emphasizes David's moral confusion. The sentence is perplexing because it is interrupted twice by elaborate subordinate clauses, but also because it alternates between David and Uriah in a disorienting manner – and in a way that tends to collapse the distance that David would like to establish between them. For instance, the construction "outraged by so much as a thought …" suggests that Agnes is offended by Uriah, yet it is *David* who is made giddy by her image. The phrase "all awry" applies more to David in this extract than his hated alter-ego. Thus, through the deliberate manipulation of micro-textual detail, Dickens reveals linguistic violence to be a vital part of the *Bildungsroman*'s improving language, employing its motive-force to demonstrate that violence – even of thought or word – is ultimately self-defeating.

The elastic medium of representation offered by this improving language is of no small import, for Carlyle's foundational text suggests that the complex "double vision"

the genre affords offers a solution to nothing less than the "vain interminable controversy … touching what is at present called Origin of Evil" or the riddle of individual happiness (*Sartor Resartus* 255). This, according to Carlyle, is essentially a rhetorical problem whose form or "dialect" changes "from century to century" but that "arises in every soul, since the beginning of the world; and in every soul, that would pass from idle Suffering into actual Endeavouring, must first be put an end to" (255). Here, then, the hortatory dimension of the *Bildungsroman* – and its powerful deployment of the soothing mode of civilizing rhetoric – become evident. Drawing inspiration, as it were, from Teufelsdröckh's remark that books are "talismanic and thaumaturgic" by virtue of their power to "persuade men" (243-44), these texts develop a language that enables its characters (and readers) to persuade themselves to confront the flawed nature of reality and yet to find meaning and even joy therein, thus sustaining their efforts to improve their world. Although in order to solve such thorny problems, the *Bildungsroman*'s improving language necessarily raises greater awareness of evil, it does not stop there – perhaps more importantly, its special rhetorical function depends on its capacity to offer individuals the moral resources to fortify and even rejoice themselves in the face of evil, even under the most adverse of circumstances. Concentrating its imaginative energies neither on an idealized past or a deferred state of future bliss, the rhetorical thrust of this language is resolutely directed towards the present – towards convincing the subject of *Bildung* of Jarno's realization in *Wilhelm Meister*: "your 'America is here or nowhere'" (qtd. in Carlyle, *Sartor*: 148).[19] In spite of the philosophical trappings of Teufelsdröckh's discourse, the *Bildungsroman*'s language offers no merely theoretical "Solution", but is charged with a sense of immediacy and force that is strongly oriented towards action. The

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[19] Carlyle misattributes this famous line to Lothario in *Sartor Resartus.*

rhetorical dynamics of this language are summed up nicely by Teufelsdröckh in one of his more explicitly homiletic moments:

> Yes here, in this poor, miserable, hampered, despicable Actual, wherein thou even now standest, here or nowhere is thy Ideal: work it out therefrom; and working, believe, live, be free. Fool! The Ideal is in thyself, the impediment too is in thyself: thy Condition is but the stuff thou art to shape that same Ideal out of: what matters whether such stuff be of this sort or that, so the Form thou give it be heroic, be poetic? (260)

Like Teufelsdröckh's speech, the English *Bildungsromane* we have been studying set themselves the task of simultaneously naming the limitations of the actual and maintaining the reality of ideals and their transformative potential. In order to compass this challenging task, these texts builds on Carlyle's rhetorical achievement to develop a supple language capable not only of clear-sighted analysis, but of synthesizing, "shaping", and giving poetic form to highly mixed matter. Though it might traffic in disruptive forms, its net rhetorical effect is essentially constructive, ordering, and stabilizing. Unlike Voltaire – at least as Teufelsdröckh construes him – the language in which the genre schools its characters and readers offers not only "a torch for burning" but also "hammer[s] for building" (258). While I am not arguing for a triumphalist reading of the *Bildungsheld*'s imaginative power, the elastic language conceived by the *Bildungsroman* is deeply informed by the insight "[t]hat life develops from within" (Barrett Browning 2.485), and its special power, rather than actually eliminating the disagreeable aspects of reality, lies in its capacity to construct a livable space for individual subjectivity – for "life in life" (Barrett Browning 1.916) – even under the least favorable of circumstances. What Pater describes as "the art … of so relieving the ideal or poetic traits … in our everyday life … that … the mere drift or *debris* of our days, come to be as though it were not" might sound hedonistic in the context of the privileged Marius (65), but surely this rhetorical art performs a vital service to many of the other

protagonists, enabling them to preserve their psychic integrity amidst harsh and demoralizing external conditions. It is this elastic, improving language that sustains Alton in his "dingy, foul, reeking twelve-foot back-yard" (14) and the "civilized dungeon of brick and mortar" that constitutes the tailor's workroom (80); David, "reading as if for life" in his cold stepfather's household (67; 161) or "story-telling in the dark" at Salem House (105); Aurora, as she endures the cramped, emotionally-starved upbringing devised by her English aunt. Aurora's affirmation of the inward sense of freedom and "true life" afforded by the literary imagination (1.1067) responds specifically to the narrow feminine education that her aunt, she feels, has conceived to "ground [her] down … for household uses and proprieties" (1.1040-42), but her words gesture to the powerful compensatory function of literary language that enables all these characters to live and grow in the face of a hostile, unmeaning world – whether their difficulties are created by class disadvantages, or flawed parental authority:

> My soul was singing at a work apart
> Behind the wall of sense, as safe from harm
> As sings the lark when sucked up out of sight
> In vortices of glory and blue air. (1.1053-56)

The Victorian narrative of *Bildung*, then, conceives the civilizing language of literature as constructing alternate spaces for subjectivity to inhabit under the constraining pressures of the actual, and thereby allows the individual to live, as it were, in very small places – on very meager means. While it stirs the inner life and stimulates the imaginative expansion of self, it also stabilizes "the outer life" (Barrett Browning 1.1058-60), helping the individual "make [her] peace with Life" (1.679), reconciling her, at least temporarily, to things as they are, while sustaining the possibility of changing them. At best, then, literary language is imagined by the *Bildungsroman* as a linguistic resource that is

particularly adapted to modern civilization – for if it is a "natural" consequence of civilization that "the weight and importance of an individual, as compared with the mass, sink into greater and greater insignificance" (Mill, "Civilization" 126), what could be more useful than a language that acknowledges the individual's relative insignificance, and yet enables her to maintain and develop a space of meaning and uniqueness?

In spite of the remarkable adaptive powers afforded the individual by this literary language, its political valence, viewed with much suspicion by modern critics, did not go unquestioned by Victorian writers. Alton Locke, for example, voices one of the charges brought against Victorian notions of the literary by Chris Baldick and Terry Eagleton (e.g., Baldick 66), when he draws attention to the tendency of such imaginative discourse to debilitate and breed political apathy among the working classes:

> After all, our dreams do little harm to the rich. Those who consider Chartism as synonymous with devil-worship, should bless and encourage them, for the very reason for which we working men ought to dread them; for, quickened into prurient activity by the low, novel-mongering press, they help to enervate and besot all but the noblest minds among us. (82-83)

Notwithstanding the dangers of political co-optation, the Victorian *Bildungsroman* represents the consolidating, soothing effects of its literary language as vital to mental well-being and human development. As the examples above indicate, in many narratives of *Bildung*, it is literary meaning-making that enables the protagonist to survive and even develop under highly constrained external conditions. Affirming the idea that "life develops from within" (Barrett Browning 1.485), their literary abilities provide some means of the negotiating the "roads/ Betwixt the seen and the unseen" (2.468-69), affording characters like Jane Eyre, Alton Locke, David Copperfield, and Aurora Leigh a greater measure of power in shaping their inner lives. As a result, such characters are better able to preserve the integrity of their inner worlds in the face of external pressures,

and – since the "inner life inform[s] the outer life" (1.1068) – to make use of their limited external resources to realize their ideals.

Conversely, the consequences of attempting to dispense with this creative, reconciling power of the literary are shown to have dire consequences for human beings in spite of all the material advantages they might possess. Without the resources to make-believe in things as they "might be" (1.1109) – to buffer consciousness against the onslaught of "what is" (1.1108), such characters bear out the fearful truth of Aurora Leigh's remark, "'[T]is not in mere death that men die most" (3.12). In *Robert Elsmere*, the Squire's ambition to "[g]o to your grave with your eyes open" might sound heroic and even enlightened (Ward 562), but the text clearly shows that to have only a "torch for burning" and "no hammer for building" (Carlyle, *Sartor* 258) is not only ethically problematic, but to leave oneself vulnerable to the inner realities and unseen forces at work in the human psyche. Hence after a lifetime of "attacking" English beliefs and educational ideals, the Squire's fiercely critical intellect is impotent against his extreme "terror of things unseen" (374) – intractable imaginary forces that subject him to fits of insanity, reducing him to a savage beast:

> They rushed in and found Meyrick struggling in the grip of a white figure, that seemed to have the face of a fiend and the grip of a tiger. Those old blood shot eyes – those wrinkled hands at the throat of the doctor – horrible! (563)

Ultimately, then, Wendover's critical philosophy is shown to be decivilizing for himself, and, although it plays a significant role in the expansion of Elsmere's intellect, the novel suggests that on its own its capacity to contribute to social improvement is severely limited as well. In spite of its enlightenment imagery, the Squire's motto betrays the limitations of his philosophy. For all its pretensions to fearless vision, this compressed formulation of his life's work seems to have lost sight of other human beings – it frames

the Squire's aspirations in terms of an individualistic achievement, and there is no mention of others, or the impact of this vaunted clear-sightedness on their lives. More disturbing, however, is the manner in which the Squire's motto is quite literally centered on death. Such an unrelentingly critical discourse has little chance of motivating people to better things or to form a more ethical culture. Indeed, the text implies that an impulse towards violence has become the dominant rhetorical effect of the Squire's discourse – his assimilation of European biblical criticism has produced mainly "attacks" on his native culture, and certainly his efforts to "speak … what he conceived to be the whole bare truth to [Robert]" are motivated by an almost atavistic appetite for destruction – as the narrator describes it, a "cruel whimsical pleasure" (309), "[t]hat curious instinct of pursuit, that imperious wish to crush an irritating resistance" (315). Given the destructive, brutalizing tendencies of the Squire's rhetorical practices, it is hardly surprising that the end of his life should be tormented by madness and fits of violence.

Without cultivating the creative faculties, a model of textual practice that focuses only on the critical mode is not only powerless to sustain individual and social improvement, but even contributes to an insidious process of moral degradation. As if the Squire's fate were not enough, *Robert Elsmere* further emphasizes the dangers of excessively critical textual practices in the figure of Edward Langham. For all his great intellectual gifts (57) and "exceptional personal beauty" (54), Langham is the exact fictional embodiment of the specter that haunts John Stuart Mill during his personal crisis – the overly-analytical modern man "suffering from paralysis of some moral muscle or other; as if some of the normal springs of action in him had been profoundly and permanently weakened" (54-55). The problem with Langham's relentlessly critical

discourse is that it forces him to see too clearly the flawed nature of reality, leading him in his disillusionment to persuade himself of "[t]he uselessness of utterance, the futility of enthusiasm, the inaccessibility of the ideal, the practical absurdity of trying to realise any of the mind's inward dreams" (55). Langham's extreme negative idealism – his lofty aspiration to "pure intelligence, pure open-eyed rationality" (240) – not only condemns him to idiosyncrasy and isolation but leads him into contradictions that cause pain both to himself and others. Understandably hungry for human warmth and affection, he responds on several occasions to the friendship offered by Rose Leyburn, only to recoil again, chastising himself in the most extreme terms for "encroach[ing] on a young life, like some creeping parasitic growth, taking all, able to give nothing in return – not even one genuine spark of genuine passion" (240). As in so many of the cases examined earlier – Henchard, Eric, Conrad – this destructive language has a decisive impact on the outcome of Langham's struggles. Langham's critical and intellectual sensibilities might induce him to shrink from action, choices, and any form of positive statement, but the text makes it clear that his (inconsistent) efforts to avoid action also represent a course of action – in his efforts to refrain, as it were, from any kind of positive statement, his life and frustrated desires not only serve to articulate a distinct statement about the paralyzing effects of modern intellectual culture (433), but, like the underlined passage from Sénancour's *Réveries* (58), effectively constitute a "text" that demoralizes and blights hopes of human improvement. Portraying Langham's final struggle in terms of a "long and ghastly argument" with "a spectral reproduction of himself" (433), Ward suggests the folly of attempting to avoid action and utterance – his failure to persuade himself to act on his feelings of "remorse and terror, love and pity" (434) does not remove him from the

practical realm, but consummates the text of his "maimed" life (433). Whether he acknowledges it or not, therefore, Langham constructs a text that, no less than the person of the Ritualist clergyman Newcome (166), merely confirms the wretched limitations of humanity and denies its potential for growth and change.

By creating characters like Wendover and Langham to depict extreme types that influence and illuminate Robert's development, Ward employs one of the most important literary devices of the *Bildungsroman* – the technique that I referred to earlier as "the language of character". While most accounts of nineteenth-century rhetorical history tend to hold responsible the "interiorization" of rhetoric for the decline of the discipline during the period,[20] I would like to suggest that the *Bildungsroman* makes a distinctive contribution to the history of rhetorical thought by developing the metaphor between people and texts in particularly productive ways, thereby radically expanding the category of ethos. A fuller treatment of the genre's rhetorical innovations is beyond the scope of this chapter; suffice it to say that the notions of character as a textual construct – and, conversely, human beings as a rhetorical medium – are developed to a high level of sophistication, and play an important role in the formulation of the *Bildungsroman*'s improving language. The *Bildungsroman*'s exploration of the human dimensions of textuality might be read as building on the Christian rhetorical tradition, which had long placed a great deal of emphasis on the speaker's character. In *De doctrina Christiana* (427 CE), St. Augustine, for example, asserts that "the life of the speaker has greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of language"

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[20] While more recent scholarship has established that it is more accurate to speak of the transformation, rather than the disappearance, of rhetoric during this period (e.g., Wellbery; Ueding), it is still commonly assumed that the romantic "interiorization" of discourse resulted in a decline of interest in rhetoric and its study. See, e.g., the editors' introduction to Bizzell and Herzberg's *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* (2000).

(4.59) and exhorts the Christian preacher to aspire to live his life as a "flowing speech" (4.61). However, never were textual metaphors for people and humanizing metaphors for texts deployed so dexterously and in such varied ways as they are in the *Bildungsroman*.

Already in *Wilhelm Meister*, Goethe had adroitly exploited the rich array of possibilities that arise from figuring people as texts and vice-versa: key documents like the "Confessions of a Fair Saint" and Wilhelm's *Lehrbrief* emphasize the strong link between text and identity, and various characters function as texts representing Wilhelm's developing subjectivity – for example, Mignon might be read as an externalization of Wilhelm's innermost, poetic self, while characters like Aurelie function as a warning of the passionate extremes that he must learn to avoid. In *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle lays out the textual dimensions of humanity much more explicitly:

> Great Men are the inspired (speaking and acting) Texts of that divine BOOK OF REVELATIONS, whereof a Chapter is completed from epoch to epoch, and by some named HISTORY; to which inspired Texts your numerous talented men, and your innumerable untalented men, are the better or worse exegetic Commentaries, and wagonload of too-stupid, heretical or orthodox, weekly Sermons. (247)

Carlyle's striking textualization of human life gave the Victorian *Bildungsroman* a highly productive trope for thinking about the human dimensions of textuality, motivating writers to explore what the notion of the "language of character" in creative and fluid ways. If Carlyle suggests that people can usefully be conceived as texts, Aurora Leigh and David Copperfield anthropomorphize texts, inviting readers to consider how, at the other end of the continuum, texts assume human qualities for their users. For Barrett Browning's protagonist, "Poems are/ Men, if true poems" (3.90-91), and, like Aurora, the young David finds comfort and moral sustenance among his father's books:

> From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came

out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time. (66)

This figurative exchange between people and texts animates the textual design of the *Bildungsromane* we're examining on various levels. For one thing, character becomes an important unit of textual organization, and very importantly in the case of novels named for their main characters, provides a valuable means of gaining some purchase on the text's larger argument. Within the text, people do not only stand in for certain values or modes of using texts, the rhetorical power of the human image is emphasized – Aurora, for example, speaks of being

> … more moved, more raised, I say,
> By a simple word .. a broken easy thing
> A three-years infant might at need repeat,
> A look, a sigh, a touch upon the palm,
> Which meant less than "I love you," than by all
> The full-voiced rhetoric of those [pregnant thinkers of our time]. (4.1103-1108)

On yet a more sophisticated level, these Victorian *Bildungsromane* depicts characters employing other characters as a medium of textuality, using them to externalize aspects of their inner lives and to make sense of their relationship with others. On all these levels, then, the "language of character" affords the *Bildungsroman* a powerful superadded resource for thinking about textuality and its human implications – in particular, for modeling how its improving language works to sustain a sense of creativity and independent thought, and yet also to promote social integration.

To begin with, the humanization of textuality in the *Bildungsroman* supports the idea that the protagonist's changing patterns of speech and behavior are key to understanding the macro-rhetorical purpose of the text – as Carlyle's Editor remarks about the shadowy details of Teufelsdröckh's biography, "The Man is the spirit he worked in; not what he did, but what he became" (264). The humanized rhetorical

medium, moreover, provides an expanded field of textuality to explore the nature of this linguistic becoming – one in which the protagonist's actions and patterns of relationships – and not only their verbal behavior – are taken into consideration. When this expanded field of textual practice is considered, one notices that many of the protagonists initially engage in discourse that strongly asserts their difference and independence from their social context – and form (or reject) affiliations that express and support their sense of individuality and personal agency. At the beginning of their stories, when their autonomy and agency are clearly threatened by class disadvantages, negligent authority, and gender norms, a strongly imaginative, individualistic language is required to sustain the psychic integrity of the identities that Alton, David, and Aurora precariously inhabit. Their traffic in highly creative, imaginative textual activity is closely bound up with the need to challenge conventional forms of authority. In the case of Alton and Aurora, their very desire to be taken seriously as creative writers is in conflict with traditional social structures – which, as the accounts of their education indicate, do not expect or encourage working-people or women to participate in the discourse of the public sphere. Thus it is no surprise that the choice of vocation involves a break with characters who represent the traditional social unit of the family. Alton's literary studies estrange and eventually alienate him from his mother and sister, while Aurora's literary aspirations – and Romney's dismissive attitude towards them – strongly influence her rejection of him and his financial assistance in Book 2. In different ways, rigid social structures proscribe the very possibility of rhetorical agency – let alone rhetorical development – for these characters, whether the resistance manifests itself in Mrs. Locke's strict religious views, or Romney's condescending assumptions about women writers. Faced with such a

constraining social medium, a pose of creative defiance is the only means for Alton and Aurora to wrest some measure of rhetorical agency for themselves. Both texts depict their protagonists making crucial preliminary steps towards developing a public voice by distancing themselves from people who stand in for – and would assimilate them into – the society that threatens to devoice them.

Especially marked is Aurora's rejection of Romney – Barrett Browning hints that her protagonist is at least partially conscious of the highly performative dimension of her refusal to accept his gift. In spite of her latent feelings for Romney, Aurora makes him an embodiment of a social order in which authority is overwhelmingly masculine. In order to magnify her sense of autonomy, she articulates her symbolic defiance of this masculine authority with such energy that even she is aware of the extravagance both of her gesture and her description of it:

> As I spoke, I tore
> The paper up and down, and down and up
> And crosswise, till it fluttered from my hands,
> As forest-leaves, stripped suddenly and rapt
> By a whirlwind on Valdarno, drop again,
> Drop slow, and strew the melancholy ground
> Before the amazèd hills … why, so, indeed,
> I'm writing like a poet, somewhat large
> In the type of the image, and exaggerate
> A small thing with a great thing, topping it. (2.1163-71)

As critics have noted (e.g., Reynolds; Brown), Barrett Browning alludes to Milton here, ironically suggesting that the epic style associated with his poetry is incommensurate with her domestic subject-matter. However, Barrett Browning may have intended the allusion to be taken more seriously than Aurora thinks, for by invoking *Paradise Lost*, she hints that, at this stage at least, Aurora's sense of Romney's (benevolent) power is so great that the only way she can imagine some author-ity for herself is to assume an

oppositional position in relation to him – to play, as it were, Satan to Romney's God.[21]

Such a fierce declaration of autonomy might seem excessive – it brings tears to Romney's eyes (2.1175) – yet Barrett Browning's point is that it is necessary for resisting the images of feminine dependence deeply ingrained in Victorian social discourses. Aurora's half-acknowledged pose of Satanic defiance acknowledges her deeply internalized sense of Romney's power, but it also expresses her reckless determination to pursue her literary calling. Hence, even though her figuring of Romney as a tyrannical authority causes pain both to Romney and herself, it does succeed in creating for her a necessary space to develop independently and as a writer – a space of self-reliance that Romney, with the best intentions in the world, cannot give her.

If Aurora turns Romney into a synecdoche of the society she must oppose, David illustrates the workings of the *Bildungsroman*'s improving, humanized language in the way he employs the charismatic, rebellious James Steerforth as a metaphor for self – a metaphor with which to buttress his emergent subjectivity against the hostile, oppressive social structures in which he finds himself. Throughout their friendship, Steerforth is "a person of great power in [his] eyes" (99), and, by means of imaginative identification, David draws on this power to enhance his own sense of personal agency, first during his stay at Salem House, and later as an inexperienced young clerk in London. Significantly, it is Steerforth who initially encourages the young David's storytelling – the older narrator therefore establishes a strong connection between his beloved alter-ego and one

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[21] The Satanic overtones surrounding Aurora's rejection of Romney's financial gift may be discerned in the way that Aurora's triumphant assertion of independence immediately produces a sense of how this violent gesture of defiance is also socially estranging and self-destructive. Aurora's sense of triumph, realized metaphorically in the figure of reaching the top of a mountain (2.1120-26) is swiftly succeeded by the melancholy image of the autumnal leaves of Vallombrosa – which, as Margaret Reynolds and Sarah Annes Brown remind us, are used by Milton "to express the impotence of the fallen angels" (Brown 726).

of the "main points in the character [he] … develop[s] … in writing [his] life" – the habit of "ma[king] stories for [himself], out of the streets, and out of men and women" (179). In spite of the crucial role that Steerforth plays in activating David's literary powers, and the imaginary power he affords David's evolving selfhood, the narrator also makes clear the potential dangers of inhabiting Steerforth's persona. The exuberant, heroic individualism of this Byronic character might exert an empowering influence on one's sense of self, but it can carry a heavy price for others. Already at Salem House the darker side of Steerforth's personality manifests itself in his victimization of the hapless but kind Mr. Mell (ch. 7), although David is so strongly under Steerforth's spell at this stage that he can only think of "what a noble fellow [Steerforth] was in appearance, and how homely and plain Mr. Mell looked opposed to him" (109). The problematic consequences of David's uncritical devotion to Steerforth become ever clearer, however, as the creative energies of self embodied by the older boy degenerate into a destructive loss of self-control. Dickens's representation of David's drunken loss of self-possession under the influence of Steerforth – "theguidingstarofmyexist ence" (368) – may be amusing, but captures in his protagonist's demotic speech the self-destructive tendencies of the "undisciplined heart" (819). While the full extent of Steerforth's capacity for destruction is realized in his devastating effects on Mr. Peggotty's family – a tragedy for which David feels deeply responsible – the narrator emphasizes much earlier the price David must pay for identifying so closely with Steerforth. So prominent is Steerforth's place in David's imagination that he even feels implicated in his idol's past violence towards his cousin, and is haunted by the scar that he cannot help but superimpose on Rosa Dartle's portrait:

> It was a startling likeness, and necessarily had a startling look. The painter hadn't made the scar, but *I* made it; and there it was, coming and going: now confined to the upper lip as I had seen it as dinner, and now showing the whole extent of the wound inflicted by the hammer, as I had seen it when she was passionate. (306)

Although in the passage above, David's "wounding" of Miss Dartle occurs at several removes from reality – he imaginative superimposes the scar on a painted image of her – the imagined violence and attendant feelings of guilt are sufficiently disturbing on their own, and usefully illustrates how David's relationship with – and imaginative use of – Steerforth provide a very concrete means of educating David, and the reader, about the potentially destructive consequences for others of the individualistic, imaginative energy he embodies.

Just as David's movement to a more complex, discerning sense of affection for Steerforth (e.g., ch. 32) signals the novel's efforts to develop a language of character that tempers individual creativity with a greater sense of social responsibility, Aurora's career also traces the development of a model of textual practice that is more alive to its social implications – in particular, the importance of reconciling the claims of individual creativity with the need for community. While Aurora's dismissal of Romney might purchase a much-needed sense of space for her to develop as a person and writer, it also leaves her very much alone. Moreover, as pointed out earlier, this need for distance is itself symptomatic of an internalized sense of Romney's Godlike stature – long after she has rejected Romney's benevolence, she continues inwardly to protest against his assumed sense of her insignificance: "Ay," she complains after one of their later conversations, "he/ Supposed me a thing too small, to deign to know … some intruding, interrupting fly,/ Not worth the pains of his analysis" (4.1214-18). It is Aurora's own sense of inferiority that reinforces her estrangement from Romney, and in order to suture

this ruptured social bond, she cannot rely on the written word, but needs to work through the medium of other people. Particularly important in this process is the figure of Marian Erle, whose resilience following her abduction and rape provides Aurora with a concrete embodiment of feminine self-worth that transcends the need for social approval. Initially, Aurora finds in Marian an exaggerated version of her own latently anthropolatric way of relating to Romney – Marian's reverential awe towards her benefactor and aspirations to "prove the handmaid and the wife at once" (4.228) mark her as the Eve whom Aurora never could play. Later on, however, when suffering – and child-birth – have "killed" this self-abasing persona, Marian the "fallen" woman is imaginatively embraced by Aurora as mother, daughter, and sister to form a highly unorthodox family (7.116-32), a space of feminine value that is not governed by the rigid hierarchies that structure the traditional model of the family. This unconventional social unit plays an important role in liberating Aurora from the worshipful tendencies underlying her estrangement from Romney, teaching her to perceive the "traditional" feminine roles and qualities in a new light. Tenderness and nurturing care can be just as effective as – perhaps even more so than – more aggressive ways of articulating creative difference, for this unconventional family provides Aurora a new vehicle for externalizing her subjectivity – a fresh conceptual language, based on togetherness instead of separation, with which to think about and express individual values. No longer confined to the role of the solitary rebel, Aurora's intimacy with Marian and her child is critical to overcoming her interiorized sense of inadequacy, preparing her to renew her ties and work together with Romney to achieve social change.

The general movement towards reconciliation articulated by the protagonists'

evolving social configurations in these novels – and particularly the conventional

dénouement in marriage in *David Copperfield* and *Aurora Leigh*[22] – may lead to the

impression, however, that the improving language that I have been describing is merely a

resource for people to work out their problematic desires imaginatively without

disturbing the *status quo*. Is, then, the only change promoted by the *Bildungsroman*'s

"improving" language the kind of subjective adjustment that permits the subject to make

peace with "things as they are"? Does this reading of the model of textual practice

endorsed by the *Bildungsroman* in fact confirm its function, as Morretti and D. A. Miller

suggest, as a device for containing the radical energies of youth – a mechanism that

substitutes internal conflict and imaginary freedom for action in the real world? As

already noted in the case of *Jane Eyre*, the Victorian *Bildungsroman* was certainly aware

of the dangers of its critical energies being neutered – in *David Copperfield*, the figure of

Julia Mills provides another example of how the capacity to participate vicariously in the

emotional lives of others might simply offer a genteel way of deriving pleasurable

excitement in a highly civilized state of society. Yet the Carlylean genealogy I've

constructed for the *Bildungsroman* suggests that any imaginative solution the genre might

offer would be incomplete if not translated into practice. As Teufelsdröckh remarks,

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[22] John Jordan's excellent essay, "The Social Sub-text of *David Copperfield*" (1985), provides a good
example of the kind of reasoning that makes contemporary critics so resistant to David's success at the end:
"To understand the novel [as a narrative of middle-class heroism] is relatively easy, though for many
readers it proves somewhat dissatisfying. All it requires is that we accept David's version of his life and
along with it the values of his middle-class viewpoint. It also requires, however, that we collaborate with
David in overlooking his betrayals of Emily and that we blind ourselves in the self-serving omissions and
distortions in his narrative perspective" (89-90). To regard David's integration into Victorian society in a
more sympathetic light is not necessarily to erase all his shortcomings, which, after all, his own textual
practices have made available to the reader. Aurora's happy-ending has also attracted much negative
criticism. Critics who agree that *Aurora Leigh*'s is an "essentially conservative feminism" (Brown) include
Deirdre David and Elaine Showalter.

"Conviction is not possible till [it converts itself into Conduct]… Most true is it, as a wise man teaches us, that "Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by Action" (259). In spite of the imputed conventionality of their endings, the exuberant energies of the imagination are not simply consigned in *David Copperfield* and *Aurora Leigh* to an earlier stage of development – the people that they become continue to traffic in literary creativity, even if they have learned to employ – and control – such power in more thoughtful, socially responsible ways. Not only does David record his imaginative debt to Steerforth "at [his] best" (801) at several points in his life-story (e.g., 462), the profession that he finally settles on – that of novelist – is far less pedestrian, and much more creative work than his earlier plans to become a proctor, and indeed represents an adult version of the storytelling encouraged by Steerforth at Salem House. Similarly, if marriage symbolizes Aurora's social re-integration after her self-imposed exile for the sake of poetry, it is a marriage made possible, among other things, by Romney's greater appreciation of the art for which she rejected him. Far from demanding a renunciation of her art, the Leighs' union promises to give just as – or perhaps even more – important a role to Aurora's poetry in their efforts to promote social change.

In *David Copperfield* and *Aurora Leigh*, the co-existence of progressive values and relative prosperity at the end make it much easier to think of the *Bildungsroman* as a genre that strives to coordinate internal and external civilization, promoting a model of textual practice that enables the individual to use language as – indeed, to become – an agent of social change, while maintaining harmonious social ties with others. It may seem, however, far more questionable – even incongruous – to speak of the rhetorical ends of *Alton Locke*, *Marius*, and *Robert Elsmere* in terms of "improvement" and "social

integration". The trials endured by these characters – mental as well as physical – do not simply culminate in death, but death far away from their native communities and familiar surroundings, in some form of estrangement from the societies they would change. Alton dies on board ship before reaching the New World; Marius spends his last days under the care of "rude" country people in a remote rural area (292-293); Robert finally succumbs to phthisis in Algiers, outside the Anglican faith so beloved to Catherine. Is the term "*Bildungsroman*", then, as Todd Kontje invites us to consider (109), a misnomer for such apparently pessimistic novels, in which characters appear to undergo not so much a process of formation as of self-annihilation? How can these characters exert an improving influence on their societies and readers when it seems so difficult to believe in even their own "improvement"?

Notwithstanding the sober endings of these novels, all these characters, as suggested earlier, experience an expansion of consciousness that is reflected and realized in their rhetorical practice, and is particularly evident in the wider, more inclusive audience and social medium they imagine for their works and lives. As a Chartist, Alton's reform efforts are confined mainly to furthering the interests of the working class, but his bitter experiences with the Chartist movement and his relationship with Eleanor Ellerton convince him that "there are other classes to be considered beside yourselves," that "the nation is neither the few nor the many, but the all," and that "it is only by the co-operation of all the members of a body, that any one member can fulfil its calling in health and freedom" (379). At the end, he is called upon to aspire not simply to be a Cockney poet, but to write for the whole English nation, and, indeed, for modern civilization (384-85). While Marius's development is not as overtly political, he too

experiences a definite change of heart, compelled by a sense of compassion for "those whom [the most advanced philosophies of his day] have left here below" (268) to move beyond the individualistic Cyrenaicism to which he has hitherto subscribed. As for Robert, unbelief in orthodox Christianity so radically expands the scope of his pastoral and philanthropic activities that he eventually succeeds in moving even his staunchly Christian wife to declare that "God has not one language, but many" (510). To be sure, it would be difficult to describe these short lives as happy or successful in any unqualified sense, but there is certainly there is much to be affirmed in the hard-won personal growth achieved in these novels.

Even if one accepts that these characters undergo a process of change that can justly be described as "improvement", in what sense can they be said to be improving? Given the "unhistoric" impact of their words and deeds on the wider state of things as they are, do these texts merely confirm the notion that literature "makes nothing happen" (Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" line 36)? It is here, then, that an understanding of the Victorians' humanized notion of textuality proves particularly valuable, for, while death removes characters from the fictional world, it potentially enables them to exert an even more powerful rhetorical influence as texts in the real world. Alton's biography, for instance, acquires an increased sense of pathos by virtue of his untimely death, providing a prime example of how death in the Victorian *Bildungsroman* might be read not as dissolution, but as dying, like Keats's Apollo, into textual life (*Hyperion* bk. 3, line 130). As Alton makes clear at the beginning of his story, the cultural vitality of one's writings is not to be undervalued – especially in a world in which "thousands 'die and give no sign'" (19). In any case, although the lives of these characters are in one sense

"unhistoric" (*Middlemarch* 822), these novels go out of their way to emphasize that their impact on their societies as human texts is far from negligible. In the first place, however ready we might be to regard them as misfits or prodigies, none of these characters die in isolation, but in the company of sympathetic individuals who are willing to retell and transmit their stories – and whose efforts to do so are borne out in the material existence of the text encountered by the reader. Thus, Crossthwaite ensures that Alton lives on not only in his published poetry, but in a biography whose candor more than compensates for the excision of his political poetry earlier in the novel. In *Marius* and *Robert Elsmere*, the way in which the main characters leave their societies the better for having lived in them is realized in even more concrete ways. Robert leaves behind "many works of charity" and the "New Brotherhood", a secular philanthropic organization that the narrator assures us "still exists, and grows" (576), but more striking than these is the development he serves to catalyze in his wife, whose "present mind and its outlook" are described as "no more the mind of her early married life than the Christian philosophy of to-day is the Christian philosophy of the Middle Ages" (534). It is perhaps in winning Catherine's great mental and spiritual strength that the continued vitality of Robert's improving character is most immediately realized, for after his death, "not one of those whom Robert Elsmere had loved was forgotten by his widow" (576). As for Marius, the narrator might register some unease over his representation as a martyr, yet this Christian interpretation of his life is far better deserved than the negative virtue evoked by "his old prayer," "*Tristem neminem fecit*" ("He made no one unhappy") (293). Marius, in fact, employs his very person to purchase Cornelius's freedom, becoming, in unconscious imitation of Christ, a sign of his great love for his Christian friend. By substituting his

body for Cornelius's, he effectively proclaims the Christianity that he believes he is assuming only in name, at the same time, also contributing to the continued vitality of the Early Christian community by enabling, by means of this stratagem, Cornelius's marriage to Cecilia. Thus, in death, these improving characters impart a new, wider social significance to Tennyson's suggestion that "men may rise on stepping stones/ Of their dead selves to higher things" (*In Memoriam* 1.3-4).

The language of Christianity might continue to shape and resonate through the stories of these characters, but these novels do not rely on the reward of eternal life in heaven to guarantee the worth of their lives. Rather, the two novels illustrate clearly that one of the *Bildungsroman*'s most powerful means of persuasion lies in the way it aligns the becoming of the protagonist with the emergence of the new in this world, showing how such improving characters participate, in the very fibers of their being, in bringing forth a better, if still imperfect, future. Thus, Marius's various anticipations of an ideal "to come" finally find their ultimate expression in his sacrifice for Cornelius, whom he regards as "[m]ore than brother [but] like a son also" (288), and through whom he feels connected to this vision of an improved world:

> A new hope had sprung up in the world of which he, Cornelius, was a depository, which he was to bear onward in it. Identifying himself with Cornelius in so dear a friendship, through him, Marius seemed to touch, to ally himself to, actually to become a possessor of the coming world. (289)

In a similar vein, Ward's narrator defends Robert against the charge of weakness when he succumbs to the desire to find out more about the biblical scholarship that jeopardizes his faith:

> Might not the other half [the world] plead that in every generation there is a minority of these mobile, impressionable, defenceless natures, who are ultimately at the mercy of experience, at the mercy of thought, at the mercy (shall we say?) of truth; and that, in fact, it is from this minority that all human advance comes? (315)

The alignment of these characters' process of becoming with the civilizing weight of history itself not only asserts their subtle yet decisive shaping influence on their fictional communities, but argues for the far-reaching power of their struggles to incarnate the language of improvement within the medium of the actual – a gradual but ultimately irresistible process in which the *Bildungsroman*, and its readers, play a critical role.

CHAPTER 4

Civilizing Women: The Power of Connecting Small Things with Great

In the final movement of *Miss Marjoribanks*, amidst the excitement of the approaching election at Carlingford, the indomitable heroine suddenly finds herself in a highly embarrassing social situation. Just as she is about to engage in campaign deliberations with Mr. Ashburton, Lucilla's *tête-à-tête* with her chosen candidate is abruptly interrupted by Mr. Cavendish – an old flame, who, after ten years of self-imposed exile, is determined to reclaim his former prestige by running for the same seat as Lucilla's man. While Mr. Ashburton is disconcerted by his opponent's assumed intimacy with his "fair counsellor" (342), Mr. Cavendish is outraged by this blow to his political – if not romantic – aspirations. He becomes increasingly "savage" (377) and "quite violent" in his disregard for social propriety (378). Lucilla, however, is more than equal to this emergency, and holds in check the hostile masculine forces surrounding her with characteristic *élan*:

> [S]he gave the one rival her hand while she held the arm of the other, at the door of the dining-room … They were both looking a little black, though the gloom was moderate in Mr. Ashburton's case; but as for Lucilla, she stood between them a picture of angelic sweetness and goodness, giving a certain measure of her sympathy to both – Woman the Reconciler, by the side of those other characters of Inspirer and Consoler, of which the world has heard. The two inferior creatures scowled with politeness at each other, but Miss Marjoribanks smiled upon them both. Such was the way in which she overcame the difficulties of the meeting. (378)

Deliberately juxtaposing the men's dark looks with Lucilla's deftly-assumed sweetness and light, Mrs. Oliphant's carefully balanced syntax and imagery achieve in this passage an ekphrastic quality that both mocks and pays tribute to one of the most

enduring icons of Victorian literature and culture – woman as civilizer. One of several critical moments in the novel at which the "savage" impulses of men are deflected and contained by the civilizing influence of women, this scene economically illustrates the cultural power of this figure. More striking, however, is Oliphant's sophisticated appropriation of the Victorian angel. Both author and her protagonist display a knowing attitude towards the conventionality of this figure, yet avail themselves – with gusto – of its rhetorical possibilities. Lucilla's performance is clearly an expedient to maneuver out of a tight situation – her "sweetness" and "goodness" can no more be taken at face value than the perfunctory politeness between the two men. As for Oliphant, Lucilla's mobilization of the domestic angel provides an occasion for humor – at the men's expense – demystifying the idealized abstractions of selfless womanhood named in the passage. Such icons of feminine virtue, the narrator suggests, need not be viewed simply as imposing absurd demands on women, and might in fact offer an invaluable source of cultural authority. At the same time, Oliphant raises questions about the actual efficacy of Woman the Civilizer – Lucilla may think her ruse successful, but does the cosmetic nature of the reconciliation she engineers merely confirm the triviality of women's influence? Are Lucilla's diplomatic efforts merely a childish distraction from real politics? Any attempt to answer such questions is complicated further when the reader recalls that these men are not primarily competing for Lucilla's affections – but for her political support.

If the passage generates unsettling questions about the civilizing woman's cultural significance, it makes at least this much clear: to the Victorians, the relationship between women and the civilizing process was by no means as straightforward as critics of the

domestic angel habitually make it out to be. The figure of woman as civilizer was capable of provoking much critical reflection, and the wider social implications of domestic influence was the subject of active inquiry. If, as Deirdre David has argued, women came to function "as Victorian symbols of civilization" (204), they were, as such symbols, very much available for appropriation and transformation. As the passage above suggests, Woman the Civilizer performed a much wider range of cultural functions than constituting empire (David) or consolidating middle-class control (Langland 22). Focusing on several mid- and late-Victorian narratives of feminine development, I show that these texts illuminate the concept of civilization elaborated earlier in particularly significant ways. Victorian writers inserted women into the discourse of civilization through diametrically opposed arguments, representing them either as the chief agent of this process, or as a major countervailing force. As various critics have pointed out, both narratives about women and civilization could be oppressive to those they sought to represent. In this chapter, I want to move beyond ideological critique of the civilizing angel and (one of) her polar opposites, the infantilized woman-child, to focus on how these texts engage the competing arguments about women and civilization on the level of form. By approaching such arguments as rhetorical entities whose style and figures may be analyzed and appropriated, these novels and plays manipulate the imagery of scale, for example, to inflect the competing narratives in surprising ways and to suggest creative solutions to the conundrums they pose.

In order to develop a sense of the debate about women and civilization during this period, I begin by considering a variety of influential texts on the place and power of women in nineteenth-century Britain. Do these texts position women as agents or objects

of civilization? Drawing on Sylvana Tomaselli's meta-critical intervention in "The Enlightenment Debate on Women" (1985), I show that both arguments identifying women with and opposing them to civilization powerfully animate Victorian writings on the "Woman Question." The paradox – and possibilities – of feminine influence in this discourse may be traced, moreover, to its modest scale and enclosure. Whether Victorian writers viewed the domestic sphere as a vital seedbed for human creativity and progressive values or as a space of mental stasis and cultural stagnation, they attribute its peculiar influence to its affiliation with everyday micro-processes and the relative autonomy that exists in this domain.

Given the duality of their thinking about women's influence on civilization, does the Victorians' concept of civilization empower women, or place them in a double bind? In the second part of the chapter, I examine two mid-Victorian female *Bildungsromane* that actively engage with the terms and imagery of the debate sketched in the opening section. Both George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866) foreground the constraints placed on women by the conflicting theses about their relationship to civilization, but also attempt to imagine how women might realize their potential and contribute to social improvement by working creatively with – and against – the cultural roles available to them. Through the development of two very different female protagonists, these novels imaginatively explore the contradictions resulting from such opposing views of women, but also gesture to the possibility of synthesis.

The third section then considers several dramatic texts later in the period that thematize women's education. Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), its English

adaptation, *Breaking a Butterfly* (1884), and George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) all appear to be dominated by the argument that tends to belittle women by positioning them as the objects of civilization, yet remain committed to the idea that social improvement depends critically on women. Like Eliot's and Oliphant's novels, these texts counter the disabling tendencies of the belittling argument by engaging concrete aspects of its form. Working against the devaluation of everyday theatricality, Ibsen and Shaw reveal the cultural force – and educational power – of linguistic creativity and performance in the domestic sphere, even "low" forms of literariness – such as Nora's melodramatic imaginings – that carry little or no literary prestige.

The chapter closes by reflecting on the literary implications of these various attempts to represent women's development and its social impact. Do the writers' methods of representing women's development attempt to incorporate notions of change on a formal level, or do they merely rely on – and reinforce – literary and generic conventions? If these texts represent literary language as a valuable resource for marginalized groups such as women, the Woman Question, I suggest, afforded an important venue for conceptualizing the social power of literature, and, through its implications for domestic culture, shaped the idea of literature as a social practice.

Angels or Demons? Victorian Representations of Women's Influence on Civilization

In "The Enlightenment Debate on Women" (1985), Sylvana Tomaselli offered a meta-critical intervention that usefully identifies two basic arguments that have long structured thinking about women's relationship to civilization. On the one hand, her influential essay documents the tendency of contemporary feminist scholars to reinforce "the facile

alignment of the conceptual opposition of woman to man under the perennial nature-culture dichotomy" (102) – that is, to represent women as objects, if not enemies, of civilization. On the other, Tomaselli's own archival research on late-eighteenth-century "conjectural histories" draws attention to a theoretical tradition that "linked women, not, as is all too swiftly done, to nature, but to culture and the process of its historical development" (101).[1] Drawing on Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau, Denis Diderot, and William Alexander, Tomaselli represents her recovery of "the view that woman civilises, that she cultivates, refines, perhaps even adulterates and corrupts" (105) as a corrective to radical feminist critiques that insist on women's "virginal quality" relative to civilization (104).[2] Aligning women with nature, such feminist discourse one-sidedly represents them – like nature – as passive victims of a male-dominated civilization, when in fact Tomaselli shows there was a significant body of eighteenth-century writing that recognized women's key role in shaping the "history of civilisation and manners" (121).

In this section, I expand my opening comments on *Miss Marjoribanks* by demonstrating the remarkable degree to which the conflicting arguments Tomaselli describes co-existed and collided in Victorian literary culture. Surveying a range of

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[1] In her more recent work, Tomaselli has shown her continued interest in elaborating and exploring the obscured history of "the realm of mores, morals and education with which women have been particularly identified for centuries" ("The most public sphere of all" 239). In "The most public sphere of all: the family" (2001), for example, she highlights Mary Wollstonecraft's emphasis on the importance of women and the domestic sphere to social reform: "What she contended was that husbands' and wives' perceptions of themselves and of each other were the building-blocks of society, and that the condition of women was the true and only starting point of social and political change, however limited or ambitious" (241).

[2] There are interesting parallels between these conflicting conceptualizations of women's relationship to culture and the opposing paradigms for understanding literature's relationship to civilization that was sketched in the Introduction. Just as the feminist critics Tomaselli mentions insist on women's "virginal quality" relative to a male-dominated culture, literary critics seeking to affirm literature against an ethically-compromised civilization tend to emphasize how this literature disrupts, subverts, or in some way opposes the normative values of its society.

prominent Victorian texts dealing with women and their place in society, I show how powerful arguments constructing women as agents as well as objects of civilization were readily available during the period. These antithetical views of women were present not simply as shadowy fantasies or the stuff of witty paradox, but as thoughtfully elaborated theories about their position and powers in modern society. In particular, I show that Victorian evaluations of women's influence on civilization are a function of how writers interpreted their traffic in what I shall style "microscopic" forms of power. The significance of this formulation will be elaborated more fully later, but for now it should generally be understood to refer to the habits, dispositions, as well as forms of agency that women acquire in the course of negotiating the minutiae and enclosed spaces of domestic existence.

It is perhaps no surprise that arguments forcefully asserting women's civilizing powers should have enjoyed wide currency during the era that gave us Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1854), yet Woman the Civilizer was not simply a vague, visionary figure or male fantasy, but a role through which writers of both sexes attempted to imagine a realistic basis for feminine power. Thus, while for the most part writers such as Sarah Stickney Ellis and Sarah Lewis accept the conventional boundaries imposed on women's agency, their highly successful treatises on the role of women strive to reveal the hidden significance of domestic culture, arguing that it is through these seemingly inconsequential channels that women most effectively exercise their civilizing powers. In *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (1839), Mrs. Ellis asserted that it was woman's "particular province to preside" over the domestic sphere. This, she emphasized, was no light responsibility, since it is this sphere of duty

that gives "the tone to English character" (39): "a nation's moral wealth," she tells her imagined addressee, "is in your keeping" (13). Similarly, Sarah Lewis's *Woman's Mission* (1839), inspired by Louis Aimé Martin's *Sur l'Education des Mères de Familles* (1834; trans. 1842), claimed for women "no less an office than that of instruments (under God) for the regeneration of the world" (11), but maintained that they would "best fulfil [their mission] by moving in the sphere assigned them by Providence" (47).

It was not only women writers who sought to valorize feminine agency in the domestic sphere. By working to consolidate women's authority in the household and establishing the crucial importance of domestic culture to society at large, Ellis and Lewis in fact converge with no less eminent a writer than Goethe, whose aesthetic and philosophical achievements had become increasingly available to Victorian readers through the efforts of such mediators as Carlyle, Sarah Austin, and G. H. Lewes (see Ashton). In his classic *Bildungsroman*, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Goethe privileges the domestic sphere over its public counterpart as a space in which the Enlightenment ideals of inner harmony and independence might be realized. "[W]here is there any station higher than the ordering of the house?" asks the charismatic Lothario (425), while Theresa, the novel's "genuine Amazon" (414), embodies the superior opportunities for self-cultivation and "inward mastery" that domesticity affords women (426). Goethe suggests, moreover, that it is upon women's skilful domestic management that men's capacity for self-realization depends. Through her industry in the household, a women "procures her husband genuine independence, that which is interior and domestic" (426), thus enabling him to "direct his mind to lofty objects" (426) and act effectively in the public realm.

John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) makes clear this vital importance of feminine agency to the formation of men. In his lecture, "Of Queens' Gardens," Ruskin cites the poetry of Dante Rossetti and Coventry Patmore to figure the change that women might produce in terms of the difference between beast and man – even between the human and the divine. Ruskin quotes Rossetti's early Italian poet telling his beloved, "A man from a wild beast/ Thou madest me, since for thy love I lived" (110), and employs a passage from Patmore's *Angel in the House* to exhort women not to undervalue their power, warning them not to "spoil … the bread and spill … the wine,/ Which, spent with due, respective thrift,/ Had made brutes men, and men divine!" (114). As Ellis and Lewis had done earlier,[3] Ruskin also links women explicitly to education. Drawing on evidence from the works of Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott, he shows how women emerge as "infallibly faithful and wise counselors" (107), arguing that "in all cases, with Scott as with Shakespeare, it is the woman who watches over, teaches, and guides the youth; it is never, by any chance, the youth who watches over or educates his mistress" (109).

Significantly, all these writers are keen on establishing the wider social implications of women's civilizing power. Lewis, for example, insists that women's agency in the domestic sphere has the potential to serve as a "great … engine in the regeneration of society" (61), while Ruskin is clearly interested in extending women's sphere of activity beyond the merely personal:

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[3] Ellis, for example, asserts that "An influence fraught either with good or evil, [women] must have … [B]y neglecting to obtain an influence which shall be beneficial to society, they necessarily assume a bad one" (49). Beyond arguing that women should be qualified to educate men, Lewis places a great deal of emphasis on self-formation: "The work of individual self-formation is a duty not only to ourselves and our families, but to our fellow-creatures at larger; it is the best and most certainly beneficial exercise of philanthropy" (3).

what the woman is to be within her gates, as the centre of order, the balm of distress, and the mirror of beauty; that she is also to be without her gates, where order is more difficult, distress more imminent, loveliness more rare (132).

Similarly for Goethe, women's effective ordering of the domestic realm provides not only the basis for, but, ideally, the model for sound statesmanship, enabling a man to "act in the state the same character which so well becomes his wife at home" (426).

If Victorian literary culture produced powerful arguments fueling – and fueled by – the image of woman as civilizer, it also sustained a range of discourses that placed women and feminine culture in opposition to civilization, representing them, at best, as requiring to be civilized, and, at worst, as regressive, disruptive obstacles to the civilizing process. Extreme versions of this argument have been studied at length by, for example, Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) and Nina Auerbach's *Woman and the Demon* (1982). These critics focus on – and celebrate – the representation of women in Victorian literature and culture as a destructive force, a source of disorder and radical energy that threaten civilized norms and notions of respectability. Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849) registers the Victorians' awareness of this rhetorical trend through the eponymous heroine's description of an imagined encounter with a mermaid. Disturbed by Shirley's "monstrous likeness of ourselves," Caroline protests that "we are neither temptresses, nor terrors, nor monsters" – only to be reminded by her friend that "There are men who ascribe to 'women,' in general, such attributes" (246).

While most writers on this side of the question did not go so far as to figure women as the demonic embodiment of some anti-civilization principle, they nevertheless represent women and domestic culture as backward, and therefore a hindrance to the civilizing process. Bartle Massey, the otherwise enlightened schoolmaster in George

Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), exemplifies this moderate form of misogyny, comparing women to "adders and wasps, and hogs and wild beasts" and other minor "evils that belong to this state o' probation" (240). The assumption that women are somehow closer to nature, and lower than men in the chain of beings, is borne out in such comments as, "where's the use of talking to a woman with babbies? … she's got no conscience – no conscience – it's all run to milk!" (246). Interestingly, since these comments are directed at his dog, the immediate object of his misogynistic remarks exemplifies the tendency to collapse the distinction between women and animals.

One of the most carefully developed arguments to focus on the decivilizing aspects of women's influence and domestic culture comes, ironically, from John Stuart Mill's proto-feminist tract, *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Determined to strengthen his appeal to remove the socio-political constraints on Victorian women, Mill was prepared to highlight the very real defects that these constraints produced in them and the households they governed. Dismissing as "silly panegyrics" notions of women's "superior moral goodness" (195), Mill represents domestic culture in its present state as a throwback to a more primitive age:

> a single relic of an old world of thought and practice exploded in everything else …as if a gigantic dolmen, or a vast temple of Jupiter Olympus, occupied the site of St. Paul's and received daily worship, while the surrounding Christian churches were only resorted to on fasts and festivals. (148)

Mill provides numerous ways in which this survival, "in the very heart of society," of the "right of the strong to power over the weak" tells on personal and public life (199). He represents marriage as "the only actual bondage known to our law" and women as "legal slaves to their husbands (197), suggesting that the family is more often "a school of

despotism" (168) than a "school of sympathy" – "a school of willfulness, overbearingness, unbounded self-indulgence" (161-62).

In addition to their corrupting effects on personal character, the social and legal inequalities between the sexes, Mill argues, serve to render domestic culture a pernicious influence on the public sphere. Because women are "taught [they] [have] no business with things out of [the domestic] sphere … [they] seldom [have] any honest and conscientious opinion on them" (163). Confined as they are to a "narrow circle of personal and family selfishness" (*On Liberty* 127), women's influence "is often anything but favorable to public virtue" (*Subjection of Women* 203), since a wife affects a man's "conduct in things in which she may not be qualified to influence it for good – in which her influence may be not only unenlightened, but employed on the morally wrong side; and in which he would act better if left to his own prompting" (163). On the whole, Mill presents domestic influence as a "drag … upon every aspiration … to be better than public opinion requires" (205) – a retarding force that prevents "people in general" from moving beyond the "mediocrity of respectability" (207). He foregrounds the limitations of women and domestic culture not to feed misogynistic assumptions, but to indict the systemic ways in which a male-dominated society has hindered women's development. Still, the image of women he presents is far from flattering, and sharply contradicts the elevated role of civilizing angel imagined by Ellis, Lewis, and Ruskin. As inhabitants of an anachronistic, backward space, Mill implies, women are hardly qualified to act as civilizing geniuses; on the contrary, in their current state they exert a retrogressive influence on society.

Mill's explication of the dangers posed by women to social improvement clearly illustrates that the view that women are antithetical to civilization was as powerfully represented in Victorian culture as the idea that they are civilization's principal agents – even by those most sympathetic to women's cause. The co-existence in this period of these diametrically opposed arguments was such that they even occur in the same text, as, for example, in *David Copperfield*, where David exchanges infantilized – and infantilizing – women like his mother and Dora Spenlow for strong, redemptive figures such as Betsey Trotwood and Agnes Wickfield. To close this section, I propose to show that this deep-seated split in Victorian thinking about women can better be understood in terms of the different ways in which writers conceived of their access to various forms of microscopic power – power that inheres in the capacity to analyze and manipulate the micro-processes that organize social life.[4]

Indeed, the debate about women represents a key site at which the Victorians articulated their growing interest in theorizing the everyday micro-processes that shape human existence. Both proponents and detractors of Woman the Civilizer were agreed that the everyday micro-processes in which women trafficked constituted a significant force for good or ill. Ellis apologizes in her Preface for entering "into the apparently

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[4] I am suggesting, then, that these nineteenth-century writers were very much engaged with questions that modern theorists of the everyday are interested in – that is, how the micro-processes that organize social life might be analyzed and manipulated. Michel Foucault's seminal work in *Discipline and Punish* (1975; trans. 1977) has, of course, played a key role in drawing attention to the "microphysics of power" that underwrites disciplinary technology in modern societies, and his more recently published lectures, "Society Must Be Defended" (1997; trans. 2003) attempt to articulate a "biopolitics" that aims to comprehend and control micro-processes such as biological reproduction and sickness in aggregate (see, for example, lecture 11). Whereas Foucault is better known for illuminating how "miniscule" technical procedures acting on and with details serve to produce mechanisms of social control, Michel de Certeau has written persuasively about how similarly "microbe-like," quotidian "tactics" might allow marginalized groups or individuals to appropriate established forms and express their creativity (xiv).

insignificant details of familiar and ordinary life" with which Victorian women had to deal, but the aim of the book is precisely to show that "to women belong the minute and particular observance of all those trifles which fill up the sum of human happiness or misery" (38-39). Just as Ellis emphasizes how much depends on women's delicate perception and ordering of her "microscopic" sphere (33), Lewis highlights the cumulative force of those innumerable "nameless and undefinable" influences that women – whether they will or not – exert on those dwelling in their households (14). "The man carries with him to the forum the notions which the woman has discussed with him by the domestic hearth," she writes, tracing the prevailing political mood of the nation to its multiple origins in individual homes: "from the household of every citizen issue forth the errors and the prejudices which govern the world" (38). Even Mill, who goes out of his way to debunk facile assumptions about women's improving influence, nevertheless acknowledges the power they wield in the household by virtue of "the insensible contagion of their feelings and dispositions," which enables them to "obtain a degree of command over the conduct of [their intellectual superiors] altogether excessive and unreasonable" (163).

Where these thinkers disagree, then, is over the tendencies of this microscopic power and the relationship between such forms of agency and the bounded nature of women's sphere. For writers who affirm the domestic sphere as the center of enlightened, civilized order, its modest, enclosed dimensions were inseparable from the range of special powers it afforded its guardians. For Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, the domestic sphere offers an ideal space for a woman to exercise her creativity because it is artificially insulated from the intractable flux that prevails in the external world,

where men are so constrained by circumstances beyond their control that they in fact "rule … nothing" (425). Continuously called upon to exercise a variety of her creative powers within a zone of relative autonomy, the housewife "acquires all sorts of knowledge" (426), and is thereby protected from over-specialization – one of the chief dangers of modern civilization.[5] In the writings of Ellis and Ruskin, one similarly finds women's sphere imagined as an oasis from the least desirable aspects of modernity. Ellis, for example, suggests that an internalized image of the domestic sphere might serve as a "second conscience" amidst the "many voices, which in the mart, the exchange, or the public assembly" tempt a man to compromise his integrity for "the mammon of unrighteousness" (52-53). Likewise, Ruskin represents the feeling of home that the "true wife" sustains as "the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division" (*Sesame and Lilies* 116).

Beyond valorizing it in terms of those undesirable elements against which it forms a protective shield, these writers also affirm woman's sphere in positive terms, suggesting that women's focused activity within such modest bounds actually enable them to acquire a range of "microscopic" powers that they might not otherwise develop. As Ellis puts it:

> …the sphere of a domestic woman's observation is microscopic. She is therefore sensible of defects within that sphere, which, to a more extended vision, would be imperceptible. If she looked abroad for her happiness, she would be less disturbed by any falling off at home. If her interest and her energies were diffused through a wider range, she would be less alive to the minuter claims upon her attention. (33)

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[5] In his *Introductory Lectures to Political Economy* (1832), Richard Whately quotes Adam Smith at length to illustrate "[o]ne danger arising from excessive division of labour" – "how the mind is apt to be narrowed – the intellectual faculties undeveloped, or imperfectly and partially developed, through too great concentration of the attention on the performance of a single, and sometimes very simple, operation" (195). Reviewing the chief arguments against civilization, Mill, too, draws attention to "the contrast between narrow mechanical understanding, produced by a life spent in executing by fixed rules a fixed task, and the varied powers of the man in the woods, whose subsistence and safety depend at each instant upon his capacity of extemporarily adapting means to ends" ("Coleridge" 123).

According to Ellis, the concentration of mental energies within the modest scale of the domestic economy enables women to develop a microscopic vision that, among other things, affords "a readiness of application of the right means to the desired end" (29) and facilitates intensive modes of reading.[6] The "comparatively limited circle" to which women are confined becomes in this view a source of strength (31), rather than a cause of intellectual narrowness, for

> an acute vision directed to immediate objects, whatever they may be, will often discover as much of the wonders of creation, and supply the intelligent mind with food for reflection as valuable, as that which is the result of a widely extended view, where the objects, though more numerous, are consequently less distinct. (32)

Ruskin imagines women developing a different kind of microscopic vision within their artificial enclosure of sweetness and light – one based of a greater capacity for empathy, particularly a feeling for absent others. Hence he stipulates as one of the chief requirements of a woman's education that she "be taught to extend the limits of her sympathy with respect to that history which is being forever determined, as the moments pass in which she draws her peaceful breath" (121). "She is to exercise herself in imagining what would be the effects upon her mind and conduct," he writes, "if she were daily brought into the presence of the suffering which is not the less real because shut from her sight" (121). These higher powers of sympathy are ultimately to form the basis of the highest moral idealism: feminine culture, in Ruskin's elevated vision, becomes the bearer of a utopianism that must restrain the violence of men, and ameliorate suffering in the world. Constructing women as beings who operate within a nobler, better sphere than

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[6] Ellis describes English women as "diligent and thoughtful readers" who do not, however, read widely: "It was not with them a point of importance to devour every book that was written as soon as it came out. They were satisfied to single out the best, and, making themselves familiar with every page, conversed with the writer as with a friend, and felt that, with minds superior, yet congenial to their own, they could make friends indeed" (30).

the actual, Ruskin attributes to them greater responsibility than men for the moral state of the world:

> There is no suffering, no injustice, no misery in the earth, but the guilt of it lies lastly with you. Men can bear the sight of it, but you should not be able to bear it. Men may tread it down without sympathy in their own struggle; but men are feeble in sympathy, and contracted in hope; it is you only who can feel the depths of pain; and conceive the way of its healing (136).

To thinkers who championed woman's civilizing powers, then, her small, enclosed world might, if justly employed, yield a variety of microscopic powers ranging from the practical to the ideal. Yet the bounded nature of women's sphere was also recognized as a moral hazard, and even Ellis acknowledged a woman "may sometimes attach too much importance to the minutiæ of her own domestic world, especially when her mind is imperfectly cultivated and informed" (34). Women's acquired talent for focusing on details might all too easily become a form of myopia, as Ruskin warns, dwelling vividly on the "wonderful" irony of the "tender and delicate" woman who intoxicates herself with domestic feeling in order to forget the problems in the wider world (137).

Whatever special forms of mental discipline women might acquire by restricting themselves to the domestic sphere, Mill maintained that the benefits could not justify the pernicious effects of such confinement on women and society in general. Even if, as Lewis claims, the subtle forms of influence attained by women surpass any kind of direct authority by virtue of their capacity to "modify disposition," "implant sentiments," and "alter character" (13), Mill regards such microscopic powers as useless, for women in their current state lack the resources to wield it effectively. Women's microscopic focus, he suggests, has made them myopic – in general, they cannot understand the importance of larger social issues – "purposes which hold out no promise of private advantages to the

family" (*Subjection of Women* 203). Because they have been excluded from public affairs, women "hardly ever meddle with them for any legitimate purpose, but generally an interested one" (163). For Mill, then, the "secret agency and imperceptible operation" of domestic influence (Lewis 94) constitutes a dangerously unregulated form of power, which is only too liable to abuse.

So was the figure of Woman the Civilizer, in Mill's words, merely "a piece of tiresome cant intended to put a complimentary face upon an injury" (166) – and were the microscopic powers of Victorian women so hopelessly compromised? Or might Mill, in his determination to strengthen his appeal on women's behalf, have overlooked some of the real possibilities that Victorian women's mastery of their microscopic sphere might have to offer? Where does a truer estimate of women's powers lie? My point in asking these questions is not to deny the oppressiveness of the gendered norms that Mill sought to expose. Neither do I seek to defend writers such as Ruskin against the charge that his idealistic representation of women's role helped to reinforce the *status quo* as far as gender inequality was concerned (see, e.g., Millett). Yet however fanciful or preposterous Ruskin's middle-class queen might appear to the modern reader, the importance of such empowering images of femininity to Victorian women should not lightly be dismissed.[7] For those living with the historical realities of gender inequality, a bald account of women's resulting limitations could only further undermine feminine agency if it were not balanced by a just estimate of what women *could* do in their present condition. Could

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[7] As Amanda Vickery has convincingly argued, texts that have come to be identified as conduits of "domestic ideology" undoubtedly carried many other ideological messages and rhetorical resources besides, and were "probably subject to multiple and/or selective readings" (408). The message of empowerment that Ruskin's text offers might well have been as important – if not more so – than the doctrine of separate spheres and its disabling consequences for women.

the resources women already possessed help to reform the unjust social constraints they suffered and contribute to larger social change? The next section examines two mid-Victorian novels of feminine *Bildung* that address this question as they engage the contradictory arguments about women and civilization analyzed here.

Planless Riddles or Grand Designs? Feminine Projects of Improvement in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Miss Marjoribanks*

Although a wide gulf appears to separate Eliot's tragic novel from Oliphant's "great comic masterpiece" (Jay xxv), the premises of these female *Bildungsromane* may be formulated in strikingly similar terms: both focus on the development of young women whose personalities and aspirations are larger than the provincial English towns in which their histories unfold. Struggling under the "sense of oppressive narrowness" that characterizes life in St. Ogg's (272), Maggie Tulliver is

> full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge; … with a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it (235).

Lucilla Marjoribanks's goals are more concrete, but just as ambitious. Hers is the "master-mind which first conceived the grand design of turning the chaotic elements of society in Carlingford into one grand unity" (157). By undertaking nothing less than the "reorganization of society" (18), Lucilla faces all the resistance and complications that might be expected from her small, "old-fashioned, self-conceited, Tory town" (Oliphant, *Phœbe Junior* 36), the fictional setting of Oliphant's popular series of stories about provincial life, *The Chronicles of Carlingford* (1863-76).

In their efforts to realize their imaginative ideals amidst the "oppressive narrowness" of provincial life, do these women succeed in improving their societies and

selves? Do their narratives, on the whole, endorse the image of Woman the Civilizer, or do they suggest that, at least in their current state of marginalization, women's projects of (self-)improvement are inconsequential – even a hindrance – to genuine social progress? In relation to the vastness of modern civilization (see Ch. 1), is women's focus on the microscopic represented as a double disadvantage, or, as Sarah Lewis argues (19-20), the key to further social improvement? In this section, I show how these novels engage the antithetical arguments about women discussed earlier on different levels, addressing the larger implications of the debate but also responding to these arguments on the level of micro-textual form. In particular, I show how both texts address the rhetoric of scale underlying this debate, engaging the significance of women's microscopic sphere through the deliberate use of language and imagery that compares "small things with great" (Eliot 273). By paying close attention to novelistic play with the language and imagery of size, one discerns in these texts coherent arguments about the limitations – but also the possibilities – of the microscopic sphere in which Victorian women operated.

In *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator's consciousness is permeated with a sense of the vastness of civilization – the massive scale of which thinkers like J. S. Mill viewed as a threat to all forms of individual agency (see Ch. 1), not only that of talented women. The panoramic sweep of the narrator's vision extends not only diachronically to include the "long growth and history" of St. Ogg's (115), but is capable of apprehending events over wide expanses of geographical space – for instance, the domestic troubles that occur "in every town, and by hundreds of obscure hearths" (273). It would hardly be surprising if all individuals appeared "emmet-like" from such a perspective (272), and, indeed, as Dinah Birch points out (xi), characters are very frequently figured as "smaller living

things" in this novel (117). In such a vast moral universe, women's microscopic focus seems to place severe limitations on their agency, and hardly seems to qualify them to serve as intellectual or moral guides. With her fetishistic attachment to her "table-cloths and china" (205), Mrs. Tulliver exemplifies perfectly the contracting effects of domesticity on women's intellectual powers. When forced by circumstances to look beyond her narrow domestic concerns, her foolish attempt to conciliate Mr. Wakem only succeeds in sealing the financial ruin of the family. The complete disconnect between intentions and outcomes readily supports the argument that women are not bearers of enlightened order, but closer to brute creation in their lack of cultivation – an idea that the narrator reinforces by describing Mrs. Tulliver as "a hen tak[ing] to stratagem" (242). Her disastrous efforts to ameliorate the family's economic situation suggest that the notion of woman's civilizing power is a delusion sustained only by her actual state of semi-civilized ignorance, and clearly identifies women's microscopic sphere as a source of their ineffectuality.

Mrs. Tulliver's disastrous attempt to play Woman the Reconciler prefigures Maggie's problematic relationship to this figure, and the spectacular gap between intention and outcome that plague her various projects of improvement. Indeed, the consequences of Maggie's actions are so consistently destructive, that several commentators have read her character as embodying some essentially feminine impulse towards regression and disorder.[8] I would like to suggest, however, that Maggie's

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[8] In "Demonism and Maggie Tulliver" (1975), for example, Auerbach writes that "[f]rom the beginning, Maggie's kisses tend to take life rather than bestow it … Maggie's recurrent pattern of action is to enter worlds and explode them. Her destructive aura takes shape in the associations of demonism, witchery, and vampirism that surround her" (157). More recently, Joshua Esty has referred to Maggie as Eliot's "unregenerate girl-ghost," opposing her to "the mature Victorian angel of the house" ("Nationhood,

checkered career does not simply endorse one side of the debate about woman's relationship to civilization. Rather, Eliot's representation of Maggie illustrates the contradictions that arise for a talented young woman in a culture that elevates women and yet, in its social and educational practices, in fact reinforces the idea that women are inferior to men. Maggie's story dramatizes how these conflicting arguments about women interfere destructively in the development of a particular individual, shaping her actions and discourse practices in ways that are often self-defeating.

If Mrs. Tulliver's failed attempt to prevent Wakem from buying the mill suggests that it is the mental narrowness of domesticity that produces women's ineffectuality,[9] then Maggie's history of failures seems at first puzzling. Hers is a life characterized by "years of striving after the highest and the best" (471), and her mental world is nothing if not expansive – this, after all, is a character who declares, "I was never satisfied with a *little* of anything" (329, original emphasis). Even as a child, Maggie resists her mother's attempt to subject her to the tedious particulars of feminine propriety (e.g., her hair). Always seeking to escape the constraints of domesticity, Maggie is used to being called "a wild thing" (12) and identified with gypsies on account of her brown skin (104). Yet if the child Maggie chafes against domestic constraint (27), Eliot emphasizes that the positive power of the civilizing angel nevertheless appeals very strongly to her. Ironically, her abortive attempt to run away to the gypsies, and thereby escape "the

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Adulthood, and the Ruptures of *Bildung*" 117) and emphasizing her perverse resistance to the "conventional process of *Bildung* (116).

[9] Interestingly, the narrator's closing comment on Mrs. Tulliver's failure immediately reverses the effects of the dominant strand of imagery in the chapter – it casts Mrs. Tulliver as a "fly-fisher" and Wakem as a fish whose "subjectivity" she has imperfectly understood (254). This reversal of relative stature anticipates Mrs. Tulliver's compassionate attitude towards Maggie after her boating-trip with Stephen – showing that, unlike Tom, she will not let the rules of social propriety cause her to forget the importance of their ties to each other.

blighting obloquy that had pursued her in civilized life" (107), shows how deeply the image of woman as civilizer is impressed on her imagination. This episode provides, moreover, an interesting perspective on the narrative of the civilizing woman – in particular, how closely intertwined this cultural narrative is with its other, the argument that aligns women with a destructive force of nature.

While Maggie's flight to the gypsies might initially appear consistent with the argument about her wild, "demonic tendencies" (Auerbach, "Demonism and Maggie Tulliver" 166), it is important to remember that it is her failure to imitate the angelic qualities of the doll-like Lucy that precipitates a series of domestic disasters and culminates in her flight from Garum Firs. Her rebelliousness cannot, therefore, be interpreted as "natural," but is borne of Maggie's frustration with her inability to conform to the ideal of Victorian girlhood – a diminutive version of the domestic angel – and her corresponding sense of alienation from her family. Once among the gypsies, Maggie's affinity for the role of civilizer asserts itself clearly. She comforts herself with the idea that the gypsies "would gladly receive her, and pay her much respect on account of her superior knowledge" (104), and entertains ideas of becoming their queen (110). As might be expected, Maggie's visions of civilization come to naught, for in fact they grow out of a deep-seated conviction of her utter unfitness for "civilized life," and represent a compensatory fantasy that serves to assuage her wretchedness. Eliot depicts Maggie's need for such daydreams sympathetically, but she does not hesitate to mock the hollowness of her grandiose ambitions by completely inverting her civilizing narrative. Not only does Maggie end up lost, and require to be guided home by the gypsies, her narrative of civilization degenerates rapidly, under the influence of her childish

imagination, into a gothic tale. Alluding to Gottfried August Bürger's 1774 gothic ballad, the narrator remarks, "Not Leonore, in that preternatural midnight excursion with her phantom lover, was more terrified than poor Maggie in this entirely natural ride on a short-paced donkey, with a gypsy behind her" (114).

In Maggie, Eliot represents an exceptional woman who is caught between the contradictory arguments about women's relationship to civilization. The elevated conception of women offered by the first argument inspires Maggie's noble intentions, but these are limited by the scanty resources whereby society betrays the inferior status that it assigns to women – and even more seriously compromised by her internalization of assumptions about female inferiority. Her desperation to escape the limitations of her sex and the domestic sphere frequently cause her imagination to operate "on a larger scale" than she can handle (104), and to reject women's existing culture and resources as obstacles to her aspirations. This antipathy towards the "smallness" of women's existence (327) can be seen in Maggie's neglect of practical, domestic details; her problematic relationship with women; her hero-worship of men – from her brother to the "great" men she imagines saving her (287). Even after her "fall" with Stephen, Maggie continues to prefer the aid of men over women – she chooses to seek help from Dr. Kenn rather than, for instance, her aunt Glegg. The internalized misogyny that prompts Maggie to distance herself from women and feminine culture also feeds a tendency towards self-loathing. Thus, Maggie's actions often seem motivated by the belief that her "true" value will only be realized in the absence of her troublesome self. As a child, she fantasizes about becoming the diminutive Lucy (61), and attempts to enhance her sense of self-worth by disappearing – by hiding and starving herself (37), or running away (105). A similar logic

drives her problematic attempts to embrace self-renunciation as a means of achieving her high aspirations. If Thomas à Kempis and John Keble help Maggie become more considerate of others, her imperfect assimilation of their teachings nevertheless lead her to espouse forms of self-negation that diminish her sense of self and induce a state of "stupefied" passivity (328). Statements like "we are only like little children, that some one who is wiser is taking care of" (327) may be a moving expression of Maggie's faith, but such similes, Eliot shows, are also dangerously infantilizing, undermining the subject's capacity for self-determination and contributing to her ignorance of "the irreversible laws within and without her" (288).

Maggie's role in the melodramatic triangle with Stephen and Lucy clearly illustrates how her internalization of misogynistic assumptions – and corresponding rejection of women's microscopic sphere – are closely implicated in the miscarriage of her noble plans. Among other things, Maggie's discourse of self-negation makes her lamentably ignorant of that microscopic realm of personal feelings to which women were supposed have special access, and which they were sometimes accused of being too much absorbed in.[10] Impatient of the world of feelings (413), she has little understanding of her own desires, and it is this pitiful lack of self-knowledge – not any inherently disruptive impulse – that engenders the destructive relationships in which she gets entangled. Because Maggie is so accustomed to treating her own desires as unimportant, she never acknowledges her sexual desires, and remains unaware of this aspect of her personality in

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[10] In the Second Book of *Aurora Leigh*, for example, Romney discredits Aurora's literary efforts by arguing that women are too absorbed by personal feeling to grasp larger human problems: "Your quick-breathed hearts/ So sympathetic to the personal pang,/ Close on each separate knife-stroke, yielding up/ A whole life at each wound, incapable/ Of deepening, widening a large lap of life/ To hold the world-full woe" (lines 182-89). See also lines 196-99; 213-225.

her "romance" with Philip Wakem.[11] The narrator hints quite explicitly on several occasions at Philip's lack of sexual appeal for her (337; 348), yet Maggie's account of their relationship (387) convinces Lucy that the attraction between them is mutual. As a result, Lucy never conceives of Maggie as a potential rival for Stephen, and the intimate situations she arranges for the two couples only serve to fuel the latent attraction between her fiancé and cousin. Riddled as it is with such gaps in self-knowledge, Maggie's narrative of Christian renunciation proves as self-defeating as her scheme to civilize the gypsies. As Philip has predicted, her unacknowledged desires return to "assault [her] like a savage appetite" (329), and, once again, the diegetic narrative takes a gothic turn, with Stephen delivering utterances like "I could commit crimes for you" (477), effectively becoming "the ghostly boatman" to whom Maggie is in danger of "selling her soul … only for the sake of being drifted in a boat for ever" (459). Once again, Maggie's best intentions appear to backfire completely, demonstrating how the opposing arguments about women's relationship to civilization could produce sharp contradictions, and threaten to turn feminine projects of improvement into a "planless riddle[s]" (393).

In *Miss Marjoribanks*, Oliphant imagines a much happier pattern of interaction between these conflicting arguments about women – one not defined by contradiction, but instead creating possibilities that women might – as her heroine certainly does – exploit to achieve their purposes. Like Eliot, Oliphant was very much attuned to the language and imagery of size animating the debate about women's relationship to civilization, and her novel creatively engages this discursive resource in order to address the question of whether women's microscopic focus translated into an obstacle or an

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[11] Again, this might be connected with the fact that Philip is too feminine to evoke such desires in Maggie.

advantage to social improvement. The significance of women's proximity to the "mean details of existence" (Oliphant, *Salem Chapel* 97) – their constant dealings with "trifles" (*Salem Chapel* 167) – is a topic to which Oliphant devotes considerable attention throughout the Carlingford series. In *Salem Chapel* (1862-63), for instance, the young dissenting minister Mr. Vincent satirizes women's extrordinary capacity to focus on trifles, exclaiming, "If the world were breaking up, I suppose women could still drink tea!" (190). The narrator, however, questions this facile dismissal of women's microscopic focus: is this, she asks, evidence of "[w]oman's weaker nature, that could mingle the common with the great; or woman's strength, that could endure all things" (190)?

In her later novel, Oliphant shows how Miss Marjoribanks's capacity to "mingle the common with the great" is an important source of her strength – indeed, reveals her power to mobilize even the smallest particulars in the service of her larger philanthropic projects. Indeed, Lucilla's willingness to mingle apparently trivial details with weightier matters produce the most disparate conjunctions, often shocking other characters and generating superb moments of comedy. For instance, when Rose Lake approaches Lucilla over the clandestine meetings between Mr. Cavendish and her sister, Lucilla coolly propose to settle everything by coming to tea – the trifling, if genteel, nature of which solution astounds Rose by its apparent inadequacy to the situation (238). Again, immediately after she has convinced Mr. Ashburton to adopt her political strategy, Lucilla sends her chosen candidate into an "explosion of amusement" by shifting from his speech to the "colours" of his campaign, describing this as the "one thing that is really important, and must be fixed upon" (342). In both cases, however, Lucilla is vindicated.

Her plan in having Rose invite her to tea proves to be carefully thought out, enabling her both to disrupt the illicit romance and to secure the beleaguered Mr. Cavendish's co-operation in her larger scheme to prevent his public exposure as an imposter. Similarly, the violet-and-green cockades that Lucilla settles on for Mr. Ashburton are emblematic – and form an important part – of the "soft" kind of political tactics that she practices on his behalf.[12]

An important factor governing Lucilla's efficacy is her ability to adapt both arguments about women and civilization to her purposes. Unlike Maggie, Lucilla neither undervalues nor despises the microscopic sphere of women, but regards it as a valuable resource for intervening on a larger scale. If, as her father ironically remarks, she has "the wonderful advantage [of being] pleased with trifles" (45), it is because of her "large vision of relations" – her ability to perceive the web of connections linking "the smallest things with the greatest" (Eliot, *Mill* 273). Whereas poor Maggie is more often described by the term "blind" (e.g., 235), Lucilla's insight proves worthy of her name. Frequently associated with light imagery (e.g., 27; 443), her keen mental vision allows her to see how "trifles make the sum of human things" (Ellis, Preface), so that she embraces domesticity and its humble departments as worthy tools for realizing her larger project of social reorganization. This is a woman who is not afraid to declare, "I always was so domestic" (45), and who, over the course of the novel, deploys her skills in cookery (e.g., 31; 123), interior decoration (46), sewing, and gardening (197) in order to redefine

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[12] Oliphant suggests the influence of such trifles as the cockades on political opinion in her representation of the "slumberous" train of associations that leads Dr. Marjoribanks to "a kind of odd incipient agreement with Lucilla" (353) – the narrator links this process to the cockades by figuring the persuasive force of such trifles as "the tricks which some green-and-violet spirit in the dining room was playing with the Doctor's fancy" (355).

established patterns of social discourse in Carlingford. Neither does Lucilla neglect the realm of the personal, for her efforts to realize the larger projects of improvement suggested by the figure of Woman the Civilizer are well supported by her constant object, "of being harmony … with *herself*" (254, original emphasis). In contrast to how Maggie's lofty strivings are undermined by internal contradictions – by her deep-seated sense of the triviality of women and feminine culture – Lucilla's willingness to employ the so-called trifles of feminine culture[13] in the service of higher ends bespeaks an organic sense of value for women – and self. Not only does this enhance Lucilla's capacity to act effectively, it participates, on a micro-level, in the same valorization of women and their discourse that her social intervention is designed to achieve.[14]

What circumstances, then, enable Lucilla to negotiate the contradictory arguments about women – woman's greatness versus her triviality – so much more successfully than Maggie? It may seem curious that Lucilla's attitude towards women's microscopic sphere should be so generous, for her mother provides an even more depressing specter of female insignificance than poor Mrs. Tulliver.[15] With this gloomy image of female nullity

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[13] Significantly, the novel has even come under attack from feminist critics because of Lucilla's readiness to employ feminine trifles in the pursuit of her goals. For example, Patricia Stubbs writes that "*Miss Marjoribanks* is trivial in a way that *Emma* is not, and it is so because of the author's attitude, endorsing as she does Lucilla's exploitation of her traditional female role" (41).

[14] As I will explain at greater length shortly, it is important to recognize that Lucilla's project to "revolutionise" society in Carlingford (14) is not simply undertaken for her own pleasure, or to increase her own sense of self-importance – significantly, the changes in social organization she envisions will bestow on women in general a greater public voice, enabling them to move out of the relative isolation of the private sphere, to interact and to form ties with other women, and to voice their opinions to an audience beyond the confines of their own domestic space. Early in the novel, the narrator makes it clear how the current state of society in Carlingford prevents women from forming wider networks of sociability (20-21).

[15] The shadowy figure of Mrs. Marjoribanks offers a monitory example of the non-existence that middle-class Victorian women could easily be reduced to within the confines of the private sphere. Having "devoted all her powers, during the last ten years of her life, to the solacement and care of that poor self which other people neglected," Mrs. Marjoribanks all but fades away to a cipher (3) – so much so that the narrator unsentimentally remarks, "when she disappeared from her sofa – except for the mere physical fact

framing her own ambitious career, we might expect Lucilla to shrink from the domestic sphere as from a black hole, yet she demonstrates an admirably balanced estimate of its possibilities. This is because Oliphant takes pains to endow her protagonist with a host of attributes that empower her to synthesize these conflicting views of women to her advantage – and, indeed, enable her unite these seemingly incompatible images of great and small in her own person. Thus, while Lucilla is perfectly happy to work with – and through – feminine "trifles," Oliphant deliberately constructs her heroine on a heroic scale – a scale more equal to the vastness of modern civilization. From her very first appearance, the narrator constantly emphasizes that Lucilla is "large in all particulars" (4): as a teenager, she "ma[kes] the painful discovery that her gloves [are] half a number larger, and her shoes a hairbreadth broader, than those of any of her companions" (4-5).[16] As for her moral stature, there are innumerable references to Lucilla's "great mind" (201), "large and enlightened" sentiments (84), and "larger," "more comprehensive" purposes (255). Quite apart from the mock-epic language that many of the novel's critics have remarked (e.g., Colby and Colby 66; O' Mealy 73; Peterson 72), the narrator's stylistic choices tend to magnify Lucilla, suggesting a being of titanic proportions. During the first of her Thursday evenings, for example, the narrator describes Lucilla's management of aggregates of people in ways that multiply her over time and space: she is

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that she was no longer there – no one, except her maid, whose occupation was gone, could have found out much difference" (3).

[16] In "The Doctor's Family" (1862), Oliphant underlines very clearly how Lucilla's physical stature works against her – as it does in the later novel as far as men like General Travers are concerned – by preventing her from conforming to conventional masculine notions of female beauty. Thus, whereas the narrator constantly dwells on Nettie's diminutive charms – referring to her as "a little fairy queen, tiny as Titania, but dark as an elf of the East" (56) – she alludes delicately by way of understatement to Lucilla's size and maturity: "Miss Marjoribanks, it is true, was over thirty, and by no means a Titania" (106).

"in six places at once" (86), and has "her fingers as it were upon the pulse of the company" (84).

Of course, Lucilla's literal and figurative largeness, and the sense of power it evokes, are supported by – and at least partially the product of – the economic and educational advantages she enjoys as the only daughter of Carlingford's most established doctor. Perhaps the most critical basis of Lucilla's power – and her ability to negotiate the paradoxical ideas about women and civilization – is her mastery of that "most modern" science of political economy (Whately [1832 ed.] 3). The text repeatedly alludes to Lucilla's special course of reading in this discipline under the guidance of her strong-minded schoolmistress (90), and she herself speaks of political economy as her vocation, comparable to Rose Lake's espousal of visual art (163). Besides serving, as we have seen, as an important site for articulating Victorian theories of the civilizing process (see Ch. 1), political economy demanded both the power of abstraction as well as special attention to seemingly trivial detail – not surprisingly, the same combination of talents that Lucilla exercises in order to integrate women's microscopic sphere into her larger social enterprise. In his introductory textbook to the subject, Richard Whately emphasized how political economy proceeds on the "ordinary transactions of human life" (230), describing as "most valuable" to the political economist information about "what are considered insignificant matters" (233n) – for example, "common business and common conversation, in the markets, the shops, and the wharfs" (231). Since it involved observing and generalizing about such "common" everyday transactions, political economy therefore constituted an area to which women might be expected to make important contributions, yet in spite of Harriet Martineau's achievements in *Illustrations*

of Political Economy (1832-34), it was still commonly assumed that the abstract, scientific nature of the subject placed it beyond women's intellectual capacities. Significantly, in *Middlemarch* (1871-72), a novel that, like *Miss Marjoribanks*, is set during the years leading up to the First Reform Bill of 1832, political economy is one of Dorothea Brooke's stumbling blocks, and is used by her uncle to put down his strong-minded niece. "Young ladies don't understand political economy," says Mr. Brooke condescendingly (17), causing Dorothea to smart with "annoyance at being twitted with her ignorance of political economy, that never-explained science which was thrust as an extinguisher over all her lights" (18). The sense of inadequacy that this "never-explained science" produces in Dorothea enables us better to appreciate the significance of Lucilla's mastery of political economy – and the degree to which Oliphant empowers her by bestowing on her such resources. It is also the key to understanding Lucilla's social projects, the larger significance of which many of her critics fail to appreciate.[17]

To read critical accounts of the novel, one might well wonder whether Lucilla's projects can be described as improving at all. To begin with, many critics assume from the outset the triviality of her "doll's house world" (Jay xiv) – ironically, those critics

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[17] It is Lucilla's training in political economy that saves her from falling into one of the errors to which, according to Mill, women are prone – the practice of "unenlightened and shortsighted benevolence" (*Subjection* 204). In direct contrast to Mill's description of how women's habit "of looking at the immediate effects on persons, and not to remote effects on classes of persons – make them both unable to see, and unwilling to admit, the ultimate evil tendency of any form of charity or philanthropy which commends itself to their sympathetic feelings" (204), Lucilla does not give money to "the beggar who at that period infested Grange Lane with her six children" (54), "for that was contrary to those principles of political economy which she had studied with such success at Mount Pleasant" (54). Instead, she promises to "inquire into her case" and to find her work (54). Lucilla's efforts to help the beggar help herself represents an attempt to practice a form of enlightened charity – to Mill, "the only charity which proves to be charity in the end" – which does not "sap the very foundations of the self-respect, self-help, and self-control which are the essential conditions both of individual prosperity and of social virtue" (204). Lucilla's enlightened philanthropy, however, is criticized by Elisabeth Jay as evidence of her "selfish middle-class ethic," which prompts her to "embrace … *laissez-faire* economics" when it comes to the lower classes (xxiii).

who most admire Lucilla's abilities are the ones who lament the "waste inherent" in Lucilla's social activities (O' Mealy 70), suggesting that she "pours her energy into Thursday evening parties simply because she has nothing more important to do" (Williams 82). In spite of their respect for her intelligence, these critics are not prepared to entertain the idea that she might have some kind of coherent rationale for her social enterprise. Doubts about the worthiness of Lucilla's projects are compounded by the tendency of many critics to dismiss her machinations as largely self-serving. Since Vineta and Robert Colby denounced Lucilla as a "female egoist" (65), most critics – even as sympathetic and insightful a reader as Joseph O' Mealy – have tended to place far too much emphasis on Lucilla's quest for personal power (see O' Mealy 69; 70). Oliphant anticipates and corrects such misreadings of her protagonist through her depiction of how other characters in the novel – even staunch supporters such as Mrs. Chiley – habitually misconstrue Lucilla's motives (e.g., 35; 134; 290; 318). The mystified incomprehension and facile assumptions with which characters from Dr. Marjoribanks to Barbara Lake respond to Lucilla serve to mirror – and mock – readers' misprisions, and imply a position from which her activities may be more fairly judged.

Our understanding of Lucilla's motivation is greatly illuminated when we take into consideration her knowledge of political economy and how it informs her commitment to diffusing certain benefits of modern civilization to provincial Carlingford. Most immediately, Lucilla's plan to "revolutionise society in Carlingford" (14) means enhancing social connectivity – as we have seen, an important index of civilization as conceived by the Victorians (Ch. 1) – through strategically conceived social events revolving around her Thursday evenings. By setting up wider networks of sociability in

her provincial town, Lucilla aims to overcome the cliquish mentality that divides the middle-class into "ridiculous parties" (483), and to create an integrated space for social discourse in which women – often excluded from what meager social life Carlingford has hitherto had to offer (20) – might assume a more prominent role. A concrete sense of Lucilla's actual goals is afforded by her description of her limited success at the novel's end. After ten years of work, Lucilla is disappointed at the fragility of the social network she has constructed. Far from reveling in the social power she has acquired, she is dismayed that this emergent society has "only got into the way of looking to [her]" (482), and fears that it will degenerate in her absence: "they will go back to their old ridiculous parties, as if they had never seen anything better; and they will all break up into little cliques, and make their awful morning calls and freeze one another to death" (483). Lucilla's training in political economy affords insights into the civilizing process that guide her various projects, so that her aims are never merely personal. Her most explicitly political intervention in the third volume of the novel is no exception. Patricia Stubbs has made the damning accusation that Lucilla's "preferences are sexual and personal, not political" (44), but a more careful reading suggests that Lucilla's choice of Mr. Ashburton is actually based on political-economic considerations – in particular, his longstanding ties to Carlingford and contribution to the local economy. In contrast to the *parvenu* Mr. Cavendish, Mr. Ashburton's social pedigree is well-known (337); moreover, whereas Mr. Cavendish has "all his things down from town," "everyone knew that [Mr. Ashburton] … was supplied in a creditable way by George Street tradesmen":

> There was no mystery whatever about him. People knew how much he had a-year, and how much he paid for everything, and the way in which his accounts were kept, and all about him. Even when he had his wine direct from the growers (for naturally his own county

could not supply the actual liquor), it was put in Carlingford bottles, and people knew the kinds he had, and how much, and a hundred agreeable details (371).

It is Lucilla's interest in Carlingford's economic well-being, and her capacity to appreciate such valuable – if unexciting – economic data, therefore, that determine her conviction that Mr. Ashburton is "the man for Carlingford" (352), for to the political economist, his well-established stake in the local economy appeals more eloquently than anything the urbane Mr. Cavendish could ever say.

An awareness of Lucilla's background in political economy and the broader understanding of social improvement it inspires is crucial to making sense of the climactic scene in which Lucilla exerts her civilizing influence in order to restrain the "Berserker madness" of the Archdeacon, Mr. Beverley (302). This is also the moment in the novel at which Oliphant most self-consciously engages the debate about women and civilization, staging a rhetorical situation that effectively puts the opposing arguments about women on trial. Embodying the figure of Woman the Civilizer is, of course, Lucilla, while, held in thrall by "Lucilla's eye" and the "beneficial restraints of society" (302), Mr. Beverley gives voice to the misogynistic argument that represents the "native frivolity" of women as a vitiating influence on society (303). Such is the critical skepticism of Lucilla and the culture of Victorian middle-class women that Elisabeth Jay has suggested that there is "no secure vantage point" from which one can judge the validity of these diametrically opposed positions (xxv) – she even echoes the Archdeacon's fulminations when she deprecates how Lucilla's "mission of social containment" (xiv) tends to "immobiliz[e] or render … impotent her subjects' natural impulse for development" (xiii). In fact, closer consideration of the motives and actions of the spokespersons for the rival arguments makes perfectly clear which one the text

would expose as specious. Mr. Beverley's violent rhetoric reflects his confused state of mind, for his desire to embarrass Mr. Cavendish publicly is fueled by a narrow impulse to abuse the object of his antipathy. It promises to benefit no-one – not even himself, or the hapless Mrs. Mortimer, the woman whose cause he is ostensibly defending. Lucilla's aims, by contrast, are anything but narrow. Not only does her plan take into consideration the actual interests of Mrs. Mortimer and the men involved, she exercises her civilizing influence to protect the social fabric that she has begun to construct in Carlingford. In terms of Victorian models of the civilizing process, Lucilla is responding to a problem that J. S. Mill had identified as endemic to modern civilization – that is, the increasing unreliability of social knowledge and the "growth of charlatanerie" ("Civilization" 135). As O' Mealy has noted (72), Lucilla is well aware that the chain reaction of confusion triggered by Mr. Cavendish's public exposure would have devastating consequences for the social network she has so carefully established, and she acts to safeguard the social confidence that political economists like Mill and Martineau had recognized as crucial to the functioning of society. The stand-off between the rival arguments about women is not, therefore, left unresolved by the text. By having the blustering Archdeacon represent the view that women are trifling "idiots" (303), Oliphant clearly means to discredit the argument that women are a regressive influence. If Lucilla's civilizing power does indeed serve to constrain the "natural impulses" of such foolish, inconsiderate individuals, then so much the better, Oliphant implies, for the community that must put up with them.

One final aspect of Lucilla's resources deserves to be mentioned here, and that is her manipulation of language and other modes of representation, which play a crucial role in – and, indeed, constitutes the immediate site of – her successful negotiation of the

debate about women and civilization. Critics have often commented on Oliphant's irony and mock-heroic language in the novel (e.g., Colby and Colby 65; Stubbs 41-42; Williams 81), but have failed to give Lucilla credit for her creative use of language to achieve her goals. Linda Peterson, for example, dismisses Lucilla's rhetorical practices as impotent:

> neither conventional sentiments nor ironic witticisms have power enough to alter Lucilla's predicament. Whether conventional or anticonventional, they never allow Lucilla to escape the framework of convention. Her language lacks the power to create new patterns of action. (72)

Rather than focus simply on whether her language is conventional or not, I suggest that we can better appreciate Lucilla's rhetorical ability by looking more carefully at how she mobilizes different kinds of discourses and conventions – in particular, how her rhetoric creatively synthesizes the ideas of woman's greatness and triviality in order to achieve her goals. Responding to the imagery of size that animated the Victorian debate on women, a distinctive feature of Lucilla's language is its play with scale, and the adjustment of perspective – magnifying, diminishing, or both – that this allows.

A good example of this is the workings of the mock heroic style and martial imagery that are sustained throughout the novel.[18] These should be regarded as part of Lucilla's rhetorical repertoire, since presumably these stylistic features are meant to convey some sense of her mental world – Mr. Cavendish confirms that this "high" style is not confined to the narrator's commentary, but actually manifests itself in Lucilla's own speech when he remarks, "You are always statesmanlike in your views" (89-90). On the

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[18] Examples of this abound from the very first chapter of the novel: for instance, after she unsuccessfully tries to persuade her father to allow leave school to manage his household, Lucilla "retir[es] with the full honors of war," returning to Mount Pleasant to prepare herself "for what she called the charge of the establishment when her final emancipation took place" (11). With her aim to "conquer" and "revolutionise" Carlingford society (14), Lucilla's imaginative vision of her return to her native town is described as follows: "She felt like a young king entering in secret a capital which awaits him with acclamations" (26).

one hand, this elevated style enhances the significance of Lucilla's domestic proceedings, not simply to assert her superiority (cf. O' Mealy 73), but to maintain a connection between the seemingly trifling minutiæ she must deal with and her larger, more abstract aim of re-imagining society in Carlingford. On the other hand, this hyperbolic mode of describing her activities works, like Mr. Beverley's exaggeration of Mr. Cavendish's misdemeanors (305), to "save" Lucilla from an excessive sense of self-importance, and to keep in perspective the modest scope of her intervention. Far from "deluded" (O' Mealy 73), Lucilla maintains a firmer grasp on reality than most – for example, she sees more clearly than the politicking men that Carlingford is far from a global empire – it is not even the imperial metropolis. As Lucilla says to an interlocutor who vacillates about supporting her chosen candidate, "Dear Colonel Chiley! … he is not going to be Prime Minister" (363).

In conjunction with her artful deployment of grand, hyperbolic language, Lucilla employs self-effacing modes of language – the micro-textual equivalent of the argument about female insignificance – to support her large designs. One of the characteristic of her speech is her frequent recourse to stock phrases and formulæ – for example, her oft-repeated mantra that her sole object is "to be a comfort to dear papa" (e.g., 15)[19] or her standard line expressing indifference to marriage ("If *that* was what I was thinking of" [e.g., 127]). It is not just that these formulaic utterances invoke the image of the self-sacrificing woman on the level of content. By serving as respectable conversation fillers,

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[19] Even Lucilla's miraculous self-possession in the face of potentially embarrassing situation is attributed not to her mental resilience and social goals, but to her steadfast pursuit of the "grand object of Miss Marjoribanks's existence" (133). Thus, even after Mr. Cavendish jilts her, she proceeds with her various plans for revitalizing society unfazed, calmly explaining her unflagging motivation by recourse to her favorite mantra: "Dear Lady Richmond, I hope I am always able for my duty … Papa would be wretched if he did not think we were all enjoying ourselves; and you know it is the object of my life to be a comfort to papa" (133).

they actually work to cloak Lucilla's agency in, for instance, the unthreatening form of filial piety, and allow her to operate under the screen of paternal authority without openly challenging societal norms. While it formally diminishes her agency, such language effectively grant her greater scope to operate independently – for Oliphant makes it clear that, while Dr. Marjoribanks's comfort is important to Lucilla, it is far from being the main object of her Thursdays.[20] A similar pattern may be observed in the way Lucilla persuades the men in her circle to support Mr. Ashburton during the elections. Rather than asserting her opinions, her subtle strategy is to de-emphasize her own – as well as her candidate's – agency, while portraying her interlocutor as a critical influence on Mr. Ashburton's decision to run. By means of this shrewd rhetorical strategy of inflating the potential supporter's sense of self-importance, Lucilla is shown flattering Colonel Chiley (362-64) and Major Brown (372-74) into supporting the candidate whom they, she suggests, have launched into politics. Thus, Lucilla influences her interlocutors by cleverly attributing influence to them, showing how the strategic deployment of self-effacing rhetoric may afford a formidable tool of persuasion.

Miss Marjoribanks affirms, therefore, that large-scale improvements may be conceived and pursued by women – and that their best hopes of realizing such grand designs lie in a just appreciation of the microscopic sphere they have traditionally inhabited. Showing how assumptions about feminine weakness might be transformed into a formidable source of rhetorical leverage, Oliphant's novel teaches us never to despise

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[20] As the narrator wryly remarks, Lucilla's stated aim to be a "comfort to her dear papa" is most effectively accomplished by Dr Marjoribanks's absence from the Evenings that are ostensibly planned for his enjoyment (104). In fact, he is "totally unnecessary" as far as the social dynamics of Lucilla's Thursdays are concerned – the narrator bluntly states that "it is quite certain that nobody missed Dr Marjoribanks from the pleasant assembly up-stairs" (104).

the subtle power of small things – particularly when this is connected with larger visions of what might be. From such a vantage point, an argument might even be made to suggest that Maggie's career is not such a "planless riddle" after all – that it bears far more promising fruit than at first appears.[21] For when one traces their micro-effects, Maggie's "blind" struggles are revealed to touch various supporting characters in significant ways. Not only does she kindle a process of moral regeneration in Tom before their watery death (520), her seemingly futile rejection of marriage to Stephen leaves a lasting impression on Philip and Lucy of the human capacity for altruism – an impression that, the text suggests, influences all their lives, even Stephen's, for good. Considering the severe constraints she labors under, we might even go so far as to describe Maggie's achievements as more exceptional than Lucilla's, so that in some ways both these mid-Victorian novels might be said to engineer some kind of *rapprochement* between the conflicting arguments about women and civilization.

A Doll's House **and after: Discovering the Power of Small Things**

To conclude this chapter, we turn to three dramatic texts that appear to privilege one argument about woman's relationship to civilization over the other. All three plays take as their premises the argument that (literally) belittles women, emphasizing the need of women to be civilized through education. Hence, Nora is the play's titular doll, Flora is Herman and Jones's butterfly, and Eliza Doolittle's resources, as her name suggests, are more limited than any of the fictional women in this chapter. Do these plays then

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[21] For a fuller account of how, by considering the subtle rhetorical dimension of her choices, we might develop a better understanding of Maggie's *Bildung* and achievements, see my "*Saints' Eternal Rest:* The Martyrdom of Maggie Tulliver" (2009).

represent their female protagonists as passive recipients of a male-dominated civilization? In this section, I argue that Ibsen and Shaw seek to reform the civilizing discourse that belittles women by engaging concrete aspects of its form. Whereas the problematic representation of Flora's maturation in *Breaking a Butterfly* confirms that such disabling discourses must be countered at the level of form, Ibsen and Shaw persuasively show their heroines contributing in significant ways to their own improvement. In the process, these plays reflect on the educational power of everyday theatricality and other modes of verbal performance in the domestic sphere, with important implications for how literature might be conceived as an instrument of social change.

The earlier sections of this chapter have shown that arguments affirming women's civilizing function found powerful exponents in the early Victorian period, and maintained a strong presence as late as the 1860s. By the 1870s, however, it would seem that the argument depicting women as an object of civilization had gained the upper hand, as discourse on the Woman Question focused increasingly on the inadequacies of women's education, and the need to prepare women better for their roles in the family and society.[22] This cultural shift is reflected in *A Doll's House*, *Breaking a Butterfly*, and *Pygmalion*, which all center on female protagonists in various states of backwardness and delayed development. Yet the larger purpose of each text is to elevate women to equality

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[22] A database-assisted survey of periodical articles during this period suggests that "[t]he identification of education as a means of preparing middle-class women for financial and emotional independence is a recurrent theme" not only in women's writing but in writing about women in general (Birch, *Our Victorian Education* 89). Even a glance at the titles of the essays suggests the Victorians' preoccupation with this topic at this time: Dorothea Beale's "On the Education of Girls" (1866); Isabella Tod's "On the Education of Girls of the Middle Classes" (1870); A. J. Buckland's "On the Education of Girls" (1870); Fredercik Furnivall's "The Education of Girls" (1871); "The Education of Girls: Their Admissibility to Universities" (1878); Alice Gardner's "A Transition Period in Female Education" (1884); E. Lynn Linton's "The Higher Education of Women" (1886); and Frederic Franklin's "Women and Their Emancipation" (1904). I located these article by sifting through titles called up from the *Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals* database.

and beyond – by the play's end, at least in Ibsen's and Shaw's texts, the heroine's education places her in a position to instruct, rather than merely be instructed. Whether one finds their narratives of maturation convincing or not, the ways in which each playwright represents the process of transformation – even humanization – undergone by these characters underscores the relevance of language and verbal performance to the Woman Question. These plays implicate linguistic and literary conventions in the marginalization of women and other socially subordinated groups, but also suggest that language and literary art have a vital role to play in their emancipation.

Before I illustrate this claim, a word on the shift to dramatic texts at this point may be useful. Besides the fact that the three plays focus on the question of women's education in ways that speak eloquently to the *Bildungsromane* studied earlier, I suggest that it is particularly appropriate to explore the issue of women's education through the genre of drama. This is because nineteenth-century authors often made the theatrical emblematic of women's immaturity, invoking theatricality and verbal performance in the domestic context to signal the demotic nature of literary activity in the domestic realm.[23] Thus, for example, Eliot's narrator indicates the childishness of Maggie's early attempts at self-renunciation by remarking that "her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity" (292); the opening chapter of *Miss Marjoribanks* similarly exhibits the ludicrous theatricality of the fifteen-year-old Lucilla, underscoring her need to "learn … to take the characters of the other *personæ* in her little drama into consideration, when she rehearsed her pet scenes [thereafter]" (11). This devaluation of everyday theatricality would not have been lost on

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[23] For a lucid account of theatricality in the nineteenth-century novel, see Joseph Litvak's *Caught in the Act* (1992).

playwrights such as Ibsen and Shaw. As their plays show, patterns of verbal performance in the domestic sphere make up the everyday texture of our mental existence, and are powerful shapers of our lives – both private and public – for good and ill.

Thus, whereas writers such as Goethe, Sarah Ellis, and Sarah Lewis had imagined the domestic sphere as a place of freedom from some of modernity's worst tendencies, *A Doll's House* and its English adaptation, *Breaking a Butterfly*,[24] explore instead the dangers of it degenerating into a zone of stasis as the modes of verbal play it allows trap its inhabitants in an infantilized state. Well before Nora comes to realize her status as a "doll-child" and "doll-wife" in the final act (63), Ibsen painstakingly emphasizes how the private language of the Helmers' home infantilizes her. Helmer not only treats her like a child by establishing rules for her to obey – such as those proscribing macaroons (8) – he repeatedly uses terms of endearment that reduce Nora to small (if loveable) animals: for example, "my lark" (6; 47; 48); "the squirrel" (6); "My little bird" (27); "My precious little song-bird" (29); "scared dove" (37). The adjective "little" frequently appears in his discourse when he refers to Nora: she is, among other diminutive personæ, "the little sweet-tooth" (8); "my poor little Nora" with "delicate little fingers" (9), "my wilful little woman" (28); a "little madcap" (34); a "[l]ittle helpless thing" (46). Nora herself is happy to play the grown-up child with her children, and seems quite willing to participate in the her husband's infantilizing discourse – she adopts his pet-names for her, referring to herself as his "little squirrel" and "lark" (34), and even offers to become "an elf and dance in the moonlight for you" (34). Similarly, in Herman and Jones's appropriation of *A Doll's House*, Flora refers to herself as her husband's "little squirrel" (27), and is

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[24] Loosely based on Ibsen's play, Jones and Herman's play was first staged at the Prince's Theatre on March 3, 1884.

figured by other characters as a "pretty little canary" (7); "a doll" (10); "Queen Titania" (13); "the Fairy Queen" (15); and a "little bird" (21).

In *Pygmalion*, Eliza begins her career in the London streets, well beyond the domestic interiors of middle-class respectability. While she lacks the linguistic and socio-economic resources that allow Nora and Flora to engage in infantilizing verbal play, she, too, is trapped and figuratively diminished by her habitual patterns of speech. Straitened economic conditions have left her with a demotic dialect that resembles infantile language in its frequent recourse to inarticulate sounds like "Ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-ow-oo" (27), provoking Henry Higgins to refer to her in terms of diminutives that are less flattering than those applied to Nora and Flora. During their first meeting, for instance, he commands her not to "sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon" (27), and as his exasperation increases, his belittling metaphors are drawn from further down the chain of beings in the vegetable kingdom – he refers to her as "this thing" that he has "created … out of the squashed cabbage leaves of Covent Garden" (121; see also 21). To be sure, it is not only assumptions about gender roles but socio-economic differentials that allow the Professor and Colonel Pickering, in Mrs. Higgins's words, to turn Eliza Doolittle into their "live doll" (81). But in this play, language is as closely tied to economic value as it is to gender relations. As exaggerated as Higgins's insults may be, he is correct to identify Eliza's "kerbstone English" as a major stumbling block to her prospects of improving her socio-economic conditions. Class-bound notions of linguistic propriety determine that this English "will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days" (27), giving economic reality to Higgins's degrading epithets.

In spite of the diminutive language applied to them, these doll-like women are central to the moral vision of these texts, and in all three plays they are allowed – even if briefly – to assume positions of moral authority over the men who purport to guide and protect them. In the first place, Ibsen and Shaw undermine any simple division of power between the sexes. Freddie Eynsford Hill is not the only "very helpless" man in these plays (15), for they both question the assumed maturity of their male protagonists, implying that they have as much or even more growing up to do than their childlike women. Hence references to Higgins's "babylike" qualities recur in the stage-directions (e.g., 37), while Ibsen suggests that the baby talk in which the Helmers indulge is very much for the benefit of Helmer's ego. The cute epithets that Nora accepts and encourages do not reflect her secret sense of agency in their marriage (14-16). Not unlike Miss Marjoribanks, she deliberately encourages her husband's sense that she is a "[l]ittle helpless thing" (46) – not only to boost his feelings of "manly self-reliance" (15), but to maintain control of specific situations. For example, she exaggerates her need for help with her costume and dance in order to distract Helmer and prevent him from reading Krogstad's letter. Given the tenuous claims of Helmer and Higgins to authority, it is hardly surprising that Nora's and Eliza's evolving worldviews compel them to challenge the men's easy assumption of dominance. Their resistance to masculine authority, which in both cases finds expression in thoughtful, eloquent speeches, succeeds, at least momentarily, in reversing the gendered hierarchy that the men have taken for granted throughout the play. Thus, Nora's devastating critique of her marriage shocks even the self-righteous Helmer into re-considering his complacent view of their domestic existence. "There is some truth in what you say," he concedes, "exaggerated and

overstrained though it be" (63). Similarly, Eliza is able to move Shaw's incorrigible genius by her "fierce speaking" in the final act. After his violent fulminations, he is sufficiently chastened to appeal to her to return to Wimpole Street, and "confess[es] humbly and gratefully": "I shall miss you, Eliza … I have learnt something from your idiotic notions" (127). Even the comparatively hapless Flora gives her husband a lesson in charity by pleading for a raise for the impoverished bank clerk Martin Grittle (27) – a disinterested act of kindness early in the play that proves critical to its happy ending.

The dramatization of women's moral development, then, serves as the vehicle of these plays' central insights, culminating – at least in Ibsen's and Shaw's texts – in rhetorical performances that are critical to the arguments whereby they seek to educate their audiences. But what role do they imagine women to play in their own education? Notwithstanding Higgins's insinuation that his pupil "has[n't] an idea that I havnt put into her head or a word that I havnt put into her mouth" (120-21), *A Doll's House* and *Pygmalion* clearly portray women as active agents of their own improvement. Both Ibsen and Shaw, moreover, emphasize how homely forms of literariness and verbal performance play a crucial role in the remarkable transformations occurring in these women.

Nora's emancipation begins when she takes the initiative to secure a loan from Krogstad, but she ultimately comes to realize the poverty of her doll-like existence because Helmer unwittingly fails to fulfill the script of supreme self-sacrifice that she has assiduously been constructing – the private fantasy that she cryptically refers to as "the miracle coming to pass" (45). The linguistic and imaginative freedom of the domestic sphere might allow Helmer to transform Nora into his pet bird, but it also enables her

immersion in a fantasy script that eventually plays a crucial role in expanding her consciousness. Like the wild Tarantella she performs, her imaginative excesses are self-correcting in that they disabuse her of her grandiose illusions about her husband.

Just as the linguistic freedom of the domestic sphere permits Nora to spin out fictions that facilitate her moral growth, its conventional norms of politeness contribute significantly to the gradual development of Eliza's sense of self-worth. Whereas the norms of polite discourse are regarded by the likes of Higgins as superficialities that carry little or no meaning, Eliza traces her "real education" (121) – "the beginning of self-respect" – to Pickering's "calling me Miss Doolittle that day when I first came to Wimpole Street" (122). She attributes her developing sense of self-worth to "a hundred little things" that Pickering performs but "never noticed" – such as "standing up and taking off your hat and opening doors" (122). It is clear, moreover, that in spite of her dismissive attitude towards her acquisition of standard English – she calls it "just like learning to dance in the fashionable way" (121) – the powers of linguistic analysis and refined habits of speech that she masters are no superficial accomplishments. In the process of struggling, among many other phonetic subtleties, to hear the difference between "tə-yee" and "ti:" (65), Eliza acquires the mental discipline and verbal resources that, as her masterly use of irony in the final act demonstrates, make her a worthy antagonist for her Pygmalion, and forces him to revise his egocentric view of her transformation.

The representation of feminine agency in these texts underscores the power of small things – whether it be a woman's private imaginings, polite manners, or phonetic variations among different sociolects of English – in catalyzing change, especially when

they are coupled with a larger vision affirming the possibility of improvement. As *Pygmalion* makes particularly clear, attention to (linguistic) form – the question of *how* rather than simply *what* one means – is not merely a genteel luxury, but is vital to understanding and intervening in the social world. This insight into the power of supposedly ornamental – if not trivial – particulars is recapitulated on a higher level by the ways in which the texts themselves engage with macro-textual structures such as genre and literary convention. We can all agree that the larger rhetorical goal of all three texts is to represent some significant development in their heroines, but to what extent do they reinforce or depart from existing conventions in the process, and how does this affect our evaluation of how effectively they achieve their purposes?

Most commentators would agree that *A Doll's House* and *Pygmalion* succeed in evoking powerful images of women's capacity for development. These plays therefore offer, I suggest, persuasive evidence that in order to represent change effectively, it is vital to incorporate notions of change on a formal level – to introduce an element of novelty into the way in which change is represented. For both texts are highly aware of existing literary and cultural conventions, and trade upon them in their efforts to represent the evolution of their heroines. In *A Doll's House*, Nora's worldview is, for much of the play, structured by melodrama[25] – Helmer's exasperated exclamation, "I don't want any melodramatic airs" (59), is not entirely without justice. Ibsen's text thus registers the lowly status of melodrama in late-nineteenth-century literary culture but depicts Nora

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[25] As the opening of *Miss Marjoribanks* indicates, the everyday theatricality in *A Doll's House* may be as easily derived from reading sentimental novels as from a familiarity with theatrical melodrama. I use the term here as a generic vector that is capable of being combined with other cultural forms. For a succinct overview of the vexed status of melodrama as a cultural form, see Matthew Buckley's "Refugee Theatre: Melodrama and Modernity's Loss" (2009).

engaging with the resources of this much-despised genre in creative and even empowering ways. A series of melodramatic sketches – such as the elderly admirer making her his heiress (16) – sustain her amidst the various pressures with which she must cope, and, indeed, infuse her contracted existence with meaning. Genre is thematized in this play – melodrama not only colors its chief protagonist's language and actions, but constitutes a critical force determining the play's action. Most significant in this regard is the "miraculous" scene in which she imagines her husband shedding his staid *bourgeois* persona and heroically proposing to sacrifice himself to protect her (65). Referred to vaguely at several points and only articulated fully in the climactic third act, this is the "miracle" that Nora anticipates with a mixture of terror and longing (e.g., 45; 48), and that structures her speech and conduct throughout her ordeal. At no point is she primarily concerned about the loss of domestic tranquility or the legal ramifications of her actions. Love, death, sacrifice, and redemption – these are key words that charge Nora's personal melodrama with quasi-religious, vaguely messianic overtones, so that when Helmer fails to play the heroic role assigned to him, the dissolution of her script threatens the foundations of her little world. Nora is shocked into awareness by the dissonance between her melodramatic script and reality: if Helmer is not the godlike figure she has made him in her imagination, who is he? Lacking a new cultural narrative with which to make sense of their relationship, Nora calls him a "strange man" (66) – but one whom she can address as an equal. Thus, in the final scene there is a marked shift in the Helmers' patterns of interaction. Gone are the diminutives and constant play-acting: instead of masking her agency in submissiveness, Nora openly asserts herself to initiate a

"serious" conversation (62) in which critical analysis, rather than fanciful fiction, prevails.

A distinct stylistic shift, therefore, characterizes Nora's transformation in *A Doll's House*, because the text recognizes the profound impact of cultural genre on character, and, in fact, traces the emergence of Nora's desire to "try to become [a human being]" (64) to the frustration of a set of generic and textual conventions that she had previously taken for granted. It is no surprise that the play should resist the generic pressure towards romantic reconciliation since in a sense, it must position itself beyond such theatrical conventions in order to reflect on them. Shaw's representation of Eliza's development in *Pygmalion* also gains in power for its frustration of conventional plot elements. It does not conclude with Eliza's triumph at the ball – the logical end-point of the bet that sets the plot in motion – but dwells on the "trouble" that follows her successful appearance as a duchess. By refusing to pair off its principal characters, moreover, the text not only revises the myth of its namesake, in which the artist falls in love with his creation, but resists the fairytale ending that might be expected to accompany Eliza's remarkable transformation. Eliza herself is initially baffled by the absence of the marriage plot that is traditionally used to close narratives of feminine development. Aware that Higgins doesn't "notice" her in a way that would make such a *denouement* possible (128), she cries, "Whats to become of me? Whats to become of me?" (100). Higgins's sexual indifference, however, enables an ending that gives far greater scope to feminine agency – Eliza realizes that, with her education and new rhetorical powers, she must determine the answer to this question herself. Her defiance of her Pygmalion (132), and not her successful impersonation of a duchess, represents a truer moment of apotheosis, revealing

as it does a sense of autonomy and empowerment that can sustain itself in the absence of masculine authority. Higgins is no romantic hero, but once he has moved beyond his personal sense of irritation, his generous nature is capable of appreciating Eliza's new-found moral independence. No longer a "squashed cabbage leaf," Eliza appears to him at the end "a tower of strength; a consort battleship" (132) – a growth in moral stature called forth by Shaw's frustration of the "happy ending" that Eliza's fairytale-like transformation seems to invite.

Whereas the play with – indeed, the frustration of – generic conventions in Ibsen and Shaw contributes significantly to the convincing portrayal of change in their protagonists, *Breaking a Butterfly* illustrates negatively the importance of formal innovation to the effective representation of human development. In Herman and Jones's version of *A Doll's House*, the play's hero, Humphrey Goddard, actually closes the final act with the line, "Nothing has happened, except that Flossie was a child yesterday: to-day she is a woman" (76). In this manner, the text emphatically proclaims its interest in the issue of women's education and announces to the audience – in case they haven't realized it – that Flora has attained maturity in the drama they have just witnessed. Perhaps their fears that the audience might fail to grasp this crucial point were justified, for there are considerable changes to Ibsen's dramatic design in the English adaptation, demonstrating that the intention to represent feminine *Bildung per se* is not enough – *how* one represents this process is critical to the coherence of such a project. In spite of its presumable interest in valorizing women's education and autonomy, its association with Ibsen's radical play is about the most progressive aspect of *Butterfly*. Its basic storyline resembles Ibsen's plot in many particulars – a loving wife struggles to preserve her

marriage from the consequences of an unwitting act of forgery – so that it is recognizably a version of *A Doll's House.* Yet it remains a pale simulacrum of the latter, showing by contrast the power of Ibsen's linguistic and generic innovations. Indeed, *Butterfly*'s reliance on literary stereotypes – its lack of interest in incorporating an element of change on a formal level – not only attenuate the force of Ibsen's argument for female emancipation, but in important ways reverses it. Notwithstanding its radical progenitor, its adherence to generic conventions serves to reinforce traditional gender hierarchies, entirely eliminating the sense of urgency that Ibsen attaches to women thinking critically for themselves.

For one thing, the play lacks the sophisticated metatheatrical consciousness that *A Doll's House* evinces. Unlike Nora, Flora indulges in no secret romantic imaginings about her own power or her husband, whose strictness (37) and "stern" manner (43) seem to be the main obstacles preventing her disclosure. Nevertheless, the conventions of melodrama are very much in evidence in her character – for example, under the strain of the situation she locks herself up in her bedroom, and is reported to be "[p]acing up and down like a wild creature" (42). As she contemplates suicide, she too declares, "Well, they may say what they like of me, I did it all for love" (53). In this play, however, Flora's "awakening" – which is explicitly signaled to the audience in the same speech – is limited to an awareness of the legal implications of her actions:

> I did not know myself till yesterday. Oh, my eyes have been opened! I thought I was the best wife in the world. Ah, but I was mistaken, it seems that one may do all sorts of dreadful things and not mean any harm. (53)

Whereas Nora declares the law that criminalizes her actions "a very bad law" (26), Flora implicitly accepts its gender bias, and rather theatrically turns her newly acquired legal

awareness into a sublime moment of revelation, causing the clownish figure Dan Birdseye to interpose, "Mrs. Goddard, you are taking this matter too seriously" (53). Most importantly, Flora's melodramatic style never alters. In *A Doll's House*, Nora explicitly critiques the patterns of speech that have characterized her marriage, and initiates a more critical, analytical mode of discourse in the final act of the play. Here, "Flossie" remains trapped in a melodramatic mode of speaking and acting until the very end. Moments before the curtain falls, she is still threatening Dunkley in the language of revenge tragedy:

> … Listen to my last words. You shall never have one moment's peace from this time forth. I will haunt you, and make your life a misery to you. You shall hate yourself and wish yourself dead. You shall never have any friendship or love upon this earth. Now do what you please. You have earned your revenge – take it! (73-74)

Humphrey may proclaim Flora's maturation in the play's closing line, but there is very little sense that she has changed in any significant way. In complete contrast to Nora, whose greatest realization occurs after the external threat is removed, Flora's troubles end when Martin Grittle appears with the fatal promissory note, which her husband burns.

Another aspect of the play's conservative relationship to style and literary convention that does much to undermine the radical potential of its professed topic is its conformity to literary stereotypes about gender roles. Unlike Ibsen, who unflinchingly reveals that the contracted dimensions of the doll's house are actually built to accommodate Helmer's pettiness, Herman and Jones never seriously question the authority of their virtuous hero. That it is he who announces Flora's maturation serves, in fact, to reinforce his authority – not only as his wife's master and critic, but over the meaning of the play. Humphrey's worst fault is his stern manner – which is ameliorated for the audience by virtue of asides affirming his loving faith in Flora and various

instances of his generosity.[26] Plot elements that point to Helmer's fastidious and small-minded nature are carefully removed – for example, Humphrey and Dunkley are not, unlike Helmer and Krogstad, childhood acquaintances, so there is no question of unwanted familiarity from that quarter. The heroic representation of Humphrey throughout leads to the most striking deviation from Ibsen's text – the "miracle" that Nora anticipates in the earlier play actually comes to pass, with its miraculous quality strengthened by the fact that Flora does not anticipate Humphrey's self-sacrifice at all. Thus, Herman and Jones's text goes out of its way to affirm for its audience the very myth of godlike masculine authority that Ibsen dissolves for Nora. *Butterfly*'s investment in this cultural narrative means that, relative to such heroic masculinity, Flora must always remain the childish "Flossie." In keeping with the text's implicit infantilization of women, Flora's most effectual act is not the result of critical reflection, but a spontaneous deed of kindness performed in a winningly childlike manner: she cheers Grittle up, securing his loyalty and, unexpectedly, the play's happy ending. In a sense, then, there is no contradiction between Flora's stasis and Humphrey's declaration at the end: woman is most fully herself, the subtext of the play suggests, when she fulfils the romantic ideal of the child.

The unconvincing representation of Flora's maturation in *Butterfly* emphasizes that the effective representation of development and change must attempt to incorporate an element of change in the manner in which this process is represented. In other words, the

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[26] In stark contrast to Helmer's pettiness and lack of trust in Nora, Herman and Jones go out of their way to emphasize Humphrey's unswerving faith in Flora. Thus, in Act 1, Humphrey confidently dismisses the suspicions of his mother and sister about Flora's relationship to Dunkley ("I'll answer for my wife, and I need nobody to help me look after her" [11]). Later, in spite of her strange behavior and efforts to conceal her imprudence from him, he declares in an aside, "I will answer for her innocence with my life" (45).

mediation of the need for the improvement of women's condition must take into account stylistic and generic questions – for, as we have seen, such a project can be seriously compromised if one refuses to relinquish literary stereotypes and conventions that fly in the face of the process of development they seek to represent, and in fact render it entirely unnecessary. The fact that the effective mediation of women's capacity for development must involve the destruction of some of the most beloved stereotypes and cultural forms helps explain the sense of loss that marks *A Doll's House* and *Pygmalion.* If both plays suggest that women can – indeed, must – play an active role in their own improvement and wider social change, they also register the emotional cost of change, its destabilizing effects and uncertain gains. It is perhaps understandable why one Victorian critic should have pronounced *Butterfly* superior to *A Doll's House* in terms of its artistic merits,[27] for there is a disturbing lack of closure in Nora's famous exit. Huge question marks hang over the fate of both Nora and Eliza at the end. What is to become of Nora's children? Does her responsibility to herself entail neglecting her responsibilities to her family? Is Nora's departure to some extent governed by the same melodramatic logic fueling her earlier devotion to Helmer? What will Eliza do after leaving Wimpole Street? Does she really attain a measure of independence from Higgins and Pickering, or is her spirited resistance merely a pose – as much a fantasy as the conclusion that Eliza initially entertains? The impressive rhetoric that marks the emancipation of these women is to some extent compromised by an inescapable sense of the many complications elided in

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[27] Noting the play's debt to "Ibsen's 'Norah'," the *Le Follet* reviewer described "Breaking a Butterfly" as "well written and cleverly constructed ("Amusements"). In a review that appeared in *Theater*, another reviewer wrote that the play was "unimportant and trifling" in comparison with Ibsen's, yet still acknowledged it literary merits: "All that is satiric or unpleasant in the original has been eliminated and rendered sympathetic, and even if the result possess literary finish, it is a far cry from Ibsen" (qtd. in Wearing: 169).

their performances. Moreover, if both women are aware of the impossibility of reversing the transformations they have experienced, there is nevertheless a sense of mourning for their earlier, less complex selves. Hence Eliza's sense of frustration finds expression in the half-wish, "If I only could go back to my flower basket!" (129), and Nora's poignant interjection, "Oh, Torvald, I no longer believe in miracles" (67), sounds as much like an apology as a statement. If the ends of these plays are to be read as beginnings, they are hard beginnings amidst the ruins of shattered illusions – an uncertain road with meager comforts to sustain the travelers.

Nevertheless, no matter how meager their resources might appear in relation to the daunting task of crafting lives outside prescribed social norms, what modest powers these characters have acquired in order to declare their independence should not be underestimated. After all, the power of connecting "the smallest things with the greatest" (Eliot, *Mill* 273) – whether such "small things" be the arts of domesticity, phonetic distinctions, literary genres, or the doll-like women of the three plays – is the fundamental idea emphasized in one way or another in all the Victorian writings on women discussed in this chapter. In the process, these texts offer a rich resource for thinking about the power of literature as a social practice. By mobilizing arguments that revealed the critical influence of domestic culture for good or ill, writers like Ellis, Lewis and Mill indirectly valorize the significance of recreational reading practices within the domestic sphere, but more generally, such arguments about the cumulative social impact of apparently – and intensely – private activities supplies a powerful model for imagining how the institution of literature might become a vehicle, not only of progressive change,

but of consolidating desirable social values such as gender equality and communal feeling.

While intensely personal literary activity in texts such as *The Mill on the Floss* and *A Doll's House* reveal literature as a powerful instrument for understanding and engaging with the innumerable "nameless and undefinable influences" (Lewis 14) that shape the human heart, these works also invite us to imagine how the metamorphoses of consciousness in these women – these "slender …, insignificant thread[s] in human history" (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 102) – might look when multiplied over "every town, and by hundreds of obscure hearths" (*Mill* 273) in Britain and beyond. If it is "from the household of every citizen [that] issue forth the errors and prejudices which govern the world" (Lewis 38), then Miss Marjoribanks's victorious political campaign offers reassuring proof that as humble a channel as domestic discourse – and the creative use of language therein – might similarly serve as key instrument for reforming public culture. In "Civilization," Mill had written that "it holds universally, that the only mode of learning to do anything, is actually doing something of the same kind under easier circumstances" (124). Importing this insight into their consideration of feminine development, these texts on women affirm that the relative ease and protected circumstances of writing, reading and discussing literature do not necessarily make it a trivial activity – an empty exercise in rehearsing good intentions – but rather, a crucial step in realizing larger visions of social improvement.

Epilogue: The Ends of Civilization

Over four chapters, this dissertation has offered glimpses of an alternative conceptual history for the Victorian idea of civilization. Necessarily incomplete, its account nevertheless establishes that the Victorians did not use "civilization" merely to affirm the achievements of their society. Throughout this study, we have seen how this concept also provoked critical reflection about – and a conscious effort to recover – what its relentless focus on progress threatened to compromise. In particular, one of this dissertation's main concerns has been to reveal how this self-reflexive idea of civilization motivated the re-evaluation of poetic or literary language – a category of discourse that nineteenth-century thinkers had themselves defined as anachronistic, even "savage." Further illustrating civilization's capacity to sponsor the re-evaluation of concepts it had previously marginalized, the final chapter then examined how writers engaged with the relationship between women and civilization to realize more fully the valorization of the feminine already embedded in Victorian discourse on domesticity.

Although this study has focused on civilization's implications for literary language, and, to a lesser extent, the feminine, poetry and womanhood are only two from a larger set of concepts whose gradual – and ongoing – recovery takes place under the aegis of this idea. To this set we might add the concepts of childhood, nature, interiority, the past, and religion – indeed, the Victorian discourse of civilization may be regarded as an important bearer of Romanticism's intellectual legacy. To illustrate briefly the diffusion of this understanding of civilization into broader cultural circles, we can do no better at the close of this study than to turn to the Victorian Robinsonade, or island adventure tale. This popular children's genre engages with the discourse of civilization in sophisticated

ways, gesturing to the dialectical modes of thinking it supported. That texts such as Frederick Marryat's *Masterman Ready* (1841-42) and R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1858) can be shown to avail themselves of this self-reflexive concept of civilization offers particularly compelling evidence of its wider cultural impact, since these texts have often been charged with trading in crudely imperialist narratives of civilization.

The Robinson Tradition and the Victorian Concept of Civilization

Because children's assimilation of what it means to be "civilized" is necessarily incomplete, childhood is one of those categories that I have suggested was opposed to – and hence valorized through – the Victorian concept of civilization. This dialectical understanding of civilization therefore had important implications for children's literature. One effect of this was the growing seriousness with which writers approached the work of writing for children, and which is discernible in the Victorian Robinsonade's increasing commitment to the methods and ethos of realism. Marryat, for example, distinguishes his adventure tale from the most famous nineteenth-century Robinsonade, *Der Schweizerische Robinson* (*The Swiss Family Robinson* [1812]), by contrasting his own respect for geographical and scientific accuracy to Johann David Wyss's "ignorance, or carelessness … in describing the vegetable and animal productions of the island on which the family had been wrecked" (vii). The care that Marryat recommends in handling "what may appear to be trifles" in children's books (viii) is evident as well in *The Coral Island*, where Ballantyne draws on the geography and incidents from John Williams's *Narrative of Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands* (1837) – among other

nonfictional sources – to create a realistic setting for his tale. Ballantyne's commitment to realistic detail was so strong that an erroneous reference to the cocoa-nut greatly upset him, and he resolved only to write about places that he had visited himself (Quayle 143).

The attention of these books to scientific and historical detail should not simply be treated as a function of their didactic aims. Rather, they reflect a growing respect for the child reader that was shaped in part by the way in which the concept of civilization tended to motivate the recovery of categories it appeared to exclude. Many approaches to the Victorian Robinsonade – especially more recent ideological critiques of the genre – imply that such texts tend to construct their readers as passive consumers. On the contrary, the pedagogical models enacted by these texts assign considerable agency and authority to children in the learning process. Anticipating A. A. Milne's complaint that "It is the 'Family' which spoils the *The Swiss Family Robinson*" ("The Robinson Tradition" 25), the Victorian Robinsonades contrive by degrees to remove the conventional structures of authority embedded in the family. While the paternal authority of the father is very much in place in Wyss's seminal novel, one may discern from *Masterman Ready* to *Treasure Island* (1881-82) a progression in which conventional sources of adult authority are attenuated, and children assume increasingly active roles.

In *Masterman Ready*, parental authority is displaced by that of the eponymous working-class hero, whose readiest – and ablest – followers are not the parents, but their eldest son William and black servant-girl, Juno. Ballantyne removes the family from his tale altogether by stranding three teenage boys on *The Coral Island*, while Robert Louis Stevenson confines Mrs. Hawkins's bungling to the first part of *Treasure Island*. Stevenson's novel does not, moreover, stop at liberating Jim Hawkins from maternal

authority. It goes further to invest Jim's developing capacity for independent thought and action with moral urgency, linking his heroic accomplishments on the island – such as the discovery of Ben Gunn (ch. 15) and *Hispaniola* (ch. 22) – directly to his disobedience towards his adult companions. Reflecting the impact of the Victorians' concept of civilization on their understanding of childhood, the children in these adventure tales are no mere objects of instruction, but have important lessons to teach adult readers as well.

Even as these texts register an enhanced appreciation for the receptiveness, curiosity, and adaptability of youth, they also trade upon an interest in and value for "wild" or uncivilized places that received a new impetus, I suggest, from the Victorians' dialectical understanding of civilization. Studies of the Scouting movement inspired by Lord Baden-Powell have documented the rising popularity of camping and outdoor activities in the early twentieth century, but the proliferation of periodical literature devoted to "camping out" in the late-Victorian period suggests that the cult of the "great outdoors" was very much alive several decades before.[1] An important source of the Victorian Robinsonade's appeal derives from its participation in this broader cultural trend. More than a juvenile fascination with pirates and savages, one finds in these texts a deep sense of delight simply in imagining how people might survive – and thrive – away from the comforts and amenities of civilization. Both Marryat's and Ballantyne's novels clearly respond – and contribute – to this enthusiasm for camping out, dwelling lovingly

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[1] Using *The Nineteenth-Century Index* database, I surveyed a wide range of periodical articles from the 1870s and 80s that reflect the Victorians' enthusiasm for "camping out." Besides stories that dwell on the joys of camping such as "Charlie's First Camping Out" (1873) and "He Camped Out" (1889), there are many articles that provide advice on equipment and planning camping trips – for example, "Hints for Camping Out" (1882), "Practical Hints on Camping" (1882), and "Canoeing and Camping for Women" (1885).

on the details of setting up camp, hunting and gathering food, and surveying the geographical peculiarities of their fictional islands.

Beyond offering readers the vicarious pleasures of "camping out" on desert islands, *Masterman Ready* and *The Coral Island* reflect the impact of the discourse of civilization by developing the idea that the wilderness calls forth and exercises in people potentialities and skills that civilized existence has left undeveloped. Thus, the natural environment becomes a vehicle of intellectual development in *The Coral Island*, engaging the boys' interest in, for example, the science of coral atolls, and training their powers of observation. Of course, both novels also emphasize how island living also results in physical benefits for its inhabitants – Ballantyne's protagonists, for instance, are well fortified for the moral and physical trials of the latter parts of their story by frequent bathing and outdoor exercise on their idyllic island. A more striking example is supplied by Mrs. Seagrave, who at the beginning of *Masterman Ready* is frequently rendered ineffectual in emergencies by her "not very strong health" (5-6). In the course of the novel, however, island living strengthens her in body and mind.[2] Compelled to abandon the role of the delicate Victorian matron, she is surprised at how cheerful she begins to feel about their rough island existence (157), and by the end of the novel even finds sufficient courage to help the men repel the attacking savages.

Perhaps most importantly, these texts represent the wild, uncivilized space of the island as having an improving effect on people as social beings. The relaxation of conventional social hierarchies and the need for co-operation on these desert-islands

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[2] Mrs. Seagrave's greatly improved health anticipates the notion of "camp-cure" – the idea that camping out might have a therapeutic effect "in cases of nervous depression or tubercular disease" ("Camp Cure" 320).

produces a micro-culture of greater egalitarianism, enabling the characters to achieve a more harmonious state of social relations than would otherwise be possible. In *Masterman Ready*, the exigencies of the situation enable the government official Mr. Seagrave and his family to recognize much more fully the virtues of the working-class Ready. Their acknowledgement of his moral equality – indeed, authority – is registered not in word alone, but through their willingness to take their share of manual labor under Ready's direction. Similarly, the process of making the Coral Island their home creates strong affective bonds between Ralph Rover and his friends. "There was, indeed, no note of discord whatever in the symphony we played together on that sweet Coral Island;" enthuses Ralph,

> and I am now persuaded that this was owing to our having been all tuned to the same key, namely, that of *love*! Yes, we loved one another with much fervency, while we lived on that island; and, for the matter of that, we love each other still. (100)

The Victorian concept of civilization, then, shaped the idea that experiences of nature might form human beings who were not only physically and mentally fitter, but, as this effusive passage suggests, possessed a greater capacity for developing harmonious social relations with others.

Nevertheless, the workings of the discourse of civilization in these texts should not be conflated with the naïve romanticization of nature or, for that matter, childhood innocence. If, as I have suggested, the discourse of civilization gradually motivated the valorization of concepts it had othered, this process nevertheless did not entail the rejection of "civilization" and the cultural achievements it affirmed. Thus, while Mrs. Seagrave is surprised at how little she feels "the loss of books" (157), and Jack Martin censures the tendency to privilege talking over doing (17), both Marryat and Ballantyne

emphasize that it is the mental culture of civilization – in particular, the information and literate habits of mind that derive from reading – that make it possible for their castaways to enjoy the benefits of nature and youth.

It is interesting, therefore, that in spite of the idea that the main attraction of desert-islands is that "you did what you liked there" (Milne 25), the importance of organization and discipline should so regularly be emphasized – and illustrated – in these Robinsonades. Mrs. Seagrave sums up the central precept of *Masterman Ready* when she proclaims that "method is everything. While one careless little girl is looking for her thimble, another will have finished her work" (125). As her illustration suggests, the educational concerns of the domestic novel are not as alien to these romances as one might first assume.

Throughout this study, I have foregrounded the intimate relationship that developed between literature and civilization in nineteenth-century writing – literature was even implicated by some, as we shall see, in what they perceived as civilization's moribund tendencies. It is particularly significant, therefore, that reading should be defended early on in *The Coral Island*, for this immediately corrects the assumption that the book is privileging childhood and outdoor activity at the expense of civilization and its cultural resources. Thus, when Peterkin, the youngest of the trio, speaks contemptuously of the ineffectual "man of books" (23), he is soundly taken to task by the older Jack, who retorts: "I have seen a lot of fellows who never looked into books at all, who knew nothing about anything except the things they had actually seen, and very little they knew even about these" (23). A highly practical and athletic young man himself, Jack has no qualms about declaring himself "a great reader of books of travel and adventure" (23),

and indeed the narrative goes on to demonstrate Jack's argument that book knowledge can support effective action in crucial ways. To begin with, the Victorian culture of information – what nineteenth-century theorists of civilization referred to as "diffusion of knowledge" – plays a crucial role in helping the castaways identify sources of food and other kinds of useful objects in their surroundings. It is the boys' familiarity with this literature of knowledge that allows them to identify, for instance, the different uses of the coconut palm (22); the "celebrated breadfruit tree" (36); and the candlenut's capacity to function as a lamp (53). Ballantyne emphasizes, moreover, that the reading of popular science serves not only utilitarian ends, but also enables the boys take an interest in and derive amusement from nature. If nature exerts a beneficial influence on these characters, the novel also suggests that this is a "nature" which is highly mediated by texts and literate culture. Among the literate habits of mind that structure the boys' activities and are modeled in the text are the making of lists and inventories (e.g., 17-18; 123), relating knowledge of texts to practical situations, and drawing up plans for the future. Ballantyne makes it emphatically clear, therefore, that the ability of the trio to thrive on their island, is far from the result of "pluck" alone – equally critical to their survival are the textual resources and skills that they bring with them.

By demonstrating the power of reading and of discourse in general, *The Coral Island* makes a metafictional statement that affirms the educational value of its professed genre. Indeed, in its depiction of Ralph's friendship with the pirate "Bloody Bill," the text compels us to imagine a situation in which physical action is useless, and words become the only – or at least the most efficacious – means of acting available. This reversal of the implicit prioritization of deeds over words occurs after Bill has helped Ralph escape from

the unscrupulous sandalwood traders who kidnap him from the Coral Island. Fatally wounded, Bill's physical pain pales compared to the mental anguish he experiences as death approaches. With no Bible on board, the dramatic focus of this death scene is on Ralph's struggle to find the right words to comfort the dying man. Wracking his memory to the utmost, Ralph succeeds in recalling two Biblical verses that speak of the redemption of sinners. Bill undergoes no miraculous death-bed conversion, but Ralph's texts – one of which is "Though your sins be red like crimson, they shall be white as snow" (208) – evoke a powerful reaction from him. Bill expresses a mixture of incredulity, frustration, and perplexity, but is clearly affected, for he asks to hear the verses again. There is a stark contrast between the dominant style of this carefully elaborated scene and its concluding paragraph, in which Ballantyne relates Ralph's efforts to revive Bill in a series of short clauses. The earlier paragraphs dwell in considerable detail on Bill's energetic reaction to Ralph's words, even employing a description of a violent squall to suggest the psychological impact of these texts on the dying man. In this final paragraph, however, Ralph's physical actions produce no response, and the abrupt finality of the concluding sentence ("there was no flutter there – the pirate was dead" [209]) emphasizes the ineffectuality of deeds relative to words in the most critical of situations.

Indeed, the text's thematization of reading and textual activity provides yet further evidence of Ballantyne's engagement with the self-reflexive concept of civilization examined throughout this study. In particular, Ralph's efforts to comfort Bill provide an important example of how the text does not simply valorize the extensive, peculiarly modern habits of reading that were fostered by Victorian print culture. Ralph's at least

partially successful attempt to reassure his dying friend does not depend on information-focused reading that yield useful facts, but rather on an older tradition of intensive reading often associated with the study of religious texts. Thus, the novel affirms both information-centered reading and more traditional uses of texts as sources of moral encouragement and ethical guidance. Its efforts to produce a balanced treatment of newer and older modes of using texts reflect the dialectical ways of thinking encouraged by the discourse of civilization.

Ralph's use of the Bible to relieve Bill's death-throes is just one instance of Ballantyne's use of Christian discourse in *The Coral Island*, for religion occupies a prominent role in the plot, particularly towards the end of the text. In the final movement of the novel, the boys' attempts to help a group of Christianized natives go awry. Imprisoned by the hostile natives of Mango, they are saved at the eleventh hour by a missionary who miraculously converts Mango's ruler, Tararo, and his followers. I suggest that this aspect of the text provides insights into another area – religion – in which one might observe the dialectical workings of the discourse of civilization. Modern critics have often assumed that the text is animated by a retrograde, chauvinistic understanding of religion – one that, by asserting the superiority of Christianity over all others, merely repeats an age-old story of bigotry and intolerance. Yet the text's deployment of religion is far from as backward or chauvinistic as critics have suggested. For one thing, religion serves as an important vehicle of social critique in the novel. Much of the text's engagement with Christian discourse serves to draw attention to the failure of nominal Christians to live up to its ideals, and much of its critical edge is directed towards the corruptions of Western civilization rather than to the inferiority of its

racial others. More interesting, perhaps, is Ballantyne's discovery in Christian discourse of a resource for inventing a more progressive adventure tale. His creative use of Christian discourse emerges much more clearly when the missionary plot-element is considered in the context of the text's metafictional interest in genre. By allowing the missionary, and not the boys, to bring about the novel's dénouement by peaceful means rather than any spectacular act of daring, Ballantyne consciously works against the generic pressures of romance to celebrate individual heroics and the use of force. To employ conversion as the *deus ex machina* might not be any more realistic, but it does make an important point about the value of employing social engagement and persuasion to deal with conflict. Instead of glorifying physical violence, the novel represents persuasive discourse grounded in ethical example as the path of true heroism. Ballantyne's use of Christian discourse in his revision of the adventure genre reveals the religion's progressive potential as a literary resource, showing how the Christian tradition might be appropriated to tell radically different kinds of stories – stories that reflect the more humane, progressive set of values encapsulated in the concept of civilization. His Robinsonade thus illustrates one of the ways in which the Victorians' self-reflexive understanding of civilization prompted writers to rethink the concept of religion, investing it with new significance for modern culture.

W(h)ither civilization?

So what happened to this concept of civilization? How did it become so unthinkable, and how did "civilization" become so disreputable a term for modern critics? Was the concept too fragile to withstand history's contradiction of its ideals? Is the apparent

dissolution of this mode of thinking about civilization and its linguistic dimensions the result of writers consciously rejecting an idea that they no longer found persuasive? A swift glance at a few late-Victorian and early twentieth-century texts yields hints as to how we might begin to answer these questions.

To be sure, the end of the Victorian period appears to mark a crisis in the fortunes of the term. George Gissing's deployment of "civilization" in *New Grub Street* (1891) suggests that by the turn of the century, the discourse of civilization had begun to calcify into a tired commonplace, offering at best a target for irony. When challenged by the retired paper manufacturer John Yule to defend his chosen profession, Gissing's antihero Jasper Milvain rather glibly replies that "[the business of literature] helps to spread civilisation" (21). Far from satisfying his interlocutor, this evokes a violent tirade from the retired invalid:

> "Civilisation!" exclaimed John, scornfully. "What do you mean by civilisation? Do you call it civilising men to make them weak, flabby creatures, with ruined eyes and dyspeptic stomachs? Who is it that reads most of the stuff that poured out daily by the ton from the printing-press? Just the men and women who ought to spend their leisure hours in open-air exercise; the people who earn their bread by sedentary pursuits, and who need to *live* as soon as they are free from the desk or the counter, not to moon over small print. Your Board schools, your popular press, your spread of education! Machines for ruining the country, that's what I call it." (21-22)

In his emphasis on the virtues of physical training, one may detect in John Yule's speech distinct traces of the enthusiasm for outdoor sports and activities mentioned earlier. Whereas, however, *The Coral Island* affirms both nature and book learning, in Gissing's novel the idealization of the outdoors now seems to entail the denigration of literary culture. John Yule, in fact, desires nothing less than "to see the business of literature abolished" (21). His invective presents literary culture as a pernicious habit that has the opposite effect on individuals and societies than that imagined by earlier thinkers about

civilization. Completely reversing Jasper's platitude about literature's civilizing agency, Yule implies that this literary notion of civilization is a malady that reading serves to spread.

One might be tempted to dismiss John Yule's diatribe against the Victorian concept of civilization as the ravings of an embittered old invalid, but Gissing's novel does much to provoke serious consideration of the question he addresses to Jasper: "Do you suppose … that society is going to be reformed by you people who write for money?" (22). The text as a whole pursues Yule's ironic reversal of the commonplace about literature's civilizing power. Under the mounting pressures of the literary industry, writers in this novel can barely preserve themselves, let alone think of reforming others. The physically debilitating effects of the literary profession appear to be confirmed in the pestilential imagery and sense of intense strain that pervades, for example, the depiction of Marian Yule's research at the library. In his representation of the struggling literary practitioners who populate New Grub Street, Gissing seems intent on underscoring the grim reality behind Jasper's facetious reference to writers as "dwellers in the valley of the shadow of books" (14). Expanding on this morbid association between books and death, the novel's bleaker moments confirm John Yule's attack on the discourse of civilization, representing literature as the carrier of a diseased culture.

Bodily infirmity is not the only affliction that this literary malaise threatens to visit upon its victims. More insidious, Gissing suggests, is the moral degeneration that it produces. Jasper's unscrupulous behavior and callous treatment of Marian may secure his professional advancement, but seriously undermines commonplaces about the civilizing effects of literature. If the business of literature actually erodes moral integrity, how can

those participating in it hope to improve society? Jasper's pyrrhic "victory" at the end is laced with an irony that has all but leeched the Victorian concept of civilization of meaning. The term has a hollow, almost sinister, ring to it in Jasper's declaration, "I am a civilised man, that's all" (111). His use of the term reduces "civilization" to little more than an apology for moral mediocrity and worse. The predominance of this self-proclaimed "civilised man" in the grotesquely complacent final scene of the novel does not augur well for the concept.

If *New Grub Street* turns on its head Victorian assumptions about literature's civilizing function, one of the most enduring literary creations of the late-Victorian period vehemently rejects the basic premise and ideals of the *Bildungsroman* – one of the foremost genres in which the concept of civilization was articulated and explored. Like Gissing's novel, J. M. Barrie's play *Peter Pan; or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* (1904) reflects the cultural doubts assailing the discourse of civilization at the *fin-de-siecle*. Writers seemed to be finding it increasingly difficult to think of the human implications of civilization in positive terms, while the self-critical impulse that had always been a part of this discourse took more and more extreme forms. Significantly, although *Peter Pan* is very much indebted to the nineteenth-century Robinson tradition,[3] the play does not offer even the qualified valorization of civilization that one finds in *Masterman Ready* and *The Coral Island.* Instead, it poses serious challenges to the educational implications of this concept by making nonsense of the *Bildungsroman*'s

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[3] In his Dedication "To the Five" that prefaces the text of *Peter Pan*, Barrie connects the origins of Peter and the Never Land in his voracious appetite for island adventure stories in "penny dreadfuls" – as he puts it, "his greed for islands" (78). A parodic tribute to the Robinsonade genre, *The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island*, which records Barrie's holiday with the Llewelyn Davies family in the summer of 1901, is also mentioned as a precursor to *Peter Pan* (80-81).

concern with maturation and social integration on several levels. In the first place, the boundaries between childhood and civilized maturity are blurred – Mr. Darling's childish behavior in the nursery in the opening act suggests that adulthood merely involves a different kind of game, only one that is considerably less pleasurable than those that Wendy, John, and Michael engage in. Barrie gestures, moreover, at the de-individualizing – indeed, dehumanizing – effects of civilization in his facetious commentary on Mr. Darling in the stage-directions: "In the city where he sits on a stool all day, as fixed as a postage stamp, he is so like all the others on stools that you recognise him not by his face but by his stool" (90; 1.1). With such a model of normative adult masculinity framing the action of the play, it is hardly remarkable that the hero's mantra should be, "I want always to be a little boy and to have fun" (99; 1.1; 133; 4.1).

Barrie's ironic attitude towards the idea of growing up – and the concept of civilization implicated in it – is not confined to his satirical treatment of adulthood in the play. The rhetorical pressure of the text as a whole is to make Peter's seemingly impossible desire appear entirely logical. For it is not only Peter who desires "always to be a little boy and to have fun." If in his eternal boyhood, Peter embodies "youth," "joy" and potentiality itself ("I'm a little bird that has broken out of the egg" [145; 5.1]), then the text effectively re-articulates Peter's wish through the elaborate network of desire it constructs around him. It is striking that almost every character in this play wants Peter in one way or another. Nana and Captain Hook want to destroy him; John, Michael, and the lost boys want to be him; and a more conventional form of romantic desire for Peter link Tinker Bell, Tiger Lily, and Wendy. By placing Peter at the center of this structure of desire, the text implicitly endorses the supreme value of the static form of childhood he

so jealously guards. Just as John Yule opposes literary culture to physical vigor, Barrie's play effectively makes the imaginative vitality of childhood antithetical to any form of development. In contrast to the *Bildungsroman*, in which self-formation involves the preservation of childhood's imaginative powers, particularly in the form of linguistic creativity, Peter's magnetic qualities suggest that these creative energies are exclusive to childhood, and can only be diminished by maturation. There can be no argument, after all, against the logic of Peter's spontaneous utterance in the penultimate scene of the play: "I'm youth, I'm joy, I'm a little bird that has broken out of the egg" (145; 5.1) – Barrie intimates as much by having Hook throw himself into crocodile's jaws moments later. If joy and creativity are synonymous with youth, then the text's anti-developmental impulse is entirely reasonable.

In texts such as *New Grub Street* and *Peter Pan*, then, one already sees the partial denaturing of the Victorian concept of civilization – in particular, how the negative critical energies of this discourse were beginning to predominate over its capacity to articulate civilization's utopian potential. One should hardly be surprised, therefore, to observe a further darkening of the lens in writing after the Great War, which, with its unprecedented scale of bloodshed and destruction, must have seemed a cruel mockery of this idea of civilization. Indeed, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) contains a damning indictment of "civilization" in the figure of Septimus Warren Smith, whose desperate psychic struggles in the aftermath of the war clearly implicate this discourse in the nationalistic propaganda that sent an entire generation of young men to war. Woolf makes painfully clear the role of literature in disseminating the structures of feeling underwriting the discourse that has betrayed Septimus. In a flashback that recalls

Septimus's efforts to improve himself, Woolf represents him as "devouring Shakespeare, Darwin, *The History of Civilisation*, and Bernard Shaw" (85), and writes that he went "to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square" (86). The breakdown – and eventual suicide – of this self-educated character offers an extremely dark vision of the (self-)destructive ends to which the discourse of civilization could lead. Through the fate of Septimus, Woolf gestures to a vicious alliance between literature and the concept of civilization it affirms – or at least one that is highly vulnerable to political manipulation.

Framed by such broken figures as Septimus and the lingering traces of war, "civilization" in this novel cannot but be marked by a heavy sense of irony. Did the First World War, then, deal the final death-blow to the Victorian concept of civilization? Did the Victorians' understanding of the concept become unavailable to writers struggling to come to terms with the prominent role of literature in the culture that produced the war? It certainly feels as if the word itself has been steeped in the "well of tears" that Clarissa Dalloway imagines "[t]his late age of the world's experience had bred in them all" (9), and dyed in a deep sense of failure. This sense of failure and irony emerges even in a passage evoking the consciousness of the quixotic Peter Walsh, for whom "civilization" has been a key concept. Back in London after years in India, he invokes the term in order to validate his idiosyncratic life-choices:

> He had been sent down from Oxford – true. He had been a Socialist, in some sense a failure – true. Still the future of civilisation lies, he thought, in the hands of young men like that; of young men such as he was, thirty years ago; with their love of abstract principles; getting books sent out to them all the way from London to a peak in the Himalayas. (50)

Poignantly – and perhaps a little comically – Woolf represents Peter's invocation of civilization in such a way that foregrounds the disparity between his misadventures and

his idealistic belief that his checkered career has somehow contributed to the "future of civilization." There is also a peculiar sense of nostalgia, for this stretch of free indirect discourse does not claim to represent Peter as a vital influence on civilization at present, but Peter "such as he was, thirty years ago." It seems difficult to imagine, moreover, how Peter derives any comfort from a sense of his past achievements, since the present realities of postwar Britain do not say much for the civilizing efforts of "young men such as he was." The consolations of civilization seem bound to the past, while Peter's language defers its achievements to some indeterminate point in the future.

And yet, "civilization" does not merely serve as the locus for irony in this novel. Allowing her to move beyond its disappointments and failures, Woolf's genius enables her to capture elements of its dialectical impulses, testifying to the resilience of the Victorians' concept of civilization, and its continued availability to writers beyond the nineteenth century. Even in the passage above, "civilization" is not treated in wholly ironic terms. It is shown to perform important work for the individual, protecting Peter from despairing at the contradictions of his quixotic career. Clarissa, too, intuitively finds in the concept a valuable resource against self-doubt. Her friendship with Peter is intimately associated with "civilization": "She owed him words: 'sentimental,' 'civilised'; they started up everyday of her life as if he guarded her" (36).

This is not to say, however, that Woolf simply valorizes "civilization" as a device for making oneself feel better – or as more jaded critics might assert, for self-delusion. Her partial affirmation of civilization involves a much more complex relationship between "civilization" and sentiment. The pairing of "sentimental" and "civilised" in Clarissa's mental world, I suggest, is not fortuitous, for it occurs again in a passage that is

key to understanding Woolf's recovery of the term. In this wonderfully evocative

passage, Woolf deftly represents the play of Peter's subjectivity with his urban

surroundings:

> It was a splendid morning too. Like the pulse of a perfect heart, life struck straight through the streets. There was no fumbling – no hesitation. Sweeping and swerving, accurately, punctually, noiselessly, there, precisely at the right instant, the motor-car stopped at the door. The girl, silk-stockinged, feathered, evanescent, but not to him particularly attractive (for he had had his fling), alighted. Admirable butlers, tawny chow dogs, halls laid in black and white lozenges with white blinds blowing, Peter saw through the opened door and approved of. A splendid achievement in its own way, after all, London; the season; civilisation. Coming as he did from a respectable Anglo-Indian family which for at least three generations had administered the affairs of a continent (it's strange, he thought, what a sentiment I have about that, disliking India, and empire, and army as he did), there were moments when civilisation, even of this sort, seemed dear to him as a personal possession; moments of pride in England; in butlers, chow dogs, girls in their security. Ridiculous enough, still there it is, he thought. And the doctors and men of business and capable women all going about their business, punctual, alert, robust, seemed to him wholly admirable, good fellows, to whom one would entrust one's life, companions in the art of living, who would see one through. What with one thing and another, the show was really very tolerable; and he would sit down in the shade and smoke. (54-55)

Moving effortlessly from the energetic tempo of the urban scene to moments of

repose in Peter's consciousness, Woolf unifies the disparate images of this passage

through the "sentiment" for civilization that wells up in Peter as he contemplates the

complexity of the spectacle before him. Significantly, Woolf's description of this feeling

clearly distinguishes Peter's sense of "civilization" here from empire and its regime of

power. This is no belligerent nationalistic fervor – Peter himself is taken surprise by his

own feelings: "Ridiculous enough, still there it was." In spite of this sense of irony, the

passage nevertheless articulates a genuine sense of affection for the larger infrastructural

mechanisms that enable the many performers of the modern "art of living" to coordinate

themselves so dexterously. The list of images that Peter's consciousness lights upon –

butlers, chow dogs, "silk-stockinged" girls – deliberately calls attention to the

miscellaneous assortment of luxuries that this civilization permits. This is an inclusive

feeling, tolerant of forms of life that might be deemed frivolous or unnecessary – surely a sentiment that is endorsed by the novel, which, after all, centers on a party.

Peter's appreciative sense of civilization stems not only, however, from his delight in the diversity of life that civilization's quotidian mechanisms afford, but perhaps more immediately from the pleasure derived from the play of his own subjectivity – the manner in which his own consciousness spontaneously turns the complex spectacle of sensory data into a "show" for his enjoyment. Still, this capacity to play the spectator – and to develop a sense of personal affection for increasing large configurations of humanity ("London; the season; civilisation") – is ultimately no less the product of the "security" of civilization than the girls, butlers, and chow dogs. Even as her artful prose affirms the precious nature of this delicate, civilized sensibility, Woolf suggests that the internalization of civilization is no mere individual achievement, but one with important social implications. For if this finely wrought consciousness delights in its own playful activity, it also enables one to move beyond the self to imagine the intrinsic value of other lives, thus fostering a sense of connectedness with expanding circles of humanity. One of the great legacies of the Victorian concept of civilization that Woolf appropriates here, then, is the possibility of thinking of so imposing an idea in terms of the state of an individual mind, reminding us that "civilization" – and its promises – are only as real as they are developed in its humblest individual.

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