To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Esther Liu Godfrey entitled "Gender, Power, and the January-May Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Misty Anderson_____
Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Nancy Goslee_____

Richard Kelly_____

Frederick Moffatt_____

Acceptance for the Council:

Anne Mayhew_____
Vice Chancellor and Dean of Graduate Studies

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

GENDER, POWER, AND THE JANUARY-MAY MARRIAGE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Esther Liu Godfrey
May 2006

Copyright © 2006 by Esther Liu Godfrey
All rights reserved.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, their wonderful, quirky and inspiring January-May marriage, and to intergenerational couples everywhere.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank everyone in the English department at the University of Tennessee for their unwavering support and encouragement as I pursued my doctorate. In particular, I am indebted to Misty Anderson for her insight, mentoring and incredible grace under pressure over the past five years. Misty has been a model teacher, scholar and friend for me throughout my program, and I attribute much of my success to the inspiration and direction she has provided. I thank Nancy Goslee and Richard Kelly for allowing me to explore my initial ideas about January-May marriages in their classes and for providing invaluable feedback throughout the writing process. Fred Moffatt's expert guidance on the aesthetic aspects of my argument was of terrific assistance, and I greatly appreciate the perspective he contributed to this project. I also wish to thank Dox Cox, Stanton B. Garner, and Mary Jo Reiff for allowing me to work as their research assistants over the years and David Goslee for welcome advice on my reading of *Jane Eyre*. And I am perhaps most indebted to my family—Ayden, Quinlin, Wayne, Gary, Mom and Dad—for their patience, love, and understanding.

Abstract

Gender, Power, and the January-May Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature

In Charlotte Brontë's 1848 *Jane Eyre*, Rochester's housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax responds to Jane with certain dismay at the thought of her forty-year-old master marrying the twenty-five-year-old Blanche Ingram: "I should scarcely fancy Mr. Rochester would entertain an idea of the sort" (163). Yet to Mrs. Fairfax's great surprise, Rochester later makes an "unequal match" with an even greater disparity in age to Jane, ultimately bringing the novel to a sentimental close. Marriages with large age differences form an important narrative frame in nineteenth-century British literature, and they conveniently merge disruptive and conservative forces. Although they play with normative codes of sexual propriety and gender identity, they find legitimacy and acceptance through their allegiances to literary, social, and legal conventions.

This study examines the literature of the nineteenth century that engages the theme of an older husband and a younger wife—what I call the theme of the January-May marriage. The focus of my study spans the long nineteenth century, from Elizabeth Inchbald's 1791 *A Simple Story* to Bernard Shaw's 1898 *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, covering some of the most canonical works of the period such as Byron's *Don Juan*, Dickens's *David Copperfield*, and Eliot's *Middlemarch*, as well as lesser known texts like Browning's *Pippa Passes*, Geraldine Ensor Jewsbury's *Zoe*, and Trollope's *An Old Man's Love*. While this project includes works from a variety of genres (novels, poetry, plays, paintings), evaluates marriages with varied age differences (the difference in *Emma* is sixteen years, but in *Nicholas Nickleby*, the difference is over fifty years), and discusses the works of authors who wrote from assorted gender, economic, sexual and historical perspectives, the dissertation offers nuanced readings of how intergenerational marriages negotiate exchanges between gender and power.

January-May marriages have thus far served as pat examples of women's victimization and oppression within a patriarchal society, though some literary critics have begun to investigate the intricate connections between age, gender and power more fully. James Kincaid's work on the eroticized child and Catherine Robson's study on girlhood are important precursors to my own work. However, whereas their investigations probe the image of the child and issues of pedophilia, my query moves the sexual "deviancy" of child-loving into the culturally sanctified and seemingly normative marriage union and expands notions of childhood, sometimes reading the babyish younger wife as the child and sometimes the infantilized older husband. Moreover, though this theme appears grounded in a fundamentally heterosexual rubric, my work theorizes a complex relationship between age and gender that rejects such conventional restrictions on identity. Building upon the works of gender theorists like Thomas Laqueur and Michel Foucault, my project finds that literary January-May marriages respond to peculiarly nineteenth-century anxieties regarding gender roles and, organized into thematic chapters, the dissertation analyzes the theme as parody, as incest, as aesthetics, as horror, as economics, and as love.

Table of Contents

Introduction: The January-May Marriage: "The crime carries the punishment along with it." 1
Chapter One: The January-May Marriage in its Literary, Historical and Theoretical Contexts 15
The January-May Marriage in Literature 15
The January-May Marriage in a Nineteenth-Century Context 39
Theorizing the January-May Marraige 49
Chapter Two: Parody and Performance in Don Juan 55
Chapter Three: "Oh, my husband and father": The January-May Marriage as Incest Narrative in Dickens 80
The Horror of Incest in Nicholas Nickleby and The Old Curiosity Shop 92
Good Daddy / Bad Daddy: Revisions of Incest in The Cricket on the Hearth 106
Feeling (Sorry) for Father: Sympathy and the Idealization of Incest in David Copperfield and Bleak House 120
Incest and the Rebirth of Masculinity in Hard Times and Little Dorrit 142
Chapter Four: Visualizing Power: Age, Embodiment and Aesthetics 166
Seeing Gender through Age 166
Sensational Bodies in The Ring and the Book: The January-May Marriage on Trial 189
"Like a death's head skinned over": Looking and Laughing at Casaubon 199
Chapter Five: The Horror of Aging: The January-May Marriage as Gothic Nightmare 219
Growing Old in the Nineteenth Century 223
"And now the ultimate horror has come": 242
Sex, Marriage and the Monster in Jude the Obscure 242
Vampires and the January-May Marriage 250
Chapter Six: Money and Love in January-May Marriages 277
Sexual Economies and the January-May Marriage 277
Beyond Money: The Destabilizing Effects of Love 326
Conclusion: The January-May Marriage in Other Contexts 341
Works Cited 359
Vita 377

Table of Figures

Figure 1. William Makepeace Thackeray, untitled from Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 1848. Engraving. 9
Figure 2. Hablot K. Browne, "Nell, Quilp, and her Grandfather" from *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 1841. Engraving. 100
Figure 3. Hablot K. Browne, "The Marchioness and Dick Swiviller" from *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 1841. Engraving. 103
Figure 4. Anon., untitled from Co-operative Publication Society edition of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 1912. Engraving. 105
Figure 5. Hablot K. Browne, untitled from *David Copperfield*, 1850. Engraving. 124
Figure 6. John Leech, untitled from *The Cricket on the Hearth*. 1843. Engraving. 125
Figure 7. Hablot K. Brown, detail of untitled illustration from *Bleak House*, 1853. Engraving. 141
Figure 8. Hablot K. Browne, detail of untitled illustration from *Little Dorrit*, 1857. Engraving. 165
Figure 9. William Quiller Orchardson, *The First Cloud*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 832 x 1213 mm. The Tate Gallery. 177
Figure 10. William Quiller Orchardson, *Mariage de Convenance*, 1883. Oil on canvas, 104.8 x 154.3 cm. Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries. 180
Figure 11. William Quiller Orchardson, *Mariage de Convenance—After!*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 111.6 x 168.7 cm. Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums. 184
Figure 12. Edmund Blair-Leighton, *Till Death Do Us Part*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 59.5 x 43.5 in. Forbes Magazine Collection. 186
Figure 13. Robert Graves, after Sir Godfrey Kneller, *Portrait of John Locke*, 1697. Engraving, dimensions unknown. Location unknown. 203
Figure 14. Anon., untitled from *Le Livre Sans Titre*, ca. 1840. Color engraving, dimensions unknown. Location unknown. 233
Figure 15. Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1871. Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 126.7 cm. The Detroit Institute of Arts. 253
Figure 16. Anon., *Cauchemar*, from novel by Michel Raymond, title unknown, 1830. Engraving. 254
Figure 17. Anon., Frontispiece, from James Malcolm Rymer, *Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood.* 1845. Engraving. 261
Figure 18. Anon., Heading for Chapter 1, from James Malcolm Rymer, *Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood.* 1845. Engraving. 263
Figure 19. Anon., "Staking the Vampire," from James Malcolm Rymer, *Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood.* 1845. Engraving. 265
Figure 20. Anon., "Varney Faces the Mob," from James Malcolm Rymer, *Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood.* 1845. Engraving. 267
Figure 21. John Everett Millais, *Married for Rank*, 1853. Pen and ink, dimensions unknown. Location unknown. 286
Figure 22. Rebecca Solomon, *The Governess*, 1851. Oil on canvas, 26 x 34 in. The Suzanne and Edmund J. McCormick Collection. 303

Figure 23. Hablot K. Browne, "Nicolas congratulates Arthur Gride on his Wedding Morning," from *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1839. Engraving. 321
Figure 24. Anon., "To Hook up the Old with the New," 2003. Photo advertisement, 8 x 10 in. 353

Introduction: The January-May Marriage: "The crime carries the punishment along with it."

In her 1986 essay "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," Joan Wallach Scott claims that, for gender to be a fully understood as a viable term of social division, it must be interpreted not only in terms of sex, but also in light of the power inequalities added by race and class. Over the past several decades, increasing attention has been given to the impact of historical and cultural factors such as race, class, and gender on the interpretation of nineteenth-century literature. Critics like Gayatri Spivak, Mary Poovey, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have demonstrated that these three aspects of identity are crucial to negotiations of power within literary texts, and the continued popularity of these critical themes attests to the rich potential that such readings afford. And yet, an emphasis on the triad of race, class, and gender can overlook other important facets of identity formation in the literature. Despite the recent increase of attention on the figure of the child in literature, age has largely been neglected as an important component of social mechanisms of power, but an analysis of the literature reveals that age can work in conjunction with race, class, and especially gender to destabilize or to reinforce hegemonic systems of control and influence.[1]

In Geraldine Endsor Jewsbury's 1845 novel *Zoe*, the heroine, a young and beautiful girl of seventeen, finds that her position in the world as an unmarried woman is greatly limited and that, living under the authority of her strict father, she lacks the power

[1] Catherine Robson's *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001) offers an insightful study concerning the figure of the child, as does James Kincaid's *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998).

to control her daily activities. Zoe's solution to this predicament is marriage. Jewsbury writes that "seriously believing she should die by inches for the want of air and exercise, she speculated on the possibility of persuading one of these ugly old men to marry her, 'For then,' said she, 'I thought that at least I might walk out and be independent like a rational being'" (188). Though Victorian law marriage often proved harmful instead of helpful to women's legal status, Zoe envisions marriage as a means to social and personal empowerment—a way for her to be "independent like a rational being."[2] Partly because the only men she sees are the friends of her father and partly because she realizes that her youth can be exchanged for other advantages, she encourages and marries Gifford, a wealthy man more than twice her age who was once in love with her mother. Zoe promptly rises in society and becomes one of the most influential women in her provincial circle, and while others mock her choice of husband in private—"The idea of that little ugly fellow, old enough for her father, being the husband of that lovely creature! *mais tant pis pour lui*"—she gains the power that she seeks through her marriage (256).

Looking at numerous texts like *Zoe*, this project examines the varied effects of age on gendered power relations, specifically focusing on the dynamics of nineteenth-century marriages between older husbands and younger wives in which there are at least fifteen years between the spouses. In accordance with Chaucer's tradition, I call these relationships January-May marriages. The enormous popularity of this January-May theme in the nineteenth century, engaging authors from Austen to Hardy, suggests that

[2] See Mary Lynn Shanley's *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985).

these unions raised important issues for social commentary. Transgressing genres and periods, the theme emerges in poetry, novels, plays, and visual arts created by men and women from early in the century until its very close. Poets as varied as Byron and Browning take up the theme of intergenerational marriages, as do novelists as different as Dickens and Stoker. Unfortunately, despite its frequent emergence in nineteenth-century literature, the January-May marriage has received very little scholarly treatment. Perhaps because such marriages remain common in the twenty-first century and because their existence has a long history in Western societies, these relationships appear too commonplace to deserve much critical attention. Despite the popularity of the theme in the nineteenth century, a period, as I will discuss in detail later in this chapter, that engages the theme to negotiate dynamic rifts in gender identities, academic scholarship has overlooked the theme's importance as social commentary. There are a handful of articles that specifically address the concept of young wives in relation to certain nineteenth-century works, but, to my knowledge, no substantial study has been offered to address the larger nineteenth-century phenomenon.

Even when January-May marriages do arise as side-issues in critical discussions, critics have traditionally followed the lead of second wave feminist critics and enlisted such marriages as further evidence of the oppression of women in the nineteenth century, with the beautiful and saint-like heroine suffering under the unreasonable domination of a patriarchal husband. This critical perspective emphasizes the powerlessness of the young wife and laments her experiences within the confines of society and marriage. Speaking of the famous literary marriage between Dorothea Brooke and Edward Casaubon in

George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Barbara Hardy expresses this view with a particular nod to the age difference in the marriage; she claims that such fictional suffering heroines

> are all brought up in a culture where marriage is what is expected of them and is all that is expected of them. The horror and misery of such a system is demonstrated in marriages with men who are old enough to be their fathers, who have little in common with them, and who in various ways fail in sexuality and love. Casaubon is over forty-five, Dorothea nineteen. (70)

I do not claim that Hardy is entirely wrong in her assessment of these types of marriages. Certainly Dorothea, Zoe, and other young brides sometimes feel "horror and misery" from their marriages that they never expected in their engagements and that are related to the generational gaps that divide the spouses. Yet the distribution of power in these marriages is far from unidirectional, and January-May marriages are neither wholly libratory nor wholly conservative in their approaches to gender. Rather than displaying simplistic power structures, these marriages often reveal complex systems of gendered control, and age proves a crucial, though complex, marker of the division of power between husbands and wives.

Furthermore, while nineteenth-century literary critics have noted the repressive elements of these marriages, they have hereto neglected to uncover their subversive potential or the conscious or unconscious associations they bring about via sexual practices that deviate from social norms. In many cases, January-May marriages prove interesting tropes for nineteenth-century literature because of their uniquely positioned vantage concerning social fears and desires regarding sexuality and gender. The relative

innocence and childish manners of the younger wife often encourage links between the January-May marriage and pedophilia, while the daddy-daughter aspect of the relationship evokes the social taboo against incest. As critics James Kincaid and Catherine Robson have demonstrated, pedophilic elements destabilize gender in texts throughout the century from Wordsworth to Carroll, and the incest theme worked as a Romantic weapon for attacking patriarchal authority. For example, Percy Shelley's *The Cenci* and Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* enlist explicitly incestuous relationships between fathers and daughters to develop narratives that suggest increased female agency and the destruction of male power. In *The Cenci*, Beatrice kills her sexually abusive father, and in *Mathilda*, the daughter's reaction to her father's confessed feelings initiates his flight and suicide. Yet pedophilia and incest wield a different power when compared with these more legitimized unions that comment on the social order. Although January-May marriages certainly raised eyebrows, they also allowed for the subversive dismantling of gender identities within an acceptable heterosexual rubric—however undesirable or odd—that fascinated and repelled nineteenth-century sensibilities. Like pedophilia and incest, the January-May marriage structure hints at sexual deviancy and turns upon the power of desire. But unlike the more taboo plots, the January-May marriage theme challenges sexual and gendered constructions from a vantage position that is culturally, religiously, and ethically "legitimate" and thereby privileged. This project seeks to explain some of the various uses to which this theme was used by writers and artists of the nineteenth-century.

Though several chapters are not chronological in approach, this dissertation examines the nineteenth century from Austen's 1811 *Sense and Sensibility* and 1816

Emma to fin de siècle texts like Hardy's 1895 *Jude the Obscure* and Stoker's 1897 *Dracula*. Surveying over twenty works of literature that include epic poems (Browning's *The Ring and the Book*), canonical novels (Dickens's *David Copperfield*), plays (Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*), sensation fiction (Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*), and visual arts (Edmund Blair-Leighton's *Until Death Do Us Part*), I trace patterns that emerge in the use of the January-May marriage theme and chart the various implications that the theme suggests regarding the construction of gender and the distribution of power through age. Not all of these marriages are conventionally fulfilled in the texts I examine. For example, I read *Dracula* and *The Vampyre* as Gothic versions of the theme, where unions are violently consummated through blood rather than English law. In other examples, the marriage is desired by at least one party but ultimately rejected—often as a direct result of the age difference—as in *Bleak House* and *An Old Man's Love*, yet I maintain that these "failures" of the January-May marriage should instruct our readings of age, gender and power within the larger theme. Furthermore, though some readers could object to the comparison between *Sense and Sensibility*'s thirty-five-year-old Colonel Brandon and *Nicholas Nickleby*'s seventy-year-old Arthur Gride, I claim that common elements exist among these different uses of age within the theme. Marianne's reactions to Brandon's affections underscore, and even exaggerate, the differences between their ages (nineteen years), making him appear older than his years would suggest: "he is old enough to be *my* father; and if he were ever animated enough to be in love, must have long outlived every sensation of the kind. It is too ridiculous! When is a man to be safe from such wit, if age and infirmity will not protect him?" (30). The age difference between Marianne and Colonel Brandon does affect the distribution of power

and gender roles in their relationship and suggests the diversity of situations in which gender anxieties manifest themselves.

My first chapter provides an overview of the literary, historical, and theoretical background for my work. Though I have found it impossible to discuss all of the earlier January-May marriages in literature that contributed to the nineteenth-century treatment and reception of the theme, I have given a broad description of the evolution of these marriages over time, focusing on what I find to be noteworthy or particularly intriguing examples in the tradition. Because my project is grounded in a materialist-feminist concern with equal access to financial, social, and legal security, I outline several historical movements that challenge gender identities and are relevant to the theme's development in the nineteenth century. I believe that the January-May marriage responds to specific historical conditions, using its subversive and conservative agendas as needed to guide and direct public sentiment about marriage, power, and gender. I also introduce my theoretical perspectives in this chapter and describe two of the patterns that are common to most January-May marriages in the nineteenth century: the January-May marriage as parody, and the January-May marriage as a romantic triangle.

My second chapter offers a short case study of these two main patterns within the January-May marriage through Canto I of Byron's *Don Juan*. Byron's poem depicts the stereotypical dynamics of the January-May marriage with amazing dexterity, and while his rollicking sexual exposé is, in some ways, atypical of most nineteenth-century texts, it highlights the parody and triangularity that pervade the theme whether it is treated humorously or not.

My third chapter examines the "daddy-daughter" aspects of the January-May marriage through works by Dickens, including *Nicholas Nickleby, The Cricket on the Hearth*, *David Copperfield,* and *Bleak House*. Initially, my attention here appears to cover well-traveled critical ground; as Robert M. Polhemus observes, "Ever since people learned that *David Copperfield* was a favorite of Freud's...readers have found illuminating signs of the Oedipus complex in the book" ("The Favorite Child" 10). However, while the incestuous implications of January-May marriages remain obvious to most readers of these works, I believe that this psychological approach has been vastly oversimplified. Since I read marriage as psychologically and legally essential to Dickens's understanding of family and patriarchy, I will claim that the introduction of the incestuous element into marriage (however legitimized by the lack of familial blood) proves to be a destabilizing force for larger social constructions. Throughout this chapter, I also analyze the novels' original book illustrations of older husbands and younger wives to show how the word-image association contributes to readers' perceptions of pedophilia, incest, and aging. Ultimately, this chapter suggests that the daddy-daughter aspect of these relationships undermines patriarchal authority by utilizing various strategies and argues against reading incest as inherent victimization.

The fourth chapter explores the visualization of power in January-May marriages and the attention to the effects of aging on the body; an examination of the aesthetics of January-May images sharpens a critical understanding of the theme's mechanics. For example, an illustration from *Vanity Fair* (Fig. 1) captures the image often constructed by the January-May marriage; Sir Pitt Crawley, though in rank and station far superior to



Figure 1. William Makepeace Thackeray, untitled from Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 1848. Engraving.

Becky Sharpe, kneels down in a submissive position to the young woman he wants to marry. The staging of this illustration not only mocks gendered rules of engagement, but also positions Sir Pitt so that the eye is drawn to his bald crown and, consequently, the age disparity of the intended match. Critically, this chapter is aligned with recent efforts by theorists like Elizabeth Grosz to reassess the corporeality of the physical body without essentialzing the body as a site for gender difference. After an initial introduction, this chapter develops in three sections how nineteenth-century perceptions of vision and aesthetics responded to aging and how those perceptions related to power. Part One examines four paintings from the Victorian period that engage the theme of the January-May marriage: William Quiller Orchardson's series, *The First Cloud*, *Mariage de Convenance*, and *After!*, as well as Edmund Blair-Leighton's *Until Death Do Us Part*. All four paintings use the bodies of older men and younger women to visualize power, destabilizing and returning agency along gendered divides. Part Two theorizes about Browning's *The Ring and the Book* and the spectacular bodies it displays for public judgment. Pompilia's beautiful and young body is theatrically exposed full of the knife wounds given by her "hook-nosed and yellow in a bush of beard" husband Guido. Finally, Part Three discusses male embodiment in *Middlemarch*, focusing specifically on the attention given to Casaubon's physical appearance. The novel's vivid, however unkind or grotesque, descriptions of Casaubon heighten the text's dalliances with sexual deviancy and its play with marital power, creating aesthetic images of "Old and Young" that both titillate and repulse readers' sentimental and sexual expectations.

The fifth chapter addresses the Gothic element within the January-May marriage theme. Reworking the ideas of critics like Robert Mighall that connect Gothicism to temporal disruptions, I argue that the January-May marriage itself presents a historical anachronism, merging past and present with a condition just as horrifying as a nineteenth-century venture into a medieval castle. As historical anachronism, the "horror" of the January-May marriage caters to broader nineteenth-century fears of aging and proves all the more terrible (and exciting) because of its associations with sexuality in the marriage theme. This perceived threat of older men penetrating young women corresponds with social anxieties about potential emotional and economic burdens of what was thought to be an increasingly aged population. In texts like Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, January-May marriages become a form of Gothic nightmare, indicating a direct correlation between the popularity of the January-May theme in the nineteenth century and the rise of the vampire legend in literature. I read three vampire texts—*The Vampyre, Varney the Vampire,* and *Dracula*—as contributors to and participants in the January-May marriage theme.

Saving the oldest and most obvious aspects of the January-May marriage for last, the sixth chapter probes the relationship between love and money in the January-May marriage theme. This chapter begins by looking at marketable ages in the nineteenth century. Age emerges as a commodity, specifically coded by gender, in which a woman's value is marked by her ability to produce valuable goods via her fertility. A man's value is distinguished by his ability to provide and protect, and, since it often took a man into his forties or later to reach financial security, what are considered his disadvantages in age are supposed to be more than adequately resolved with money. John Everett Millais's *Married for Rank* offers an artistic rendition of this phenomenon.

Many of the January-May marriages that I investigate consequently involve disparate economic situations between the older husbands and younger wives. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë skillfully blends Jane's status as a governess with her role as a "girl-bride" to construct her as a sexually androgynous and empowered figure within her relationship to Rochester. *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Sense and Sensibility* also reveal the exchange of youth for economic security. Though I chart the progress that women made during the nineteenth century to secure their access to financial capital and place these texts in their historical contexts, the chapter reveals how youth remained a type of product that could be bought and sold by men and women even late into the century. The second half of this chapter negotiates how love can be separated from the economics of marriage. Austen's *Emma* potentially reconciles a difference in age with an overwhelming love, and several of the marriages that are not fulfilled offer other examples. In *An Old Man's Love*, a man who is initially concerned with gaining the affections of his ward, who "did receive from his hands all that she had—her bread and meat, her bed, her very clothes," ultimately surrenders his desire for her, dissolves their engagement, and even provides a dowry so that she can marry another lover (who is closer to her age). John Jarndyce in *Bleak House* also elects to withdraw his marital prospects with Esther, establishing her and her young love Woodcourt in their own "Bleak House." And Sydney Carton makes the ultimate sacrifice of his life to free the lover of Lucy in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Rather than suggesting that a submissive nature is vital to true love, I claim that such texts support a communitarian ideal that is far removed from the self-centered practices of the older husbands in *Middlemarch* or *The Woman in White*. These examples also counter

conventional associations of individuality with masculinity and sacrifice with femininity, challenging nineteenth-century concepts of gender and power yet again.

The conclusion contextualizes the January-May texts that I have covered in the dissertation by giving an overview of different age and gender frames in the nineteenth century and in contemporary culture. I provide biographical examples of older man-younger woman romances, examine older woman-younger man reversals of the January-May theme, and explore the tradition in nineteenth-century American literature. I discuss the portrayal of January-May marriages in contemporary film and media, citing Anna Nicole Smith's U.S. Supreme Court case as evidence of the continued relevance of the theme. This conclusion also incorporates non-Western traditions that have influenced my work on the January-May marriage; the Gabra nomads of East Africa demonstrate a close relationship between age and gender through their culture's concept of *d'abella*, older men who assume a feminized position within Gabra society.

The aim of this project is to investigate a social system that has been so much a part of our lives and histories that critics have too long neglected analyzing what age can reveal about understandings of gender and power. I have chosen the nineteenth century as the scope of this study because it offers a unique period of gender disruption and anxiety that resulted in a wealth of literature enlisting January-May marriages to negotiate gender, but I believe that the patterns of exchange that are revealed in the nineteenth century can inform our larger understanding of age as a fundamental marker of gender. The danger inherent to such an endeavor, it appears to me, resides in unnecessarily limiting the implications of this field of study. Certainly, I do not intend to imply that women must be young to wield power over men, or that such power must be

sexual. One of the most important attributes of age remains the fact that age is not a static characteristic of an individual. Any identity that originates from age and its influence on gender is not fixed, but continually in flux. Old men and women were once young, and most young men and women hope to grow old. This inherent instability that stems from the temporality of one's age makes age an intrinsically unstable factor in a complex social economy of power. Much work remains to be done to elucidate how age affects gender throughout racial, economic, and cultural groups. This project endeavors to encourage and contribute to that conversation.

Chapter One: The January-May Marriage in its Literary, Historical and Theoretical Contexts

The January-May Marriage in Literature

The January-May marriage's destabilizing potential has enjoyed a long-established tradition in British literature that reaches back to Chaucer, who provides more than a memorable name for these marriages between older husbands and wives. In the late fourteenth century, Chaucer was not the first to raise the issue of age versus youth in Western marriages, and several critics place Chaucer's interest in how age affects male power with the larger literary *senex amans* (aged lover) theme, which was already popular in French, German and Italian literature and art of the early Middle Ages. For example, Giovanni Boccaccio's *Ameto* details the impotence of the older husband of a youthful nymph, and critics have compared Chaucer's use of the theme with that of Maximianus, who also wrote about the problems of aging and sexual desire.[3] Recognizing the theme's potential to intrigue audiences, Chaucer emphasized the disruptive qualities that January-May marriages afford with wit and insight, and his influential texts should inform critical readings of the theme in subsequent works. Older husbands and younger wives are central to three distinct stories in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*: "The Wife of Bath's Prologue," "The Miller's Tale," and "The Merchant's Tale." The bawdy sexuality and crude schemes displayed by the women in these stories have led

[3] See M. Teresa Tavormina's explanatory notes to "The Merchant's Tale" in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); Albert E. Hartung's "The Non-Comic Merchant's Tale, Maximianus, and the Sources," *Mediaeval Studies* 29 (1967): 10-25; and Janet Boothman's "'Who Hath No Wyf, He is No Cokewold': A Study of John and January in Chaucer's Miller's and Merchant's Tales," *Thoth* 4 (1963): 3-14.

some medieval scholars to interpret Chaucer's use of the theme as evidence of his participation in a larger body of anti-feminist literature, but other critics have used contemporary gender theory to challenge such notions and have asserted that Chaucer is reacting against such a tradition with an explicitly subversive agenda.[4]

This agenda remains, to a certain extent, embedded in a binary gender system, and its objective is far from a social order of gender equality. Rather, as Chaucer's use of established genres like the fabliau evidence, what these early January-May stories present is often a world-upside-down, where the great chain of social order has been not disturbed, but set on end. Thus, the older husbands in these tales repeatedly emerge as the culturally disempowered, while the younger wives create a gender hierarchy which, if not matriarchal, at least exploits the male figures in the immediate stories to great effect. Age, sexuality, and wealth form an elaborate system of exchange in these stories, and the stories reveal how the younger wives come out on top—in terms of cultural respect, in terms of sexual gratification, and in terms of economic security.

Alisoun, the Wife of Bath, narrates her personal experience of this type of power reversal. Marrying her first husband when she is only twelve, she manages to manipulate a male-dominated economic situation to her advantage; though her old first husband certainly purchases his young bride like so much property, it is Alisoun who lives to enjoy the life savings of her husband. Altogether, she successively weds and widows three rich old men and, through their deaths, accrues a small fortune that she then manages to exchange for other social capital in her fourth (titled) and fifth (younger)

[4] Notably, scholars have explored more thoroughly the importance of age to understandings of gender in Chaucer's day than in subsequent periods. See, for example, Michael Masi's chapter "Money, Sex, and Gender" in his recent study *Chaucer and Gender* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005) 77-102.

husbands. Her love-them-to-death approach to marriage has led some critics to link her too quickly to the caricatures of women found in misogynist medieval texts like her husband Janekyn's book of "wicked wives." But Chaucer presents her with far more complexity, and wit, than stock accounts of problematic women. To her husband's disparaging remarks about women, she responds,

> By God, if wommen hadde writen stories,
> As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
> They wolde han writen of men moore wikked-nesse
> Than al the mark of Adam may redresse. (693-6)

Alisoun is more than a stereotypical portrait of a crass and aggressive woman; she offers a pragmatic perspective of how women could make the most of a sexist world. While a social system that encourages marriages between twelve-year-old girls and rich old men might fall under Alisoun's understanding of men's "wickedness," she adapts to the age-gender-class system to create her own advantage. By the time of her fourth and fifth marriages (which present their own age-based troubles), she is able to marry younger men (who satisfy her sexually), the last of whom she "took for love, and no richesse" (l. 526).

We meet Alisoun on the other side of her string of January-May marriages, but "The Miller's Tale" and "The Merchant's Tale" both offer depictions of young wives who still expect to benefit from the deaths of their elderly husbands, and the advantages of such matches would have been transparent to readers in Chaucer's day. In her essay, "Widow-To-Be: May in Chaucer's 'The Merchant's Tale'," Margaret Hallissy convincingly argues that young women who managed to marry and to widow older men

created uniquely sovereign positions for themselves as women in the middle ages: "When, as in 'The Merchant's Tale,' a healthy young woman marries an older (and richer) man, Chaucer's medieval audience would have seen that marriage as an interlude, as preparation for a longer (and happier) widowhood, if it is managed so as to ensure her well-being in the later 'estaat'" (295). Both May and the young wife in "The Miller's Tale," also named Alisoun, stand to benefit from the economic, social and legal status that widowhood offers if they can preserve their marriages, at least in their husbands' minds, until death releases them.

Moreover, the subversion of the male-dominated gender system does not have to wait for widowhood to begin. In "The Merchant's Tale" and "The Miller's Tale," the younger wives effectively emasculate their older husbands while they are wed by affecting traditionally masculine attributes like sexuality, cunning, and control and conversely rendering the husbands impotent, foolish, and powerless. In these stories, the means for this usurping of masculine privilege revolves, of course, around sexual desire, and thus while Januarie and John believe they are sating their own sexual fantasies by marrying "som mayde fair and tendre of age," they are met with sexual appetites larger and more able than their own—and consequently end as cuckolds ("The Merchant's Tale" 1407). In "The Miller's Tale" Alisoun and her lover Nicholas convince John that he needs to prepare for a flood, and while he sleeps in a barrel to float away in the rising waters, Alisoun and Nicholas are free to enjoy one another sexually. Alisoun's challenges to her husband's sexual ability and authority effectively un-man him, and her assumption of an empowered position radiates out to her sexual relations with other men. When Absolon, another suitor, tries to kiss her through a window, he finds too late that

she has offered her behind rather than her face, and his attempt to avenge his disgrace by branding her ass with a hot poker only harms her other lover, Nicholas, who offers his own bottom to continue the joke. Thus, Martin Blum maintains in "Negotiating Masculinities: Erotic Triangles in the *Miller's Tale*" that "Alison alone gets away unpunished. She is, it seems, rewarded for being the most successful 'man' of the tale, whereas her male counterparts all receive their individual lessons for failing to fulfill their expected roles as men" (37).

Furthermore, the gender reversal that begins with John's impotence and ends with Alisoun's infidelity would have appeared to some degree "natural" to medieval readers who, unlike John, followed the proverb of Cato

> That bad man sholde wedde his simylitude.
> Men sholde wedden after hire estaat,
> For youthe and elde is often at debaat. (3228-30)

This belief that the older husbands should have known better than to wed young, lusty wives mediates to a large extent the social stigma of their wives' unfaithfulness, allowing the stories more room for ribald, amoral fun and simultaneously legitimizing gender instability as an inevitable component of the marriage of "youthe and elde." John appears to be aware of the dangers that accompany his marriage, and he tries to protect his interest in his eighteen-year-old wife's fidelity:

> Jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage,
> For she was wylde and yong, and he was old
> And demed hymself been lik a cokewold. (3224-6)

But despite his jealousy and attempts to "cage" his wife, he finds, as Chaucer's audience well expects, her abilities circumvent his control. In "The Merchant's Tale," Januarie is forewarned by his friend Justinus to reconsider his decision to marry a young wife when he is sixty years old. "Trusteth me," cautions Justinus, "Ye shul nat plesen hire fully yeres thre" (1561-2). Indeed, Justinus' prediction comes true, and readers delight at the inevitable punishment of such a foolish man.

The Merchant's description of Januarie's perversely humorous lovemaking to May on their wedding night plays upon sexual inadequacies associated with old age, and encourages readers' interpretations of the January figure as the inept, and rather grotesque, lover—further legitimatizing the gendered power reversal to come. After Januarie "kisseth hire ful ofte; / With thikke brustles of his berd unsofte," he finds that he must "laboureth…til that the day gan dawe" to consummate their marriage, whereupon he is so thrilled with his feat that he cries out loud, though "The slakke skyn aboute his nekke shaketh / Whil that he sang, so chaunteth he and craketh" (1823-4, 41, 49-50). Readers are encouraged to identify with May who has to endure Januarie's old rooster-like performance and are prompted to wait for the likely outcome of Januarie's ineffectual lovemaking:

> But God woot what that May thoughte in hir herte,
> Whan she hym saugh up sittynge in his sherte,
> In his nyght-cappe, and with his nekke lene;
> She preyseth nat his pleyyng worth a bene. (1851-4)

Chaucer's audience anticipates and enjoys hearing of Januarie's subsequent disempowerment. When he later loses his eyesight, May takes advantage of his blindness

and makes love with her young lover Damyan in a tree—just above the head of her husband. Though May could be judged in the wrong for violating her vows to her husband and for further appropriating her husband's power within the marriage, the "unnaturalness" of their coupling eases readers into an easier acceptance of the "naturalness" of the gender / power reversal. And, as in "The Miller's Tale," this gender reversal extends beyond the January-May marriage. Thus, Jean E. Jost correctly reads "The Merchant's Tale" as a warning for men not to ignore their wives' sexual desire or the limitations of their own sexual prowess: "Januarie's sexuality is a joke-ineffectual, preposterous, and disgusting. Totally oblivious to May's subjectivity, much less her sexual desire, Januarie creates only himself and acknowledges only his own (mistaken) sexual desire" (124). By example, Januarie demonstrates for Chaucer's audience what one should not do in a romantic relationship, and a masculine ideology regarding potency and possession is thus made to serve the ends of female agency and subjectivity.

Readers' sympathies guide the subversive qualities of the January-May theme in Chaucer. Few readers mind that these old men are feminized—that is, placed in positions of disempowerment—or that the Great Chain of Being has been disrupted, because the older husbands are not driven by pure motives of love and caring for their young wives but by their own foolish desires. However, Chaucer at times reminds his audience that the January-May marriages have created yet another system of gender inequality. The Miller includes lines in his tale that suggest John's deeper affection for his young wife, allowing that he loved Alisoun "moore than his lyf," and one has to feel sorry about the physical injuries John suffers as the result of his fall in the barrel while those around him "turned al his harm unto a jape" (3222, 3842). "The Reeve's Prologue" also gives voice

to the older man's perspective, and the Reeve, who has been the butt of the Miller's tale, expresses the frustrations of a man who has had, and lost, the masculine privileges afforded by youth. While these elements remind readers that power inequities continue despite power reversals, the hilarity of the fabliau form ensures that neither the husbands' victimized positions nor the wives' conventional wickedness will prohibit the playful disruption of gender roles.

The rambunctious medieval interest in the January-May marriage appears to wane slightly during the Renaissance, though the theme continues to operate through a shared understanding between author and audience about the relationships between age, sexual desire, economic exchange, and gendered power.[5] The jest-book *The Sack-full of Newes* thought to date back to at least 1582, outlines the story of an older master whose young wife enjoys the sexual favors of the servant John.[6] Ageist stereotypes continue to fulfill readers' expectations in these Renaissance tales, and in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (c. 1590-3), Gremio, who is rich and old, is one of the suitors of the beautiful Bianca, though he is bested by the young Lucentio. Referred to as a "pantaloon" in the play, Gremio's presence nods to the *commedia dell'arte*, in which Pantaloon, the imprudent older lover in spectacles, slippers, and pantaloons, is a stock figure in the comedy. Gremio is a "graybeard" whose "love doth freeze," and the audience delights at how the distasteful idea of his union with Bianca is thwarted by the abuse of other characters on his "crafty withered hide" (2.1 336, 402). Yet the threat he poses, or the

---

[5] There are a number of German paintings from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries with older men and younger women. See Chapter Four on the January-May aesthetics.

[6] *The Sack-full of Newes* is reprinted in 1861 by J. O. Halliwell from a copy dated 1673, printed by Andrew Clark, and sold by Thomas Passenger at the "Three Bibles" on London Bridge. Halliwell believes this is the same text referred to by Robert Laneham in a letter written in 1575.

marriage poses, is not ridiculous. He clearly tempts Bianca's father with a lengthy catalog of his wealth, from his "house within the city" that is "richly furnishèd with plate and gold" to the "sixscore fat oxen standing in my stalls" (2.1.344, 345, 356). Gremio even advances that his age and imminent death should be viewed as positive qualities, since Bianca, as his widow, will be in control of his estate if she submits for a few years as his bride:

> Myself am struck in years, I must confess,
> And if I die tomorrow, this is hers,
> If whilst I live she will be only mine. (2.1.358-60)

However, Bianca's father is the only one besides Gremio who considers him a viable husband for Bianca, and Bianca's marriage to her young love secures the play's happy ending.

In *Othello* (c. 1603-04), the January-May theme departs from its comic tradition to explore the tragic consequences of gender anxiety, and Shakespeare's use of the theme foreshadows some aspects of its later development in the nineteenth century. *Othello* thus presents a much bleaker look at January-May marriages, as the jealous fears that drive him to murder his wife for her seeming adultery are compounded by his racial as well as generational Otherness.[7] Although race dominates the play's concerns, Othello's position as an older husband is never far from the surface. Early in Act I, Iago crassly warns Desdemona's father, "an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe," and Iago later

[7] Perhaps due to critical attention to the play's racial issues, there are few scholarly treatments of the play's attention to age. See Albert Rolls's "*Othello* and the Body in Transformation," *Renaissance Forum* online 6.1 (2002) and Marcus Nordlund's "Theorizing Early Modern Jealousy: A Biocultural Perspective on Shakespeare's *Othello*," *Studia Neophilologica* 74 (2002): 146-60, which both briefly address the importance of Othello's age.

uses Othello's age to convince Roderigo of Desdemona's love for Cassio (1.1.90-1). He explains that "there should be...sympathy in years, manners, and beauties—all of which the Moor is defective in" (2.2.229-31). When fully consumed by jealousy, Othello himself reveals that his age is a large part of his sexual anxiety about his wife, "for I am declined / Into the vale of years" (3.3.281-2). Gender subversion works differently in *Othello* than in other works of the period; Othello's masculinity is compromised not by laughter at his bawdy exploitation, but by the public's offense at his horrific error. Once challenged, Othello abuses his masculine power over his wife, physically and emotionally destroying her, and she becomes a martyr for women's rights through her innocent death.

Othello remains, however, an anomaly in earlier uses of the theme. During the Restoration, numerous playwrights embraced the theme's comic potential for gender trouble, and the bawdier plays of the period celebrate, much like Chaucer's tales, cuckoldry's challenge to normative sexual and gender relations. By the late seventeenth century, playwrights like William Congreve employed January and May figures as stock characters to continue the mischievous manipulation of sex, money and power in plays like *Love for Love* (1694) and *The Old Bachelor* (c. 1689-93). In *Love for Love* the foolishness of older lovers is utilized for comic purposes through the outcomes of two separate relationships. Sir Sampson Legend courts the beautiful young Angelica only to lose her love to his own son, yet the audience witnesses the fate Sir Sampson narrowly escapes when the elderly Foresight is cuckolded by his young wife. A similar plot structure arises in *The Old Bachelor*, where the aging bachelor Heartwell desires to marry the young prostitute Silvia. Heartwell, however, is prevented from fulfilling the marriage

(through which Silvia is eager to advance her economic position) and the inevitable infidelity it will bring, though the audience enjoys the cuckolding of another older man, Fondlewife, by his young wife Laetitia.

The successes of earlier Restoration plays had provided an ample foundation for Congreve, and, in foregrounding age as a trope for gendered power on the stage, had established an important tension between the performative aspects of gender and essentialized preconceptions about age. William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) utilizes the January-May theme for subversive purposes by making the grasping older husband Pinchwife a cuckold by his young wife.[8] The play makes it easy to condone the sexual instability initiated by the January-May theme; Pinchwife's outright misogyny as demonstrated by his contempt for his outspoken sister and other London women serves to enhance the audience's enjoyment of his debasement, which is brought about by his belief that women are more manageable in their natural "country" state. To his discomfort, Pinchwife learns that women's submission is not innate, but culturally (and theatrically) produced, and that, conversely, when unrestricted by social mores, the rejection of gender roles is a likely result. Although it is tempting to read young Mrs. Pinchwife's infidelity as the result of her corruption at the hands of her jealous husband, her desires for Horner prove to be natural, and only the means for their actualization are learned. Consequently, Margery Pinchwife fails to perform the role of feminine exemplar, while Pinchwife's citified sister manages to assume a learned, albeit cynical, feminine persona. Pinchwife's performance of masculinity is likewise compromised, and

[8] Here again, the January-May theme proves important beyond national borders. Moliere's *L'École des femmes* influenced the plot of *The Country Wife*, where the middle-age husband foolishly believes he is ensuring his wife's fidelity (and his masculinity) by marrying a young country girl.

here, the theatrical instability of gender centers upon "natural" limitations of gendered bodies.

The play encourages the audience to view Pinchwife's age as a feminizing characteristic of his embodied self—suggesting that he is less of a man because he cannot sexually please his wife as a young man could. Though he hopes that by importing a wife from the country, he will have a spouse who "will not know the difference betwixt a man of one-and twenty, and one of forty-[nine]," he discovers that his age "naturally" disempowers him within his marriage (1.1.381-2). In physically failing to satisfy his wife, he fails theatrically to reproduce his masculine identity and power. Thus, he is associated by the audience and the other characters in the play with the sexually impotent "shadows of men," or "Half-men"—those "old boys, old *beaux garçons*, who like super-annuated stallions are suffered to run, feed, and whinny with the mares as long as they live, though they can do nothing else" (1.1.180-5). Pinchwife's character demonstrates that masculinity is temporal and transitory; and, while he was once a young rake, the audience can now take pleasure in the fall from masculine privilege that his age (and his flawed marriage to a much younger wife) encourages. Thus, the January-May structure encourages a reconsideration of gender as a stable ideology from multiple points. As the play feminizes Pinchwife, it conversely endows Horner, seemingly feminized through his feigned impotency, with a new masculinity. The perceived masculinity or femininity of all characters is therefore brought into question as gender emerges as the product of multiple forces that include age, potency, and economics—not as a static signifier of a sexual body.

Women writers like Aphra Behn also made use of the January-May theme during the Restoration in such plays as *The Rover* (1677), *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678) and *The Lucky Chance* (1686), which all follow the now-familiar motifs of a sexual economy that centers upon age. Behn's plays directly confront cultural values that exchange youthful sexuality for economic gain. In *The Rover*, Florinda rebels against her father's wishes that she marry the wealthy Don Vincentio (dubbed by Hellena as Old Sir Fifty); in response to her brother's advice that she consider the fortune and jointure offered by Don Vincentio, she replies, "Let him consider my youth, beauty and fortune, which ought not to be thrown away on his age and jointure" (1.1.77-8). Don Vincentio suffers the abuse of his January predecessors—descriptions of his "feeble carcass" invite disgust from the audience and Florinda as they consider the nights she will spend in a "moth-eaten bedchamber" (1.1.110, 104). Yet, in Behn's hands, the maneuverings of the January-May theme are at once more explicit and more ambiguous. The audience and characters of her plays share the typical fun with gender that the January-May marriage's power reversal carries, but by the end of the drama, the plays present gender dynamics far more complicated than a Chaucerian world-upside-down. While seizing the opportunity for gender subversion (a subject Behn maintained a vested interest in as a female playwright), Behn ultimately reveals her own frustrations at a social order to which she and her characters are subject and her skepticism in the ability of age to disrupt that order. The January-May theme provides a method of challenging male authority, but the final curtains close on a world still controlled by masculine power, where women remain the objects, and not the agents, of sexual and economic exchange.

In *Sir Patient Fancy*, practical women like the maid Maundy lament a system that encourages a traffic in young women by older, wealthier men. In this case, the beautiful young Lady Fancy is married to the aging hypochondriac Sir Patient Fancy, and the play reveals that the relationship centers on the prospect of Lady Fancy's independent widowhood that will come at Sir Patient's death. Sir Patient believes his wife is true and faithful, while she entertains lovers as she cunningly maneuvers to ensure her share of his fortune. As Maundy prepares to smuggle a young lover into Lady Fancy's chamber, she gives voice to the sentiment that infidelity in such marriages is to be expected: "to say truth, there's a Conscience to be used in all things, and there's no reason she should languish with an old man when a young man may be had" (3.2.78-80). Appealing to a higher moral law, rather than the marriage laws of social contract, Maundy leads the audience to condone her lady's actions. Since Sir Patient is presented as a bumbling fool, absorbed with his own flagging physicality rather than the interests of his wife, he becomes yet another easy object of ridicule like his numerous January predecessors.[9] Thus presented, Lady Fancy's mercenary tactics come across as humorous comedy—the just deserts of a faulty system of exchange—and yet the play's underlying message projects a dark model of agency that simultaneously reflects and critiques the existing property law. When Sir Patient cries that he fears he is descending to his grave, Lady Fancy's aside, "This is the Musick that I long'd to hear," has already been justified, even as the audience senses unease at the theatrical front she hypocritically maintains to her

[9] Dawn Lewcock notes that Behn never allows Sir Patient to speak directly to the audience, while Lady Fancy addresses the audience personally on numerous occasions. Lewcock concludes that "By building such relationships through direct asides or comments to the audience by some characters and not by others Behn is able to sway the audience's sympathies to or from any particular character" (77). See her article "More for Seeing than Hearing: Behn and the Use of Theatre," *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge, 1996) 66-83.

husband: "[You] Die! Oh that fatal word will kill me—(Weeps) Name it no more if you'd preserve my life." (4.2.71-3). Although this exchange is funny, Behn suggests at the end of the play that Lady Fancy's machinations are no better, nor more moral, than those used by men like her husband to oppress her. Encouraged by his nephew, Sir Patient tests and discloses Lady Fancy's dishonesty (as well as her plan to take his daughter's share of his fortune) to the world. Lady Fancy's power is overthrown, and Sir Patient reclaims his authority to discipline and to punish. While critical of male-dominated society, Behn appears reluctant to replace the gendered hierarchy with another system of gender inequality, and, somewhat frustrated, can therefore offer no way out of the gender-power struggle.

Behn's *The Lucky Chance* likewise avoids reductive conclusions concerning the power reversals initiated by youth and age. Nevertheless, much of the action in the play continues to portray a theatrical interest in making fun of elderly men, and, as the two older husbands, Sir Feeble and Sir Cautious, frantically try to maintain control of their wives' sexuality, the play conveys that "a young wife is able to make any old fellow mad, that's the truth on't" (3.5.42-3). Sir Feeble and Sir Cautious are both ludicrous figures, evoking laughter and contempt from the audience by their unrestrained desires for sex and for money. Sir Feeble produces horror in his newlywed bride and the audience as he resorts to baby-talk with his wife, giving her trinkets and jewels in eager anticipation of their wedding night, while Sir Cautious makes himself a cuckold, by bartering his wife to her lover for three hundred pounds. While the play spares no opportunities to deride the two older husbands, the play rejects other components of the January-May tradition, most notably the infidelity of the young wives. Leticia and Lady Fulbank both have young

male lovers who succeed in their attempts to woo the young wives from their husbands, but both are saved the infamy of being unfaithful wives, despite their extramarital sexual relations. Leticia's flight from her elderly husband into the arms of young Belmour finds justification in the fact that Leticia and Belmour had already sworn themselves to one another before Sir Feeble interfered by cheating Belmour of "fame and life, / And then what dearer was, his wife" (3.5.153-4). Lady Fulbank is also vindicated from her sexual relations with young Gayman (whom she loved before she married Sir Cautious); although she has often teased Gayman sexually, even leading him into her bed, she never consummated their affair until tricked by her own husband into doing so. Following moral conventions, she intends to be faithful to her older husband—although she makes it clear that she longs to be rid of him, and, after he tricks her, she swears that she will never share a bed with him again. Ultimately, the older husbands in *The Lucky Chance* are bested, not by their wives, but by the young male rivals whose more traditional masculinity satisfies the desires of the women in the play and the audience. Anticipating his death, Sir Cautious promises to leave Lady Fulbank (along with the rest of his property) to Gayman, and the play's ending depicts a system of male-male privilege through this sexual inheritance, even if it is criticized.[10]

Although Behn's plays suggest the growing complexity associated with January-May marriages, the theme often continued to follow stereotypical models on the eighteenth-century stage in popular comedies like Richard Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, where Sir Peter and Lady Teazle theatrically reproduce the unstable

[10] For a good discussion of the economics of this marriage, see Earla A. Wilputte's "Wife Pandering in Three Restoration Plays," *SEL* 38.3 (1998): 447-64.

relationships between power, age, and gender. Humor remains an essential component of the theme's negotiations, with the older husband again receiving much of the abuse for his ill conceived plan to wed a young wife. Sir Peter is well aware of his weakened position since marrying Lady Teazle, and he bewails,

> When an old bachelor marries a young wife, what is he to expect? 'Tis now six months since Lady Teazle made me the happiest of men—and I have been the most miserable dog ever since that committed to wedlock! We tiffed a little going to church, and came to a quarrel before the bells had gone ringing. I was more than once nearly choked with gall during the honeymoon, and had lost all comfort in life before my friends had done wishing me joy....I am sneered at by all my acquaintance, and paragraphed in the newspapers. She dissipates my fortune, and contradicts all my humors; yet the worst of it is, I doubt I love her, or I should never bear all this. (287)

Lady Teazle is similarly conscious, and vocal, concerning her new influence as a wife, and openly acknowledges to her husband the power that her youth affords while making him even more mindful of his age-related debased condition. To his demanding inquiry, "so a husband is to have no influence, no authority?" she promptly responds, "Authority! No, to be sure—if you wanted authority over me, you should have adopted me, and not married me: I am sure you were old enough" (289). Refusing the submission, respect and obedience expected of wives, Lady Teazle upsets expectations of traditional femininity and instead bestows upon herself the command and rights of a self-governing individual.

Like Chaucer's women, Lady Teazle is cognizant of the material advantages that she has gained through her marriage and of the economic rewards that widowhood would secure. Though she was the daughter of a simple country squire, "a girl bred wholly in the country, who never knew luxury beyond one silk gown," she has willingly exchanged her youth for wealth and a title after refusing multiple offers from men of her own class (289). Though, like Wycherley's Pinchwife, Sir Peter expressly chose his young bride "with caution" by selecting her from outside of the fashionable London circuit, his prudence does not pay, as Lady Teazle refuses to act submissively, or even gratefully, for what she sees as a fair bargain of youth and beauty for fortune and prestige. Sir Peter repeatedly bemoans that she will be his financial ruin through her extravagance, and, despite his objections, she furthers the insult by knowingly taunting him with her anticipation of absolute liberation at his death. To his attempt to make her appreciative of her indebted relationship to him ("you were pleased enough to listen to me: you never had such an offer before"), Lady Teazle counters that there were other rich suitors who would have died and granted her widow status by now: "No! didn't I refuse Sir Tivy Terrier, who everybody said would have been a better match? for his estate is just as good as yours, and he has broke his neck since we have been married" (303). Instead of the unspoiled, dutiful daughter/wife that Sir Peter had hoped to import from the country, Lady Teazle takes full advantage of the benefits of her age-related power, and she tortures Sir Peter into submission.

Much of this power still arises from the sustained conviction that older husbands cannot please their young wives sexually, and that the young wife has the ability, if not the right, to make her husband a fool in the eyes of society through her infidelity. Joseph

Surface refers to Lady Teazle's capability of cuckolding her husband as the "only revenge in your power," and though he incorrectly delimits her options to advance his own sexual interest in her (as we have seen, she clearly possesses economic and emotional powers over her husband), Surface unabashedly voices the idea that Lady Teazle's sexual agency adds clout to her power position. Lady Teazle thus holds her control of her sexuality over her husband; when he accuses her of an affair with Charles Surface, she pointedly warns, "Take care, Sir Peter; you had better not insinuate any such thing! I'll not be suspected without cause, I promise you" (303). Aware of her ability to make good on her promise and to provide cause for the suspicion, Sir Peter once again acquiesces to her demands. By the fourth act, Sir Peter has given up entirely to Lady Teazle's wishes. She will no longer have to wait for his death for her financial independence, as he resolves to provide her with a separate maintenance of eight hundred pounds a year and still plans to leave her the majority of his wealth upon his death. In his conversation with Joseph Surface during the famous screen scene, Sir Peter's deference to Lady Teazle becomes clear; he explains, "And there's, you know, the difference of our ages makes it very improbable that she should have any very great affection for me; and if she were to be frail, and I were to make it public, why the town would only laugh at me—the foolish old bachelor, who had married a girl" (319). This is an especially self-sacrificial scene, and if we read the abnegation of self as a traditional mark of feminine virtue, Sir Peter here fully accepts his new position within the marriage as wife, leaving Lady Teazle to exercise the rights and privileges normally associated with a husband's status. Ultimately, Sir Peter accepts the cultural penalty of a January-May marriage, and

he resigns himself to his sentence; after all, as he explains, "the crime carries the punishment along with it" (288).

The reversal of gender roles follows many of the characteristics of the theme as found in Chaucer—economic gains for the younger wife, the threat of sexual rivals, public ridicule for the cuckolded husband, but the theme proves more conservative by the eighteenth century than its medieval counterpart. Although the theme remains subversive and gender roles are shown to be so unstable through Lady Teazle's assumption of masculine authority that they will never be fully reaffirmed, Sheridan nonetheless restores a respectable guise of gender normalcy by the end of the play through the Teazles' mutual recommitment to their marriage and to the stabilized identities that are represented by that monogamous union. From behind the screen, Lady Teazle overhears her husband's submission to her power, and his relinquishing of male authority initiates, paradoxically, her return to a feminine position.[11] Having "recovered her senses," Lady Teazle denounces her intention to take on a lover and reforms to make herself into the image of the loyal and trustworthy wife that Sir Teazle had originally hoped she would be. After letting her "pine a little" in remorse of her treatment of him, Sir Peter reclaims his manhood and his wife, declaring happily, "we may yet be the happiest couple in the country" (333). Importantly, the play never allows for the consummation of Lady Teazle's extramarital exploits, and this nod to sexual etiquette, like Behn's efforts in *The Lucky Chance*, contributes to the play's efforts to reinstall conventional gender roles in the final act. Yet the affirmation of gender identities is never completely successful,

[11] In this sense, perhaps *The School for Scandal* has more in common with "The Wife of Bath's Tale" where the erring knight is given what he wants only when he acknowledges a woman's prerogative to choose for herself.

coming as it does only as the result of gender reversal, and *The School for Scandal* maintains its subversive stance although its allegiance to sexual decorum make the message decidedly more subtle than those of Chaucer or the bawdier plays in the tradition.

As the January-May marriage theme continues towards the end of the eighteenth century, its ability to stabilize or disrupt codes of gender and power grows increasingly complex. Operating through established, though often unspoken, notions of biological and social structures, the January-May theme captures a unique negotiation of gender identities that can be used for social commentary. The gendered power reversals that often accompany the marriages support the theme as a tool for social subversion, but the theme's general reliance on tropes of female (in)fidelity prevent the message from being fully libratory. Thus, the marriages of Wycherley, Behn, and Sheridan might be best read as relatively subversive on a continuum of gender subversion and gender affirmation. Yet some of the fun that reigned in Chaucer's use of the theme begins to disappear, and we increasingly see younger wives' extramarital desires portrayed as sources of real danger, both for her own well-being as well as that of her husband and children. Nearing the nineteenth century, the literary focus changes, and attention turns to what would be "the day after;" the literature demonstrates an interest in what would be, for example, the day after everyone in "The Miller's Tale," including old John, realizes that he has been cuckolded by his wife, or, alternately, what would happen the day after a young wife realizes she wants to, but dares not, act on her desires. In these later texts, the January-May marriage develops more fully its potential for multiple, and sometimes contradictory, purposes regarding gender identities.

Elizabeth Inchbald's 1791 novel *A Simple Story* offers a useful example of how age is enlisted as an essential component of gender and power by the late eighteenth century. Although the marriage between Miss Milner, who is eighteen, and Dorriforth, who is thirty, does not boast the larger age difference that characterizes January-May marriages, the novel's incorporation of other elements of age-based power (Dorriforth is selected by Miss Milner's dying father to be her guardian, and she is legally and emotionally his ward) and its participation in other aspects of the January-May theme (Miss Milner uses her age to reject her feminine position within the marriage and is eventually seduced by a young male lover) make it relevant to a larger overview of the theme.[12] From the moment of their first meeting, their difference in age and their respective positions as guardian and ward delicately shade their actions toward one another. Miss Milner's youthful beauty overwhelms Dorriforth, giving him "something like a foreboding of disaster," as he greets his ward who is "lovely beyond description" (13). But Miss Milner is not immune to the effects of the influence Dorriforth's age and position have over her; when she greets him, she bursts into tears, kneels down, and promises "ever to obey him as her father" (13).[13] As their sexual attraction toward one another grows, their age difference affects their negotiations of gender within the relationship, encouraging both their defiance of and submission to gender norms.

---

[12] Likely because their age difference is not that large, many critics have ignored how age contributes to power within the novel. Several critics refer to Dorriforth as "the young Catholic priest." Though Dorriforth is hardly elderly at thirty, designating him as "young" fails to clarify his age in light of the age of his much younger wife. One exception is George E. Haggerty's "Female Abjection in Inchbald's *A Simple Story*," *SEL* 36.3 (1996): 655-71. Haggerty finds that "by eroticizing the 'father,' Inchbald unapologetically cuts through the tenets of sensibility, which paint the father as a superior being endowed with saintly grace, and proposes a domestic scene that is neither simple nor in any conventional sense 'happy'" (657).

[13] For more on the novel's play with incest, see Susan Allen Ford's "'A name more dear': Daughters, Fathers, and Desire in *A Simple Story*, *The False Friend*, and *Mathilda*," *Re-visioning Romanticism*, eds. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: U of Philadelphia P, 1994) 51-71.

Despite Miss Milner's pledge to obey her "deputed father," she struggles with subservience to one whom she envisions as also a potential lover. Dorriforth does not approve of the fashionable lifestyle that she enjoys, and while he attributes his judgments to his religious convictions, they are, in truth, based primarily upon his secret fears of exposing her to rival male suitors, especially the young Lord Frederick, who Inchbald is careful to note is only twenty-three. When "balls, plays, incessant company, at length rouzed her guardian from that mildness with which he had been accustomed to treat her," Dorriforth summons the powers that he holds as her guardian and commands her to stay at home from a ball that she plans to attend that evening. A tense day passes, as no one seems quite sure whether the order will be obeyed or not. Eventually, Miss Milner does submit to his command, and, in turn, Dorriforth releases her to attend the ball. Dorriforth is pleased at the capitulation of his ward, and while he simultaneously wrestles with his attraction for her, he is nonetheless relieved to believe that she had learned her proper place either as "daughter" or wife.

While Dorriforth's ward, Miss Milner discharges much of her subversive energies towards a surrogate January figure: Mr. Sandford, Dorriforth's advisor.[14] She refuses to submit to his authority and shocks his sensibilities through her liberal understanding of a woman's role in society. Sandford urges Dorriforth to rid himself of her and arrange for "the care of so dangerous a person [to be] given into other hands" (42). Yet Dorriforth, and eventually Sandford, cannot resist Miss Milner's charms. Dorriforth and Miss

[14] Dismissing the age difference between Miss Milner and Dorriforth, Peter Mortensen reads Sandford as the oppressive father figure from whom Miss Milner is saved by her young lover Dorriforth, arguing that Dorriforth does not become the oppressive father figure until the second half of the novel. See Mortensen's "Rousseau's English Daughters: Female Desire and Male Guardianship in British Romantic Fiction," *English Studies* 83.4 (2002): 356-70.

Milner exchange the bonds of guardian and ward for those of lovers and engage to be wed. Notably, when their mutual attraction is openly acknowledged and accepted, the January-May dynamics begin anew. Miss Milner explains that she cannot obey him while he is a lover, and, in a series of defying actions, she risks their marriage in her attempts to make him submit to her. When he orders her not to attend a masquerade ball, she deliberately defies him, dressing "in men's cloaths" when she does go to accentuate her assumption of masculine authority within the romance. Refusing to obey his commands and aggravating his unease by flaunting Lord Frederick's continued advances, Miss Milner's intentions are clear; she explains to her friend Miss Woodley, "instead of stooping to him, I wait in the certain expectation, of his submission to me" (173).

Miss Milner's expectations, however, are never fulfilled in their entirety, and, rather than setting up a gender world-upside-down, Inchbald's use of age in marriage promotes more complex readings. Miss Milner and Dorriforth (now Lord Elmwood) do marry, and Dorriforth eventually does become a cuckold when his wife has an affair with the young Lord Frederick while Dorriforth is away in the West Indies. But Dorriforth is never defeated or feminized in the way that we see Chaucer's husbands treated. His reaction to the affair is violent, and Inchbald explains, "Lord Elmwood's love to his lady had been extravagant—the effect of his hate was extravagant likewise" (197). His wife banishes herself from their home to the most "dreary retreat," and Dorriforth sends away their six-year-old daughter Matilda because she is a constant reminder of her mother, ordering all those around him that they must never mention either of their names in his presence. Dorriforth also punishes his rival; he duels with Lord Frederick, and leaves him "so maimed, and defaced with scars, as never again to endanger the honour of a

husband" (198). By these exertions of his male power, Dorriforth resists the destabilizing effects of age on his gender identity, and he soon "regain[s] his usual tranquility" while his wife lingers and dies in guilty seclusion. However, while the novel never endorses the farcical play with gender found in Chaucer, Inchbald manages to steer the novel's conclusion away from an unmitigated affirmation of masculine and feminine constructions. Even when embodying the father-lover-protector role late in the novel as he rescues his estranged daughter from a kidnapping and potential rape, Dorriforth finally submits to female influence—albeit the influence of his biological daughter and not his ward-wife. Miss Milner, Dorriforth, and Mathilda are shown to be the victims of a gendered social order that age can manipulate, but not fully overcome, and Inchbald ultimately places much of the blame for the novel's tragedies on the lack of "a proper education" for women.

The January-May Marriage in a Nineteenth-Century Context

By the beginnings of the nineteenth century, the January-May marriage had proven to be an effective plot structure that could evoke a wealth of unspoken cultural assumptions concerning male potency, female fidelity, economic exchange, and gender-based power. Able to meet a wide range of objectives, the January-May theme could work subversively or conservatively, through humor or through tragedy. The unique relationship of the January-May marriage thus offers a useful tool for authors and readers attempting to negotiate specifically nineteenth-century concerns regarding gender and sexuality, and the theme resurfaces with newfound energy and intent throughout the period. Without becoming trite, January-May relationships become central to the plots of

dozens of canonical nineteenth-century texts, and they shade the experiences of characters and readers through countless other works. It appears that peculiar circumstances converge in the nineteenth century to encourage a heightened interest in the theme's potential, and consequently, while January-May marriages pervade British literature, I maintain that the nineteenth-century popularity of this theme emerges in response to numerous social, industrial, political and economic factors that heightened anxieties over the identities of men and women.

The nineteenth century remains fascinating to literary and social historians as a period of enormous economic, industrial, and political change, and due to the efforts of feminist and gender theorists over the past several decades, current literary criticism benefits from numerous scholarly inquiries into the intricate relationships between the cultural specificity of the nineteenth century and the production of masculinity and femininity in life and literature. Without depicting nineteenth-century individuals as historical others who are to be scrutinized and judged from a more enlightened vantage, critics such as Judith Lowder Newton, Mary Poovey, and Nancy Armstrong have established how nineteenth-century culture uniquely affected male and female identities, and, in turn, how those constructions contributed to social change or stability. For example, in *Women, Power and Subversion*, Newton connects a gendered literary subversion to a broader political and economic rebellion: "What might appear at first to be relatively simple resistance to the ideology of woman's sphere therefore takes on, in this larger context, a wider significance; resistance to an ideology governing middle-class women intersects with resistance to ideologies sustaining capitalist relations as a whole" (21). Newton argues that a direct relationship exists between the treatment of gender in

literature and economic forces in society, and other feminist theorists have expanded her scope to develop links between gender, politics and industrialization.[15]

The last decade of the eighteenth century initiated an increased agitation for public attention regarding "the woman question" and displayed the culminating effects of a century of Enlightenment thought. A prosperous economy and a growing leisure class helped to create a sizeable body of female readers and writers who, as literary consumers and producers, could influence the cultural production of masculinity and femininity.[16] By the late 1780s and 90s, women's participation in literary culture grew to have overtly political objectives. Proto-feminist claims like Mary Wollstonecraft's 1787 *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and Catherine Macaulay's 1790 *Letters on Education* resonated in subsequent works like Inchbald's aforementioned *A Simple Story*, which concludes by tracing numerous gender problems to a lack of female education. Moreover, late eighteenth-century women like Wollstonecraft who felt increasingly polarized into separate spheres through a growing middle class merged the political philosophy of John Locke with early feminism to argue for women's equality via women's rationality. Rejecting essentialized notions of feminine docility, passivity, and sensibility, these women benefited from the intellectual endeavors of Bluestocking women such as Elizabeth Robinson Montagu from the 1760s and 70s and urged their claims as rational creatures. Assertions for a broader reconsideration of the role of women in society grew alongside the calls for reform that initiated the French

---

[15] See, for example, Barbara Caine's *English Feminism: 1780-1980* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) and Ellen Jordan's *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[16] See Stuart Curran's "Women Readers, Women Writers," *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 177-95.

Revolution, and Wollstonecraft's demand for "a REVOLUTION in female manners" in her 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* aligned the woman question with larger human's rights issues. Such debates for equal rights necessarily brought to the forefront the question: what is the difference between men and women?

Much of this difference was thought to be biological. Physicians and scientists had advocated well into the eighteenth century a "one sex" model for the human body. Although twenty-first century readers informed by anti-essentialist theorists might interpret such a system as a unifying, rather than a dividing, method of classification, the one-sex model operated under the understanding that women were but imperfect or not fully developed specimens of the more complete male anatomy. A biological system of gender hierarchy was already at work in the one-sex model, and women simply embodied physical lack, or, as Freud would later make famous, a castrated male. During the eighteenth century, this system was replaced by a different, though still biological, classification of the sexes, and in *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Thomas Laqueur describes how the eighteenth century invented our current understanding of sexual and gender distinction. He provocatively claims, "The reproductive organs went from being paradigmatic sites for displaying hierarchy, resonant throughout the cosmos, to being the foundation of incommensurable difference" (149).[17] Even advocates for the rights of women tended to work within the assumption of essentialized differences between genders and argued for the rights of women as a necessary *parallel* to the rights of men. Nonetheless, as liberal thinkers further worked

[17] See also Anne Fausto Sterling's *Sexing the Body* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), which connects important historical-scientific constructions of sex to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and a "crisis of gender" that corresponds with social and economic forces as well as developing scientific knowledge.

against the subjection of women, they found that their logical queries led to questions of innate gender differences. For example, while Mary Hays seems to endorse the idea of gender-based human characteristics, she poses at the beginning of the chapter "What Women Are" in her famous 1798 *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women*: "To say what women *really* are, would be a very difficult task indeed" (Hays' emphasis, 67).

The appearance of a two-sex model of sexual difference coincided with an increased need for gender clarity in an increasingly confusing world of men and women. The agitation for reform regarding the woman question inevitably met with a backlash of criticism intended to affirm a political, social, and economic system of male dominance and control, and this conservative movement was fostered by anti-Wollstonecraft sentiment that increased upon William Godwin's publication of her posthumous memoirs, which revealed to the public the intimate details of her sexual relationships with Godwin and Gilbert Imlay, as well as her two suicide attempts. Yet even the most adamant rejections of Wollstonecraft's theories reveal that social perceptions of gender were in flux; many of the advocates for traditional gender roles did "protest too much" and consequently disclose their own fears and anxieties about gender identities. Responses to Wollstonecraft and the woman question such as Thomas Taylor's 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* and Richard Polwhele's 1798 *The Unsex'd Female* convey a frantic scurrying to reinstate codes of natural law that privileged physical and psychic differences between the sexes. Polwhele expresses his vision of anarchic women presuming rights in a footnote to his poem: "Nature is the grand basis of all laws human and divine: and the woman, who has no regard to nature, either in the decoration of her

person, or the culture of her mind, will soon 'walk after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government'" (6). Subversive and conservative forces struggled throughout the early nineteenth century to make sense of the ongoing debate, encouraging, for vastly different reasons, a social reconsideration of gender.

By the mid-1840's, the increasing effects of industrialism and capitalism coincided with the processes that undermined and reinstated gender identities. Newton examines the division of the nineteenth-century labor force, claiming that the rise of factory production led to the decline of home industry and therefore to the rise of "separate spheres" for masculine and feminine work (18-21). Yet, these gendered realms of labor were inextricably bound with class economics; rather than experiencing a dramatic division of a masculine workplace and feminine domesticity, working class laborers witnessed an increased blurring of gender division by the mid-1840's. Agrarian notions of men and women's work dissolved as both men and women were utilized in the growing industrial economy.[18] Moreover, the corresponding polarization of male and female realms within the middle class can be read as the result of a larger societal anxiety about gender identities that emerged from the instability of working-class gender roles in the new social framework.

For example, in 1843 Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna published a study on the British working class: *The Perils of the Nation: An Appeal to the Legislature, the Clergy, and the Higher and Middle Classes*. In the chapter regarding the mining poor, the unsteadiness of class-based gender identities becomes central to Tonna's study. She laments at length

[18]For more background on the shift from agrarian to industrial economies, see Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and J. T. Ward, *The Factory Movement: 1830-55* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1962).

the sinful licentiousness that pervades the mine, this "scene of deepened gloom" (54). Men, women, and children worked in mixed company in the mines, wearing little clothing because of the heat, and created an androgynous workplace where the notion of separate spheres and often gender differences themselves did not exist. She writes, "The dress of these young laborers is the same: from seven or eight years of age to twenty and upwards they may be seen, naked to the waist, and having a loose pair of ragged trowsers, frequently worn to tatters by the constant friction of the chain" (47). Tonna writes repeatedly, almost obsessively, of the virtually "naked" bodies sweating and writhing in the dark tunnels of the mines and concludes, "No circumstances can possibly be conceived more inevitably tending to general profligacy; and that the most abandoned vice does reign in the mines, transforming the female character into something so depraved that their language and conduct are described as being far worse than the men, is but too well attested" (56). The gender ambiguities of the miners clearly offended the understanding of all gender constructions in Tonna's world, and she warns her reader that the deviancies of the poor have widespread ramifications as these androgynous figures are reborn from the mines into society: "Indeed, the transfer to the surface, of a body of females so utterly hardened in the gross depravities of the mines, must, for a time, spread contamination on all sides" (54).

This language highlights a middle-class fear that the androgyny of the working class was infectious. Tonna's simultaneous reluctance and willingness to talk about the lack of gender affiliation in mining work reveals the anxiety of the middle class regarding gender multiplicities and the threat of gender disruption that formed a core component of the "perils" facing British society. For social reformers, the lack of gender division

among the working class justified a cultural imperialism that attempted to inscribe morals and identities upon working-class bodies in exchange for physical necessities like healthy food and air. Tonna's work certainly demonstrates a concern for the well being of the working poor, yet the need for reform coincides with explicitly middle-class interests and allows Tonna to manipulate the middle-class fear of the workers spreading the "contamination" of androgynous identities and their perceived gender deviancy outside of their social context. Like Tonna, Friedrich Engels makes similar observations of class-based gender ambiguities in his 1845 *The Condition of the Working Class in England*; speaking here of factory labor, he writes, "this condition, which unsexes the man and takes from the woman all womanliness without being able to bestow upon the man true womanliness, or the woman true manliness—this condition which degrades, in the most shameful way, both sexes, and through them, Humanity" (184). Again, the welfare of the poor is addressed in conjunction with the larger interests of the middle class to reinscribe clear gender divisions, and Engels, typically an advocate for the working class, speaks for the bourgeoisie.

Perhaps even more threatening than Tonna's examples, here gender roles are not merely ambiguously androgynous, but, as in Chaucer's world-upside-down, sexually reversed. Quoting from a letter from a working-class man, Engels describes a husband sitting by a fireside mending stockings with a bodkin while his wife works at the factory. Regretfully pining for the separation of spheres that his class position no longer affords, the male-wife complains to his friend, "she has been the man in the house and I the woman" (183). Rousing fervor for social change, Engels prompts his middle-class audience's likely response: "Can any one imagine a more insane state of things than that

described in this letter?" (184). The "perilous" condition of Tonna's mineworkers and the "insane state" of Engels's factory family suggest an equally perilous and dangerous position for the middle class, who, seeking to help the working class with basic economic concerns, also tried to resolve their own basic gender concerns by establishing a natural hierarchy of gender via labor relations.

Legislative reforms attempted to address many of the century's multiplying sources of gender instability. Parliament demonstrated that it was more likely to advance legal changes that supported women in their traditional roles as mothers and wives, such as the 1839 Infants Custody Act, but even these limited changes worked to improve a long-established code of justice that endorsed male privilege. Later reforms indicate a slow but continued effort to empower women within their marriages by giving them more rights to their property and children, as well as the ability to terminate the marriage contracts without the financial expense and legal maneuverings of an act of Parliament, as had been earlier required.[19] Conservative legislation often attempted to mitigate the effects of these strides towards female equality. The Contagious Disease Acts of the 1860's singled out women, but not men, for examination and detention to curb the spread of prostitution in the burgeoning industrial cities, and as a "protective" measure, the Factory Acts of the 1870's limited the hours women, who often worked for lower wages than men, could be employed in the factories. Legislation that was proposed but failed also illuminates the nineteenth-century gender issue; John Stuart Mill added an amendment for women's suffrage to the Second Reform Act of 1867, and though he was

[19] See Shanley for more information on the Infants Custody Act of 1839, the 1857 Divorce Act, and the 1870 Married Women's Property Act.

widely ridiculed for his stance, his agitation suggested that social change would eventually come and encouraged the creation of women's suffrage groups in major British cities.

The diverse literature of the nineteenth century reflects the tumultuous changes that affected how men and women viewed themselves and one another, and many works attempted to make sense of the shifting gender roles that individuals encountered in real life through literature's more controllable medium. Some works actively sought to direct social thought toward specific outcomes—often endorsing new extremes of gender identities like the now-notorious "angel in the house" of Coventry Patmore's 1854 poem. The necessity to reinstall clear boundaries between masculine and feminine labor thus emerges in Victorian literary creations directed toward middle-class audiences like Tennyson's *The Princess* (1847). Though Tennyson tempers the King's gender proclamation through the perspectives of the Prince and Princess, the authoritarian King's reactionary call for strict gender codes reveals a social desperation for hegemonic binary identifications. The King's often-quoted lines encapsulate the sentiments that voice Victorian anxieties regarding the increased gender instability:

> Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
> Man for the sword and for the needle she:
> Man with the head and woman with the heart:
> Man to command and woman to obey;
> All else confusion. (V. 437-41)

The Princess is intended, however, as a work advocating women's rights, and shares concerns with other mid-Victorian texts like Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*

(1856) that promote social attitudes towards gender equality.[20] For example, coming on the heels of Mill's call for women's suffrage and his feminist treaty *The Subjection of Women*, Anthony Trollope's 1869 novel *He Knew He Was Right* details a social and legal structure that deprives a woman of her child when her husband goes mad from sexual jealousy. Gender identity surfaces as a central issue of concern for writers of the day, and questions about how designations like "male" and "female" relate to social distributions of power permeated nineteenth-century texts. This unique cultural setting proved to be a fertile ground for the January-May marriage as a literary device, and the theme evolves in the nineteenth century, playing off the tropes and stereotypes of the tradition but adapting the theme's characteristics to resonate with nineteenth-century readers and ease (or increase) readers' gender concerns.

Theorizing the January-May Marraige

The broader critical framework for this approach is built upon the work in gender theory influenced by Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Nancy Armstrong. In stressing both the socially constructed and performative natures of gender identities and their relationships to social and political movements, I offer a study that is grounded in the nineteenth-century conditions that fostered such portrayals of gender. Thus, while the dissertation distinguishes itself from the projects of second-wave feminism and an attention to the victimization of women, it remains connected to a materialist feminist

[20] Despite the sympathy expressed in *The Princess* for the rights of women, Tennyson's fear of gendered reversals of power are manifest throughout his poetry, including "Lucretius," "The Lady of Shalott," "Lady Clara Vere de Vere," and "Maud."

concern over social and economic realities faced by women in the nineteenth century. I reject binary classifications of gender into masculine and feminine realms; employing these terms with caution, I largely treat them as linguistic signs for codifying power within a specific culture that has associated certain characteristics such as passivity or authority with women or men. Consequently, though this marriage theme appears grounded in a fundamentally heterosexual rubric, my enquiry into the January-May marriage probes a complex relationship between age and gender that rejects such conventional restrictions on identity. At times, the January-May marriage so thoroughly undermines stereotypical notions of men and women that such identifications are impossible, and because of this "queering" of the literary subjects, the theories of Eve Sedgwick and Judith Halberstam are important to my critique of the tradition.

While I trace several specific patterns of development within the larger January-May theme, some characteristics appear to extend throughout most of the January-May relationships as represented in the literature that I cover, and these characteristics reveal a great deal about the general workings of the theme. Foremost, the January-May theme typically centers on a romantic triangle consisting of the husband, wife, and young rival. Though occasionally more than one suitor vies for the wife's affections, the triangular structure proves dominant, and often the multiple suitors blend into a blurry Other figure, representing a composite of what the husband is not. Secondly, these January-May marriages operate through a parodic display of excess—excesses of age and youth, impotency and desire, masculinity and femininity, power and powerlessness, ugliness and beauty. These two components—that of the triangle and that of parodic excess—emerge in almost all of the texts that I examine, and they work independently and synchronously

regarding gender. First, I will offer a brief explanation of the importance of the romantic triangle in the January-May theme.

Sedgwick's work on male homosocial relationships and the triangulation of desire influences my reading of these January-May relationships. As Sedgwick has explored in her chapter "*The Country Wife*: Anatomies of Male Homosocial Desire" in *Between Men*, many of these texts are foremost concerned with encounters among the male characters. Behn's *The Lucky Chance*, as I have discussed, ultimately discloses an intricate system of exchange among men, in which a wife can be bought, sold, and passed down as a commodity from man to man. Sedgwick is correct in reading these erotic triangles as systems of gender instability and flux, yet I distinguish my position from hers in regard to the activity and passivity of the male and female agents, and my reasoning here stems from the January-May theme's emphasis on the importance of female sexual desire. While Sedgwick and other feminist theorists like Gayle Rubin have presented the female in the erotic triangle as the object of the desires of her two active male suitors, I challenge this assumption of woman's passivity. Although Sedgwick claims that "'To Cuckold' is by definition a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man," the *OED* indicates that the word means "to dishonor (a husband) by adultery: said a) of a paramour; b) of a wife" (50).[21] Especially within the erotic triangles that are encouraged by the age differences inherent to January-May marriages, the young wives emerge as vital, active beings who consciously, sometimes forcefully, pursue or resist the affections of men. I further argue that the recognition of female desire and agency increases rather than decreases the

[21] For a detailed account of the etymology of the word "cuckold," see "The Language of Infidelity" in Alison Sinclair's *The Deceived Husband: A Kleinian Approach to the Literature of Infidelity* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993) 30-49.

gender asymmetry of the distribution of power within the erotic triangle. This female subjectivity is not fixed, but static; of course, the younger wife is at times objectified, but so, in turn, are her younger male suitor (clearly the object of female desire for his theoretical ability to please her sexually) and her older husband (objectified as a source of economic stability as well as an embodiment of male insufficiency). While I do not maintain that the active position of the female within the triangle can only result from her youth, the ages of the wife, the husband, and the lover do affect the triangulation of power and desire, and their ages complicate their relative positions as "men" and "women" within the triangle.

The second characteristic that I identify as fundamental to the theme involves the ways in which the January-May structure encourages excessive displays of conventional traits of masculinity and femininity. Simon Dentith explains parody's modus operandi: "One of the typical ways in which parody works is to seize on particular aspects of a manner or a style and exaggerate it to ludicrous effect" (32). The binary gender divisions that were typically manifested in a nineteenth-century relationship between a man and woman of similar ages assume a heightened mimetic quality when the age difference is exaggerated to the extent of a January-May marriage. Both the January and the May figures within these relationships form gross, often grotesque, caricatures of normative notions of men and women, and when these caricatures are grafted into a traditional romance narrative, they offer a parody of marriage itself, as well as the polarized gender identities that marriage was thought to unite. Moreover, the January-May marriage allows for the exaggeration of contrary gender characteristics. If, for example, there was a tendency to oversimplify female morality into a virgin / whore dichotomy, the January-

May structure provided for a wife to represent both an exaggerated, ultra-idealized virgin and an equally extreme, ultra-realized whore. Women, who were often associated with children and childish innocence in the nineteenth century, are even further relegated to that position when they appear as child brides. Yet, conversely, social associations of sexuality and fecundity with youth inevitably heighten the sexualized attributes of these young women. Men, who already enjoy the privileges of a patriarchal social order, often find that their power is hyperbolized through their age; a husband, who was intended to fulfill the protective role of a woman's father upon marriage, is even more paternal when he is twice her age. But, as we have seen, an older husband's age also exaggerates qualities thought to be typical masculine weaknesses, especially those weaknesses of the flesh. Through the January-May marriage, the husband and wife serve individually as parodies of men and women and together "as one flesh" as a parody of a larger social system. Additionally, as parody, the January-May marriage functions as both a repressive and libratory motif.

In *A Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon defines parody as "repetition with a critical difference" (20). Because parody functions as a repetition of a pre-existing structure, it is, to a certain degree, a conservative force. Consequently, while Judith Butler lauds the subversive features of twentieth century drag in *Gender Trouble*, she recognizes that the mimetic aspects of parody inherent to drag necessarily recreate many of the gender stereotypes that undermine homosexual or bisexual experiences. Hutcheon explains,

> The presupposition of both a law and its transgression bifurcates the impulse of parody: it can be normative and conservative, or it can be

> provocative and revolutionary. Its potentially conservative impulse can be seen in both extremes of the range of ethos, reverence and mockery....Yet parody can, like the carnival, also challenge norms in order to renovate, to renew. (76)

Therefore, while the repetitive dimension of parody functions as a conservative mechanism, the "critical difference" provides for change, and in the January-May theme the critical difference that drives the parody is, of course, age. Although I do not believe that all of the authors who draw upon the January-May theme intend to use age in a subversive manner, age nonetheless provides the means for subversion. Furthermore, the destabilizing effects of age often manage to wrest free from authorial control. I read several texts, like those of Dickens, as subversive, not because Dickens necessarily intended them to be so, but because I believe that many of his attempts to reaffirm gender identities through the January-May structure highlight an anxiety surrounding gender that might otherwise go unnoticed. Parody is powerful; sometimes overwhelming authorial control.

One example of how an author can use the parodic elements of the January-May marriage to great effect and then fail in his attempt to rescind the subversive implications of his plot is Byron's *Don Juan*. Therefore, the best summary for this chapter about the various contexts for my readings of nineteenth-century January-May marriages is to point to the next chapter, a case study of Canto I of *Don Juan*, which reveals how triangularity and parody work in a specific nineteenth-century text.

Chapter Two: Parody and Performance in Don Juan

Byron's masterpiece *Don Juan* provides an interesting case study of the basic dynamics of the nineteenth-century January-May marriage, and many critics have already proven the poem to be a central work in the early nineteenth-century literary treatment of gender. In "Dismantling Traditionalist Gender Roles: An Exotic Counter-World in Byron's *Don Juan*," Frank Riga suggests the poem's radical revision of gender binaries, and Jonathan David Gross' recent *Byron: The Erotic Liberal* reads the homoerotic relationship between the narrator and Juan as a decisively seditious move on Byron's part. Other works, including Susan Wolfson's "'Their She Condition': Cross-Dressing and the Politics of Gender in *Don Juan*," and Caroline Franklin's "'Quietly Cruising o'er the Ocean Woman': Byron's *Don Juan* and the Woman Question" and "Juan's Sea Changes," explore the powerful ambivalence of Byron's attitude toward gendered constructions. However, critics have not yet examined the importance of age to Byron's treatment of gender. From the first Canto, Byron establishes age as an essential component of gendered power relationships, and this quality is responsible for much of the fun in the poem. Like cross-dressing, homosexual innuendoes, extramarital affairs, and other efforts to play with gender in the poem, age raises questions regarding the stability and legitimacy of sexual identities. Spanning the youth of Juan to the maturity of Catherine the Great, *Don Juan* uses age as yet another guidepost in its wandering navigation of gender.

Juan, of course, is consistently (and considerably) younger than most of his female sexual partners. While youth can be read as a feminizing characteristic, as in the case of Juan's relationship with Catherine, the ages of sexual partners manipulate gender

in intricate ways. One's age can disempower, but it can also empower. Byron revels in the complexities age affords, and he deliberately begins the poem by participating in a larger nineteenth-century interest in January-May marriages. Byron's interest, then, is not just in the power dynamics of younger male / older female relations, but also between older male / younger female relations, as he evidences through the Alfonso / Julia / Juan triangle of Canto I. The January-May marriage theme provides a narrative structure that both deconstructs and reifies masculine and feminine identities, and a close reading of Byron's choice of subject matter here is an important foundation for understanding any subversions or affirmations of gender that the poem posits.

Byron's own position in the early nineteenth-century debate over men and women proves to be as ambivalent and varied as that of the larger British population. Even when placing his stances within a historical context, it would be difficult to label Byron's views on women as "feminist." His distaste for the increasing intellectualism of women finds voice throughout his letters and recorded conversations, as well as in his satirical *The Blues* and repeated jabs throughout *Don Juan* at the Bluestockings. Moreover, the general misogynistic tendencies he directs toward his mother Catherine Byron, his wife Annabella Milbanke, and ex-lovers like Claire Clairmont are clearly documented.[22] He is quoted by Thomas Medwin as saying,

> Like Napoleon, I have always had a great contempt for women; and

[22] Margot Strickland's *The Byron Women* (London: Peter Owen, 1974) continues to be a useful source of information regarding the women in Byron's life and David Crane's *The Kindness of Sisters: Annabella Milbanke and the Destruction of the Byrons* (New York: Knopf, 2002) offers a more recent study of the complex struggles Byron faced with women. Recent biographies such a Phyllis Grosskurth's *Byron: The Flawed Angel* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), Benita Eisler's *Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame* (New York: Knopf, 1999), and Fiona MacCarthy's *Byron: Life and Legend* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002) detail Byron's early years.

> formed this opinion of them not hastily, but from my own fatal experience. My writings, indeed, tend to exalt the sex; and my imagination has always delighted in giving them a *beau idéal* likeness, but I only drew them as a painter or statuary would do,--as they should be....The Turks and Eastern people manage these matters better than we do. They lock them up, and they are much happier. Give a woman a looking-glass and a few sugar-plums, and she will be satisfied. I have suffered from the other sex ever since I can remember any thing. I began by being jilted, and ended by being unwived. Those are wisest who make no connexion of wife or mistress. (qtd in Medwin 73)

Yet such rantings fail to paint a complete picture of Byron's complex fascination with and repulsion from women. While his statement provides a glimpse into his rationale of heterosexual, or even heterosocial relationships, clearly Byron did not live up to his description of the "wisest" that refrain from involvement with women.

While biographical insights into Byron's treatment of gender in *Don Juan* are certainly limited, a brief analysis of the power structures of his relationships, especially the Alessandro Guiccioli / Teresa Guiccioli / Byron triangle, provides an important foundation for this reading of the poem.[23] Although Byron and Teresa's sexual relationship did not begin until April 1819—after Canto I had been mailed to John

[23] *Don Juan*'s biographical connection to Byron's life has a long-established tradition in scholarship (particularly Cantos I and II). T. G. Steffan's "Byron at Work on Canto I of *Don Juan*," *Modern Philology* 44 (1947): 141-64 and Leslie Marchand's "Lord Byron and Count Alborghetti," *PMLA* 64 (1949): 976-1007) both give ample evidence to suggest that Byron's life largely influenced Canto I. Steffan suggests that Byron's work on his *Memoirs* led to the poet's direct infusion of his immediate personal matters into *Don Juan*. This biographical interest continues into current scholarship; Gross, for example, probes Byron's own homosexual experiences to support his claim regarding the sexual orientation of the poem's narrator.

Murray—Byron's interest in the Italian concept of the *cavaliere servente*, a lover of a married woman who often committed to the relationship for life, was already well formed. In 1817 and 1818, similar triangles inspired *Beppo* and *Mazeppa*, which can be seen as precursors to *Don Juan* in form and theme.[24] The power dynamics of such relationships clearly intrigued Byron, and he reflects in a letter to John Hobhouse dated April 6, 1819 on his earlier observations of Alessandro's jealousy: "[he] does not seem so jealous this year as he did last—when he stuck close to her side even at the Governor's.—She is pretty" (*BLJ* VI 107). Byron had met the Guicciolis in January of 1818, and the same letter to Hobhouse conveys this: "I knew her a little last year at her starting." As the parties circulated within the same Venetian c*onversazioni*, it is possible that Byron was already thinking of the Guiccioli marriage when he began Canto I in July of 1818.[25] The usual assumptions about aging and sexuality that characterize the January-May marriage also seemed apparent to Byron; speaking of the Guiccioli marriage, he quips, "What happiness is to be expected, or constancy, from such a *liaison*? Is it not natural...she should find somebody to like better, and who likes her better.... young women, and your Italian ones too, are not satisfied with your good old men" (qtd in Medwin 22-3). Often, the similarities between the art of *Don Juan* and Byron and Teresa's lives were exceptionally close. Byron writes in a letter to John Murray,

---

[24] *Beppo*, written in the autumn of 1817, and *Mazeppa*, written between April 1817 and the autumn of 1818, both explore the dynamics of age, sexual power, and adultery. *Beppo* relates the tale of a *cavaliere servente*, a middle-aged married woman, and her sea-faring husband. *Mazeppa* describes the relationship between a young lover and a young wife who is unhappy with her older husband: "His wife was not of his opinion--/ His junior she by thirty years--/ Grew daily tired of his dominion;" (167-69). Both works are in *The Complete Poetical Works*. vol. 4, ed. Jerome J. McGann. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

[25] Though Benita Eisler's *Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame* follows the biographical claim that Byron "hardly noticed" Teresa in 1818, his own words describing her position in relation to other men and his inability to get close to her in 1818 suggest otherwise. *Mazeppa* describes the waiting period before the affair begins between the young lover and Theresa: "I saw, and sigh'd—in silence wept, / And still reluctant distance kept" (244-45).

"Tonight as Countess G[uiccioli] observed me poring over 'Don Juan' she stumbled...on the 138th Stanza of the first Canto—and asked me what it meant—I told her—nothing but 'your husband is coming' as I said this in Italian with some emphasis—she started up in a fright—and said '*Oh My God—is* he *coming?*' thinking it was *her own*" (Byron's emphasis, *BLJ* VI 239). As told in his letters and journals from the early months of their affair, Byron reveled in the correlation between his life and *Don Juan* and seems to have gained as much pleasure from enacting his artistic creation as from the affair itself.

Even more compelling than the affinities of the situations are Byron's struggles with the complexities of the distribution of power within the Guiccioli triangle, which Byron ultimately found as disturbing in real life as in fiction. In many respects, the age difference of the Guiccioli marriage exaggerated typical early nineteenth-century gender characteristics, as Alessandro assumed a heightened position of domineering, fatherly authority and Teresa a position of childlike docility. In several letters to different people, Byron depicts Teresa as a "pretty fair-haired Girl last year out of a Convent" and emphasizes her youth by repeated references to her age of "nineteen years" in contrast to the Count's age of "sixty" (*BLJ* VI 107, 113-4, 215-6).[26] Byron often presents Alessandro as a particularly sinister character, whose reputation hints at his involvement in several murders, and Origo and many others have reckoned him as a real-life version of Robert Browning's Duke of Ferrara and have suggested that he might have killed his

[26] Teresa's own interests in the power dynamics of age are well documented. Byron criticizes her for having no tact, citing as an example the fact that she "talks of age to old ladies who want to pass for young" (*BLJ* VI, 108). MacCarthy notes that "though she seems to have told Byron she was nineteen, the register in the Battistero di San Giovanni in Fonte in Ravenna reveals that she was twenty. Already, so young, she had falsified her age" (356). Byron's letter to Douglas Kinnaird of April 24 describes her as twenty (*BLJ* VI, 113). Teresa continued her efforts to make herself appear younger by crossing out Byron's description of her as "nineteen years of age" and replacing it with "seventeen" (*BLJ* VI, 216).

first wife (*BLJ* VI, 144; Origo 25-6). At other times, Alessandro seems to be entirely under the control of Teresa. Byron describes how the Count came to him crying upon discovering Teresa's infidelity (*BLJ* VI 244). Furthermore, Teresa appears very much in power in her relationship with Byron, especially in the early stages of the relationship. Calling Byron "the greatest trophy of the age," Fiona MacCarthy relegates Byron to the position of trophy "wife" and removes Teresa from the traditional depiction as child bride (356). These reversals of gender stereotypes clearly intrigued Byron who seems to have indulged himself by taking the feminine role in the relationship; however, as the novelty of his position wore off, Byron felt increasingly weakened in his role as *cavaliere servente*. In June 1819 he writes rather proudly to Richard Hoppner, "he is completely *governed* by her—for that matter—so am I," but by October he suggests a change in his perception in a letter to John Hobhouse: "I can't say that I don't feel the degradation.... here the *polygamy* is all on the female side. —I have been an intriguer, a husband, and now I am a Cavalier Servente. —by the holy!—it is a strange sensation" (Byron's emphasis, *BLJ* VI 164, 266).

As it did from time of Chaucer, feminine sexual desire drives the force behind the January-May marriage theme's power for subversion. Traditional power structures of heterosexual relationships are turned upside down because of the sexual threat posed by the age difference between the older man and the younger woman—what Byron dubbed a "preposterous connexion" (qtd in Medwin, 22). Describing Julia, *Don Juan* humorously comments on the dynamics of such relationships within the larger social order by focusing on Julia's sexual needs rather than Alfonso's:

> Wedded she was some years, and to a man

Of fifty, and such husbands are in plenty;

And yet, I think, instead of such a ONE

'Twere better to have TWO of five and twenty. (1.62.489-92)

Julia's sexuality, while in many ways affirming the notion that women (especially darker women) were innately more physical and more licentious than men, nevertheless provides a means to power. In this light, Mary Hays' 1798 argument in defense of coquetry becomes more subversive than it might appear on a first reading: "And if indeed, women do avail themselves of the only weapons they are permitted to wield, can they be blamed? Undoubtedly not; since they are compelled to it by the injustice and impolicy of men" (91). As in earlier January-May texts, *Don Juan* foregrounds the naturalness of Julia's sexual desire, and through this desire, she comes to control her husband—effectively renaming him as a cuckold. Sexuality serves not only as a means of repression in society, but also as a vehicle of enabling power, and in *Don Juan*, both Juan and Alfonso are temporarily feminized through Julia's sexual maneuverings.

Juan's youth enables the gender reversal in much the same manner as boys were feminized within Greek society in homosexual encounters and in Turkish performances of boys dancing as girls, both customs of interest to Byron as revealed in Louis Crompton's *Byron and Greek Love*. Consequently, Byron describes how at sixteen, Juan is deemed by society as "almost man," which causes his mother to fly into a rage and bite her lip to keep from screaming (1.54.429). Though Donna Inez's reaction indicates a fear of her son's growing masculinity, Byron phrases the description so that her distaste with Juan's youthful femininity is also implied. Later, Antonia criticizes her mistress's lover as a "pretty gentleman" with a "half-girlish face," and deems him unworthy of the risks

imposed to Julia's marriage and her job: "'Had it but been for a stout cavalier...But for a child...I really, madam, wonder at your taste'" (1.170.1360; 1.172.1368,69,71). Juan's feminine position with Julia is further advanced by his passivity, both in initiating the affair and in the violent scene of its disclosure. Within the pair, Julia maintains the sexual advantage, and she assumes the conventionally masculine role of instructing her young lover. Dreaming of the day her husband will die "even seven years hence," Julia envisions teaching Juan "the rudiments of love," effectively raising Juan as her sexual partner (1.85.676,79). When their physical affair begins, she places her hand on Juan's and leans herself onto him controlling him physically: "The hand which still held Juan's, by degrees / Gently, but palpably confirm'd its grasp" (1.111.881-82). Susan Wolfson convincingly argues that Julia and Antonia's placement of Juan within the bedclothes while Alfonso searches the room foreshadows Haidée and Zoe's clothing of Juan and subsequent gender reversals brought about by feminine attire: "Though not overtly transvestite, these coverings still compromise Juan's manhood, for each, while protective, also marks him as passive and dependent, the property of a woman's design" (600). Though, as with Horner in *The Country Wife*, Juan's feminization facilitates his access to women, the narrator's subjective attention to Juan's body throughout the poem links him to an objective feminine physicality held in distinct contrast by Romantics with masculine rationality.

Interestingly, age works in much the same way for Alfonso; his "fifty, or sixty" years remove him from the height of masculine privilege just as Juan's age emasculates through youth (1.146.1164). Echoing the narrator's early remark about men "five and

twenty," Antonia indicates that a cavalier "Of twenty-five or thirty" embodies her ideal of manliness, and the narrator of the poem scathingly attacks Alfonso through his age:

> She thought of her own strength, and Juan's youth,
>
> And of the folly of all prudish fears,
>
> Victorious virtue, and domestic truth,
>
> And then of Don Alfonso's fifty years;
>
> I wish these last had not occurr'd, in sooth,
>
> Because that number rarely much endears,
>
> And through all climes, the snowy and the sunny,
>
> Sounds ill in love, whate'er it may in money. (1.107.849-57)

The narrator's description that Alfonso was "A man well looking" is qualified by the phrase "for his years," and Byron allows Julia to exaggerate his age even further: "you have threescore, / Fifty, or sixty—it is all the same" (1.65.514; 1.146.1163-4). Thus, although he maintains the façade of manly power, Alfonso is acutely aware of the ways that age threatens his sexual power; Byron writes, "he was jealous, though he did not show it, / For jealousy dislikes the world to know it" (1.65.519-20). Byron's letters suggest that his attention to masculine decline was a very personal one, and they convey his own concern with passing through what he considered to be the masculine prime. A letter of Byron's in July 1819 laments his inability to keep off weight since he turned thirty, the growing wrinkles around his eyes, his bad teeth that "remain by way of courtesy" and his graying and balding head. Though Byron is only thirty-one, he speaks of the fact that in "my time of life.... my personal charms have by no means increased" (*BLJ* VI 174). The poem suggests Alfonso's virility is likewise defiled by his age, and

after a verbal battering from Julia that lasts thirteen stanzas and a "half-hour," Alfonso appears a "foolish figure" (1.161.1282). When he returns from his expulsion from Julia's bedroom, Julia has maintained her ability "to turn the tables" of gender and dominate the relationship (1.175.1396). The power associated with the male is clearly in Julia's hands as she "laid conditions, he thought, very hard on, / Denying several little things he wanted" (1.180.1435).

While Juan and Alfonso are feminized, signifiers of gender work to construct Julia's masculinity. Even before the affair, Julia's eyes are "handsome" and full of fire and her "stature tall," and the shift in power brought about by her affair proves to have nurtured her masculinity. The voicelessness of femininity is discarded under the threat of her affair's disclosure, and Julia gains masculine voice. Though Byron rebukes her hypocrisy, "Oh shame! / Oh sin! Oh sorrow! and Oh womankind! / How can you do such things and keep your fame," he presents her critique of her marriage and sexual dissatisfaction with such humor and wit that the reader is amused at Alfonso's embarrassment and misfortune (1.165.1312-15). In her thirteen-stanza tirade, she threatens not only Alfonso, but the other men of the *posse comitatus* as well. Julia harshly ridicules Alfonso's impotence, advancing her own masculinity by publicly stripping his; sarcastically mocking Alfonso's age, she hopes the man they are searching for "has not sixty years, / At that age he would be too old for slaughter, / Or for so young a husband's jealous fears" (1.155.1233-34). Flaunting her sexual agency, she runs through a litany of young suitors she could have selected as her lovers, reminding the married men of their wives' power. She even transcends the realm of domesticity by entering the public arena to challenge the lawyer's business practices. Yet in *Female*

Masculinity, Judith Halberstam notes that "the difference between men performing femininity and women performing masculinity is a crucial difference to mark out: the stakes in each are different, the performances look different, and there is a distinct difference between the relations between masculinity and performance and femininity and performance" (238). Certainly, Byron intended for the gender performances in Canto I to produce different responses from his audience. Whereas Juan and Alfonso's feminized positions call for humor and readers laugh at their disempowered manhood, Julia's newfound masculinity simultaneously evokes the reader's compassion for her plight and a heightened social anxiety due to her newly liberated status. Halberstam goes on to argue that female theatrical performances of masculinity are potentially more subversive because of their unique combination of male and female masculinities that "provide a rare opportunity for the wholesale parody of, particularly, white masculinity." Cast as younger wife and racial Other, Julia enjoys a unique position for gender subversion, and parody, in fact, proves a crucial part of Byron's play with gender.

The January-May marriage enables gendered binaries of power to be redistributed, yet the shift is not complete in its exchange of identities. Age can work to reverse the gender binary in regards to sexual power, but it can also work, in the same context, to exaggerate conventional systems of male-female power. In the January-May theme, the wife, who is conventionally subjected to the powerless and defenseless realm of a child, can be further relegated to a subservient position in contrast with her even more fatherly, oppressive husband. A basic materialist-feminist reading of any such relationship would argue that an older male has more opportunity than his younger female counterpart to amass wealth, power and experience, while, in contrast, a younger

woman would have less chance than an older woman to amass material, social, and sexual authority. Young men likewise could exhibit more intense masculinity as a result of raging hormones, role-playing, and cultural pressure. Juan and Alfonso, however feminized, cling to the concept of manhood, while the empowered Julia remains a woman. Thus, in *Don Juan*, the performances of gender include female performances of femininity as well as masculine performances of masculinity.

Paradoxically, at the same time Julia adopts masculine characteristics, she exudes an excess of femininity, and while Juan and Alfonso take on feminine guises, they portray excesses of masculinity.[27] By analyzing the manuscripts for clues to the revision process, Guy Steffan's "Byron Furbishing Canto I of *Don Juan*" documents the numerous places in the Canto where Byron revised specifically for an exaggerated effect. For example, Alfonso originally was to arrive with only half his "household," not half the city at his back, and Julia's desirousness is revised to merit not one, but two bishops' devotion in the final version. Fully aware of the power of parody, Byron alters the manuscript to heighten already exaggerated markers of gender. These excesses themselves have subversive qualities and form a more complex attack on masculine and feminine identities. In this manner, *Don Juan*'s January-May romance operates in much the same way as contemporary drag performances function to exaggerate, subvert and affirm gender constructions. Just as drag engages in over-the-top mimicry of feminine gestures, dress, and anatomy, the excesses within the characters of the January-May

---

[27] Judith Butler explains the "panicked," repetitive mimicking that is gender: "It is this excess which erupts within the intervals of those repeated gestures and acts that construct the apparent uniformity of heterosexual positionalities, indeed which compels the repetition itself, and which guarantees its perpetual failure" (24). See "Imitation and Gender Subordination," *Inside / Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991) 13-31.

triangle disrupt and destabilize gender norms. The excessive theatricality and parody of the January-May theme draws attention to the instability of any notion of a gendered original that the parody is replicating. By exaggerating the way power is coded and demonstrated by "men" and "women," the January-May marriage theme ultimately works to unhinge, or to employ Polwhele's term, to "unsex" existing gender roles.

Donna Julia, especially before her love affair with Juan, exudes a childlike feminine excess that serves to parody the characteristics culturally ascribed to women. Though on the surface the descriptions of Julia seem little more than Byron's actualization of creating his "*beau ideal*," they have a deeper, subversive element. Byron chooses to portray the young wife Julia as so much woman that she becomes no woman and thereby challenges the essentialism of gender identification. Upon her introduction to the poem, she is described,

> There was the Donna Julia, whom to call
>
> Pretty were but to give a feeble notion
>
> Of many charms in her as natural
>
> As sweetness to the flower, or salt to ocean,
>
> Her zone to Venus, or his bow to Cupid,
>
> (But this last simile is trite and stupid). (1.55.435-40)

Byron plays on the conventional tendency to naturalize her feminine qualities, but self-reflexively unveils the error of his last allusion and suggests the problems of essentializing femininity. Julia is associated with both plentitude and lack as she initially denies her longings for sexual pleasure—fulfilling extremes of opposites, both "sweetness" and "salt." The poem thus reveals how the repressive structure of sexual

codes leads to further excessive displays of feminine virtue, which are, in fact, complimentary tropes in this gender spectacle: "if her heart had deeper thoughts in store / She must not own, but cherish'd more the while, / For that compression in its burning core" (1.72.571-72). Julia's initial commitment to a wife's faithfulness is so extreme that it suggests childlike naïveté more than hypocrisy, yet she feels herself so capable of fidelity that she puts herself to the test. After all, she believes "a virtuous woman / Should rather face and overcome temptation, / That flight was base and dastardly" (1.77.609-11). But, as with Margery Pinchwife, Julia's performance of feminine virtue is transparent both to the reader and to the narrator, who, knowing the likely results of her repressed desires, urges for his own sexual benefit that "young ladies [should] make trial" (1.78.624). Byron consistently encourages parodic representations of masculinity and femininity with keen awareness of their subversive consequences.

As a parody of patriarchal law, Alfonso is theatrically presented with all the social props of male authority, and he arrives to confront Julia with "half the city at his back" (1.137.1090). While the investigation of Julia's room is violent and abusive, the display of masculine excess appears farcical. His age, which should convey a public mark of dignity and respect, causes Julia to question if the attack is "worthy of your years?" (1.146.1163). Alfonso is flocked with "torches, friends, and servants in great number" privileging him with manly reason, social custom and class advantage. The legal representative who accompanies Alfonso proves little more than authority for hire. Even Alfonso's performance with the phallic signifiers of male power is so excessive that it is ridiculous. Julia chides, "Oh, valiant man! with sword drawn and cock'd trigger, / Now, tell me, don't you cut a pretty figure?" (1.150.1199-2000). Byron's parody of the

patriarchal husband becomes even more scathing in light of Alfonso's affair with Donna Inez. Patriarchal authority in its excess proves so hypocritical, and so theatrical, that its validity is undermined; Alfonso suggests instead a split between the signifiers of male power and the corresponding body.

Juan's romantic youthful masculinity is also presented with such plentitude and humor that it too loses all pretense of legitimacy. Evoking Wordsworth and Coleridge as the whipping boys of manly sentiment, Byron mocks the high-seriousness associated with masculine intellectualism:

> He, Juan, (and not Wordsworth) so pursued
>
> His self-communion with his own high soul,
>
> Until his mighty heart, in its great mood,
>
> Had mitigated part, though not the whole
>
> Of its disease; he did the best he could
>
> With things not very subject to control,
>
> And turn'd, without perceiving his condition,
>
> Like Coleridge, into a metaphysician. (1.91.721-28)

Here, Byron strikes at common signifiers of romantic masculinity by showing Juan's pubescent excess of sexual desire. As Juan dwells upon the significance of the stars and other natural phenomena, the narrator reminds the reader, "If you think 'twas philosophy that this did, / I can't help thinking puberty assisted" (1.93.743-44). The poem suggests Juan's stargazing is inspired by his reclined position, likely to facilitate his masturbation, while thinking of the "boundless skies" and "Donna Julia's eyes" (1.92.735-36). Juan orgasmically "pored upon the leaves, and on the flowers," losing himself in his revels

until he finds he has missed his dinner (1.94.745). The "lonely walks" and "lengthening reveries" coded by Romanticism as manly poet / visionary characteristics are exaggerated with other youthful, masculine objectives into witty parodies of gender excess.

Through the reversal of power and the parody of masculine and feminine constructions, Byron's use of the January-May theme criticizes normative gender identities and their distributions of power. By highlighting how age influences readings of gender, the January-May construction forces a reconsideration of gender as a self-contained marker of identification. Instead, gender emerges as a composite of multiple elements that include race, class, and age. Like Mary Hays' comment, "To say what women *really* are, would be a very difficult task indeed," Byron echoes the lack of a coherent understanding of gendered identity: "Man's a phenomenon, one knows not what" (1.133.1057). However, gender identities prove to be more firmly entrenched in nineteenth-century thought than some critics would assert. The excesses of gender traits expressed in the January-May marriage do subvert masculine and feminine norms in their parodic treatment of the subject, but in their satirical play, they also reify the very notions they attempt to dismantle. This paradox has puzzled some critical efforts that tend to uphold either the poem's commitment to established identity constructions or their radical upheaval, such as Frank P. Riga's 1999 "Dismantling Traditionalist Gender Roles: An Exotic Counter-World in Byron's *Don Juan.*" Byron's *Don Juan* clearly is invested in a subversion of gender constructions, and in this sense, Riga's claim proves insightful: "By changing Don Juan with each new context, Byron introduces and examines questions of fixed social roles and fixed male identities. By his very nature as a chameleonlike figure, Byron's protagonist contests traditionalist views of masculinity"

(3). Yet Riga neglects to relate *Don Juan*'s reinscribing of gender norms. In fact, the January-May marriage serves a dual purpose that suits Byron's complex attitudes toward the nineteenth-century woman question. Not only do the parodic representations necessitate the continuous production of gendered characteristics, but after numerous complex challenges to traditional gender, Canto I also concludes with a more outright attempt to reaffirm masculine and feminine norms, which should inform readings of gender throughout the rest of the poem.

Byron's literary attacks on conventions of gender reveal his interest in dismantling such restrictive identities, perhaps for personal reasons motivated by both his heterosexual and homosexual desires, many of which were considered prosecutable by law in Regency society. However, parody, in reproducing to excess the codes of gender it wishes to destroy, ironically must participate in their reconstruction. Arguably, this irony fits Byron's own complex investment in heterosexual male domination, even as he suffers from its effects. As Wolfson has noted, "Even granting the notoriously adept ironies of *Don Juan*, its politics of sexual difference prove remarkably complex and unstable. At times they are governed by the general satirical perspective of the poem; at other times they clash with Byron's pronounced liberal politics; and at still others they appear scarcely fixed" (585). Age provides Byron with a way to navigate these instabilities meaningfully, and the January-May theme offers a vehicle that encompasses Byron's contrary motives. For example, when his affair with Teresa Guiccioli becomes known to her husband, Byron takes a decidedly conservative, and unusually self-sacrificial, approach in recommending she stay with her husband, "[I] persuaded her with the greatest difficulty to return with her husband to Ravenna" (*BLJ* VI 241). Here,

Byron's inconsistent display of respect for his elder counterpart and the institution of marriage conveniently allows Byron to disengage from a relationship no longer that exciting.

But Byron's most obvious biographical display of his interest in manipulating and advocating gender roles comes through his denial to Claire Clairmont access to her daughter Allegra despite the pleas of both the Shelleys. Until the famous Caroline Norton case of the 1830's, a mother did not have equal rights under English law to her children. He writes in a letter to Richard Hoppner in September 1820:

> Clare writes to me the most insolent letters about Allegra—see what a man gets for taking care of natural children!...If Clare thinks that she shall ever interfere with the child's morals or education—she mistakes—she never shall—The girl shall be a Christian and a married woman—if possible.... To express it delicately—I think Madame Clare is a damned bitch. (*BLJ* VII 174-5)

While in works like *Don Juan* and *Sardanapalus*, Byron displays an apparent desire to subvert gendered identities, he is not above using them in life to his practical advantage in maintaining submissive positions for his ex-lover and daughter. Fortunately, age, like other characteristics that can be used to reground or subvert gender, is a rubric that can be set aside at any time in favor of Byron's own power as father and man.

Byron reminds the reader of his ambivalent stance on the rights of woman issue. Though the narrator often champions the naturalness of Donna Julia's sexual desire for a younger man, he alternately chastises her for her infidelity by appealing to religious tradition when it affords him benefit:

For instance—gentlemen, whose ladies take
Leave to o'erstep the written rights of woman,
And break the—Which commandment is't they break? (1.98.778-80)

If the "written rights of women" are grounded in Christian theology, Byron can utilize religious tradition to contradict his more rational arguments regarding the naturalness of Julia's desire, which he can now read qua adultery—a crime to both the state and church. Moreover, Wolfson notes how "a feminized Juan always invites death into the poem, whether in the form of threats to his own life or to the lives of those implicated in his travesties," and thereby warns of clear physical ramifications for gender deviancy (601). Arguably, Byron senses the consequences of his gender bending to his own male privilege and quells his gender anxiety through a necessary affirmation of gender norms. The subversion of the gender reversals initiated by the January-May marriage comes crashing down through a seemingly insignificant marker of maleness—a pair of shoes. After reveling in Julia's sexual exploits and titillating the reader's expectations that Julia and Juan might escape, Byron reinstalls male power. Just at the point of Canto I when Alfonso's control is most diminished and the searches of Julia's bedroom are about to leave with no evidence of her infidelity, Byron writes,

A pair of shoes!—what then? not much, if they
Are such a fit with lady's feet, but these
(No one can tell how much I grieve to say)
Were masculine; to see them, and to seize,
Was but a moment's act.—Ah! Well-a-day! (1.185.1441-45)

Since the stylistic differences between male and female shoes are socially inscribed, the shoes remain a subversive element of the poem in its denaturalized arbitrariness, but the shoes nevertheless initiate conventions of gender.[28] The "seeing" and "seizing" of the shoes mark the shift in the Canto toward a return to gender norms. The reversal of power and parodic treatment of gender comes to an end, and the seemingly inevitable return to masculine domination begins.

Despite the comic cheekiness of the shoes' symbolic relation to male sex organs, the shoes become an important gender signifier in the poem, and Juan gains a noble male virility that he has lacked thus far in the poem. Rejecting the feminine passivity that has characterized him heretofore, he actively wrestles with Alfonso in heated battle and adopts the dangerous qualities of masculine power; though his voice remains "an octave higher" than Alfonso's, he blasphemes, his "blood was up," and he loses his temper—all actions proper for men, but not for women in the nineteenth century (1.185,186). Juan is now dangerous, and the narrator describes how Alfonso is lucky that Juan did not seize the sword dropped on the ground lest "Alfonso's days had not been in the land / Much longer" (1.185.1478-79). Juan throttles Alfonso and causes his nose to bleed before losing his only clothing, revealing to the world his physicality as a marker of gender in further support of his manliness. Furthermore, the discovery of his shoes indirectly leads to his adventurous travels, which advance his association with the youthful masculinity of the Romantic quest and heroic escapades that carry him through the rest of the poem.

---

[28] In *Romanticism and Male Fantasy in Byron's Don Juan* (New York: St. Martin's P, 2000), Charles Donelan views the discovery of the shoes as the "intrusion of the Real" into the poem. My reading resists this interpretation, as the codes of fashion that correspond with male and female shoes instead represent the penultimate in arbitrariness and mutability.

The end of Canto I also restores Alfonso to a secure place of male privilege within the law, which pays the customary respect to his age, gender and authority. Whereas the moment before he discovers the shoes, he is described as in a position of powerlessness and exile "like Adam lingering near his garden" begging forgiveness from a God-like Julia, his detection of the male shoes gives him evidence of gender (albeit not *of* the body but worn *on* the body) that is sufficient to reinvigorate his male potency (1.180-81). Appropriately, he immediately leaves the room to regain his sword, the symbol of his patriarchal authority and power, and upon returning, "threaten'd death" (1.182-83). Although he neglects to kill anyone, despite his oath, Alfonso manages to inflict injury through the law, which is likewise restored to its powerful agency, and Alfonso sues for divorce, enforcing the sexual double standard that has condoned his affair with Donna Inez but that punishes Julia's infidelity. Effectively, Alfonso's age and gender are legally and socially vindicated, and he is returned to a respected position as a senior patriarch.

Julia, in contrast, becomes once again a child, "sent into a nunnery" where numerous girls, including Byron's Allegra, were directed for their customary educations. In choosing to punish Julia, Byron follows Alfonso's mob's rationale of the initial storming of her room, "Were *one* not punish'd, *all* would be outrageous," and reinstates gender identity and subsequent female repression by men (Byron's emphasis 1.138.1104). Julia loses her adult status as a sexual individual and her agency as a wife and becomes a passive victim both of Alfonso and of Juan. Her letter to Juan expresses her assumption of the traditional codes of the female gender: "I have no further claim on your young heart, / Mine was the victim, and would be again" (1.192.1531-32). Byron

rhapsodically ventriloquizes his views on essential gender difference, seemingly sympathetic, through Julia's letter:

> 'Man's love is of his life a thing apart,
>
> 'Tis woman's whole existence; man may range
>
> The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart,
>
> Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange
>
> Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,
>
> And few there are whom these can not estrange;
>
> Man has all these resources, we but one,
>
> To love again, and be again undone. (1.194.1545-52)

Julia's newfound commitment to gender norms manifests itself throughout the letter. She laments that her "breast has been all weakness" and that her "brain is feminine" (1.195. 1553,57). While these self-deprecatory remarks do not seem to fit the woman who publicly belittled her husband with strength and wit, they correspond with Byron's need to reestablish feminine subjection. Julia confirms the sexual double standard again as she accepts that Juan "will proceed in beauty, and in pride, / Beloved and loving many" while in contrast she envisions for herself that "all is o'er / For me on earth, except some years to hide / My shame and sorrow deep in my heart's core" (1.196.1561-64). Indeed, the poem sadistically proves her masochistic prophecy to be right in Canto II, when Juan quickly forgets her love for that of Haidée.

Byron continues to play this "come here / go away" game with gender identities for the remainder of *Don Juan*, cyclically subverting masculine and feminine norms only to reinstall them with force. After Canto I, Haidée's matriarchal rule of paradise is

overthrown by the destructive return of her father Lambro. Juan's sexual subordination to powerful female figures like the Sultana Gulbeyaz is countered with his manly sack of Ismail. And, of course, Juan's sexual exploits have their own way of reifying a masculine identity. While traditional gender identities surface throughout the poem, these repetitive motions that incessantly reveal Byron's need to reestablish gender norms point not only to Byron's apparent personal confusion but also to nineteenth-century society's larger inability to feel comfortable with the functions of gender. If age, like race and class, can demarcate social divisions of power, then the authority of gender as a basis of a sex-class system appears all too erroneous, yet, paradoxically, the restoration of traditional masculine and feminine identities proves to be the necessary effect of gender's failure to hold up under Byron's scrutiny. Allowing for such repetition and yet disrupting gendered distributions of power, the January-May marriage theme of Canto I sets a foundation for gender presentations in all of *Don Juan*. Juan is repeatedly feminized only to be restored to positions of male privilege, establishing a relationship between gender and age that will manifest throughout the poem.[29] Furthermore, as gender binaries become more polarized during the nineteenth century, *Don Juan* helps to initiate a later Victorian attraction to this older man / younger woman theme and the January-May marriage's multifaceted implications for masculine and feminine identities as evidenced in literary productions such as George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, and Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book.* Although, in its emphasis

[29] Peter Graham's *Don Juan in Regency England* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1990) also reads the introductory materials and Canto I as a "map" readers should use to navigate the rest of the poem. The book also makes note of Juan's age in relation to Julia and the other women with whom he has sexual encounters throughout the poem, reading age as a biographical reference to Byron's sex life as well as a device that overturns the Don Juan myth.

on age-based power imbalances, the January-May marriage forces readers to reconsider gender's vitality as a social category, its subversion is much more complex, and more troublesome, than perhaps even Byron could grasp or control.

Don Juan demonstrates how the January-May theme employed a unique erotic triangle to both destroy and rebuild conceptions of gender through parody and excess, and the following readings offered by this dissertation suggest that the January-May theme often functioned in the nineteenth century through these means—often liberating gender identities only to reaffirm them. However, while Byron's poem captures many of the fundamental strategies of the January-May marriage and the gender anxieties that the theme attempts to resolve, in many ways, *Don Juan* serves as a bridge between the eighteenth and nineteenth century manifestations of the theme. Whereas *Don Juan* shares with most of its January-May predecessors an interest in the overt cuckolding of the elder husband, in most nineteenth-century texts, this concentration on consummated adultery evolves into an obsession with the mere threat of adulterous behavior; though the triangular pattern persists in nineteenth-century January-May romances, rarely is the husband a victim of a fully culminated sexual affair. *David Copperfield*'s Doctor and Annie Strong remain parodies of masculine and feminine norms through their immoderate projections of gender stereotypes, but, even more fervently that Sheridan's Lady Teazle, Annie steadfastly remains faithful to her older husband and resists the advances of the young Jack Maldon. Though parody remains an important element of the January-May theme throughout the nineteenth century, late January-May marriages take on subtler and more complex methods for probing identity, suggesting that anxieties about gender and age have perhaps become too fragile and too visible for such ribald

play. Consequently, the subsequent chapters of this dissertation investigate some of the more intricate tropes that emerge within the larger theme over the course of the nineteenth century.

Chapter Three: "Oh, my husband and father": The January-May Marriage as Incest Narrative in Dickens

Analogies between January-May marriages and father-daughter relationships surface in numerous May texts throughout the nineteenth century, highlighting marriage as a venue for traditional patriarchal authority as well as a cover for overtly disruptive sexualities. On the one hand, the age difference inherent to the January-May romance exaggerates the already existent imbalance of power among men and women in the nineteenth century by endowing the husband with the additional authority of parent, ensuring male power through a dual enactment of gendered and generational hierarchies. Embracing paternal control as a benevolent force that guides and protects women in society, January-May marriages could also extol the virtues of a patriarchal society by demonstrating women's seeming desire for male leadership, instruction, and control. Thus, Dorothea Brooke's heartfelt proclamation that the "really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it" renders the January-May marriage as an extension of women's childhood—a means for empowerment and learning if the wife "wished it," though keeping the husband in an idealized state of knowledge and ability (7). Unlike *Middlemarch*, not all January-May texts stress the disappointment of marrying a "sort of father," but they often do point to a conservative cultural affinity with Dorothea's wishful sentiment. In these daddy-daughter motifs, the January-May marriage can operate as a restorative force for gender relations, but, in doing so, implies that the situation requires restoration and, thus, that it is already in danger. In Dorothea's case, her glorification of husband as father acts

as compensation for the weak or absent male figures (her dead father, her ineffectual uncle, her insipid suitor) in her own life, and in imagining Casaubon to be an omniscient, all powerful patriarch, she establishes expectations of her older husband that he can never fulfill.

Like the larger January-May theme, incestuous connotations between older husbands and younger wives thus served multiple objectives regarding gendered identities. From a basic psychoanalytical perspective, the incest taboo drives individuals into gender differentiation and into normative, exogamic heterosexuality.[30] In her recent study *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler rightly points out that conventional psychoanalytic explanations of incest limit the possibilities of familial and social relations to a mother/father binary and neglect to consider homosexual, single-parent, and non-traditional family structures (158). Butler asserts, "It might, then, be necessary to rethink the prohibition on incest as that which sometimes protects against a violation, and sometimes becomes the very instrument of violation" (160). The incestuous dimensions of January-May marriages can be a part of a larger social indictment against sexual deviance and gender instability; however, incest offers numerous means of assailing traditional sexual identifications. Whereas Butler and other feminist and queer theorists have promoted a reevaluation of the pre-Oedipal period or a deliberate forgetting of the

[30] As Freudian scholars have duly noted, Freud's theoretical formulation of the Oedipus complex can be traced to the January-May marriage of his own parents. Jakob Freud was twenty years older than Freud's mother, Amalie, and Jakob was already a grandfather by a child from his first marriage when Freud was born. In *Freud and Oedipus* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987), Peter Rudnytsky concludes that "The coincidence between Freud's biographical accidents of birth and the Oedipus drama is staggering....Instead of the situation that happens in a normal family, where relationships are unequivocal and generations succeed each other diachronically, the result of Oedipus' incest is that time is frozen and each of his kinship ties *must have two names*" (author's emphasis 16). Describing Freud via Edward Said's comments on incest, Rudnytsky further explains that "Because of the discrepancy between the ages of his father and mother, there is indeed a 'tangling-up of the family sequence' and Freud is confronted by the 'burden of plural identities'" (16).

Oedipal proscription of normative heterosexuality, I believe that reading the January-May marriage as an "almost"-incest narrative highlights the disruptive potential of the theme.[31] Rather than advocating presumptive heterosexuality or binary gender identification, the January-May marriage's incestuous overtones suggest radical revisions of kinship structures and sexuality by collapsing normalizing (marriage) institutions and encouraging (incestuous) desires.

Incest's subversive potential arises from numerous dynamics within the January-May marriage theme. As I explain more fully in the dissertation's introduction, the ages of the January-May marriage partners confuse their respective claims to masculinity and femininity. Older husbands in January-May marriages often lose their authority as their young wives usurp their claims to financial, physical, intellectual and sexual power. Entering into second childhoods, these older husbands underscore the pliability of gendered and aged constructions and make psychological processes of gender differentiation difficult to categorize. Since many nineteenth-century spousal arrangements were characterized by gender inequalities that continued women's continued submission to a patriarchal figure, the intensification of this structure through age increased potential for parodic critiques of incestuous gender relations. Moreover, if the Oedipal stage is a compulsory process that leads to gender identification, then incestuous desire ironically is vital to social and gender stability, though the desire must be continuously inspected and restrained to prevent the tragic consequences of *Oedipus*

[31] Judith Halberstam's work on queer forgetting offers yet another method for debunking the Oedipus myth. See for example, her essay, "'Dude, Where's My Gender?' or, Is There Life on Uranus?" in *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 10.2 (2004): 308-12.

Rex.[32] Paul Kelleher theorizes that Freud's "counterintuitive" interpretation of incest thereby concludes that "normal sexual development entails a necessary deviance that precedes normality" (157). Deviant, incestuous or queer desire proves necessary for conventional heterosexual identification, and this interdependence of standard and abnormal sexualities undermines binary logic of what is subversive and what is conservative. The January-May marriage allows for the exploration of incest beyond violation; many January-May texts present intergenerational romances between figurative fathers and daughters who are happily married, rewriting the horror of Oedipus as a plausible ideal and removing the apparent need to move from deviant to normal behavior. Because the incest theme also negotiates female Oedipal desire, it foregrounds and legitimizes feminine sexuality by equating it with familial love. Even if daughterly desire were enlisted as evidence of the monolithic power of the heterosexual rubric, it challenges gender constructions by emphasizing feminine subjectivity. And incest raises other subversive prospects. The January-May marriage's triangular structure prompts a male Oedipal struggle; by correlating husband with father, the January-May marriage aligns women with young men who have also been objectified by male power and drafts youthful masculinity as an apt vehicle for expressing a male Oedipal drive to strike at father. Additionally, texts that introduce the January-May marriage only to reject its

[32] For Freud's description of the "female Oedipus complex," see his 1931 essay "Female Sexuality." Later psychologists explored the father's desire for the daughter. Judith Lewis Herman's thorough study *Father-Daughter Incest* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981) is a useful resource. Sandra Gilbert's essay, "Life's Empty Pack: Notes toward a Literary Daughteronomy," *Critical Inquiry* 11.3 (1985): 355-84, surveys the role of fatherly desire in literature and details some important theories that extend Freud's initial work.

consummation ultimately perpetuate the incest theme by prolonging the fulfillment of (pseudo)incestuous desire.[33]

The incestuous element is also subversive in its broader debunking of marriage as a social institution. If, as Foucault asserts in *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*, the family offered a system of alliance built upon two fundamental relationships, those between parents and children and husbands and wives, disintegrating boundaries between these two axes of power fostered by incest narratives challenged the basic organizational structures of society (108). Since paternity can be difficult to establish, the January-May marriage toys with a literal potential for incest, and a young woman marrying a man "old enough to be her father" could, in fact, be marrying her father.[34] For example, in George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898), Sir George Crofts, a longtime friend and business partner of the prostitute Mrs. Warren, hopes to marry her daughter Vivie, whose father remains unidentified throughout the play. Crofts admits, "Why, for all I know, *I* might be her father" (45). Finding no physical resemblance between himself and Vivie, Crofts unsuccessfully attempts to draw the mystery of Vivie's parentage from her mother. Admitting that he is "thoroughly uncomfortable about" the possibility that Vivie could be his biological daughter, Crofts nevertheless proceeds with his sexual attraction towards her and proposes marriage. Though Vivie declines Crofts's offer, Shaw's play underscores the affront to the incest taboo that is initiated by the age difference between

---

[33] The editors of the recent collection *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004), Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, argue a queer perspective that theorists need to reconsider whether intergenerational or incestuous desire is psychologically damaging to the younger partner. Proposing that many gay and lesbians begin experimenting with sex with partners who are much older than themselves, this position demands that critics figure out "how to make sense of the child's pleasure without pathologizing it or reducing it to 'trauma'" (xxix).

[34] Scores of nineteenth-century texts, including Dickens's *Bleak House* and Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, structure their plots around the uncertain paternity of young and beautiful heroines.

Crofts and Vivie and implies that intergenerational marriage can be a destabilizing component of sexual and social relations.

Of course, the subversive aspects of incest are not always emphasized in January-May texts, and nineteenth-century writers enjoyed the varied interpretations engendered by the January-May marriage. Often the daughter's "seduction" solicits sympathy for her plight, and as victim of pedophilic desire, the younger wife emerges as martyr. In these versions of the incest narrative, the older husband often appears as the stereotypical "dirty old man" whose perverse passion deserves public scorn and demands control and surveillance. In these scenarios, the young male suitor of the molested young woman can free the young wife from the taint of an incestuous relationship and restore masculinity and femininity to the realms of normative heterosexuality. Texts can also direct sympathy to masculinity by venerating the older husband as a kind and gentle patriarch, lovingly (and seemingly platonically) guarding his child-wife. Younger wives in these stories seem to enjoy having another father to guide and protect them, and the slippage between fatherly and husbandly authority in the home can come easily in intergenerational relationships. Several of these January-May narratives suggest that women prefer domination to equality, though the pat equation of father with husband proves troubling because of the incestuous connotations. For this reason, the January-May marriage theme can be most successfully conservative when the plot threatens to turn incestuous and then prevents the transgression.

For nineteenth-century writers, incestuous elements within the January-May marriage offered a convenient method of integrating both subversive and normative approaches to gendered power into popular discourse under the guise of a legitimized,

heterosexual union. Later in the century, more texts take up the January-May theme as the literature moved away from the more explicit tales of incestuous relationships that emerged during the Romantic period. There is little to compare with the openly incestuous narratives in Percy Shelley's *The Cenci* or Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* during the Victorian period, and the prevalence of texts dating from the late 1830s about older husbands and younger wives indicates that the January-May marriage served as an acceptably disguised outlet for exploring dynamics of incest. In his seminal work *The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend*, Otto Rank describes the way the incest theme has been masked within standard storylines to vent socially inappropriate subjects: "we observe continually increasing repression of the attraction between father and daughter, expressed in the increasing obscurity and delicacy with which this incestuous relationship is depicted" (330).[35] Viewed through the January-May marriage, incest is titillating but controlled, dangerous yet safe, and it is therefore no wonder that the theme surfaces in the works of canonical Victorian authors.

For Charles Dickens, the January-May marriage afforded a perfect situation for considering gender and power via incest. Though many other nineteenth-century authors draw attention to January-May marriage as a disguised incest narrative, more than any other author, Dickens maximizes the potential of the theme by exploring its subtleties in multiple contexts. In text after text, Dickens obsessively returns to the January-May marriage as a means of rewriting these differing implications of incest, repeatedly evoking the dynamics of father-daughter love to destroy and rebuild the roles of husband

[35] Rank's contributions to the study of the incest narrative in literature remain important, though he unfortunately, like his colleague Freud, based his theories upon presumptions of male supremacy and subjectivity.

and wife. Because he offers so many variations on this theme, each of the incestuous scenarios that I have described as possible in January-May marriages actually occurs in Dickens's works. A thorough examination of the varied use of this theme by Dickens provides valuable models for reflecting about how other authors engage the deviancies of intergenerational romances in their works.

In reading Dickens's novels, it is difficult to ignore the frequent and anything-but-subtle exchanges of affection between mothers and sons, fathers and daughters, sisters and brothers. Robert Polhemus correctly notes that "ever since people learned that *David Copperfield* was a favorite of Freud's...readers have found illuminating signs of the Oedipus complex in the book," and a rich critical heritage already exists that probes the Oedipal and Freudian dimensions within his larger corpus of works ("The Favorite Child" 10).[36] Over the last decade, Polhemus has offered some of the most provocative interpretations on the issue of older men-younger woman relationships in Dickens, and he expands his readings of Dickens in his new study of incest *Lot's Daughters*, in which he reinterprets incest through the biblical tale of Lot and his daughters and the surrounding events of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Revising the Oedipus complex as the "Lot complex," Polhemus charges, "Dickens had a Lot complex that shaped his outlook, his relations with women, and his hugely influential fiction. A sanitized Lot theme

---

[36] See, for example, Carolyn Dever's *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) and Dianne Sadoff's "Storytelling and the Figure of the Father in *Little Dorrit*," *PMLA* 95.2 (1990): 234-45. In her chapter on "Dickens' Little Women" in *Dissenting Women in Dickens' Novels: The Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1998), Brenda Ayres includes a paragraph on "the December/May relationships that often occur in Dickens' novels." According to Ayres, "Usually the text depicts the father as a good patriarch and the woman as a true beneficiary. Marrying a father figure facilitates transfer of patriarchal power. The female is to respect not only gender, but age as well. Having submitted to the authority of the father since birth, she also will submit to a man who reminds her of her father. Although perhaps fortifying the bastions of patriarchy, such a practice blisters with incestuous implications" (71).

featuring the benevolent embrace of daughterly figures by men and of paternal figures by very young women appealed to him, and he used it again and again" (29). Other critics theorize Dickens's incest narratives in more explicitly Freudian terms. Dianne Sadoff argues in *Monsters of Affection: Dickens, Eliot and Bronte on Fatherhood*:

> Charles Dickens's narrative project...takes as its central metaphor the primal scene. His novels track down the father's sexual and violent rape or wrong as narrative origin, deny the hero could have been conceived by that sinful figure, structurally and surreptitiously kill the father, and proceed to engender the hero as subject with language; the figure of the daughter serves to efface these sonly activities. (3)

Moving away from this position expressed by Sadoff and other critics, this chapter at once widens and focuses the current conversation about incest in Dickens. Instead of revisiting David Copperfield's frustrated longing for his mother or the urge to supplant a dead father in *Great Expectations*, this chapter stresses the specific importance of reading the January-May marriage as father-daughter incest narrative and considers this theme throughout the broader corpus of Dickens's works. I am particularly interested in what the theme suggests about the stability of marriage and how it critiques power relations between men and women. Thus, while I find the similarities between Dickens's personal life and his obsession with older man-younger woman romances striking, unlike Polhemus, I do not attempt to draw lengthy parallels from Dickens's literary depictions of father-daughter love to his biography.[37] I do, however, agree with Polhemus that

[37] Dickens met Ellen Ternan, who was twenty-seven years his younger, in 1857 when he was experiencing marital problems. Their love affair has been accepted by numerous (though not all) Dickens scholars,

Dickens uses the theme inconsistently through his works; indeed, Dickens's contradictory presentations of the incest theme in different works attest to his fluctuating positions on gender and on conventional marriage. But Polhemus neglects to discuss several key works involving Dickens's treatment of father-daughter incest and only briefly presents Dickens as one example in his sweeping overview of the tradition from Lot to President Clinton.[38] Because the January-May theme emerges in so many of Dickens's novels, including *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41), *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Bleak House* (1852-53), *Hard Times* (1854), and *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), it merits detailed scholarly attention as an integral part of Dickens's larger wrestling with gendered identities and familial relationships. Incest is not the only element of the January-May marriage at play in Dickens's use of the theme—work remains to be done on how Dickens's narratives of intergenerational relationships draw upon aesthetics, the gothic, economics and love—but incestuous nuances unify his long and varied occupation with the family romance, even when those incestuous elements are used in contradictory ways.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, what Dickens does with the incest theme is theoretically quite complex. By presenting successful and unsuccessful January-May romances, Dickens manages to preserve and to overturn the incest taboo, and even when

---

including Fred Kaplan in his biography *Dickens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988) and Michael Slater in his study *Dickens and Women* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1983). Other scholars see evidence of Dickens's frustrated desire for Mary Hogarth or Fanny Dickens in his idealization of daughter figures like Nell Trent or Amy Dorrit. See, for example, "Charles Dickens; Orphans, Incest, and Repression" in Russell M. Goldfarb's *Sexual Repression and Victorian Literature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1970) 114-38. Though my main concerns reside elsewhere, I believe a pattern emerges throughout Dickens's career that suggests as he ages, his attitudes towards older man-younger woman relationships become noticeably more sympathetic.

[38] Polhemus focuses on *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*, noting *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* in chapter annotations.

it is preserved, the perpetuation of father-daughter or daughter-father desire proves troubling and destabilizes gender and familial unity. The effects of aging on gender further muddle the divisions of gender and the ordering of kinship bonds; as children serve as parents and parents as children in Oedipal revisions, it is difficult to say who is killing whom. After all, as sexual identities become threatened through rumors of infidelity and myths of sexual prowess, it seems as if the older men, and not the infants, would suffer most from anxieties derived from a castration complex.[39] And the solutions that Dickens offers to struggling, emergent identities are remarkably fresh—and at times startlingly provocative. Though critics have often noted the predictable pattern of Oedipal aggression in Dickens's works, they have overlooked Dickens's attempts to resolve that struggle non-violently. Though Dianne Sadoff chooses to highlight a pattern in which "the son must continue symbolically to vengefully murder the father in an effort to transform him into the dead father," Dickens often presents not the murdering of father, but the marrying of father as a restorative ideal ("The Dead Father" 45). Furthermore, when incestuous January-May ties are not formed, desire proliferates, often redirecting the familial love that has been displaced outside the family back into biological parent-child venues.

I begin this discussion of Dickens chronologically because I believe that Dickens comes to realize the greater potential of the January-May marriage as incest narrative only after early, somewhat predictable, endorsements of the social taboo, and because I want to emphasize the trajectory Dickens follows as he connects his varied depictions of

[39] As I note elsewhere, Freud's theory of castration anxiety is difficult for me to accept, and I use it here with more humor than seriousness.

incest to his concerns with marital stability and with gendered power. *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* outwardly accept the necessity of the incest taboo, and consequently, their plots adopt threats of incest that tacitly inspire readers' fear and disgust. Adding to the horror of potential incest, husbands and fathers in these early works are selfish and corrupt, if not outright sinister, and, abusing power they garner through age and gender, they introduce the young women in their care to danger rather than providing patriarchal protection. Through these early novels, Dickens stresses the necessity for the taboo and the drive into gender differentiation that it inspires, though, as I have already suggested, heteronormativity's dependency on a primary, incestuous sexual deviance prevents this move from being stable. Moreover, because these novels demonstrate that marriage itself can be somewhat incestuous and that marriage can be abused by "bad" men, they challenge marriage and masculinity as sources of social constancy.

These early works make provoking claims about the January-May marriage and incest by themselves, but Dickens complicates his first renditions in later revisions of the theme. It would be inaccurate to say that Dickens moves from an early approval of the incest taboo to a later approval of incest, but his works reveal his increasing awareness of incest's power to critique systems of gender and power. In *The Cricket on the Hearth*, Dickens creates several January-May romances that reveal how their incestuous connotations can work to different effects. In this work and in subsequent novels like *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*, incestuous dynamics further destabilize traditional marriage when the "horror" of intergenerational romance is recast as idealized incest and fatherly older husbands become sympathetic figures who are desired by their young

brides. Not only do these texts foreground feminine subjectivity, but they also disclose problems with masculine authority without demonizing it or suggesting it is beyond repair. By encouraging the reader to feel sorry for these father figures, Dickens eventually crafts narratives in which incestuous love has the potential of revising "bad" masculinity, as in *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit*. Unlike *Nicholas Nickleby*, these later January-May plots boast no heroic young savior who will rescue the young bride from legitimized incest, and there is little pretense that gender and power are stable forces. But to get to these depictions of January-May marriages in his later works, Dickens must begin by invoking the incest taboo as psychological horror.

The Horror of Incest in *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*

Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* offers one of the earliest Victorian treatments of the January-May theme, and its incestuous subtext advances the romance plot. In the novel, Madeline Bray's unquestioning devotion to her father initiates her betrothal to Arthur Gride, who is more than fifty years her senior. Both relationships suggest the destructive implications of daddy-daughter love, and, ultimately, the incest taboo is revalidated through Nicholas, presumptive representative of normative heterosexuality. In *Nicholas Nickleby* incest is never idealized or actualized; it appears as a terrifying possibility that teases the heroine and the reader who are saved from witnessing its realization, though both have ample time to reflect on its potential fulfillment. The quasi-incestuous relationship between Walter and Madeline Bray prepares the reader for the reciprocal January-May arrangement, and the suggestions of father-daughter incest undermine

familial bonds in both relationships, threatening metaphorically to burn down the house. More than a horror of incest, this horror encompasses a larger fear of aging and abusive masculine power, and Dickens thrills his audience with both social and sexual perils.

The novel describes Walter Bray as "an unnatural scoundrel"; Dickens's initial description casts him as one who had "something of the old fire in the large sunken eye notwithstanding, and it seemed to kindle afresh as he struck a thick stick, with which he seemed to have supported himself in his seat, impatiently on the floor twice or thrice, and called his daughter by name" (692, 698). Violently phallic, Walter Bray's actions cruelly dominate Madeline, a "young and beautiful creature" who eerily resembles her dead mother, yet Madeline faithfully refuses to abandon him. Dickens presents Walter Bray as a sick figure, furiously compensating for his lack of economic, physical, and social power through his exertions over his daughter. He expects her to be a "slave to [his] every wish" yet protests too much against the notion "that there is anything in what she has done for me but duty" (709, 714). He revels in the knowledge that his is in control of Madeline's will and her body, and while his decision that she marry Gride largely hinges on economic benefits, as I discuss more fully in a later chapter, Walter Bray enjoys the gratification of his paternal right to his daughter's body.[40] To the suggestion that he drop a "hint" about his choice of bridegroom for Madeline, Walter Bray boldly responds, "To hint a wish, sir! I am her father, am I not? Why should I hint, and beat about the bush?" (714). Literally and figuratively, Bray drives his point home. His domination is so overtly abusive that characters in the novel pragmatically suggest that the economic and

[40] Polhemus notes that an important and often overlooked event in the Lot myth is his offering of his virgin daughters to appease the sexual desires of an angry mob. A father's ability to use and exchange his daughter's body is thus essential to Polhemus's theory of the incest narrative.

sexual liberation that could be expected upon the death of Madeline's much-older husband would provide a site to displace Madeline's pent-up resentment toward her father. Ralph Nickleby cunningly advises, "If she profits by anybody's death, let it be by her husband's—don't let her have to look back to yours, as the event from which to date a happier life" (716). Heeding the truth of Ralph's suggestion, Walter Bray begins to accept Gride's proposition. Though he delays revealing to Madeline his intentions, jumping up to silence the discussion with "a gleam of conscience in the shame and terror of this hasty action," Bray does insist upon the marriage of his eighteen-year-old daughter to the seventy-something Arthur Gride, replacing the novel's insinuations of destructive father-daughter love with the potential January-May substitute of (grand)father-daughter marriage.

The novel capitalizes rhetorically on the perverse sexuality that this marriage poses; stressing the lecherous motivations of Gride, the novel ensures that readers can vividly imagine the consummation of conjugal rights so that the perverse can be fully enjoyed before its possibility is eliminated. When Madeline caresses her father after he experiences a spasm, the novel allows the reader to slip into Gride's lustful fantasies. Though Dickens claims that even "a very hard and worldly heart" would have pitied Madeline as she held her father and "pour[ed] forth words of tender sympathy and love," Gride's "bleared eyes gloated only over the outward beauties, and were blind to the spirit which reigned within, evinced—a fantastic kind of warmth certainly, but not exactly that kind of warmth of feeling which the contemplation of virtue usually inspires" (716-17). Put simply, Madeline is "hot," she makes Gride hot, and yet, the text clearly intends for this glimpse into sexual fantasy inspired by a father-daughter embrace to give readers the

chills. Manipulating incestual and intergenerational taboos, the text conjures images of "unnatural" sexual relations and playfully lingers on moments when this damsel-in-distress is in sexual danger. When Madeline is instructed by her father to shake Gride's hand, "Madeline shrunk involuntarily from the goblin figure, but she placed the tips of her fingers in his hand" (717). After the handshake, Gride displays "many amorous distortions of visage" and, overcome with desire, resorts to kissing his own fingers. As Gride excitedly anticipates his wedding day, the reader is left to conjecture the unrestrained release of Gride's sexual appetite on Madeline's body. That Dickens intends the thought of sexual relations between Madeline and her (grand)father-husband to solicit widespread disgust is certain, though there is also evident pleasure in the invocation and imagining of the deviant.

Madeline is saved from this incestuous marriage when her father conveniently dies on her wedding day, and the novel ultimately commands the reader's respect and gratitude for the incest taboo that has successfully averted sexual tragedy. Because the novel does not sympathize with Walter Bray or Arthur Gride, Bray's death and Gride's rejection appear just—even natural. While the novel remains a critique of paternal authority, it clarifies the necessity of the incest taboo for social and sexual stability. The incestuous threat must come before the younger masculine power (via Nicholas) can restore a traditional family structure. Thus, the normative, same-age marriage of Nicholas and Madeline remains dependent on a primary narrative of incest.

****

The January-May incest plot of Madeline Bray and Arthur Gride proved so thematically successful in *Nicholas Nickleby* that Dickens recycles it in his next novel,

The Old Curiosity Shop. In this retelling, Nell, like Madeline, suffers from the poor decisions and injurious habits of her guardian, who exposes her to the libidinous wishes and January-May proposal of a much older man in this version. Dickens sensationally exaggerates many of the details in the Bray-Gride plot, which may already seem exaggerated, to grotesque effect.[41] At thirteen, Nell is even younger than Madeline, and the destructively close familial relationship exists between Nell and her grandfather, and not her father, who is dead. Accordingly, outreaching Madeline, Nell resembles not only her beautiful dead mother, but also her dead grandmother, and thus links granddaughter, daughter and wife as one.[42] Already married, Quilp is "an elderly man," and, though not as old as Gride, he is even more physically repulsive, as Dickens disguises his more overtly ageist attacks in *Nicholas Nickleby* through Quilp's exponentially problematic body (29). As of his wife's friends puts it nicely, Quilp is "not quite…what one calls a handsome man, nor quite a young man either," and the narrator describes him less tactfully as a "panting dog" whose animalistic "ghastly smile" displayed "the few discoloured fangs that were yet scattered in his mouth" (29). As in *Nicholas Nickleby*, the careful construction of the characters' unhealthy familial bonds and a hidden incestuous subtext leads to its more explicit exploration and rejection by means of the January-May marriage plot. When Quilp proposes to Nell that she "be my wife, my little cherry-cheeked, red-lipped wife," he brings to the fore incest (paired this time, with

---

[41] For Dickens's conscious participation in the grotesque tradition in the novel, see chapter four of Michael Hollington's *Dickens and the Grotesque* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1984).

[42] Describing Nell, her great-uncle explains, "If you have seen the picture-gallery of any one old family, you will remember how the same face and figure—often the fairest and slightest of them all—come upon you in different generations; and how you trace the same sweet girl through a long line of portraits—never growing old or changing—the Good Angel of the race—abiding by them in all reverses—redeeming all their sins" (525).

pedophilia, bigamy and bestiality) for readers' cathartically intertwined horror and delight.

Though the marriage proposal is relatively brief and never seriously entertained by anyone but Quilp, its early interjection in the novel drives the plot and prompts the flight and exhausting travels of Nell and her grandfather.[43] As Hillary Schor has described, "The spectacle of *The Old Curiosity Shop* is organized around the alternate veiling and discovering of Nell's sexual vulnerability. Nell is a kind of pornographic object" (34). Shockingly, Quilp describes his lecherous intentions with particular reference to their age difference: "Say Mrs Quilp lives five years, or only four, you'll be just the proper age for me. Ha, ha! Be a good girl, Nelly, a very good girl, and see if one of these days you don't come to be Mrs Quilp of Tower Hill" (53). To thirteen-year-old Nell, the proposal that she become Quilp's "number two" and the second Mrs. Quilp is initially hard to comprehend, but she quickly internalizes the dreadfulness of his request, and her terror prompts her to action. While the actualization of his proposal is to be delayed until the death of his living wife, the sexual threat that Quilp poses is imminent. Several critics, including Polhemus, have noted both the text's and Quilp's fascination with Nell's bed, and, coming shortly after his indecent proposal to Nell, his request to

[43] Though Nell is only aware of the proposal of Quilp, other January-May marriages appear to threaten Nell throughout the text. Nell's great-uncle the "single gentleman" is appalled at the thought that Nell has been married to a much older man while working for Mrs. Jarley. Misreading the situation he encounters, her great-uncle threatens legal action to Mrs. Jarley's unsuspecting bridegroom: "Mind, good people, if this fellow has been marrying a minor—tut, tut, that can't be" (358). His hasty words reveal that the sexual deviancies he stresses "can't be" indeed could be—not only in his imagination, but in reality. In fact, his threats to one he thinks is "marrying a minor" are legally unfounded, since the age of consent in 1840 was still twelve, and Parliament did not raise it to thirteen until 1875 or to sixteen until 1885. And the threat of yet another January-May marriage provides further motive (at least to readers) for Nell's flight. Nell's brother initiates the plan for Dick Swiveller to marry Nell (who is, remarkably, the same age as the Marchioness).

give Nell a kiss on her cheek stimulates her revulsion and disgust.[44] When Nell dutifully obliges, he praises "what a nice kiss that was—just upon the rosy part. What a capital kiss!" and leeringly admires her body, "so small, so compact, so beautifully modeled, so fair, with such blue veins and such a transparent skin, and such little feet" and later urges Nell to "sit upon Quilp's knee" (81, 94). Though such verbal espousals clearly make the grandfather nervous, Quilp avoids addressing his matrimonial / sexual proposal to Nell's guardian, and so conveniently, Dickens avoids the question of whether or not the grandfather's blinding greed and gambling addiction would lead him to follow Walter Bray's example and effectively sell the sexual rights to Nell's body.

The threat of the January-May marriage shifts attention from the threat of the grandfather, whose own selfish and unthinking abuse of Nell's body ultimately leads to her death, and from the gender instability that is initiated by the lengthy story of a precocious child caring for childish adult. Quilp's proposal isolates incestuous desire and suggests that it is something that one can flee from, escape, and thereby successful overcome. Each time Nell manages to give Quilp the slip, the incest taboo is legitimized and secured, and the disruption of expected gender and age roles caused by Nell and her grandfather lapse into comfortable Victorian notions of the dutiful daughter. The death of Quilp removes the pressing threat of a January-May marriage for Nell, and the narrative thus restores the relationship of grandfather and granddaughter to familial normalcy just before their deaths, so that the reader can accept that in their graves "the child and the old man slept together" (548).

---

[44] See Polhemus's article, "Comic and Erotic Faith Meet Faith in the Child: Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* ('The Old Cupiosity Shape')," *Critical Reconstructions: The Relationship of Fiction and Life*, eds. Robert M. Polhemus and Roger B. Henkle (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994) 71-89.

Thus far, Dickens has used the incestuous connotations of the (failed) January-May marriage theme to reinforce presumptive heterosexuality. The horrifying propositions in *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* provide the reader the opportunity to fear the dissolution of the incest taboo before having it, and gender stasis, neatly restored. But this pattern of disruption and stabilization is too simplistic because the ages of the January-May marriage partners encourage alternate readings of the genders of the respective participants. Throughout *The Old Curiosity Shop* Nell plays the parent to her childish grandfather, and though she evokes traditional images of mothering women, she also enters into socially-inscribed male territory. While her grandfather tries and fails to secure Nell's future through winning a fortune at gambling, Nell assumes the real breadwinning position within their family, taking on a number of odd jobs along their journey to provide their food and lodging. She directs and leads their travels (the grandfather describes, "she walked behind me, sir, that I might not see how lame she was—but yet she had my hand in hers, and seemed to lead me still"), and she negotiates the necessities for their survival on a daily basis (535). James Kincaid asserts, "Nell is precocious, more the adult than her own grandfather" (238).[45] As demonstrated in the illustration in which Nell shelters and comforts her troubled grandfather (Fig. 2), Nell and her grandfather clearly exchange expected age and gender positions, and this gender reversal complicates the implications of the incest taboo. If father and daughter are no longer affixed to conventional gender restraints, then the

[45] Malcolm Andrews also notes this reversal in *Dickens and the Grown-Up Child* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1994) 85, as does Catherine Waters in "Gender, Family and Domestic Ideology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2001) 126.



Figure 2. Hablot K. Browne, "Nell, Quilp, and her Grandfather" from *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 1841. Engraving.

incest taboo loses its power to impose normative heterosexuality. Moreover, if the narrative displaces incestuous desire onto January-May marriage, then its fulfillment, or even the contemplation of its fulfillment, via the socially and religiously sanctioned venue of marriage weakens the incest taboo. Thus, in the illustration, as the reader voyeuristically watches Quilp voyeuristically watching the familial bond as a site for gender subversion, a new triangularity is formed that overrides the simplicity of Dickens's (failed) marriage plot. Consciously or unconsciously, Dickens seems to have grasped this potential after writing through these first two January-May scenarios, and other January-May dynamics at play in *The Old Curiosity Shop* indicate that Dickens was beginning to rethink and revise the use of the January-May plot in ways that would play out rhetorically in his later works. Though the difference in the ages of Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness is not as extreme as those between Madeline Bray and Arthur Gride or between Nell and Quilp, their ages and their intermingling of parental and spousal roles push Dickens's use of the January-May marriage theme and incest into new directions.

Dickens does not disclose the exact ages of Dick Swiveller or the Marchioness. In response to his question, "How old are you?" she replies, "I don't know." Yet Dickens provides enough information to identify safely her position as a child; Dickens repeatedly describes her as "the child," "the girl," and "the small servant," and, in the final chapter, we learn that after six years of schooling the Marchioness is "at a moderate guess, full nineteen years of age" (552). Though the details are more guess than fact, the Marchioness is nevertheless very young, and her relationship with Dick Swiveller suggests that the January-May marriage can blur the boundaries between incest and

marriage while answering audience expectations for a predictably sentimental ending. Illustrations for the novel reveal how readers would have imagined their age difference. Authorized by Dickens, Hablot K. Browne's original drawings of the couple resemble caricatures; the Marchioness looks like an elderly woman in a child's body as her legs dangle childishly off the table (Fig. 3). The mixture of age signifiers on the Marchioness's body signals an deliberate ambiguity on Dickens's behalf of her age, but, if the original illustrations are unclear, the text provides evidence for further deduction. If the reader applies Dickens's approximation of her age in the final chapter to previous chapters, the Marchioness is about thirteen years old upon her first meeting with Dick Swiveller, who coaxes the half-starved waif into his confidence through food and drink. She is also thirteen when she flees her situation with Sally Brass to live with and care for Dick Swiveller during his illness and delirium, after which he wakes to find himself undressed without "so much as a waistcoat" because the Marchioness has had to sell his clothes for food (surely an occasion for Victorian audiences to question the propriety of their arrangement). Later, Dick Swiveller supports the Marchioness from his annuity, effectively becoming the guardian of the parentless child, and sends her to boarding school for her education. While he visits her, he reflects on his dual role as guardian and as lover, and the reader learns what he already knows: "it occurred to him, *but not for the first time*, that if she would marry him, how comfortable they might be!" (552 emphasis added). The 1912 edition of the Co-operative Publication Society may not demonstrate Dickens's authorial intent, but it shows, I believe more accurately, how readers were likely to envision the couple from the textual descriptions. In this image, there is no age ambiguity surrounding Marchioness as old woman or little girl. She is very much a child,



Figure 3. Hablot K. Browne, "The Marchioness and Dick Swiviller" from *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 1841. Engraving.

and as her future husband leers at her, their differences in age and body size are emphasized in the frame (Fig. 4). Dick Swiveller has raised his own wife, and although he waits for her to be of age to propose, the marriage's associations with incest and pedophilia are too blatant to ignore.

This relationship, forming only one of the novel's several romantic subplots, is important because it foreshadows Dickens's more complex treatment of the January-May theme in later works. Even though the ages of Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness are not dramatically different—perhaps only ten or fifteen years—in recognizing the guardian-child marriage as a normative, indeed "comfortable" ideal, Dickens reshapes his former depiction of incest as a tragedy to be avoided at all cost. Prior to the Swiveller-Marchioness relationship, even death was preferable to a January-May marriage (the deaths of Madeline's father and of Nell effectively prevent the consummation of the other January-May marriages); after the Swiveller-Marchioness marriage, the January-May plot, and even its incestuous connotations, are not so horrific. Together, the Swivellers extend a picture of matrimonial bliss, as the Marchioness becomes "a most cheerful, affectionate, and provident wife" and Swiveller "an attached and domesticated husband" (553).[46]

[46] Why it is acceptable for Dick Swiveller to marry the Marchioness, and not Nell, is a question worth probing. Certainly, the class differences between Swiveller and the Marchioness helps to justify the disparities in their ages (though Nell may beg, Dickens makes it clear that she does not belong in the lower class).



Figure 4. Anon., untitled from Co-operative Publication Society edition of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 1912. Engraving.

Good Daddy / Bad Daddy: Revisions of Incest in *The Cricket on the Hearth*

In *The Cricket on the Hearth*, Dickens offers a more complex treatment of the incestuous aspects of older man-younger woman romances, and this text conveys the varied and sometimes contradictory uses of father-daughter incest that characterize his later works. To facilitate these multiple readings, *The Cricket on the Hearth* contains several potential January-May marriages, each with incestuous components. A detailed examination of each of these relationships uncovers the diversity of Dickens's more mature use of the daddy-daughter motif. First, there is the central January-May couple of John the Carrier and his wife Dot, who, like Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness, presents intergenerational marriage as a plausible success, though from the beginning of the story, Dickens emphasizes his knowing manipulation of the incest narrative and takes pleasure in the uncertainty of their kinship tie. The text includes repeated references to their ages at the beginning of the story: "for fair she was, and young"; "a man, much taller and much older than herself"; "I was very young"; "I being such a child", but, in case the reader has ignored these age designation, Dickens allows the text to shout loudly to call attention to their apparently incestuous union. The figure of the visiting Stranger, who affects deafness, demands clear speaking during the explanation of their relationship, but what is clarified is not the normalcy of the marriage union, but rather its disruptive potential.

> "Your daughter, my good friend?"
>
> "Wife," returned John.
>
> "Niece?" said the Stranger.

"Wife," roared John.

"Indeed?" observed the Stranger. "Surely? Very young!" (195)

The repetitive emphasis on "wife" belies the Stranger's and the reader's difficulty in recognizing normative heterosexual marriage because of the visual signifiers offered by age. To be sure he is not witnessing a deviant sexual arrangement, the Stranger must check again with "Indeed?" and "Surely?" and Dickens plays with the mingled discomfort and delight it brings in John and the reader. To confirm the sexual relations between this old man and "very young" woman, the text takes immediate care to recall the physical evidence of their coupling: the baby. "Baby, yours?" questions the Stranger. Dickens explains that "John gave him a gigantic nod; equivalent to an answer in the affirmative, delivered through a speaking-trumpet" (195). While the question of paternity nods to social expectations of sexual unrest within intergenerational marriages, the baby stands as signifying product of John and Dot's successful ability to intertwine the identities of child, wife, father and husband.

The Stranger is not the only character attuned to the incestuous possibilities suggested by John and Dot's marriage. The plot turns on Dot's perception of their marriage, and while she affirms her desire for John early in the story, her expression is shaded by her awareness of the oddity of their arrangement. She confesses, "I did fear once, John, I was very young, you know—that ours might prove an ill-assorted marriage, I being such a child, and you more like my guardian than my husband" (191). She tells John how she worried that he might not "learn to love me, as you hoped and prayed you might" (191). But he affirms their mutual desire. Admitting that he "had learnt that, long before I brought you here," John (like Dick Swiveller) pushes their relationship even

further into pedophilic fantasy. John does not permit himself to acknowledge his "child-loving" consciously, but when she speaks of being a girl at school, Dickens allows that "He might have been thinking of her, or nearly thinking of her, perhaps, as she was in that same school-time. He looked upon her with a thoughtful pleasure" (192).[47] Despite the unspeakable and unthinkable motivations of their desire, the father-daughter / parent-child family romance remains a fantasy that both indulge in, and both jubilantly fulfill. By also encouraging the reader's not thinking but "nearly thinking" of the incestuous insinuations of the relationship, the story depicts the January-May marriage as a model of domesticity. As an infantilized Dot tends to the kettle, fills John's pipe, sits on a stool at his feet, and performs other wifely duties, the texts lulls the reader into a complacent acceptance of the normalcy, even the ideal perfection, of their relationship.

Ironically, tensions develop within the story when this incestuous model becomes threatened by what is, on one level, the possibility of cuckoldry that is typical of January-May romances, and on another level, a father's jealous sexual possessiveness of his daughter. With the introduction of the young Edward Plummer disguised as the old Stranger, Dot's fidelity to her January-May / incestuous marriage grows suspect, and John and those close to the couple are quick to presume Dot's inclination towards a more normative sexual encounter. Dickens loads the story with apprehensive references to Dot's potential adultery, purposefully misleading the reader with numerous allusions to the "shadow" that haunts their happy hearth. When John's friend Tackleton reveals Dot's suspicious conduct, he voices social expectations that prescribe and insist upon same-age,

[47] See James Kincaid's *Child-Loving*. Kincaid uses the term "child-loving" to denote the both active and passive positions of the child in the exchange of sexual power.

non-familial desire. Tackleton prepares John for the revelation of his wife's betrayal: "I am sorry for this. I am indeed. I have been afraid of it. I have expected it from the first" (235). Here, normative adultery threatens idealized incest, and Dickens tantalizes the reader with a shocking play of aesthetic images. As John and Tackleton peer in the lighted window at the suspected lovers, Edward, who had been dressed as an old man, holds the white wig that enabled his disguise in his hand, and same-age heterosexual desire appears a dirty secret, witnessed through a metaphorical keyhole, that lies underneath the more legitimate sexual aberration of January-May / incestuous love.

As is typical in father-daughter incest narratives that are thwarted, John reacts violently per conventional masculinity to what he has seen, brooding through the night about his urge to murder the young lover and likewise avowing his longing to seek revenge on his wife.[48] Both the possibility and product of their marital bliss disintegrate, and Dickens reveals that "he could have better borne to see her lying prematurely dead before him with her little child upon her breast" (239). But John's predictable response does not last through the night, and the tale suggests that the incest narrative has destabilized gender roles within the marriage to a remarkable degree. For, if the incest taboo is what initiates primal gender identification and heterosexual desire, then its failure or its disregard provides for a reformulation of gendered identities. Guided by the home's Cricket and household Fairies, John reconsiders his role as man and husband; paradoxically, Dot's fidelity to the domestic ideal challenges society's traffic in women and fears of women's sexuality. Vindicating Dot's power to her accuser Tackleton, John

[48] See Rank, chapter eleven: "The Relationship Between Father and Daughter in Myth, Folktales, Legends, Literature, Life and Neurosis," 300-37.

praises his wife, whom he had watched "grow up, from a child, in her father's house" and condemns himself: "I had not—I feel it now—sufficiently considered her" (247). He rhetorically asks, "Did I consider that I took her—at her age, and with her beauty—from her young companions?" (247). John scorns himself for selfishly marrying a woman young enough to be his daughter and concludes that he is a "wearisome" husband who does not deserve his wife. While Tackleton stares wide-eyed at John's conscious resignation of power to his wife, John praises his wife's deceit: "Heaven bless her for the cheerful constancy with which she has tried to keep the knowledge of this from me!" (248). He announces his sacrificial intention to give Dot "the best reparation" that he can, and "release her from the daily pain of an unequal marriage" (248). Pledging his undying love and promising to remember Dot in his will although he no longer identifies her as his "dutiful and zealous wife," John validates female sexuality and the "natural" heterosexuality of same-aged unions. Humbly and non-violently succumbing to both the subversive effects of female desire and to the seemingly conservative forces of normative, same-age sexuality, John announces his plans to step aside. Expecting a show of masculine authority and power, Tackleton rubs his ears in disbelief.

The inherent contradiction in Dickens's sentimental ending to his Christmas story is that, in clearing Dot of the charge of adultery and restoring monogamous marriage to a central place, the text sustains a reading of idealized incest. Moreover, the challenges to traditional gender identities that it has encouraged remain intact when Dot and John recover from the threat to their marriage, for the sexual threat posed by the younger suitor compels recognition of the importance of Dot's sexual desire. Interestingly, it is her Oedipal attraction to John that their sentimentalized reconciliation affirms. Dot explains,

"at first I did not love you quite as dearly as I do now; when I first came home here, I was half afraid that I mightn't learn to love you…being so very young John! But, dear John, every day and hour I loved you more and more" (259-60). Dot makes it clear that their sexual attraction is mutual, and she resumes her role as daughterly wife with the authority of a sexually empowered individual. Having just overheard John's relinquishing of power, Dot is fully aware of her value whether she is cast as faithful or adulterous. She prolongs the physical embrace that will cement their reunion, tantalizing John and the reader while she verbalizes her love for her "dear old goose," and though she points out that they are only playing at normative heterosexuality, she insists it is a game she intends to continue: "And when I speak of people being middle-aged, and steady, John, and pretend that we are a humdrum couple, going on in a jog-trot sort of way, it's only because I'm such a silly little thing, John, that I like, sometimes, to act as a kind of Play with Baby, and all that: and make believe" (259). Dot, John, and the reader consciously acknowledge the theatricality of their enactment of heterosexual marriage, yet despite the awareness of their aberrant, incestuous relationship, which has initiated the challenges to gender roles, their January-May marriage nevertheless thrives within the text. Directly addressing the reader, Dickens writes, "You never will derive so much delight from seeing a glorious little woman in the arms of a third party, as you would have felt if you had seen Dot run into the arms of the Carrier's embrace" (260). Readers are finally free to enjoy watching what they have heretofore been encouraged to imagine and to reject in Dickens's previous works.

If this marriage were the only one to probe the incest taboo through the January-May theme in the story, it would still be difficult to pronounce a simplistic verdict on

Dickens's new use of the daddy-daughter motif. Because the reader grows to sympathize with John as a "poor old man" who genuinely and unselfishly loves his wife, the possibility of Dot's adultery looms as the great tragedy in the tale. But the normalizing strategy of their threatened loss and reconciliation fails under the disruptive effects of their respective ages. Additionally, the larger implications of the January-May marriage as incest narrative are complicated by the several parallel January-May romances that serve as subplots within the story. John and Dot's marriage is contrasted with the proposed marriage "on the last day of the first month in the year" between the elderly Tackleton and the beautiful young May Fielding, literally evoking the "January-May" tradition. Bertha, the blind daughter of Caleb, initiates another January-May romance through her unrequited love for Tackleton (or at least the inaccurate construction of Tackleton as a kind and gentle man that is fostered by her father). Bertha's close emotional and domestic relationship with her father contributes yet another January-May / father-daughter relationship to the story, and, worth mentioning, even if only in passing, is the love affair between May and Edward—who appears in an old man's disguise. Inundated with January-May romances, the text explores Dickens's growing interest in the incest narrative as an opportunity for reflection on the failures of masculinity and for probing the power inequities of marriage.

At first, the similarities between the marriage of John and Dot and the proposed marriage between Tackleton and May suggest that their marriage could be another depiction of the January-May romance as idealized incest. Coincidentally, they plan to marry on the same date as John and Dot. Dot's real name, Mary, is conspicuously close to May, with whom she shares girlhood memories of school, and Tackleton is eager to

befriend John and Dot, who he deems "just such another couple. Just!" (199). Inviting John to the wedding, Tackleton explains with a nudge, "We're in the same boat, you know....A little disparity you know" (200). Attempting to align himself with John in some sort of older husband cohort, Tackleton arranges to have May visit with Dot in hopes that Dot's happiness in marriage will have a beneficial influence on his own young bride: "You'll say you'll come? It's as much your interest as mine, you know, that the women should persuade each other that they're quiet and contented, and couldn't be better off" (200). But Tackleton's engagement to May never attains the status of idealized incest modeled by John and Dot.[49] Tackleton's pursuit of May reeks of incest as violation, and, like Dickens's earlier treatments of January-May marriages, their story insists that the incest taboo is best maintained.

Despite her similarities to May, Dot proclaims the inaccuracy of any analogy between the couples, declaring, "he's as old! As unlike her!" even though, because of her inability to pinpoint the distinguishing difference, she leaves the similes and her thoughts unfinished. To Dot, Tackleton is exceedingly older than John, and she asks her husband to clarify how much older Tackleton is, but John evades a direct answer. Nevertheless, Tackleton is no John, and he is thoroughly presented as "a domestic Ogre" (198). A toy-maker, Tackleton ironically "despised all toys," and alluding to the economic advantages linked with age in January-May marriages, the text reveals that he "had been living on children all his life, and was their implacable enemy" (198). Instead of inculcating May with hopes of wedded bliss, to Tackleton's horror, Dot playfully exposes the irregularity

[49] In "The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth*," *SEL* 39.4 (1999): 675-89, Elisabeth Gitter reads John, Tackleton and Caleb in similar "January" positions, equally deserving of criticism for their "shameful desire" of "girls who could be their daughters."

of the January-May arrangement. At the gathering arranged by Tackleton, Dot directs the conversation:

> "Ah, May!" said Dot. "Dear, dear, what changes! To talk of those merry school-days, makes one young again."
>
> "Why, you an't particularly old, at any time; are you?" said Tackleton.
>
> "Look at my sober, plodding husband there," returned Dot. "He adds twenty years to my age at least. Don't you, John?"
>
> "Forty," John replied.
>
> "How many *you*'ll add to May's, I am sure I don't know," said Dot, laughing. "But she can't be much less than a hundred years of age on her next birthday."
>
> "Ha, ha!" laughed Tackleton. Hollow as a drum that laugh, though. And he looked as if he could have twisted Dot's neck, comfortably. (225)

Dot continues her critique of Tackleton overriding his evident displeasure until she goes too far and is chided by her husband, but despite this check, Dot's message is successful, and Tackleton's lecherous desire for May emerges as both distinctly different and perversely problematic.

The Tackleton-May subplot serves several objectives. It functions as the more stereotypical January- May relationship that Dickens has already presented via Arthur Gride and Quilp, and, as such, it provides a site for targeting readers' likely responses to the incestuous connotations of January-May marriages, luring negative attention away from the idealized couple of John and Dot. Evidencing the necessity of the incest taboo, their foiled romance encourages traditional gender identifications, which come to fruition

when Edward (like his literary precursor Nicholas Nickleby) sweeps in to rescue and wed May moments before she is prepared to marry Tackleton, whose attempt to marry "a young wife...a beautiful young wife" is further tainted by the economic advantages that he offers May and her mother. Here, Dickens seems to realize the importance of balancing positive and negative portrayals of his incest narrative, but what inevitably complicates the reading of the incest narrative in the story is the additional January-May couple: Bertha and her father, Tackleton's impoverished employee Caleb. Loving both her father and Tackleton in a strangely bifurcated January-May theme, Bertha brings the incestuous implications of the January-May marriage back home.

Literally unable to see Tackleton for what he is, Bertha imagines him only as her father has constructed him for her; to Bertha, Tackleton is an honorable, compassionate, fatherly man worthy of her passionate devotion. Because of her father's protective deception, Bertha never envisions Tackleton as "cold, exacting, and uninterested" but rather as "an eccentric humorist who loved to have his jest with them, and who, while he was the Guardian Angel of their lives, disdained to hear one word of thankfulness" (208-09). Bertha pines for her "Guardian Angel" in secret longing, though, because of her consistent and unfounded delight when he visits, Tackleton believes her to be an idiot. Bertha's misguided fantasy leads her to desire "to be his patient companion in infirmity and old age" and she jealously, though submissively, tells May, "the knowledge that you are to be His wife has wrung in my heart almost to breaking!" (217, 230). Through the contrast between the real and imagined Tackleton, Dickens offers a biting analysis of paternal aggrandizement. Like the dashing and debonair facade he forms for himself, the character that Caleb has constructed for Tackleton is a lie, grown from the "enchanted"

world that Caleb has built for Bertha from "the magic of devoted, deathless love" (208). Unwittingly, Caleb has conflated his own idealized persona with that of Tackleton, fashioning an invented father figure who, in truth, emotionally mirrors himself though physically and financially better off. When he realizes that he has raised his daughter to love a romanticized version of himself, he recoils at the horrific incestuous connotations, yet, knowing Bertha cannot consummate her love with Tackleton or with himself, is dismayed that she will be left alone. He remorsefully questions, "Have I deceived her from the cradle, but to break her heart at last!" (236).

Repeating the expressions of Bertha and Caleb, Tilly Slowboy, the nursemaid, relates in a drowsy, singsong lullaby the hope and the horror that surrounds the story's multiple depictions of the January-May marriage as incest: "Did the knowledge that it was to be its wives, then wring its hearts almost to breaking; and did its fathers deceive it from its cradles but to break its hearts at last!" Coming at the climatic point in the story where Dot's infidelity is most suspect and May's marriage most likely, Tilly's use of the gender-neutral "its" extends the implications of her song to Dot, May, and Bertha—as well as to John, Tackleton, and Caleb. The song's mixed messages about incest, about parental deception, and about unfulfilled desire resonate within the text's multiple readings of incest. The knowledge "it was to be its wives" almost makes "its hearts" break—seeming to indicate the horror of incest; however, since Tilly is picking up Bertha's line about her loss of Tackleton to May, the song participates in the perpetuation of incestuous desire. According to the song, hearts apparently break because of incest *and* because of the incest taboo, and the text simultaneously encourages the reader to accept some January-May unions and to reject others.

Bertha's displaced desire for her father falls on Tackleton because of her father's deceit. Dickens allows Bertha affectionately to take Tackleton's hand and to kiss it, caressing it within her hands and resting "her cheek against it tenderly" before letting go. Bertha's blindness provides for this otherwise unlikely display as well as her verbal rhapsodies of "blind" devotion to what the text makes clear are troublesome January-May / father-daughter arrangements, and Elisabeth Gitter correctly notes that Dickens uses blindness and Oedipal echoes to negotiate "incestuous transgressions": "Her dead eyes cannot awaken guilt....Both literally and figuratively the blind girl is the daughter who cannot see the sins of the father" (682-83). For most of the story, those around Bertha perpetuate her mistaken understanding of Tackleton, and Bertha likewise clings to a vision of her father as handsome and powerful provider for their home. She has not seen "that Caleb's scanty hairs were turning greyer and more grey, before her sightless face" (208). Upon Caleb's "confession" near the end of the narrative, she learns that Tackleton is "a hard master" who is "ugly in his looks and in his nature," and she initially blames her father, "Why did you ever fill my heart so full, and then come in like Death, and tear away the objects of my love!" (253). Caleb is creator and destroyer of her romantic fantasy, and it appears Bertha will reject his true self as she rejects that of Tackleton.

Gitter's reading asserts that incestuous desire merits a "guilt" that is deserved and expected, but the text is quick to replace Bertha's anger toward her father with her renewed love for him, and Dickens condemns neither incestuous love nor premeditated deception as "sins of the fathers." Instead, he suggests that Caleb's actions are worthy of readers' pity if not their approbation and consent, since the trickery has been executed for the daughter's well-being. Caleb's actions read as good, albeit short-sighted, intentions,

and Dickens affirms that the real tragedy is not in the lie, but in the lie's unraveling and in the anxious worrying of the sacrificial father. Dickens has Bertha reflect on the years of scanty resources her father has suffered to perpetuate her happy illusion of their economic well-being, and like the magical presence which "appeared behind her, pointing to her father," she recognizes him for his selflessness as the text deftly reworks her imagined January-May romance into sentimentalized father-daughter love. Her father rises in her esteem, and when he admits his position as "an old man, worn with care and work," Bertha declares, "The greyer, and more worn, the dearer, father!" (254).

In her happiness, Bertha embraces her father, "caressing him with tears of exquisite affection," and acknowledges the thinness of the ruse that distinguished the idealized Tackleton from her father and her fantasy-father from the real. When Caleb laments that her idealized image of him is gone, Bertha affirms, "Dearest father, no! Everything is here—in you. The father that I loved so well; the father that I never loved enough, and never knew; the benefactor whom I first began to reverence and love, because he had such sympathy for me; all are here in you" (255). Her newfound appreciation of her sacrificial father smoothes paternal anxiety, and she lets it be known that there is no other man whom she "would love so dearly, and would cherish so devotedly" as her father. While Bertha here reflects the feminine loyalty and anti-materialism of popular domestic ideology, her love for her father implies more than is typical of that of a dutiful daughter because of its incestuous insinuations via the January-May romance. Indeed, the collapsing of father and lover in Caleb is essential to the story's happy ending, and it directly contributes to the recovery of the "bad" man Tackleton. Apologetic for his earlier abuses, Tackleton rejoins the others with hat in

hand, happy to be an equal among his social inferiors, and the narrator gaily quips, "what had the Fairies been doing with him, to have effected such a change!" (264). Though Tackleton's revision of masculinity is too neat and quick to be realistic, it suggests the January-May marriage's dramatic potential to revise gendered power.

Dickens's later novels rework the basic January-May frameworks that he details in *The Cricket on the Hearth* to different ends. In these texts, Dickens follows patterns he establishes in *The Cricket on the Hearth*, though the implications of these January-May marriages vary widely. "Happy" January-May marriages appear alternately as conservative (*Little Dorrit*) and progressive (*David Copperfield*) models. The failure of January-May marriages works as both an emblem of sacrificial masculinity (*Bleak House*), and as a means for making masculinity less rigidly self-centered (*Hard Times*). As Dickens writes and rewrites these stories of intergenerational romance, he revels in the inconsistencies of the theme. David L. Cowles has noted that Dickens's "treatments of women probably engender more unintentional self-contradiction than any other topic," and while I agree with Cowles's basic premise, I believe Dickens's contradictions extend beyond "women" to men, sexual relations, and indeed to gender identification itself (80). Specifically because the incest taboo worked as both a conservative and a subversive force, Dickens enjoys the pliable nature of the January-May theme and he rhetorically adapts it as needed for his narrative objectives. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explain how Dickens expands the circumstances he forms in *The Cricket on the Hearth* in his subsequent depictions of January-May marriage. By extending the sympathetic portrayals of older husbands he has fostered with John and Caleb, Dickens develops some additional January-May narratives as idealized incest. And by following the example set

by Tackleton, in later works Dickens also presents incestuous desire as a force for resolving abuses of masculine power.

Feeling (Sorry) for Father: Sympathy and the Idealization of Incest in *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*

Following the example set by John the Carrier, some of Dickens's more endearing January figures are prepared to relinquish their incestuous desires for the normative leanings of their younger May counterparts, and after *The Cricket on the Hearth*, Dickens offers other sympathetic renderings of lustful fathers and the incest theme by expanding the motif of the unwanted husband who is ready for sexual sacrifice through the characters of Doctor Strong in *David Copperfield* and John Jarndyce in *Bleak House*.[50] The invocation of sympathy happens on two levels. Sympathy first emerges when the older male appears to be (or is) rejected because the younger woman prefers a younger man. As these are "good" men—kind, fair, and otherwise benevolent individuals who appear undeserving of the sexual retribution of cuckoldry, the novels effectively toy with the reader's competing expectations of what "should" happen. Even if the reader

[50] In this chapter, I will not give a detailed analysis of the intergenerational dynamics at work in *A Tale of Two Cities*, but Sydney Carton's famous sacrifice for Lucie Manette serves as a fitting backdrop for a query into the use of the sacrificial father motif in *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*. Carton is only about fifteen years older than Lucie, though his flamboyant lifestyle, "prone to sloth and sensuality," makes him appear aged and as another flawed father in the Dickensian canon. Upholding normative sexuality in place of his own unrequited January-May desires, Carton saves Lucy's same-age husband by taking his place at the guillotine, and while Carton famously proclaims "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done before," he signals the proper valuation of his act, and, ironically, ensures the mythologizing of January-May incest as a tantalizingly prospect.

understands or even advocates the younger woman's "natural" inclinations to normative, same-aged sexuality, compassion for the good older man solicits sympathy for him in his slighted position, and this initial consideration for the older husband's plight then increases when he acknowledges his weakened status by withdrawing his claim to sexual fidelity from his younger wife. Sacrificing his desire for hers, the older husband reinforces himself as a favorable character, and though many feminists have cringed at John Jarndyce's gifting of his young fiancée Esther to her same-age admirer, the outlandishly homosocial exchange of a woman between these men encourages renewed consideration of women's power within intergenerational marriages. This sacrificial element could appear as a denial of deviancy in favor of prescriptive heterosexuality, but the effects of such sacrifice are difficult to compartmentalize. On the surface, sympathy for the sacrificial father figure suggests a restored faith in benevolent masculinity and a return to traditional male-female power relations, but because the sacrificial father is connected to aberrant, incestuous desire, sympathy for him correlates with endorsement—on some level—of the domestication of his self-regulated incestuous tendencies. The earnest willingness of an older man to sacrifice himself for a younger woman initiates a complex process of reverse psychology, and whether or not the actual sacrifice is demanded by the plot, readers must negotiate their mixed feelings about the older man's loss. Reading these texts with attention to the sympathetic portrayal of the aging husband and his frustrated incestuous love thereby offers new possibilities for old interpretations of the January-May marriage theme.

The January-May marriage in *David Copperfield* may not appear subversive. For example, feminist critics have emphasized the conservative inferences of the relegation of

women to positions of childishness and subservience.[51] Kelly Hager objects to what she sees as Dickens's idealization of the child-wife: "Those happy, successful marriages, or at least those marriages which Dickens would have us see as such, are ones in which the wife has been disciplined or subdued to her husband's liking. Annie sits for long hours and listens to her husband read from his everlasting Dictionary" (1014).[52] Annie Strong, the much younger wife of David's teacher, Doctor Strong, does sit subordinately and listen admiringly to her husband, whom she addresses passionately, "Oh, my husband and father," and she simultaneously fulfills readers' expectations of wifely and daughterly duty as the ages of the marriage partners seem to place them more firmly within a traditional age and gender hierarchy (606).

The marriage is indeed inundated with standard tropes of older man-younger woman marriages; Doctor Strong knew both Annie's father and Annie "from a baby six months old," and the novel explains that he had effectively saved her from a life a poverty, because "she had not a sixpence, and had a world of poor relations" (226). In education and in experience, Annie is the weaker of the two, and in contrast to the image in which Nell comforts her grandfather, two of the book's illustrations convey the image of Annie at her husband's feet. She appears to be praying worshipfully at the altar of aging masculinity, while David and the reader-viewer look on to ponder the scene's meaning

---

[51] As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, most of the psychoanalytical criticism regarding *David Copperfield* considers David's antagonistic relationship with his stepfather, Mr. Murdstone, and his frustrated longing for his mother. David's contemplation on his father's grave is fertile material for Oedipal analyses, though the incestuous connotations of January-May marriages deserve equal scholarly attention.

[52] In "Child-Wives of Dickens," *The Dickensian* 59 (1963): 112-18, Jane Steadman tries to distinguish Annie from the more insipid young wives in the novel. She charges that "there is real *womanly* emotion in her assertion of love for Dr. Strong," but tempers her praise with the qualification: "Here we see the successful formation of a woman's character by her teacher-husband" (116).

(Fig. 5). This is a familiar image. We see a remarkably similar juxtaposition of older husband and younger wife in *The Cricket on the Hearth* with Dot at John's knee (Fig. 6). While I would agree with Hager's argument that it is important to be mindful of implicit systems of gender and generational power, I believe the dynamics at play here can be read too simply if read too quickly. The incestuous components of the Strong marriage challenge several gender assumptions about the balance of power within their relationship, and Annie, like Dot, wields surprising sexual and emotional authority in her marriage. Dr. Strong emerges as a man to be pitied as much as admired, and the novel lauds him because of his feminine capacity for self-sacrifice rather than because of his mastery of traditional masculinity. The Strong marriage placates anxieties about gender identities by fulfilling expectations of feminine sexual virtue, but it undermines the stabilizing effects of marriage by idealizing non-normative familial and sexual bonds.

Though Annie is forty-three years younger than her husband (she is twenty while he is sixty-three), Annie's marriage to the Doctor is, appropriately, one of Dickens's "strong" January-May marriages, and the disruption of their marriage is not the novel's happily-ever-after conclusion, but rather a sentimental and psychological ploy to intensify readers' longing for marital restoration. Therefore, the narrative of the Strong marriage adheres to a classical comic formula with action falling into a crisis of potential infidelity, followed by the happy restoration of marital understanding and an affirmation of the marriage vows. Yet for much of the novel, the marriage seems doomed to failure as a result of "so much disparity in point of years," and as narrator, David teases the



Figure 5. Hablot K. Browne, untitled from *David Copperfield*, 1850. Engraving.



Figure 6. John Leech, untitled from *The Cricket on the Hearth*. 1843. Engraving.

reader with the possibility of Annie's affair with her cousin Jack Maldon, drawing out the reader's uneasiness (and conveniently giving the reader ample opportunity for imagining Annie's unfaithfulness) for almost half the novel.

The text introduces Doctor Strong and Annie through the eyes of young David, so, as with the (affected) deaf elderly man in *Cricket*, Dickens deliberately encourages an initial misreading of their relationship and kinship tie. Their differences in age and appearance are stressed, and their arrangement appears a curious oddity even to a boy.[53] David describes that "Doctor Strong looked almost as rusty, to my thinking, as the tall iron rails and gates outside the house; and almost as stiff and heavy as the great stone urns that flanked them" (215). In contrast, David first describes Annie as "a very pretty young lady—whom he called Annie, and who was his daughter, I supposed" (216). David then adds that "I was very much surprised to hear Mr Wickfield, in bidding her good morning, address her as 'Mrs Strong,' and I was wondering could she be Doctor Strong's son's wife, or could she be Mrs Doctor Strong" (216). This trajectory from daughter to daughter-in-law to wife moves quickly, and though David and the reader soon learn the apt designation for their familial and sexual bond, the initial confusion lingers.[54] If there is any chance that the reader could forget the visual markings that suggested incest by covering them with the bandages of marriage, the text recalls the image: "It was very pleasant to see the Doctor with his pretty young wife. He had a

---

[53] Dickens carefully constructs the child David as both a sexual innocent and as a knowing commentator about adult relations. Such paradoxical portrayals of children fueled Kincaid's *Child-Loving* and *Erotic Innocence* and Catherine Robson's *Men in Wonderland*. See also Richard D. Mohr's "The Pedophilia of Everyday Life" in *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004) 17-30.

[54] Pointedly, the question of their relationship is settled when Doctor Strong inquires about a job for his "wife's cousin," which drops the first hint about the third point in this love triangle: Cousin Jack. Because of the January-May marriage, Annie is riddled with the taint of sexually deviant behavior from the beginning.

fatherly, benignant way of showing his fondness for her, which seemed in itself to express a good man" (227). Moreover, recalling her crass clarification of the relationship to Annie before her marriage, Annie's mother directs, "Annie, Doctor Strong will not only be your husband, but he will represent your late father: he will represent the head of our family, he will represent the wisdom and the station, and I may say the means, of our family" (229). Dickens disguises his retying of the incestuous knot amidst the humor of the mother-in-law's mercenary motives, but the message is clear that, as in Annie's words, Doctor Strong is her "husband and father." When a few sentences later her mother criticizes her for being "a little unnatural towards your own family," a double meaning seems implicit (230).

Dickens's decision to cast, then remove, and then recast this marriage with incestuous imagery is provoking, and it is impossible to isolate it from the disturbing closeness of Agnes, David's future wife, and her father Mr. Wickfield, who dwells quite obsessively on the possibility of Annie's infidelity with Jack Mauldon. Whereas Doctor Strong is sweetly, even childishly, oblivious to any sense of impropriety in Annie's relationship with her cousin, Wickfield hints at the problematic structure of their association every chance he gets. When Doctor Strong innocently proposes getting Jack a position abroad since "Satan finds some mischief still, for idle hands to do," Wickfield reads his own sexual fears into the message, revising Strong's maxim to include warningly that "busy hands" also produce "mischief" (216). Wickfield tells Strong that he "penetrates his motive," later greeting his lack of an ulterior motive with "astonishment" (216,17). And Wickfield is the leading perpetrator of the rumor that Annie is in a sexual relationship with Jack; he confides his suspicions to David as well as

many others, and David (like the reader) comes to accept the imagined truth of Annie's infidelity. Explaining to the "simpleton" Mr. Dick, David discreetly, but clearly, exposes the "secret" of Annie and her husband: "There is some unfortunate division between them…[s]ome unhappy cause of separation. A secret. It may be inseparable from the discrepancy in their years" (603). Why does Wickfield care so much about the Strong marriage to spread such stories about their supposed marital difficulties? Why does he pursue Jack and Annie, delighting in their persecution all the while bemoaning their illicit sexuality? His fixation stems from his identification with Strong and with the idealization of daddy-daughter love. Jack's same-age desire terrorizes Wickfield's own intergenerational longings for Agnes, and he truly fears she will leave home for another man. Immediately after one of his early encounters with Jack, Wickfield drinks to excess, which loosens his tongue to tell the tale of his personal incestuous anxieties. With drunken, bloodshot eyes, he wonders "whether my Agnes tires of me," protesting "When should I ever tire of her!" (221). He clings desperately to Agnes, to her physical closeness: "I must keep her near me" (222). Drowning his worries about her loss in wine, he tacitly presents his feelings for his daughter as overwhelmingly unhealthy because they remain frustratingly unfulfilled, and years later, he explains in retrospect, "My love for my dear child was a diseased love, but my mind was all unhealthy then" (773). Shifting his own incestuous struggle to the Strongs provides him with the simultaneous pleasure of displacement and commiseration.

In fact, the Strong marriage allows a legitimized consummation of incestuous desires in much the same way that David's first marriage to Dora placates his Oedipal

urge to marry his mother.[55] The critical difference is that David's same-age marriage to Dora is disastrous while the Strong marriage is not. Had Dora not died an early death, David too clearly would have suffered from years of marriage to his child-mother (until, perhaps, he had become old enough to appreciate her infantilized personality as a pedophiliac). Perhaps same-age marriage does not realize the libratory potential of idealized incest because there is no age discrepancy to free the partners from the tethers of gender affiliation, or perhaps the same-age marriage lacks the ability to link bodies to variant gender affiliations. The Strong marriage is successful, and the reader is happy that it is so, because Doctor Strong's position as both father and husband in the relationship complicates gendered and generational authority.

When suspicions about Annie's infidelity are forced upon Doctor Strong by Uriah Heep (while all other characters seemingly revel in his ignorance and, consequently, the suspension of the sexually deviant triangle), he fails to model irate masculinity or even disappointed paternity. Neither jealous nor scolding, he is understandably dejected, but, like the carrier John, Doctor Strong assumes a decidedly submissive and sacrificial stance towards the charges against his wife. Blaming himself, he begs forgiveness: "If I did her wrong; as I fear I did, in taking advantage (but I never meant it) of her gratitude and her affection; I ask pardon of that lady, in my heart!" (570). Strong legitimizes his wife's sexual yearnings, rationalizing that it is "natural" that she should have "some regretful feelings" towards her cousin. Strong confirms that he wishes Annie to be financially and sexually independent, and he redrafts his will to emphasize the fact that, upon his death,

[55] Critical readings of David's marriage to Dora as Oedipal drama abound. See, for example, Sadoff's aforementioned *Monsters of Affection* and Alexander Welsh's *From Copyright to Copperfield* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987).

he "gives her all unconditionally," and he prepares "to bear the knowledge of the unhappiness I have occasioned, as submissively as I can" and looks forward to his death, which will "release her from constraint" (605, 571). Dickens intends the reader to respect Strong's recognition of his marriage as naturally troubled by their age difference, but because Dickens has developed compassion for Strong and not for Jack, he indicates that what is normative, expected, or even "natural" is not what is wanted.

Annie may throw herself at her husband's feet when confronting the charges of her adultery, but she does so only to rise with a surprisingly masculine tone of authority (she is physically supported, no less, by Mr. Dick). When her mother and Strong, her father figure, attempt parentally to silence her sensational semi-public confession, she defies them both, and, "looking down upon her husband" from her new vantage, affirms that her sexual and emotional needs are not what everyone supposes (608). In front of the audience of her mother, Mr. Dick, Betsey Trotwood, and David, whom the display "thrilled," Annie details her motivations for marriage, repeatedly demanding more opportunity to speak: "Do not speak to me yet!" "A little more!" and "Another word!" (611, 12). Contrary to what her mother and Wickfield have suggested, Annie announces that she did not marry for money, but for love. She admits that she once had feelings for her cousin, but declares in retrospect, that their normative, same-aged marriage would have "been most wretched" (610). She stresses that she *prefers* her marriage to her husband and eagerly displays her physical affection for him. Falling again to the floor, she embraces him, and the audience (both the characters in the room and the reader) rejoices in their marital bliss. The final image of the couple is that of a father and daughter, husband and wife intertwined: "She had her arms around the Doctor's neck,

and he bent his head down over her, mingling his grey hair with her dark brown tresses" (612).

The witnesses to Annie's confession are delighted that Strong's sacrifice is not wanted, but the promise of willing self-sacrifice has already succeeded in winning sympathy for the aging husband and his incestuous marriage. In this novel filled with unhappy same-aged relationships (David's mother and Mr. Murdstone, Betsey Trotwood and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, David and Dora, Steerforth and Emily), January-May marriages and the affectionate cohabitations of "fathers" and "daughters" provide a happy alternative to their more conventional counterparts. Seldom mentioned is the fact that David's mother Clara and his biological father were themselves participants in a January-May marriage (which perhaps contributed to his mother's early widowhood). Clara, who was in a lower class position than David's father, was "not yet twenty" upon marriage while David's father was "double [his] mother's age" (13). Nevertheless, Clara declares "we were very happy," and, interestingly, she is in a uniquely empowered female position as a young widow when we first meet her. Her degradation and death only come after she enters into a same-aged relationship with Murdstone. Alcoholism seems the real danger in the Wickfield home—not the "diseased" love between Agnes and her father, and Emily, who traverses many social and sexual boundaries in the novel, starts life anew with her uncle and father-figure, albeit seemingly platonically, in Australia.[56] Intergenerational and familial cohabitation reads

[56] I find it curious that Mr. Peggotty finds it necessary to mention that he hears Emily's nightly prayers only through "t'other side of the canvas screen" that divides their sleeping arrangements (798).

favorably in comparison to the normative counterpart, and here the January-May marriage appears as its literary, social, and sexual culmination.

****

Contemporary readers of *Bleak House* were largely confused by the sacrificial decision of John Jarndyce to "give" Esther Summerson to her young lover Allan Woodcourt. *Bemtley's Miscellany* explains,

> Of Mr Jarndyce and Esther Summerson we hardly know what to say. We should like to have substantial faith in the existence of such loveable, self-merging natures, whether belonging to elderly gentlemen or young maidens. But we cannot say that we have. Indeed, the final disposal of Esther, after all that has gone before, is something that so far transcends the limits of our credulity, that we are compelled to pronounce it eminently unreal. We do not know whether most to marvel at him who transfers, or her who is transferred from one to another, like a bale of goods. (74)

While *Bentley's* objects to the novel's open portrayal of economies that traffic in women, its main doubt lies with the questionable selflessness of the January-May couple and the forfeit of personal interest within the frame of sexual loss and gain. Unlike the January husbands of *The Cricket on the Hearth* and *David Copperfield*, who benefit from their offers to release their wives without having to follow through with their promises, Jarndyce does sacrifice himself, informing Esther that he is relinquishing "the old dream I sometimes dreamed when you were very young, of making you my wife one day" and that he was wrong to have his happiness "too much in view" (751-2). Jarndyce's

sacrifice, however "unreal," is supported by a similar unselfishness displayed by the other January figure in the novel, Sir Leicester Dedlock. Though Sir Leicester, who is already married, is less able to make a "gift" of his wife to Captain Hawdon, who is already dead, he selflessly sacrifices his reputation and the public cry for "a bill of divorce" and gives his wife his unyielding approval and her good name. The novel indicates that both Esther's and her mother's attraction to same-age men is to be expected. Esther informs the reader at the end of her narrative that she has been married to Woodcourt for "full seven happy years," and Honoria Dedlock dies pining outside the graveyard of her same-age lover.[57] Yet, precisely because the older men give up their claims to their incestuous relationships, the novel supports their incestuous desires and ironically garners support for non-traditional sexualities through these January-May marriages' failures.

Esther's illegitimacy allows for a tangle of kinship structures that are crucial to the novel's plot, and, in this novel of lost mothers and fathers, it is fitting that her relationship with John Jarndyce be multifunctional. From her childhood he is her surrogate father and her seducer; he offers to take charge of her when she is twelve, and he assumes responsibility for her when she is fourteen, saving her from an uncertain future by sending her to a "first rate establishment" for her education and proper grooming to be his "Dame Durden." Riding with her in the coach to her new school, he paternally wipes the tears from her eyes and plies her with sweets: "the best plum-cake

[57] However "natural" Honoria's desire appears, the novel suggests that it is destructive for her, for her husband, and for the stability of marriage. Though her flight from home could be interpreted as her rejection of her older husband, her farewell letter suggests that her departure is intended to save her husband from further disgrace: "I have no home left. I will encumber you no more. May you, in your just resentment, be able to forget the unworthy woman on whom you have wasted a most generous devotion—who avoids you, only with a deeper shame that that with which she hurries from herself—and who writes this last adieu" (667).

that can be bought for money—sugar on the outside an inch thick, like fat on mutton chops" (25). When Esther is summoned from school to live in Jarndyce's house as companion to Ada, she gives thanks for "that Father who had not forgotten me," and though the capitalization of Father denotes its author's religious intent, her words carry a double meaning, as she has been remembered by her earthly, as well as heavenly, father.[58] As Esther is twenty and Jarndyce "nearer to sixty than fifty" when she comes to live in his home, his paternal role to Esther and to his other wards is well-established. No one seems to raise an eyebrow when Jarndyce puts his arms around the waists of Ada and Esther and kisses them "in a fatherly way" (60).

In the beginning, Esther's position as eldest child to her fatherly guardian appears appropriate. She addresses Jarndyce as "my guardian" rather than calling him by name, and, for a short time, their kinship structure remains clear. However, as she assumes duties that are more commonly associated with a wife than a daughter, their relationship becomes more problematic.[59] Esther serves as a big sister and a little mother to her wayward companions Ada and Richard, and, soon after her arrival, she receives the keys to the house, affirming her symbolic position as mistress of Bleak House long before her engagement to Jarndyce. As Esther fulfills cross-generational duties within this non-nuclear family, her familial connection to Jarndyce grows more suspect, and by the time of her convalescence from smallpox, the reader no longer knows how to interpret their interactions. When Jarndyce lovingly embraces Esther, calling her alternately "My dear,

---

[58] In "The Forgotten Father in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*," *Dickens Quarterly* 17.2 (2000): 88-93, Teresa Valenti interprets this statement as a hidden reference to Esther's biological father.

[59] As I briefly mentioned earlier, the mystery of Esther's illegitimate background introduces the possibility that Jarndyce could literally be her father, exponentially increasing the incestuous insinuations of their relationship.

dear girl," "My little woman," and "my love, my love" over the course of a few short moments, the muddled state of their kinship ties surfaces. And although Esther continues to punctuate her conversation with Jarndyce with the designation "my guardian," her feelings for him are uncertain, and when she discloses her relief that he does not mind her appearance, the reader must consider the layered meanings of her words: "He has seen me, and he loves me better than he did; he has seen me, and is fonder of me than he was before; and what have I to mourn for!" (434).

Indeed, Esther's pock-marked appearance encourages the disintegration of the boundaries between their familial and romantic feelings for one another, and with the loss of Esther's youthful face, Jarndyce's slippage from guardian and father to lover and husband comes easily. For Jarndyce, Esther's marred beauty seems to negate some of the years that separate them, and though he does not say as much in his letter to Esther that proposes marriage, she "well" knows that "when I had been better-looking, he had had this same proceeding in his thoughts, and had refrained from it" (538). Exactly how their relationship could change becomes an important issue. Preparing Esther for his proposal before he gives her the letter, Jarndyce makes her promise repeatedly that "nothing can change me as you know me," and Esther agrees to this promise (536). In truth, they had long collapsed the roles of father and lover and of daughter and wife, and despite the fact that Jarndyce is "past the prime of life; on his having attained a ripe age, while [Esther] was a child," Esther readily admits that she "had expected the contents" of the letter, and she cries that she is "happy in the undeserved love of the best of men" (537-38). After their engagement is settled, Esther continues to refer to Jarndyce as her "guardian" instead of calling him her fiancé, and when she says that their new

understanding of their family structure "made no difference" in their lives, she attests to the comfortable amalgamation of kinship roles that they had already formed.[60]

But their engagement does make a difference. When Esther puts her arms around Jarndyce's neck and kisses him, it is now undoubtedly with the feeling of an expected wife, not a daughter. She takes a new position by the side of her "guardian's" chair, and, with two hundred pounds, which Jarndyce provides for her trousseau in his dual role as father and suitor, she begins "to make such preparations as [she] thought were necessary" to her wardrobe so that it will be suitable for a new bride. Esther frets over what and when to tell Ada of her altered status in the home, and Ada, trying to negotiate her own family romance with her cousin Richard, laments the confusion of Bleak House's kinship structure: "O when I think of all these years, and of his fatherly care and kindness, and of the old relations among us, and of you, what shall I do, what shall I do!" (606). Though Mrs. Woodcourt had earlier predicted that Esther would marry "some one, very rich and very worthy, much older—five-and-twenty years, perhaps—than yourself," her marriage to Jarndyce, who is almost forty years her senior and already established as her father-figure, remains an uncomfortable subject, and because of their awkwardly incestuous and improper domestic situation, Esther and Jarndyce plan for their wedding to be carried out in "the most private and simple manner" (367, 748).

Jarndyce is not a bad man. Allowing Jarndyce a dark side when the wind is in the East, Dickens nevertheless makes certain that Jarndyce is a likeable, noble, and

---

[60] In "Double Vision and the Double Standard in *Bleak House*: A Feminist Perspective," *Bleak House*. New Casebooks ed. Jeremy Tambling. (New York: St. Martin's P, 1998) 65-86, Virginia Blain addresses the "sexual taint" that transfers from Honoria Dedlock to her daughter Esther. Though Blain reads this taint as the illegitimacy of sex outside of marriage, I believe the taint is inseparable from both the mother's and daughter's incestuous January-May relationships, and I contend that Esther's continued feelings for Jarndyce perpetuate nonstandard sexualities more that they "purge" them.

openhanded character. Though Esther had nurtured a love for Allan Woodcourt, she is prepared to let the romance go after her illness scars her face and she thinks their relationship improbable, and she explains at several places in the text that she is truly fond of her guardian. She memorizes the words of his proposal letter, she affectionately touches him, and she delights in his company, worrying about his health when they are not together. Esther likes Jarndyce, and so does the reader. Perhaps this is the reason that Dickens spares him from outright rejection. When Woodcourt returns from abroad to extend his offer of normative, same-age, exogamic love, Esther is already committed to Jarndyce, and she refuses Woodcourt, explaining that "in the future, which is clear and bright before me, I am most happy, most fortunate, [and] have nothing to regret or to desire" (733). Her preference for Woodcourt is evident but controlled, and it is left to Jarndyce to act on his awareness of the mutual desire of the young lovers.

Showing Esther his creation of her own "Bleak House" to share with Woodcourt, Jarndyce clarifies his decision to release her from their engagement: "When it was that I began to doubt whether what I had done would really make you happy, is no matter. Woodcourt came home, and I soon had no doubt at all" (752). Not wishing his "love," his "ward," and his "child" to "sacrifice her love to a sense of duty and affection," Jarndyce sacrifices his own sexual interests instead. Esther trembles "violently" and, weeping, puts her head on her father/lover's chest and her arms around his neck when she learns of his resolution. In a matter of moments, Jarndyce again alters their relationship, restoring it (as if it needed restoration) to expected father-child dynamics. Pressing Esther to his chest, he instructs her to "Lie lightly, confidently, here, my child. I am your guardian and your father now" (752). Jarndyce's sacrifice exponentially increases the

sympathy he has already enjoyed as an embodiment of "good" masculinity, and because he can be pitied for his loss, his associations with incest and pedophilia can be overlooked. Jarndyce lifts Esther's head to kiss her "in his old fatherly way again and again," and she clings to him, seemingly innocently, in a renewal of their respective positions as father and daughter, though the passion suggested by "again and again" prevents their relationship from being clearly defined.

The idea that heteronormative sexuality is stabilized by this renaming of their familial positions is unavoidably problematic—if not in the words of *Bentley's Miscellany* "eminently unreal." When Jarndyce urges Woodcourt to "take from me , a willing gift, *the best wife that ever a man had*," he calls attention to the spousal relationship that he had already participated in with his ward (753 my emphasis).[61] Esther had never chosen to change her designation of her "guardian" to "John" or anything denoting a deliberate forgetting of their parent-child relations, and thus the suggestion that Jarndyce is her father and guardian "now" but not "then" is a narrative sleight of hand by Dickens that he performs not-so-well. The disconnect that should separate Esther and Jarndyce from their romantic relationship fails, and thus when Jarndyce sanctions Esther's marriage to Woodcourt, giving his "knowledge and consent" as both father and lover, the "gifting" of Esther that transfers her "like a bale of goods" from one man to another undermines rather than supports a system of male privilege because it connects same-age sexuality with an intergenerational, incestuous love. Esther's love of Jarndyce as more than guardian is not forgotten, nor is his love of her as

[61] I am not suggesting that this relationship has been consummated, but intend to call attention to the fact that Jarndyce had already understood it to be a romantic, sexual, and marital bond.

more than his dependent ward. The scene of this transferal is ridden with pathos for Jarndyce, and it is decidedly romantic. Esther describes their farewell as lovers as they take on their normative positions: "He kissed me once again; and now the tears were in his eyes, as he said more softly: 'Esther, my dearest, after so many years, there is a kind of parting in this too. I know that my mistake has caused you some distress. Forgive your old guardian, in restoring him to his old place in your affections; and blot it out of your memory'" (753). The ambiguous "it" is their incestuous mingling of the roles of parent, child, and lover, though the call to forget "it" proves all but impossible.

Jarndyce's sacrifice in fact ensures that he is more loved by Esther and by the reader than ever before, and Dickens encourages the perpetuation of incestuous desire through his idealization of what will not be fulfilled. Looking back on her relationship with Jarndyce as she closes her story, Esther reflects, "I try to write all of this lightly, because my heart is full in drawing to an end; but when I write of him, my tears will have their way" (769). In "Fathers and Suitors: Narratives of Desire in *Bleak House*," Barbara Gottfried posits that Esther requires a "fantasy father" and that she therefore "has particular stakes in presenting Jarndyce as a benevolent agent and father figure" despite the "cost of his patronage, benevolence, and desire to sexualize their relationship" (172). But Gottfried fails to account for Esther's passionate avowals of her feelings for Jarndyce either before or after their engagement and oversimplifies "what she really wants" (198). Jarndyce and the incestuous ideal that he represents are emulated to the degree that they take on an almost mythic grandeur, not only as a "good man" but also as "the fondest father," "my husband's best and dearest friend," "our children's darling," "the object of our deepest love and veneration," and indeed, "a superior being" (769). In a strangely

modern arrangement, Esther and Woodcourt build a separate "growlery" for Jarndyce in their new Bleak House to accommodate him during his visits, Esther admits that though she is married to Woodcourt, her relationship with Jarndyce remains sufficiently confused. In the midst of detailing his superlative appellations, she provocatively quips, "to me, he is what he has ever been, and what name can I give to that?" Jarndyce's sacrifice of himself becomes the very agent of the incest narrative's continuation within the domestic sphere of the middle-class home. Esther explains, "I am so familiar with him, and so easy with him, that I almost wonder at myself" and verifies the fact that, despite her being another man's wife, very little has changed regarding the romantic tension that has characterized their relationship: "I have never lost my old names, nor has he lost his; nor do I ever, when he is with us, sit in any other place than in my old chair at his side. Dame Trot, Dame Durden, Little Woman!—all just the same as ever; and I answer, Yes, dear guardian! just the same" (769). Notably, this place by Jarndyce is not the one she occupied as his "child"; Esther earlier identified the position by his side as one that clearly denoted her changed status in the home: "I was sitting in my usual place, which was now beside my guardian's chair. That had not been my usual place before the letter, but it was now" (606). A detail of Browne's original illustration "Magnanimous conduct of Mr Guppy" for the scene immediately following the dissolution of their engagement reveals this seating arrangement and their continued physical and emotional closeness as Jarndyce's fingers lightly stroke Esther's back (Fig. 7).[62] Slipping in and

[62] Esther's deferential position to Jarndyce serves multiple objectives, suggesting her desire to be physically close to her guardian as well as her dutiful respect. Her position also serves to hide her face, and Chapter six of Steig's *Dickens and Phiz* comments upon the absence of artistic renderings of Esther's smallpox marked face.



Figure 7. Hablot K. Brown, detail of untitled illustration from *Bleak House*, 1853. Engraving.

out of daughter and wife roles as she meaningfully relocates herself in the room, Esther expresses her continued desire for Jarndyce. The sacrificial acts of these older husbands encourage sympathy for them and for the deviancies of the January-May marriage. Whether the sacrifice reacts to a titillating threat to a January-May marriage that will ultimately be removed or whether the sacrifice removes the possibility of the January-May marriage altogether, the end is the same. Dickens fosters consideration for intergenerational romance as a site for uniting the normative and the problematic.

Incest and the Rebirth of Masculinity in *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit*

The Cricket on the Hearth revealed that Dickens felt it a logical progression to move from sympathy for his older father/husbands towards a system for men's improvement. John the Carrier, Doctor Strong and John Jarndyce might be "good" daddies who deserve more pity than scorn, but what about those bad dads who, like Tackleton and his predecessors Gride and Quilp, abuse the powers associated with their age and gender? Two of his later novels that center on January-May marriages attempt to revise and restore problematic masculinity through their suggestions of father-daughter incest. Though *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit* differ in their strategies and their objectives, these novels organize a new and improved masculinity around the family romance.

Critics have largely ignored the implications of father-daughter incest that shadow Louisa Gradgrind's January-May marriage to Josiah Bounderby to give attention to the "abnormal" brother-sister relationship between Louisa and her brother Tom. In 1964, Daniel P. Deneau brought critical attention to the bedroom scene in which Louisa,

"barefoot, unclothed, [and] undistinguishable in darkness," attempts to learn the truth from Tom about the robbery (144). Deneau suggests that this scene incestuously "has the atmosphere of a seduction," and later critics have furthered his initial claim. In "Language and the Psychopathology of the Family," Richard Fabrizio points to the Louisa-Tom relationship to support his theory that "Before Freud, Dickens demonstrated incest's mechanics in the capitalist system" (236). Russell Goldfarb pushes the novel's incestuous overtones into physical certainty; referring to the dynamics of the bedroom scene, he believes the evidence "show explicitly that Louisa is sexually involved with her brother" (128). While I agree with these critics that Dickens enjoys constructing relationships that refuse pat understanding, I am less concerned with arguing the consummation of incestuous desire than with analyzing that desire's larger effects on gender and power. Additionally, I am more interested in how implications of sibling incest between Louisa and Tom coalesce with suggestions of father-daughter incest in Louisa's relationships with her husband Bounderby and with her father Thomas Gradgrind. The incestuous aspects of Louisa's January-May marriage critique both normative heterosexuality and traditional marriage as the novel reveals the interdependence of normative sexuality on "perverse" or "incestuous" tendencies. Although Louisa's almost-incestuous marriage to Bounderby seems to hold the potential for reconciling the family romance into a socially acceptable format, the stabilizing move fails—because taints of "perversion" (via incest, pedophilia, and prostitution) pervade the January-May marriage. Ultimately, the novel rejects marriage and normative sexuality as a means for remedying sexual and gender trouble and, instead, proposes that the proliferation of incestuous desire contains its own restorative strategies. Thus, through

Louisa's relationships with her brother and father, Dickens develops the incest theme as a method for transforming "bad" men into new and improved models of masculinity.

Dickens's depiction of incest in this novel of hard times is as varied and as full of incongruities and negations as might be expected at this point of an analysis of his broader use of the father-daughter incest theme. He hints seductively at the transgression of the incest taboo, and then he faithfully reinforces it, fostering through his characters a psychological battle to ascertain what is right and a physical struggle to refrain from doing what is wrong. Louisa ultimately suffers as a result of sexual codes and is unable to fulfill her love for her brother, her father, or, later, for her brother's friend James Harthouse. When she eventually leaves her husband to return to her father's home, she explains her frustrated desire and her resistance: "With a hunger and thirst upon me, father, which have never been for a moment appeased; with an ardent impulse towards some region where rules, and figures, and definitions were not absolute; I have grown up, battling every inch of my way" (164). The "Facts" that her father has taught her do not help her to negotiate the irrational or the perverse. Rejecting her father's pragmatic, utilitarian teachings, her words denote her opposition to heteronormative, exogamic and monogamous ideals of love and sexuality, even though neither Tom nor her father seem worthy of her fight. Both are manipulative individuals, largely lacking compassion for others or the ability to imagine beyond the systems of power in which they are enmeshed.

Displacement of the incest theme onto her intergenerational marriage to Bounderby does not prove liberating for Louisa either, but her marriage serves as a site for the domestication of sexual deviance, and, rather than working as a restorative tool in gender relations, further disrupts the stability of kinship structures within the novel.

When Louisa's mother repeatedly frets, "Whatever I am to call him, Mr. Gradgrind, when he is married to Louisa! I must call him something. It's impossible…to be constantly addressing him, and never giving him a name….Am I to call my own son-in-law, Mister?" she raises structuralist concerns over kinship and nomenclature.[63] Though Bounderby is not yet kin, his age has already placed him in a kindred (parental) position with Louisa's mother and father, and Mrs. Gradgrind's confusion demonstrates the destabilizing effects of intergenerational marriage on family systems. Intentionally or unintentionally, Mrs. Sparsit has similar troubles in knowing what name to use for Louisa. Mrs. Sparsit calls Louisa "Miss Gradgrind" and even "Mrs. Gradgrind" instead of "Mrs. Bounderby." "Miss" and "Mrs." convey provocative identities for Louisa as her father's daughter and her father's wife, but Dickens offers another possibility in Mrs. Sparsit's half-hearted apology to Louisa: "she begged pardon, she meant to say, Miss Bounderby—she hoped to be excused, but she really could not get it right yet" (147). Whereas the other appellations suggest Mrs. Sparsit's unwillingness to think of Louisa as Bounderby's wife, "Miss Bounderby" reveals her propensity to think of Louisa as Bounderby's daughter.

In Louisa's unhappy marriage to Bounderby, Dickens portrays what might have happened if Madeline Bray's father had not died and she had married Arthur Gride.[64]

---

[63] It would be a linguistic nightmare if a woman's father were also her husband. According to the rules of kinship, her own mother would thereby be her daughter, and her brother would be her child. According to structuralist theory, social organization "can be achieved only by treating marriage regulations and kinship systems as a kind of language, a set of processes permitting the establishment, between individuals and groups, of a certain type of communication" (61). See Chapter Three, "Language and the Analysis of Social Laws" in Claude Levi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology* (Trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. New York: Basic Books, 1963) 55-66.

[64] Since I read Honoria Dedlock's marriage as a happy one before the threat of scandal, I consider this to be Dickens's only portrayal of an unsuccessful January-May marriage in his major fiction. In a short work called "Nurse's Stories," *Selected Short Fiction*, ed. Deborah A. Thomas. (Harmondsworth: Penguin,

The reader can likewise envision how May's marriage to Tackleton might have concluded in a Dickensian world. "Old Bounderby," a friend of Louisa's father, is "seven or eight and forty" and Louisa "fifteen or sixteen" when the novel opens, and Mrs. Sparsit deems him "quite another father to Louisa" (38). Though Bounderby is not as old as Gride, and perhaps not as harsh as Tackleton, his courtship and marriage of Louisa is equally disturbing, and its overt associations with pedophilia initiate sexual perversion into the frame of conjugal stability.[65] For example, when Bounderby enters the children's study in the Gradgrind home to let them know that their father's anger over their visit to the circus was waning, he enters as an adult into the punished children's space. He plays the card of parental authority, soothing Louisa and her younger siblings with his promise that "It's all right now….you won't do so any more. I'll answer for its being all over with [your] father," but then he shifts his role from that of father to that of lover, negotiating payment for his allegiance to the children's cause: "Well, Louisa, that's worth a kiss, isn't it?" (20).

Bounderby's slippery movement from father-figure to seducer coincides with his trespassing into the children's study, and his request to Louisa—however seemingly appropriate—violates social and sexual expectations. Louisa allows him to kiss her "rais[ing] her cheek towards him, with her face turned away," but her efforts to remove the psychological stain left by his lips indicates her disgust and revulsion at his affection

---

1976), Dickens writes of other intergenerational marriages with horrific consequences. "Captain Murderer" weds young women, kills them and then eats them.

[65] The difference between pedophilic and incestuous overtones here and in Dickens's happy January-May marriages can be attributed to the unique perceptions of the wives who are involved as well as Dickens's contrasting depictions. Some young women (the Marchioness, Annie Strong, Dot) are more receptive to the affections of older men than others.

and signals a similar response from readers who are ready to sympathize with Louisa.[66] After Bounderby deems Louisa "Always my pet" and says good-bye to the children, "she stood on the same spot, rubbing the cheek he had kissed, with her handkerchief, until it was burning red. She was still doing this, five minutes afterwards" (20). When her brother Tom warns that she will "rub a hole in [her] face," she bitterly replies, "You may cut the piece out with your penknife if you like, Tom. I wouldn't cry!" (20). Louisa's response leaves little doubt that Dickens intends Bounderby's attraction to Louisa to be read as problematically perverse, and this scene clarifies the text's positions regarding "normal" and "deviant" behaviors while suggesting that these behaviors remain inextricably fused in the dominant culture. Louisa's abhorrence of Bounderby's fatherly physical affection conveys ingenuous understanding of "good touch" versus "bad touch," indicating that abuse of power can be sensed intuitively, but the imposition of courtship into this scene of discipline collapses divisions between the stabilizing heterosexuality that leads to marriage and the unorthodox sexuality that leads to child molestation. Generational privilege, heterosexual marriage, and familial loyalty appear as shabby veils that shelter more troubling desires, and Bounderby's "normal" request for a kiss and his "normal" proposal of marriage appear anything but.

Louisa's marriage to Bounderby is tainted not only by its own inferences to pedophilia and incest, but also by its interconnectedness with Louisa's larger family romance and their effectual prostitution of her body for their own ends. Louisa enters the January-May marriage because her brother and father wish it; ironically, her "unnatural"

---

[66] Dickens seemed to especially enjoy the way that "innocent" social gestures like handshakes and kisses could have covert sexual implications. Recall the kiss that Quilp solicits from Little Nell and the handshake that Gride overly enjoys from Madeline Bray.

feelings for her family drive her into this superficially normative but intrinsically troublesome marriage.[67] Louisa's love for her brother seemingly gives Tom the upper hand in their relationship, and he manipulates her for his advantage. When he considers Bounderby's job offer, Tom selfishly reasons that his employment will be all the easier because of Bounderby's desire for his sister: "You are his little pet, you are his favourite; he'll do anything for you," concluding that "I had better go where I can take with me some advantage of your influence" (44). Teasing Louisa with the thought of being close to him, Tom intentionally exploits Louisa's love in order to persuade her to accept Bounderby's proposal and its underlying sexual ramifications: "We might be so much oftener together—mightn't we? Always together, almost—mightn't we? It would do me a great deal of good if you were to make up your mind to I know what, Loo. It would be a splendid thing for me. It would be uncommonly jolly!" (44, 74). When, in the garden, he describes his reliance on Louisa's financial help to Harthouse, Tom releases his guilt from exploiting his sister's body by violently "biting the rose-buds…and tearing them away from his teeth with a hand that trembled like an old man" (134). Tom is almost in tears during this display, but he quips, "What *is* a fellow to do for money, and where *am* I to look for it, if not to my sister?" (134). Tom exercises his power to cajole Louisa emotionally, though he clearly lacks the economic advantage traditionally associated with masculine privilege. Louisa's marriage to Bounderby and her commitment to doing the unspeakable "I know what" stand to benefit her brother more than herself, and her incestuous bond with her brother promotes her January-May marriage.

[67] Like Madeline Bray, Louis is bartered for economic gain.

Thomas Gradgrind, "a man of facts and calculations," is keenly aware of the benefits of marrying his daughter to Bounderby, who is "a rich man: banker, merchant, manufacturer, and what not," and while it is difficult to imagine such a pragmatic man influenced by forces of desire (his marriage seems void of emotion at best), the novel concludes that no one, not even Thomas Gradgrind, can subsist on Facts alone (6, 15). Writing specifically about *Hard Times*, Anne Humphreys explains that "the father of Western father-daughter narratives frequently tries to negotiate his desire to keep the daughter by selecting the man she marries (not uncommonly she is given to his relative or friend), thus giving an additional turn to Eve Sedgwick's thesis of homosocial desire" (178). Thus, whereas the prostituting of Louisa is an economic act, it is a sexual act as well, requiring that Louisa's father contemplate and control Louisa's sexuality. In marrying Louisa to his "bosom friend," Thomas Gradgrind participates in the sexual exchange, which holds his gratification as much as Bounderby's as its agenda. At "fifteen or sixteen" Louisa already realizes that her father is thinking about her sexually, pondering her sexual marketability, and planning on her effectual prostitution. She knows that she is being groomed to be Bounderby's wife, and when her father speaks to her of Bounderby, "his daughter st[eals] a look at him, remarkable for its intense and searching character" (14).[68] Thomas Gradgrind's rationalizing of the "Facts" of Louisa's marriage to Bounderby also necessitates his consideration of the compatibility of their

[68] Dickens offers an even more Gothic version of this type of arranged marriage in the middle of *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* (1857), which he wrote with Wilkie Collins. In this story, reprinted separately as "The Bride's Tale," the young woman is horrified that she must marry her much-older guardian, and her fears prove correct as her husband kills her after their marriage. Dickens describes her foreboding, "The girl was formed in the fear of him, and in the conviction, that there was no escape from him. She was taught, from the first, to regard him as her future husband—the man who must marry her—the destiny that overshadowed her--the appointed certainty that could never be evaded."

ages as husband and wife, and since he is only "a year or two" older than Bounderby, his negotiation of marriage statistics reveals his own biased interest in imagining intergenerational romance. Stacking the evidence to his own advantage, he reasons that statistically many marriages in England and Wales "are contracted between parties of very unequal ages, and that the elder of these contracting parties is, in rather more than three-fourths of these instances, the bridegroom" (77).[69] Marrying Louisa to Bounderby satisfies her father's social and economic needs, while gratifying his restrained interest in Louisa as a sexual entity.

To please her father and her brother, Louisa marries a man old enough to be her father, effectually substituting the almost-incestuous dynamics of the January-May marriage in lieu of the more overtly incestuous tensions within the Gradgrind family. Louisa is rewarded for following the well-traveled path to normative heterosexuality, praised by both father and brother for her "choice" to marry Bounderby. Her father blesses her as his "favourite child," and "detaining her in his embrace" and soliciting her kisses, he tells her how pleased he is at her "sound decision" (80). And despite Louisa's evident distress on her marriage day, Tom commends her self-sacrifice: "What a game girl you are, to be such a first-rate sister, Loo!" (85). Thus far, the novel seems to follow a classically Freudian trajectory: incestuous desires are tempered by the incest taboo to drive individuals into sexual orientation and normative heterosexual relationships. Such (self-)congratulations are premature, however, because Louisa's marriage to Bounderby does not complete the Freudian blueprint for sexual normalcy. Since Louisa's marriage

[69] Dickens meaningfully pairs this chapter, "Father and Daughter," with the succeeding chapter "Husband and Wife."

is itself tainted with sexual improprieties, the taboo against incest fails to reinstate sexual stability and kinship order and only leads to more play with gender.

John Baird comments on Bounderby's decision to "resume a bachelor's life" when Louisa refuses to meet his ultimatum and return promptly to his house "by twelve o'clock at noon": "There is some reason to think that he had been little better than a bachelor all along….Indeed, there is little indication that Bounderby's relations with Louisa are any more intimate than his relations with Mrs. Sparsit" (183, 410-11). However, Humphreys claims that descriptions of Louisa and Bounderby after their honeymoon suggest that the couple has had sex (179). Nevertheless, despite Bounderby's initial desire, the marriage languishes—likely as the result of his sexual inadequacies (Mrs. Sparsit is fond of calling him a "Noodle") and Louisa's unwillingness ("she baffled all penetration"), and the novel attributes much of this incompatibility to their ages—"the differences," Mrs. Sparsit points out, "being such" (99, 142). After his honeymoon, Bounderby seems more aware of the sexual tensions present in his January-May marriage than before, blusteringly acknowledging to his rival, "You observe, Mr. Harthouse, that my wife is my junior. I don't know what she saw in me to marry me, but she saw something in me, I suppose, or she wouldn't have married me" (99). And the text has already established why this marriage would falter. No one could be surprised after Louisa's repugnant wiping of her cheek that sexual relations in the marriage would be strained, if not forced, and this January-May marriage's "perverse" taints of pedophilia, incest, and prostitution hinder its success at reconstituting fragmented gender identities. When Harthouse arrives in Coketown with his Byronic "what will be, will be" philosophy, he introduces *more* sexual disorder into the plot rather than representing

regulatory same-age, male-female, "natural" sexuality. With little regard for sexual propriety or social laws, Harthouse deems that he has "found it all to be very worthless," and, as Louisa's attraction for Harthouse grows, her compliance with expected feminine subservience lessens. Her gender identity is ironically less stable than it is before her marriage, and Louisa is less prone to sacrificing herself for the men in her life. She addresses her husband "coldly" and "with a proud colour in her face that was a new change" challenges his authority over her. "What is the matter with you?" she demands of Bounderby, before rebelliously dismissing her attempt to understand him: "You are incomprehensible this morning….Pray take no further trouble to explain yourself. I am not curious to know your meaning. What does it matter!" (148). After Louisa leaves her husband, she goes to her father—not only to seek the help that his masculinity affords, but also to challenge that very masculinity. Her father is confused by what he sees; Louisa is "so colorless, so dishevelled, so defiant and despairing, that he was afraid of her" (163). She laments her birth and criticizes the father that pushed her from incestuous desire into heteronormative sexuality and the larger system of gender inequality. Pointedly, she exacts without asking, "What have you done, O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here!" (163).

Dickens does not suggest that Louisa, or anyone, can remain in a pre-Oedipal state of gender and sexual freedom. Though the "Facts" of the incest taboo and normative heterosexuality do not explain everything, they do not disappear, and like other Victorian writers, Dickens does not even allow for the fulfillment of Louisa's extramarital desire. But, in permitting Louisa to return home and having Bounderby

accept the loss of his wife, Dickens returns to the family romance as a site for remedying, at least partially, the confusion of familial and sexual relations in the novel.[70] Louisa's return to the Gradgrind home does not drastically subvert gender relations or social order; rather, it provides a compromise in which the production of incestuous desire leads to a significantly improved state of gender normalcy.

Because the drive to exogamic marriage has already been fulfilled, Louisa and her father and brother can return to the state of incestuous longing that precedes gender determinacy, and Louisa's return to her incestuous home ironically leads to a reconsideration of the traditionally-masculine positions of her father and brother. The morning after Louisa's confrontation with her father, he questions his authority over her. Sitting by her bed, he explains that he has come to "mistrust" himself, for what he has done in the past, and for what he may do in the present and the future. Questioning whether he deserves her trust and whether he possesses "the right instinct," he prepares to speak for her behalf to Bounderby. He chastises himself for the education he has advocated for Louisa, concluding that it has fostered qualities in her that are "a little perverted" (181). Thomas Gradgrind acknowledges that the men in Louisa's life have accrued a "debt" to her from having taken from her more often than they have given, and he advocates that Bounderby, "so far her elder," accept responsibility for his part in the overall masculine abuse of Louisa: "we may all be more or less in the wrong, not even excepting you" (183). Because of the incestuous dynamics of their family and the

[70] As Baird notes in his essay, Louisa's body was considered her husband's property, and Bounderby could have sued for the restitution of conjugal rights. Baird refers to the 1838 case between Thomas Foreman Gape and his wife Fanny Louisa, in which the husband won his "rights" to his wife in ecclesiastical court after his wife left him. For a broader analysis of this issue, see Chapter Six , "A Husband's Right to His Wife's Body: Wife Abuse, The Restitution of Conjugal Rights, and Marital Rape" in Mary Lyndon Shanley's *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian Britain.*

January-May marriage, Gradgrind rethinks his claim to masculine power, and Dickens suggests that alternatives exist to prescribed patterns of gender formation when Louisa hopefully promises, "Dear father, you have three young children left. They will be different, *I* will be different yet, with Heaven's help" (205). Though shaken, Thomas Gradgrind becomes "a wiser man, and a better man" and he replaces his maniacal insistence on "facts and figures" with "Faith, Hope and Charity" (205). Her brother also eventually revises his masculine identity as the result of their "abnormal" relationship. Banished because of the robbery, Tom writes to Louisa on "paper blotted with tears, that her words had too soon come true, and that all the treasures in the world would be cheaply bartered for a sight of her dear face" (221). The brother who exploited his sister's "abnormal" love for him by prostituting her body reconsidered his abuse, and though his apology comes late, he makes her name his last word, dying "in penitence and love" for Louisa (222).

Dickens's manipulation of the incest theme in *Hard Times* proves more complex than critics have yet considered. While the novel's depiction of Bounderby recalls Dickens's early characterizations of intergenerational relationships as repulsively incestuous, the novel does not condemn incestuous desire, but rather suggests that inexplicable, extramarital and "deviant" yearnings can lead to improved gender relations. Normalizing social structures like marriage contribute to gender inequities, and greatly altering the theme from its predecessors, the novel suggests that incest is most problematic in its sanitized January-May marriage form yet demonstrates that incest is ultimately restorative when returned to play out in the father's home—unfulfilled, yet always lingering.

****

Same-aged partners suffer similarly in *Little Dorrit*, while the January-May marriage again provides a convenient site for displacing incestuous desires and restructuring gender identities.[71] Sadoff observes that "Amy and Clennam's marriage appears the perfect narcissistic paradise. The entire family genealogy (the space and time of engendering identity and difference) and the entire oedipal triangle (the structure of desire) collapse on this bride and groom" (242). As Sadoff suggests, incestuous relationships abound within this text, and multiple father-daughter romances organize a plot in which the kinship roles of father-husband-son and daughter-wife-mother often converge. Amy or "Little" Dorrit is just that: she is small, petite to the extreme, diminutive and childlike.[72] When Clennam first see her, he believes she is a "girl," and upon further scrutiny, he finds "she had all the manner and much of the appearance of a subdued child," calculating that "she might have passed in the street for little more than half" her age of twenty-two years (68, 67). Appearing even younger than her "little" predecessor Nell, Little Dorrit blurs the filial and the maternal; she is alternately known as "Little Mother" within this domestic prison pastoral, and she claims to the mentally-disabled Maggy that her two "little" names are "just the same" (183).[73] And though she is small, she dotes on her father and on Clennam with loving, wifely attention. When her

---

[71] Dickens finished writing *Little Dorrit* in May of 1857. He meets Ellan Ternan that August and legally separates from his wife the following year. Unsurprisingly, the same-aged couples of Arthur Clennam's parents, Affery and Jeremiah Flintwinch, and Pet Meagles and Henry Gowan are disastrous; moreover, the thought of Arthur marrying Flora Finching, his former sweetheart turned middle-aged, is ludicrous.

[72] In *The Companion to Little Dorrit* (London: Helm Information Ltd., 2003), Trey Philpotts notes the addition of "Little" to the early manuscript chapters, agreeing with John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson's *Dickens at Work* (London: Methuen, 1957) that Dickens came to the name "Little Dorrit" later in composition.

[73] *Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2002) by Susan C. Greenfield is a wonderful study of the rise of this theme in literature.

father is troubled, she watches over him in bed "at times kissing him with suspended breath, and calling him in a whisper by some endearing name" (249). Little Dorrit's ability to be "all" a woman can be to those near her has not escaped the notice of critics. Though Steven Wall claims in his 1998 introduction to the Penguin edition that Dickens's "stress on her innocence shouldn't be attributed to post-Freudian anxiety about attachment between daughters and fathers," other critics are less willing to overlook the intimations of incest and pedophilia in her relationships with Clennam and her father. Brenda Ayres deems that "She is the perfect Dickensian daughter, devoted to the exclusion of all else to the care of her father. The daughter acts as a mother and a wife to her father; and a mother to his other children" (77). Ayres also sees in Little Dorrit "an Electra complex" and notes the text's reference to "a classical daughter once—perhaps—who ministered to her father in prison, "comparing Little Dorrit to "the Euphrasia woman: the daughter who kept her father alive in prison through feeding him with her breasts" (247, 77).[74] This image of the breastfeeding daughter captures many of the incestuous tensions implicit in Little Dorrit's "nursing" of her father, and later, when Clennam's financial fall places him ironically in the former prison cell of her father, in

[74] Many Victorians were fascinated with the theme of women who breastfeed adults. In "What is a Golden Deed?" in *A Book of Golden Deeds* (London: Blackie & Son, Ltd., 1864), Charlotte Yonge details several examples of women breastfeeding prisoners in acts of compassion. Philpotts explains Dickens's interest the *Caritas Romana* or "Roman Charity" theme in art: "The usual depiction was of a manacled white-haired old man reclining on the lap of a young woman feeding him from her breast as gaolers watch outside the cell or executioners enter" (237). On another note, I have chosen not to elaborate on the Electra Complex as an issue within January-May marriages because it is so often associated with Freud's theory of "penis envy," which I find theoretically unsound. However, because the Electra complex is sometimes generalized as the "female" Oedipus complex, I believe Ayres's reference is important here.

Little Dorrit's "nursing" of her future husband.[75] Avrom Fleishman agrees that "Amy is both child and mother to her lover, as she had been to her father" (585).

Little Dorrit's nursing of her father-husband-child and of her future husband-father-child conveniently summarizes the complexity of kinship structures in this novel of confused familial allegiances (Clennam's mother turns out not to be his biological mother, after all). Appropriate to expectations of the domestic woman, her actions are dutiful and maternal, but they are sexually stimulating as well. Ayres proposes that Little Dorrit, like Dickens's other "little" women, is one who "can sexually arouse, but sex with her cannot be consummated, so that the man is always in a state of arousal" (77). But this reading pushes Little Dorrit further into the sexually taboo than she really is. Though she may look eleven, she is legally of age and legitimate material for both fantasy and fulfillment.[76] Though there is no reason to think her unchaste, there is likewise no reason to think her devoid of sexual desire. She marries Clennam, one of the few Victorian heroines to propose to her husband, and there is no evidence that their relationship will be non-sexual or that, as Ayres asserts, "Arthur does not seem sexually responsive or sexually interested in Little Dorrit" (78). Indeed, the novel reveals that Little Dorrit is sexualized from an early age and thereby eroticizes her for the reader. Her childhood admirer, John Chivery, "played with her in the yard" by pretending to lock her up, only releasing her in exchange for the payment of "real kisses" (228). Because of her poverty, Little Dorrit is always "lightly clad" throughout the first half of the novel, and her lack of proper clothing exposes how "delicate and slender she is" (185, 191). The shabbiness of

[75] The Marshalsea, where Mr. Dorrit and Clennam are imprisoned is inextricably connected to Dickens's own father, who was imprisoned for debt when Dickens was twelve-years-old.
[76] As I have noted previously, it was a felony to have sex with a girl under the age of ten and a misdemeanor to have sex with a girl under the age of twelve (Shanley 90).

her attire reveals her body to the reader and to other characters in tantalizing glimpses, a hole in her shoe allowing Clennam to touch a foot "like marble" (183). When she and Maggy are locked out of their prison home, Little Dorrit hazards physical and sexual violence on the dark streets of London: "They had shrunk past homeless people, lying coiled in nooks. They had run from drunkards. They had started from slinking men, whistling and signing to one another at bye corners, or running away at full speed." Little Dorrit's childlike body saves her from the "knot of brawling or prowling figures in [her] path," and identifies her as one who needs protection, like a child, from harm, but Dickens's attention to her physical vulnerability rests on a shared understanding of her sexualized status.

As "little" mother-daughter-lover, Little Dorrit can utilize the privileges of any one of her roles to promote the interests of the others. As Clennam's "dear child" and "poor child," she visits him in his lodgings at midnight, and "At no Mother's knee but her's," Clennam is tenderly nursed back to health when in prison (182, 848).[77] Precisely because of her associations with daughterly and maternal devotion, Little Dorrit is afforded the opportunities to touch, caress, and embrace without eliciting societal scorn. Soothing her father during one his attacks of self-pity, she "cling[s] to him with her arms," takes his arm and lovingly "trie[s] to put it around her neck." He eventually "suffers[s] her to embrace him, and take charge of him" and "let[s] his grey head rest against her cheek" (246). When Clennam kisses her hand "fervently" in thankfulness for her care, she allows her hand to linger "where it was, it seemed to court being restrained,"

[77] Like Dick Swiveller, Clennam is so sick that he is often unconscious, and upon waking he has no idea of the extent of Little Dorrit's role in his recovery.

and later, "the hand he held, crept up a little nearer to his face" (849). Just as Little Dorrit's childish appearance protects her when she is locked outside of the Marshalsea, her ability to enter and exit the familial positions of mother, daughter and wife works to extend her relationships with her father and with Clennam. Little Dorrit is thus "by far the best loved" of her father's three children, and she convinces the man to marry her who once discouragingly instructed her that "So far removed, so different, and so much older, I am the better fitted for your friend and adviser" (404).

Little Dorrit's story proves that intergenerational romance can make one "the best loved," because its incestuous connotations address multiple kinship needs within one relationship. However, whereas *The Cricket on the Hearth* and *David Copperfield* use the successful January-May marriage as a tool for revising gender roles and redistributing typically male power, *Little Dorrit* manipulates the incest taboo to foster a return to conventional masculine and feminine identities. It is difficult to put a finger on the places in this narrative where the January-May marriage and its incestuous connotations begin to glue together the fractured remains of gender identities and normative sexuality that litter the novel. Granted, Little Dorrit's relationships with older men follow many of the plot conventions typical of gender subversion within the larger January-May tradition. Until the very end, the reader is taunted with the possibility that the January-May couple will not unite, and the text emphasizes the fatherly role assumed by the January husband by stressing details such as Clennam's being twice Little Dorrit's age and by punctuating his addresses to her with "my child," "dear girl," and "dear child."[78] Moreover, like her

[78] Though Clennam is forty, he exaggerates his own age, telling Little Dorrit: "my child…I have passed, by the amount of your whole life, the time that is present to you" (404).

predecessors Nell, Dot, and Annie Strong, Little Dorrit assumes typically masculine roles in her relationships with her father and with Clennam. But the novel lays bare the contradictions inherent to the incest theme. In *Little Dorrit*, masculinities prove so pathetically weak and femininities seem so disruptively brazen that Dickens employs the January-May marriage between Little Dorrit and Clennam to restore gender and sexual conventions that have already been challenged.

Male figures of authority in *Little Dorrit* are troubled, perhaps more so than in any of Dickens's other January-May novels. In "Do It or Dorrit," Ruth Bernard Yeazell highlights the practical and sexual ineffectiveness of Clennam, and the other prominent men in the narrative are likewise useless—often causing more harm than good in the lives of those around them. Little Dorrit's father fulfills so many stereotypes of feminine helplessness that Alison Milbank deems him a "'female' in his situation and dependence" (107). His assumption of the hyper-paternal position of "Father of the Marshalsea" is pitiable; though his gentlemanly manners and former life of privilege endow him with additional respect within the prison, he takes more than he gives, accepting and expecting monetary tributes from debtors who leave the prison and from those who visit. Little Dorrit's brother Tip seems full of masculine potential, but he lazes away his youth and his share of the wealth, ultimately requiring his sister's assistance in later life as he did when young. Mr. Merdle, wealthy businessman, politician and father-in-law to Little Dorrit's sister Fanny, commits suicide when his financial plans crumble and he loses his fortune as well as the investments of all who associated with him. Not being "man" enough to stand up to his uncle's plan for him to marry a woman different than the one he loves and the mother of his child, Clennam's father largely fails in love and in life.

Henry Gowan successfully woos Pet but proves a lousy husband whose artistic vision, youthful charm and financial well-being quickly deteriorate. Even the frightening villain Monsieur Rigaud is absurdly ineffectual. His scheme to blackmail Clennam's mother fails and he dies in the ruins of her home. While Dickens presents unimpressive men in his other works, there never are so many as there are in *Little Dorrit*, and when the central male figure is flawed, as with David Copperfield, Oliver Twist, or Pip, it can be explained by the character's youth and the larger narrative development of the *bildungsroman*. Clennam and the other male figures in *Little Dorrit* do not enjoy these pretexts for their shortcomings. They fail to convey heroic masculinity on multiple levels—financially, emotionally, morally, and sexually.

Excepting Little Dorrit, who ably affects female submissiveness while performing masculine acts, most women in the novel likewise fall short of conveying appealing images of femininity. Little Dorrit's sister Fanny is a stereotypical bad daughter: selfish, hard, and "rather flaunting." Completely defying expectations of maternal sentiment, Mrs. Clennam is "beyond the reach of all changing emotions," and "with her cold grey eyes and her cold grey hair," she dominates Clennam, and, while he was alive, Clennam's father, who flees to China to escape her control (50). The character of Flora Finching irritates and annoys; though she is kind, she is unable to fulfill feminine gender expectations because (though the same age as Clennam) the middle-aged woman visually and behaviorally destroys his social and sexual fantasies of the feminine ideal.[79] Hopefully anticipating the reunion with his former lover, Clennam is crushed when he

[79] Most Dickens scholars agree that the character of Flora is based upon Beadnell. For details of Dickens's disappointed reunion with his aging sweetheart, see the chapter "Maria" in Slater, pages 49-76.

finally meets the woman who "always tall, had grown to be very broad too," and "Clennam's eyes no sooner fell upon the object of his old passion, than it shivered and broke to pieces" (164). Clennam's rejection of Flora leads directly to his pursuit of Pet Meagles, who, like Little Dorrit, is half his age, but, unlike Little Dorrit, mistakenly prefers the company of a pretentious misogynist "barely thirty" (218).[80] And Miss Wade, an unsympathetic caricature of Victorian lesbians, demonstrates Dickens's ideas of what could go wrong with women when they challenge conventional gender identities, lurking throughout the narrative and threatening to attract and brainwash dissatisfied women like Tattycoram to her seditious agenda.[81] Overall, the women in *Little Dorrit* are too insensitive to be considered daughterly, too domineering to be motherly, too ridiculously old and naively young to be wifely, or even too queer to be womanly.[82] Considering this crisis of gender that Dickens presents, it is unsurprising that he adapts the January-May marriage as a restorative agent in gender identity so that the legitimacy and stability of their marriage buries the disruptive effects of their implied incest.

Noteworthy differences exist between the relationship of Little Dorrit and Clennam and Dickens's other successful January-May marriages. Before the happy ending of this narrative, this novel dwells upon Little Dorrit's unrequited love for Clennam while he mourns his failure to court Pet, but the more typical pattern in *The*

---

[80] Rowan suggests that Gowan beats Pet (764).

[81] See Barbara Black's "A Sisterhood of Rage and Beauty: Dickens' Rosa Dartle, Miss Wade and Madame DeFarge, *Dickens Studies Annual* 26 (1998): 91-106 and Annamarie Jagose's "Remembering Miss Wade: Little Dorrit and the Historicizing of Perversity," *GLQ* 4.3 (1998): 423-51.

[82] The 1850's brought important new legislation concerning married women's property and divorce law before Parliament (which resulted in the defeat of the 1856 Married Women's Property Act and the establishment of a new Court of Divorce as the result of the 1857 Divorce Act). *Little Dorrit*'s unpleasant portraits of empowered women like Mrs. Clennam and Miss Wade sharply contrast that of Betsy Trotwood in *David Copperfield*, and suggest Dickens's reconsideration of the ramifications of what could be too much gender bending.

Cricket on the Hearth and *David Copperfield* involves the older husbands' concerns that their younger wives no longer love them. *Little Dorrit* extends John Chivery as a potential rival for a love triangle, but this youthful lover is no real threat and John even advances Little Dorrit's interest in Clennam, since he is so frustratingly oblivious to her desire. Additionally, in this novel consumed with financial gains and losses, economic power is more evenly distributed within the January-May marriage; indeed, financial equality seems necessary to its culmination, since Clennam will not marry Little Dorrit when he believes he stands to profit by his marriage. Only after she reveals that "I have nothing in the world," can she propose, "O my dearest and best, are you quite sure that you will not share my fortune with me now?" Ironically, the news of Little Dorrit's poverty is wonderful for Clennam and for the reader, and Dickens does not have to divulge Clennam's response to her proposal, because now that they are financial equals, his answer is evident. And even though the text has underlined the generation gap that separates Clennam and Little Dorrit, enjoying the mingling of roles in this family romance, it backpedals in the final chapter to normalize their intergenerational match. Whereas he earlier explains to Little Dorrit that "I counted up my years, and considered what I am, and looked back, and looked forward, and found that I should soon be grey. I found that I had climbed the hill, and passed the level ground upon the top, and was descending quickly," Clennam is revised in the final chapter as "the happy child" and is recast in a youthful position in relation to his friends Mr. Meagles and Daniel Doyce. In his fifties, Meagles appears as a "jolly father" to Clennam and calls him "my boy" (854). Dickens crafts Doyce as a "paternal character," releasing Clennam from his atonement in prison with the reward of a position in Doyce's business and fatherly supporting Clennam

when he stands at the altar with Little Dorrit. In the illustration "The Third Volume of the Registers," Clennam looks much younger than Doyce, and one could argue that he even looks younger than in earlier illustrations in the novel (Fig. 8). Although the text had earlier emphasized the difference between his age and that of Pet and Little Dorrit, the final image of Clennam is that of a young man. Dickens attempts to squelch the gender trouble that runs rampant earlier in the novel by glossing over the age difference and incestuous allusions in preparation of the return of normative heterosexuality, though the effectiveness of his erasure at such a late point in the narrative is questionable.

****

Dickens's varied use of the incest theme as an integral component of the January-May marriage is fascinating, and though many other nineteenth-century authors invoke the familial and sexual tensions initiated by the age differences of the marriage partners, no other writer manipulates this small leap in logic to such depth in so many separate texts. A pattern emerges in his novels that suggests a chronological move from simplistic characterizations of the January-May marriage as horrific incest to a much more complex use of the theme, though Dickens never appears to settle into a formulaic pronouncement of the theme's incestuous dynamics. Precisely because January-May marriages brought to readers' minds thoughts of nonstandard, improper sexual relations, they enjoyed a prominent place in Dickens's works, and they merit scholarly attention for what they reveal about the multiple possibilities the theme afforded.



Figure 8. Hablot K. Browne, detail of untitled illustration from *Little Dorrit*, 1857. Engraving.

Chapter Four: Visualizing Power: Age, Embodiment and Aesthetics

Seeing Gender through Age

"The tragedy of old age is not that one is old, but that one is young," asserts Lord Henry Wotton in Oscar Wilde's 1890 *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (244). Though this late nineteenth-century novel is only tangentially concerned with January-May romances, its emphasis on aging, art and gender make it a useful entry into this chapter on the aesthetic dimensions of January-May marriages as Dorian's portrait captures the essence of nineteenth-century fears about masculinity and aging. Growing visually hideous over time, the portrait produces its effect only in conjunction with Dorian's unvarying youthful beauty, and, as Lord Henry's quote suggests, it is the conscious loss of power to another that drives the tragedy of the binary of youth and age. "Your picture has taught me that....Youth is the only thing worth having. When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself," cries Dorian, "I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose?" (66). By selling his soul, Dorian wards off old age, which is magically reflected in his portrait. Because it is so dangerous, the image of idealized masculine beauty eroding over time is, like aberrant sexualities, kept in the closet—simultaneously hidden from and, through the novel's discourse, on display for public scrutiny. But, as Dorian comes to realize at the end of the novel, old age is not the only threat. Ascribing youth with cultural power proves just as dangerous, not merely to Dorian, but to men in general,

since social aesthetics linking beauty and power to youth inevitably curtail masculine authority as much as the conventional feminine version by giving it an expiration date.

Nonetheless, it is the privileging of youthful masculine beauty that directs the lives and actions of the novel's three main male characters: Dorian, Lord Henry and the artist Basil Hallward. The older men instruct Dorian to value his youth above all other means to power. In an exchange about Dorian's exposure to the sun, Lord Henry stresses why Dorian should protect his looks:

> "Because you have the most marvellous youth, and youth is the one thing worth having."
>
> "I don't feel that, Lord Henry."
>
> "No, you don't feel it now. Some day, when you are old and wrinkled and ugly, when thought has seared your forehead with its lines, and passion branded your lips with its hideous fires, you will feel it, and you will feel it terribly. Now, wherever you go, you charm the world. Will it always be so?" (62)

Lord Henry reckons youth as both a fleeting possession and a visible marker of power and attests that aging and the "decline" of life were of real concern to Victorian men who felt challenged by the aesthetics of youth. Though Lord Henry's comments vastly oversimplify the physical process and social reception of aging, they establish youth and old age as binaries much like masculinity and femininity that correlate directly to real power, and, more importantly, they suggest men's duplicity—however unwittingly—in a system that eventually curtails masculine privilege.

The popularity of the January-May marriage theme in nineteenth-century literature suggests a larger interest in probing the dynamic between age, visuality, gender and power. As Jonathan Crary has explained in *Techniques of the Observer*, the development of visual technologies during the nineteenth century such as the camera obscura and photography led to an increasingly visual culture invested in the exchange and valuation of aesthetic signs (12-14). As part of the growing print culture, images regulated aesthetic ideals, codifying physical traits like those associated with youth or muscularity with social power. The January-May marriage theme offered a convenient venue for visualizing the embodiment of gendered power since the triangular structure of the narrative contrasted aging masculinity with feminine and masculine youth, creating visual spectacles of age and gender for social perusal. Every January-May text from *Sense and Sensibility* to *Jude the Obscure* lingers over detailed descriptions of the physical bodies of the older husbands, younger wives, and young suitors, and readers are encouraged to envision the aesthetic images of these characters as they vie for authority and control within the narratives.

To theorize about the material bodies of literary and artistic characters might seem a contradiction in terms, but literature and art offer important venues for discussions of corporeality and its relation to gender because they draw attention to the discursive processes that lead to gender identification. Bodiless, characters become corporeal through the written word and painted line, and they give insight into the society that created and consumed them. Thus, like other visual markers of gender identity, age operates upon literary flesh and blood to create signs—wrinkles, gray hair, a different gait—that translate into degrees of power. Viewers have learned, however misguidedly,

to correlate signs of age that are written on the surface of the body (and by age I mean not just "old" age, but "youth," "middle" age, or any respective age) to interior conditions such as fertility, vitality, knowledge and health, which render an individual powerful in society. The January-May marriage operates visually through cultural assumptions, often times reinforcing ageist and sexist stereotypes of the body while ironically providing a means for a critique of gender.

The aesthetic dimension of the age and gender nexus draws attention to critical discussions about the role of the body in identity formation. While movements to de-center the physical body as the locus of sexual difference liberated gender theory from binary constructions that equated genitalia with identity, some feminist theorists have urged a renewed discussion about physical markers of gender and how those markers are read by society. Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter*, for example, addresses concerns raised in light of the theories expressed in *Gender Trouble*, which postulates that gender, indeed "sex" itself, is performative and not biological in nature. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler clarifies her awareness of the importance of the body but cautions against a critical empowering of the body as key to sexual difference:

> The point of such an exposition is not only to warn against an easy return to the *materiality* of the body or the materiality of sex, but to show that to invoke matter is to invoke a sedimented history of sexual hierarchy and sexual erasures which should surely be an *object* of feminist inquiry, but which would be quite problematic as a *ground* of feminist theory. (Butler's emphasis 49)

Butler maintains that the body should be read as a sign, subject to discursive interpretations, rather than as subject of sexual identities. Yet for theorists like Elizabeth Grosz, this critical wariness regarding the body restricts the potential of feminist theory and ultimately ignores the importance of bodily difference to Western patriarchy and a long history of women's repression. Grosz argues,

> there is still a strong reluctance to conceptualize the female body as playing a major role in women's oppression. Few concepts have been as maligned or condemned within feminist theory, with monotonous charges of biologism, essentialism, ahistoricism, and naturalism continuing to haunt those who use it. More recently, few concepts seem so readily embraced while at the same time undergoing a process of sanitization or neutralization—that is, a strange de-corporealization—by those feminist and cultural theorists who insist on the *discursivization* (if I may so name it) of bodies as a mode of protecting themselves from their materiality. (31)

Although the precise relationship of the body to gender is here a divisive critical point, it highlights the relevance of ongoing conversations about sexuality and embodiment. What I want to suggest in this chapter is that rethinking the body's relationship to power does not signify a simplistic return to equating gender with innate physical difference. The aim of this chapter is therefore to expand both critical positions represented by Butler and Grosz by showing how age, an attribute inextricably linked to the body, aids the understanding of bodies as material realities that are visually coded as gendered texts. Rather than ignoring the issue or protecting my critical perspective from issues of

materiality, I want to encourage a larger revisioning of corporeality and of male, as well as female, embodiment that acknowledges the significance of cultural assumptions about the aesthetics of aging.

Age, while of the body, resists positive determinations of gender identity as constructed through "fixed" markers such as a penis, a vagina, or breasts because age is transitory in nature, constantly rewriting one's contract with gender and power. Though Butler alludes to gender's dependency on the unstable component of time, she neglects to complete the association between genders and ages in flux. She writes, "Construction not only takes place *in* time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms; sex is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration" (Butler's emphasis 10). Sexed bodies are also aged bodies, and the temporal and social processes that construct aging contribute to the formation of gender identities. Yet age proves a more individualized and more negotiable trait than gender. Even when examining one's age at a specific place in time, that age is only relevant in relation to the ages of the others with whom that individual shares power. Like conventional male/female binaries, old age and youth often suggest the privileging of one over the other, though as I have suggested, these power divisions are unsettled, and the precariousness of one's possession of power as a body in time ultimately challenges gender as a stable entity.

Theorists of aging such as Margaret Cruikshank and Margaret Morganroth Gullette have asserted that gender and aging have much in common. Both gender and age are theoretically connected to the physical body, but both are performatively realized. Though still a controversial field, critical age studies argues that aging, like gender, is

socially constructed, and even the discourse about aging within mainstream gerontology reflects movements in gender studies to differentiate between the physical and the theatrical.[83] The sex / gender divide in gender theory parallels the distinguishing categories of chronological age (one's age in years), social age (one's age as performed by the individual and received by society), and physiological age (one's age in terms of physical strengths and weaknesses) among theorists of aging.[84] Additionally, both gender and age support hierarchal systems of power; in Western culture, ample evidence suggests that society often idealizes youth when compared with age, just as it often values masculinity over femininity, though neither binary operates independently of one another or other identity factors such as race, class and sexuality. Rethinking masculinity and femininity via age supports reading gender as a composite category, and Judith Kegan Gardiner, one of the first to advocate using age to refine current conceptualizations of gender, maintains that viewing gender and age as developmental rather than static categories will help to free both identities from essentialist thought and to assuage the power inequities that they foster.

Yet as Gardiner acknowledges, the correlation between age and gender has been an understudied area of exploration. Over the past two decades, feminist scholarship has drawn increased attention to the subject, but consequently most of the current scholarship about age and gender challenges the double bind of ageism and sexism and thus focuses on rescuing gerontology (literally, as Cruikshank points out, the study of old men) from a male-centered bias and strives to empower women in later life (174). While Betty

[83] See *The Need for Theory: Critical Approaches to Social Gerontology*, eds. Simon Biggs, et al. (Amityville, N.Y.: Baywood Publishing Co., 2003.)
[84] See *Connecting Gender and Ageing: A Sociological Approach*, eds. Sara Arber and Jay Ginn. (Buckinghm: Open UP, 1995) 4-12.

Friedan's *The Fountain of Age* and Barbara Macdonald's *Look Me in the Eye* are important works in the field of aging and gender studies, in focusing on issues concerning maturing women, this feminist approach has overlooked the subversive implications of age and aging on men and masculinity and has largely ignored critical arguments that remove gender from a biological framework. Thus, in looking at the nineteenth-century January-May marriage theme, I want to emphasize not only age and gender as spectacles produced and perceived in a specific social contexts but also the effects of these performances on conventionally gendered and aged repositories of power. Consequently, though much work remains to be done on the effects of women's aging in nineteenth-century literature, this chapter focuses on the aging male figure and views him in contrast with his youthful rivals for power.[85] While images of January-May marriages beg analysis of the visual construction and consumption of young male and female bodies, it is their attention to the aging male body that distinguishes them from stabilizing visual codes of authority. I maintain that because men wielded economic and legal power throughout the nineteenth century over women within their same class, the visible effects of aging on men and an accompanying loss of male power are of special importance to those interested in either the subversion or affirmation of gendered power.

Importantly, the January-May marriage theme does not suggest that women must be young to be beautiful or to exert power in society, or, conversely, that aging implies only a decline in social power for older men. While the theme's parodic dimension

---

[85] In most cases, the January-May marriage theme excludes the figure of the aging woman. One notable exception that merits scholarly attention is Flora Finching in Dickens's *Little Dorrit*. Flora, the romantic interest of Arthur Clennam in her youth, is portrayed as unattractive and annoying in middle-age. Now forty years old, Clennam hopes to marry Pet Meagles and then does marry Little Dorrit, both women half his age.

unabashedly draws upon centuries of ageist and sexist stereotypes, including myths of impotency, fertility, desirability, heterosexuality and imbedded aesthetic cultural norms, the January-May marriage encourages the reader to reimagine the forces at work in ageism and sexism. In one sense, women of all ages benefit from the aesthetic drama of the January-May marriage, while men universally suffer. Playing upon social models of beauty, images conjured by the January-May marriage theme are especially convenient opportunities for attacking male privilege since both the older male and younger male figures often find themselves in compromised positions because of the effects of aging. The young wife's claim to power is linked to her age, but, because the relationship uncovers a weakness facing all men, her triumph extends to women in general, who as participating witnesses of the January-May spectacle are invited to mock masculine bastions of authority. Conversely, the aesthetic images of older husband and younger wife could also be used conservatively to critique specific legal and social advances that women claimed during the nineteenth century and to lament the dishonored condition of a symbolic fallen patriarch, and, by implication, society. Younger wives could be easily rendered as callous, mercenary individuals whose feminist beliefs and dangerous sexuality undermine idealized marriage unions. Furthermore, inscribing the singular figure of the older husband with the blame for women's brazen assumption of their rights potentially frees other men from responsibility in women's oppression and rebellion, effectively reaffirming all other forms of masculine authority except for that of the older January husband who is deemed having been foolish enough to wed a younger May bride.

In nineteenth-century art, the visual narratives move away from such explicit acknowledgement of the economic and sexual motivations driving some older man-younger woman relationships. Nineteenth-century depictions of January-May marriages often simultaneously urge both viewers' empathetic pity and anxiety for the older husband's fallen status and silent satisfaction at the wife's coup d'etat. Relishing the ambivalent responses prompted by the topic, William Quiller Orchardson centered several of his narrative paintings on the power inequities of the January-May marriage, and his work stages the January-May marriage in three distinct phases—the beginning, middle, and end of the romance. *The First Cloud* (1887) portrays an initial marital dispute between an older husband and younger wife, *Mariage de Convenance* (1883) captures a January-May couple in the midst of their troubled marriage, and *Mariage de Convenance- After!* (1886) reveals the older husband alone, presumably left by his wife for another man. All three paintings rely upon their canvases to stage the dramatic tension between youth and age as a visual argument, and they suggest that assumptions about age can effectively complicate, if not reverse, traditional gender roles. Since Orchardson was himself almost fifty when he painted *Mariage de Convenance*, one might assume that the works sympathize with the plight of the rejected husband, disparaging the wife for making a mercenary alliance and then neglecting to fulfill her marriage vows. But the paintings inadvertently call attention to the body of the older husband, challenging notions of the authority of men's gaze by emphasizing male abjection and by recognizing women's subjective participation in the visual spectacle. Although artistic depictions of January-May marriages existed earlier in the nineteenth century, the paintings by Orchardson and Blair-Leighton from the 1870s and 80s

represent the climax of the image's popularity in nineteenth-century visual art and suggest a direct correlation between the aesthetic image and contemporary worries about the decline of male power through the law.[86] Neither the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 nor the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878 provided married women with equal legal recourse to her property, earnings, or right to exit a marriage, but both marked progressive reforms in favor of women's equality and opened doors for later legislation such as the Summary Jurisdiction Act of 1895, which was more lenient on adulterous wives and supported women's ability to leave abusive husbands prior to filing for legal separations. Citing a parody of *The First Cloud* in *Punch* in which the older husband is cast as a painter who is addressing the figure of his younger wife, his model, who is leaving the room, Joseph Kestner links the canvas to the public's widespread interest in marital breakdown and the increased legal powers of women in regards to marriage (Fig. 9). *Punch* accompanied its parody of *The First Cloud* with the quatrain:

> Yes, you can go; I've done with you, my dear.
> Here comes the model for the following year.
> (To himself) Luck in odd numbers—Anno Jubilee—
> This is Divorce Court Series Number Three. (qtd. in Kestner 169)

Like Browning's Andrea Del Sarto, the husband pretends he retains control of his departing wife, but the image and verse contend that the new legal rights of married women supplant traditional male authority. The aesthetic image of January-May marriages provides a rich medium for investigating such challenges to masculine

[86] See the discussion of John Everett Millais's *Married for Rank* (1853) in chapter four.

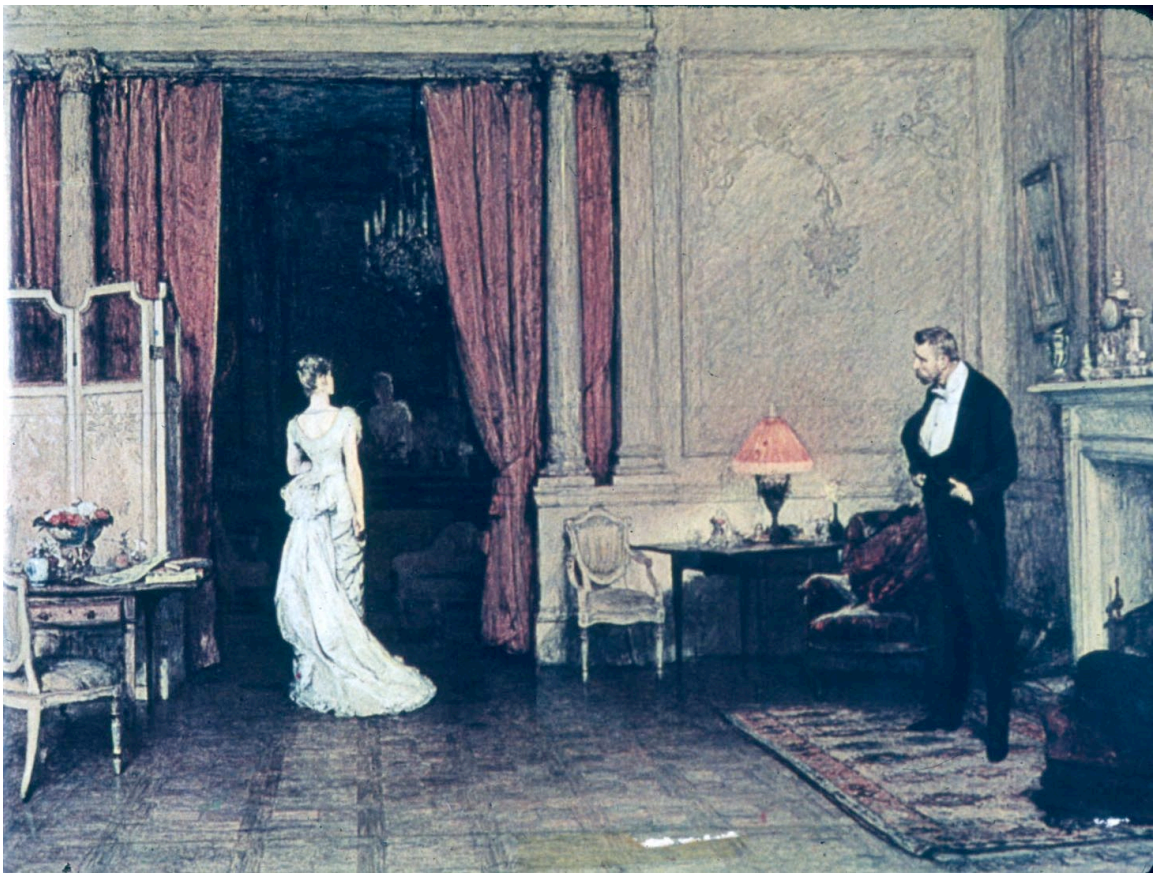


Figure 9. William Quiller Orchardson, *The First Cloud*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 832 x 1213 mm. The Tate Gallery.

authority, and it is important that these narrative paintings be interpreted in their historical context.

In his 1899 study *British Contemporary Artists*, Cosmo Monkhouse applauds the dramatic effect of *The First Cloud*, which he suggests could "furnish the germ of a three-volume novel" (183). Monkhouse's comments collapse divisions between art, literature and life, suggesting that Orchardson's January-May paintings capture the "tragedy" of an "old story," a narrative that "it is feared will go on repeating itself till love and money cease to be" (183). Though Monkhouse takes care to differentiate Orchardson's artistic agenda from the more outright didacticism of Hogarth's earlier *Marriage à la Mode*, he nevertheless reads the figures of aging husband and younger wife as commentary on a social "tragedy," and deems Orchardson a "man of good sense and right feeling" in his portrayal of events. For Monkhouse, *The First Cloud* is clearly a conservative critique of the growing independence of the "new" woman and her challenges to male power.Yet to read the image reductively as a critical statement of the effects of feminine liberty on traditional marriage misses the overwhelming anxiety that the canvas displays over the loss of male power. Connecting the painting more directly with growing nineteenth-century concerns over women's ability to sue for divorce, Kestner asserts, "Orchardson did indeed experience anxieties about the function of males in the novel climate of advancing divorce legislation" and observes that "the masculine paradigm within marriage was exploding under the press of new judicial formulations which males could not ignore" (169). Here, the older male husband becomes the embodiment of and the scapegoat for challenged male authority. Already subversive in its melodramatic rendering of a scenario that captured public interest because of contemporary divorce

legislation and Matrimonial Causes Acts of the 1880's, the play of the gaze between husband, wife, and viewer demonstrates the January-May marriage's peculiar ability to draw attention to the aging male body as a weak figure within the larger body of masculine control. While the husband directs his attention to his wife, she elects not to recognize or return his gaze, and looking outside the image, her vantage negates her husband's power, as well as the viewer's, by directing her eyes elsewhere and turning her back to inquiring eyes. If she remains a part of the drama, she defines her position by being on her way out—exiting the theatrical display through the painting's red, stage-like curtains. Although the husband's gaze remains on the wife, he appears a shunned and ineffectual being who is deprived of agency, and instead of brandishing subjective authority, he becomes the visual object as the viewer's eyes return to him. With his chin down, shoulders stooped, and head extended, the frustrated husband conveys a submissive model of masculinity, and his hands, shoved into his pockets, represent his inability to exert control within the marriage.

Judged in 1884 by the Art Journal to be "a very fine picture—a sermon—and a dismal tragedy," *Mariage de Convenance* (Fig. 10) tenders a similar paradigmatic image of the spectacular bodies of husband and wife (qtd. in Kestner 168). As in *The First Cloud*, while the husband imploringly stares at his younger wife attempting to bring her thoughts back to their dinner and to their marriage itself, she resists his advances and limits her participation within the dramatic imagery and within their marriage. Far removed from domestic bliss, the husband and wife allow viewers to envision the tension and boredom of marital breakdown, vicariously experiencing the excitement of a

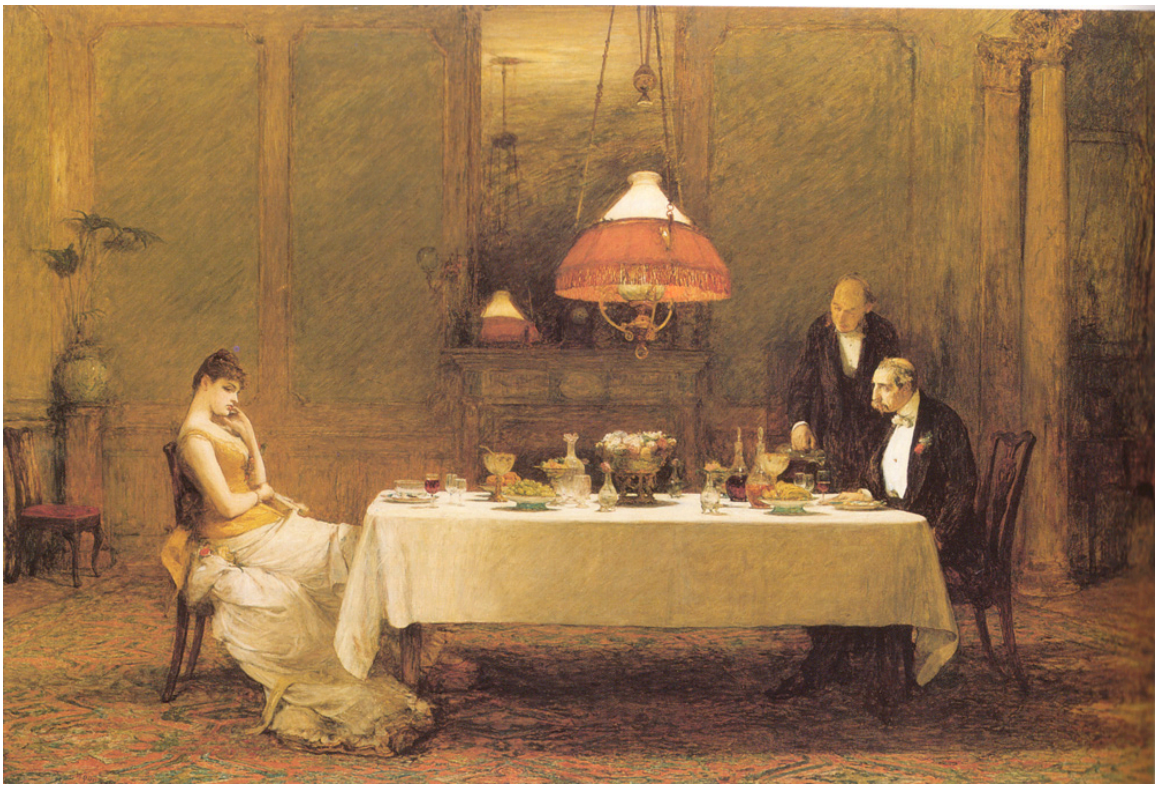


Figure 10. William Quiller Orchardson, *Mariage de Convenance*, 1883. Oil on canvas, 104.8 x 154.3 cm. Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries.

dysfunctional relationship and simultaneously reinforcing their own aesthetic assumptions about age, economics, sexuality, compatibility and gendered power. The painting makes sense to its audience, who applies the gendered economy of the day to interpret the painting's title.

Physical markers of age carry the visual argument. The wife's hourglass figure and youthful complexion contrast the pouting immaturity that her posture conveys and distinguish her as the prototypical Victorian woman-child. Sulkily, she displays her larger discontent with little concern for affecting customary courtesy or dutiful submission. In contrast, her husband's image conveys to the viewer the rest of the story: though dignified and evidently wealthy, her husband is distinctly older—old enough that, excepting the painting's title, the image could represent a different familial scene in which a father's advice is unwelcome to a wayward daughter. His graying and balding head connects him to the middle-aged servant who is positioned beside him and suggests an additional correlation between the loss of status afforded by age and class. More subtle signs of aging further the pat implication that the couple's age difference drives the couple's unhappiness and the husband's disempowered position. Though not heavyset, the husband displays a thick upper torso, and his posture, slouching forward instead of back, suggests he is middle-aged. Moreover, the sagging jowls, sunken eyes and bushy brows of the husband (all painted with fewer fine details than the wife's features) carefully construct his age (in conjunction with his wife's) as the root of the marital problem.

The painting's message clearly intends a degree of sympathy for the older husband. He is captured in the moment of both extending himself and finding himself rejected in a cycle of hope and loss which the painting implies has happened before. Thus, the older husband is ironically not only feminized by his sensitive deference to his wife's dour mood, but also because he evokes the viewer's pity. The *Art Journal* described, "At the one end of the richly-appointed table sits the young wife—ambitious, disappointed, sullen, unutterably miserable. At the other end of the table sits the husband—old, blasé, roué, bored too, and the more pitiable in that he has exhausted all his feelings and has only boredom left" (qtd. in Kestner 168). The *Art Journal*'s interpretation of the painting correctly depicts the abject state of the husband and wife, and in deeming the husband "the more pitiable" denotes that, however miserable the younger wife is, she has not "exhausted all [her] feelings." Pity for the husband stems from an assumption of his loss of wife and power and from the inference that her options are greater than his. While the servant pointedly fills the husband's glass, the painting urges the viewer to commiserate with the husband as he turns to his wine for comfort.

Yet amidst the pity, the painting displays a degree of contempt for conventional masculine authority and seemingly delights in its subversion. The *Art Journal*'s depiction of the older husband as a roué suggests that viewers were keenly aware of the husband's complicity in his own demise. If the younger wife and the power she wields are painful to her husband, they can be read as due punishment for his rakish lifestyle while a young man and for his continued participation in systems of male privilege. Kestner asserts that "Masculinity as constructed by power, maleness, fortune, career would appear to be under siege in *Mariage de Convenance*" (168). Orchardson develops

this disruptive potential even more clearly in his related painting *Mariage de Convenance- After!* in which the sensationalism of the title underscores the public interest in witnessing the spectacle of masculinity defeated.

In *After!* the table is set for one, and the decanter of wine is prominently displayed as evidence of the husband's persistent need to drown his sorrows in drink (Fig. 11). Abandoned by his wife, he sits alone, slumped before the fire in an attitude of helplessness and despair. Though he wears evening attire, his appearance is disheveled. His shirt protrudes from his vest, and he appears to have given up on appearances. Either because years have passed since the scene at the table or because the marital tensions have drained him, his face looks noticeably older than in *Mariage de Convenance*. His eyes now have drooping bags below them, and his chin doubles as it rests on his chest. Yet, frozen in youthful beauty, the portrait of his wife on the wall looks down on him in judgment, condemning the objectification of women by her spouse and society and redirecting attention to the theatrical display of despondency and loss by the male body. In this image, the gaze is even more clearly focused on the husband than in the other paintings in the series, and the regard given to the painting by the public suggests the popular desire to view the January-May marriage's anticipated conclusion. Moreover, while the figure of the deserted older husband continues to solicit sympathy, his destitute state appears suitable retribution for his former sexual deviancies as a roué and as a January husband. Kestner explains, "it is clear that his promiscuous past life, recognized by reviewers, has now been punished by the wife who abandons him" (168). Nominated as the picture of the season in 1886 by the *Portfolio* and the *Illustrated London News*, *After!* fulfilled staid social expectations of age differences in marriage

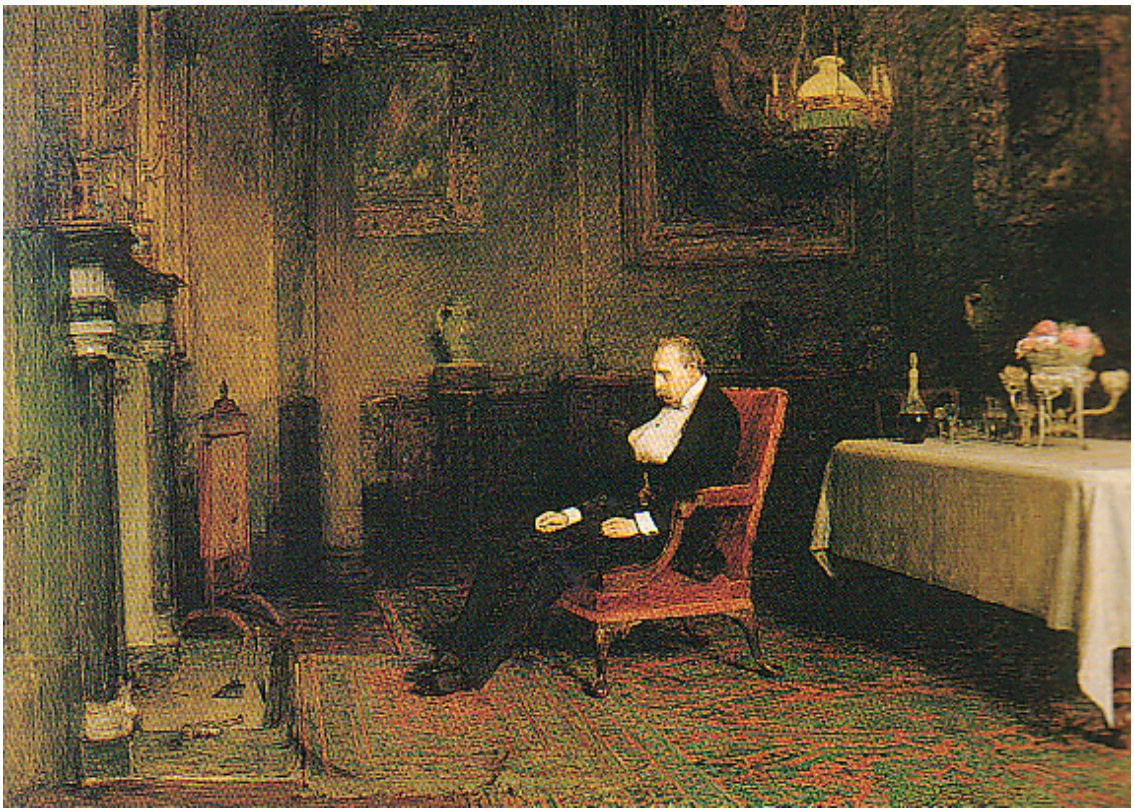


Figure 11. William Quiller Orchardson, *Mariage de Convenance—After!*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 111.6 x 168.7 cm. Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums.

while projecting social fears (and hopes) of a masculinity that has been disciplined and punished (Nunn 64).

Because the image of masculinity thwarted via the January-May marriage resonated within the public imagination and because it was disseminated throughout the literature of the early nineteenth century, other artists readily seized upon the theme's potential to convey the visual argument that aging disrupts conventional understandings of gender and power. Edmund Blair-Leighton's *Till Death Do Us Part* (1879) depicts a newlywed January-May couple walking down the church aisle, and the visual representation of the ages of the partners works ironically with the painting's title—the final promise within traditional wedding vows (Fig. 12). Here, the implications of "until death do us part" appear much more immediate, as an elegantly dressed young wife demurely, perhaps sadly, casts her eyes down as she leaves the church on the arm of her much older husband. The sexual tensions that viewers have come to expect from January-May alliances seem likely to erupt, and a well-dressed young man, possibly a former lover, tries to catch the wife's eyes as she passes. If the young wife and lover's downcast expressions can be read as evidence of the conventional January-May romantic triangle, then the title's implications that death will soon release the wife from her wedding vows prove optimistic.

But the title has darker and more problematic insinuations that rely on cultural fears of aging and death that are grafted onto the male body. Though the groom's appearance is notably slender and upright, his rigid posture and snowy white hair emphasize his advanced years. The viewer might initially assume that the title refers to the likelihood of the husband's dying before his wife, but through the image of young and

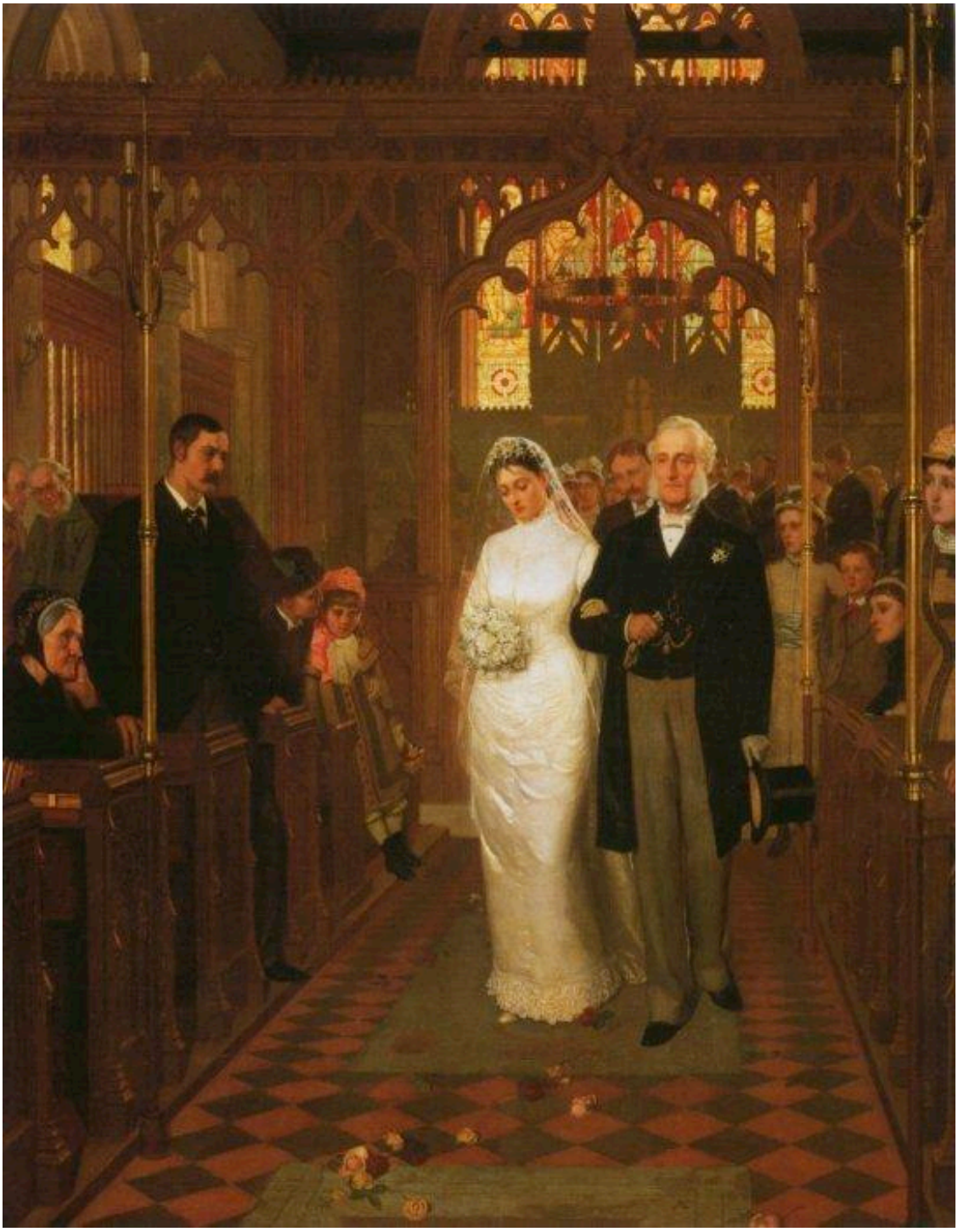


Figure 12. Edmund Blair-Leighton, *Till Death Do Us Part*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 59.5 x 43.5 in. Forbes Magazine Collection.

old bodies intertwined, the title subtly implies that the bride is marrying death itself. Yet, unlike Orchardson's images, *Till Death Do Us Part* avoids leading the viewer into pity for one spouse over another. The figure of the January husband underscores the complexity of power relations within gender and age constructions and fatalistically proposes that only death, the great leveler, will resolve the dynamic power struggle. Blair-Leighton suggests that all who are involved in this romantic triangle deserve the viewer's pity; each exert a unique form of power within the image, and each suffers from composite configurations of age and gender.

Consequently, the visual perspectives offered by the painting are complex and multidirectional; the rest of the frame is filled with onlookers, enthralled by the spectacle of this union of old and young. Though all members appear solidly middle-class, their varying age and gender combinations belie their differing personal investments in the power redistributions initiated by the January-May marriage. Behind the young man stand a young boy and a young girl. Representing the power inequalities of same-aged relationships, the boy pulls the girl, who looks rather uncomfortable, to him as he whispers teasingly in her ear. The reactions of the other viewers are varied. In the background, middle-aged men whisper to one another as they nod at the bride and groom with knowing smiles, while in the foreground, women of various ages quietly contemplate what such unions mean concerning gender roles and traditional allotments of power. An older woman with a widow's cap solemnly reflects on the masculine social privilege that affords the older husband with such an opportunity in his late life. Young women ponder intergenerational marriage as a potentially advantageous alliance. Rather

than using the visual image to convey simplistic modes of power, Blair-Leighton aesthetically captures the instability of power in January-May marriages.

However, the mid-Victorian interest in the visualization of the January-May marriage that influenced the paintings of Blair-Leighton and Orchardson often proved more openly hostile to the figure of the January husband. Though as I have stated earlier, almost all January-May texts conjure visual images of aged bodies to support their manipulation of gendered power, there is an increased interest in spectacular manifestations of the January-May marriage during the mid-Victorian period. Much of this, as Kestner describes in relation to Orchardson's art, stems from specific legislation regarding women's rights in marriage, and I want to suggest that this amplified attention to January-May aesthetics also grows from journalistic accounts in the popular press of marital discord that began with the Divorce Act of 1857, the rising popularity of sensation fiction during the 1860s among the middle class, and a mounting social antipathy toward patriarchal authority. Examining two literary works of literature from this period, Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1869) and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872), I hope to demonstrate how, prior to the work of Orchardson and Blair-Leighton, the January-May image operated via narrative discourse to transgress normative gender relations. Like sensation fiction, the January-May rubric was firmly grounded in heterosexual morality though it threatened to collapse boundaries between aberrant and acceptable behaviors. In both *The Ring and the Book*, which I examine as sensational poetry, and *Middlemarch*, which I examine as sensational realism, the older husband's body comes under scrutiny as a public document. These works emphasize the male body as text, specifically crafting through discourse an image of the aging male

body as unattractive—a visual metaphor for the blight of male systems of domination and control. Though this spectacle relies on ageist stereotypes about beauty and cultural fears of aging, this critique of the January husband proves effective, offending even those individuals seeking to preserve male privilege, who like Dorian Gray witness their own physical and social demise in the distortedly mirrored image. Thus, after subjecting the body of the older husband to public scrutiny and ridicule, the spectacle in these texts includes the destruction and disposal of his body—a reassuring gesture that contains the horror of aging, which I will explore more fully in chapter five.

Sensational Bodies in *The Ring and the Book*: The January-May Marriage on Trial

When the Divorce Act of 1857 removed divorce proceedings from the ecclesiastical courts and created a public court for divorce proceedings, the ensuing trials that showcased husbands and wives provided ample fodder for the popular press, which recounted sordid stories of marital abuse and adultery for mass delectation. *The Times* and other newspapers offered daily installments that covered the infidelity, violence, and heartache of marital breakdown, and critics have traced the public scrutiny on divorce to shifting perceptions of marriage and gender later in the century. A. James Hammerton finds that "The vivid window on marriage which was opened to the public by press reports from the new Divorce Court after 1857 was one vital factor stimulating change in attitudes to marriage by the end of the century" (102). Because the Divorce Act of 1857 made the dissolution of marriage vows more accessible to the middle class, marriage—considered by many to be central to social and moral regulation—now came under

increased scrutiny. Via the divorce court proceedings, the behaviors of individual husbands and wives became matters of public perusal and debate. Although many divorce lawsuits alleged wives' adulterous conduct, divorce records demonstrate increasing social intolerance for men's infidelity.[87] The minutiae of women's daily actions were openly dissected to discern their share of responsibility in the marital discord, but men were also held accountable for their contributions to the strife. What it meant to be a good husband and a good man became a topic of conversation among the middle class like never before. And, no matter if the coverage promoted a progressive or conservative agenda regarding gender, the popular press quickly found that visual images of the parties in litigation carried their points by playing on aesthetic arguments and sentimental appeals.

True stories of marital breakdown influenced the literary motifs of the mid-Victorian period, and the rise of the sensation novel during the 1860s reflects widespread anxieties surrounding marriage due to the disruption of masculine and feminine identities through well-publicized indictments of husbands and wives. Like the exposure of private marital affairs through British courts, sensation fiction offered tantalizing details of adulterous desire, dark secrets, and gender reversals through a medium that was legitimate, though barely respectable. Sensitive to Victorian principles of decorum and morality, sensation novels buffered their titillating narratives by couching them in familiar middle-class settings and within traditional marriage structures, and, because their writers strove to differentiate sensation novels from the immoralities found in working-class publications like the penny dreadfuls, they were more readily accepted as

[87] See Hammerton, pages 115-17.

decent literary material. However, like divorce court journalism, the scandalous nature of the plots kept sensation fiction on the fringes of social acceptability. Unsurprisingly, this marginalized literary form immediately incorporated the January-May marriage into its formula, since the older husband / younger wife scenario was, like divorce cases, sanctified by the law though unavoidably disruptive. The first sensation novel, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860), thus placed the age difference between Laura Fairlie and Sir Percival Glyde as a central component of its thrilling exploration of a marriage gone wrong, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) likewise developed its narrative around the bodies of young Lucy Graham and the aging Sir Michael Audley. Divorce court journalism, sensation fiction, and the January-May marriage theme garnered their success from negotiating the thin line between proper and improper subjects.

Though epic poetry usually aspires to rise above sensational domestic concerns, Browning's *The Ring and the Book* enjoyed the gray area of semi-respectability fostered by his subject matter, which detailed from multiple perspectives the true story of a seventeenth-century murder of a young wife and her parents by her much older husband. Several scholars have established connections between Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, sensation fiction, and the court coverage of divorce and crime through contemporary periodicals. Sue Lonoff's "Multiple Narratives & Relative Truths: A Study of *The Ring and the Book*, *The Woman in White*, and *The Moonstone*" notes numerous similarities between the epic poem and its novelistic precursors.[88] Mary Ellis

[88] Because of the "sordid" nature of Browning's source material in the Old Yellow Book, Browning apparently repeatedly attempted to interest novelists in the story before undertaking the project himself.

Gibson's "The Criminal Body in Victorian Britain: The Case of *The Ring and the Book*" convincingly argues that the poem participates in a larger social desire to regulate society by encouraging the dissemination of public information about trials and punishment. Also connecting the poem to *The Woman in White*, Gibson concludes that the poem's interest in the criminal body makes visible a public spectacle that was abolished through legislative reform. Browning's treatment of the body as a spectacular argument is clear, and the poem is self-consciously theatrical. Browning writes,

> Each incident of this strange human play
> Privily acted on a theatre
> That seemed secure from every gaze but God's,—
> Till, of a sudden, earthquake laid wall low
> And let the world perceive wild work inside. (XII. 544-48)

The Ring and the Book promises an uncensored peek at the actors' bodies in this private play, and as Gibson has recognized, "Whether it is conceived in the ostensible nakedness of classical sculpture or as an object of morbid anatomy, the body in *The Ring in the Book* is revealed in the text; indeed it may be revealed *as* text" (81). Yet this textual interest in the criminal body discussed by Gibson is further distinguished by its display of the aged body although commentary about the importance of the January-May marriage to the poem's various depictions of embodied masculinity and femininity on trial has been largely cursory and dismissive. For example, Ann Brady's "The Metaphysics of Pornography in *The Ring and the Book*" begins, "Guido's marriage to Pompilia was a

---

Henry James made note of the prose qualities in the poem in "The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*," though he deemed Browning's poem a failure.

mismatch by age, class, education, and temperament," but never returns to investigate this initial claim about their age difference. However, I believe that the disparity in ages between Guido and Pompilia is essential to the poem's subversive revisioning of gender and power. Guido is scrutinized not only as a criminal body, as Gibson describes, but as an old man.[89] Literally and figuratively, Guido's body is on trial, and it is as older husband that he is found guilty and summarily punished.

Though there is no evidence to suggest that Guido would have been a better husband or a better man if married to someone his own age, the insecurities that arise from his marriage to Pompilia, who is presented as thirty-three years his younger, exacerbate his anxious condition and his misogynistic retribution and underscore the injustice of his actions. Physically they are described as night and day, and their ages, juxtaposed against one another, inform the reader's visual image. Browning describes the marriage partners in Book I:

> A beak-nosed bushy-bearded black-haired lord,
> Lean, pallid, low of stature yet robust,
> Fifty years old,—having four years ago
> Married Pompilia Comparini, young,
> Good, beautiful, at Rome, where she was born. (782-86)

Elsewhere, Pompilia describes her husband as short "hook-nosed and yellow," and largely resembling an owl (VII. 395-96). Browning is well aware of the January-May tradition that he is invoking with these descriptions, and shortly afterwards, he

[89] Gibson also does not comment on the fact that in *The Woman in White* the "criminal" bodies Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde are distinguished by their age and by their January-May relationships, in addition to their criminality.

acknowledges both the theatricality and the assumptions that automatically accompany the information he has provided. He writes, "Let this old woe step on the stage again! / Act itself o'er anew for men to judge" (I. 824-25). While Browning proceeds to promise to provide "evidence" that should shade the reader's opinion so that the characters are judged "Not by the very sense and sight indeed," he has already implanted an image of the aging male body in the reader's mind that will be difficult to defend (I. 833, 826).

Guido thus emerges as victim. The January-May marriage plays upon its cultural and literary heritage to explain the dynamics of this gendered power reversal. In a familiar triangular structure, Pompilia seeks the aid of the young and gallant priest Giuseppe Caponsacchi to leave her husband, and Guido becomes the target of Rome's ridicule as the bested husband. Guido and his defenders make much of this gender reversal. In Book II, "Half-Rome" blames the lack of understanding given to an older husband as contributing to Guido's violent action. The narrator sarcastically encourages the methodology of those who chose to mock Guido as cuckold and impersonates their taunts:

> The proper help of friends in such a strait
> Is waggery, the world over. Laugh him free
> O' the regular jealous-fit that's incident
> To all old husbands that wed brisk young wives,
> And he'll go duly docile all his days.
> "Somebody courts your wife, Count? Where and when?
> How and why? Mere horn-madness: have a care!" (II. 826-32)

Although Browning's structuring of the story from multiple perspectives stresses the limited vantage and personal bias that direct each version of the events, this depiction of Guido as the disempowered spouse within the marriage is his best defense in explanation of his destructive behavior. In fact, he and his defenders attempt to attribute all of his violent, misogynistic acts to his efforts to restore a traditionally gendered (im)balance of power to their relationship.

What is important here is not the success of Guido's defense; ultimately, Guido is found guilty by the court and by the Pope, who effectively decrees that Pompilia is innocent and that male anxiety does not authorize blood and vengeance. What is striking is the ironical attention to the aging male body that is meant to maintain male privilege by pointing theatrically to its own limitations. Threatened by the sexual insubordination of his young wife (who refuses sex with him and bears a child that he deems illegitimate), Guido claims that the disruption of gender roles in his marriage stems from his wife's rejection of his body. He attempts to solicit sympathy from his audience, hoping that can relate to his ageist stereotypes, and he clearly protests that the visual effects produced by his body are not his fault. To save his neck, Guido distances himself from what he maintains is the simultaneous culprit and victim in the grisly affair: his aged body.

Guido maintains that he entertained idealistic hopes about a woman's ability to accept her husband despite his physical defects. Posturing as a romantic, he declares,

> No! I shall still think nobler of the sex,
> Believe a woman still may take a man
> For the short period that his soul wears flesh,
> And, for the soul's sake, understand the fault

Of armour frayed by fighting. (V. 598-602)

Though physically worn by years of "fighting" his way through life, Guido ignores the advice of his friends who inform him that his middle-aged body is likely to be rejected: "The fact is that you are forty-five years old, / Nor very comely even for that age: / Girls must have boys" (V. 586-88). He chooses to listen to Violente, Pompilia's mother, who boosts his confidence in his physical appearance because she hopes to facilitate the marriage of her daughter to a nobleman, but even Violente's advice underscores the aesthetics of aging that work against Guido. She stumblingly attests that Pompilia "would accept you even were you old / As you are" and, as apology, interjects that he would appear "youngish by her father's side" (XI. 1013-14). She tells him to "Trim but your beard a little, thin your bush / Of eyebrow" and encouragingly adds, "for presence, portliness, / And decent gravity, you beat a boy!" (XI. 1015-17). Yet, when groomed, Guido's body still appears old, and when he meets his child-bride, he finds her repulsed by his presence. Sarcastically, he reports of "the child that so loves age," describing the image of their wedding kiss and her overwhelming revulsion. In this initial resistance to him and in rejecting him sexually throughout their marriage, Pompilia challenges the male dominance that Guido has come to expect.

Using his own body as textual evidence, Guido argues the injustice of removing one's access to power because of bodily difference. By his own characterization, he is "the old outwitted husband, wronged and wroth, / Pitted against a brace of juveniles— " (V. 1355-56). Feminized by his age, Guido struggles to reaffirm male dominance, and he does not see, though Browning and the reader do, the paradox of his critique that the body should not be tied to power. Divorced from phallic power by his aged appearance,

Guido asserts, "I resent my wrong" (XI. 986). His body and indeed his ability to project gender, he argues, is beyond his control: "Being a man: I only show man's soul / Through man's flesh" (987-88). Stung by her reception of his body, Guido explains that Pompilia has "thus confirm[ed] my doubt" and affirmed that he is "past the prime" and "scare[s] the woman-world" (XI. 1000-01).

Guido's body proves frightening, not because of its display of physical force (he does, after all, have to hire four henchmen to assist him in his murdering of Pompilia, who was recovering from childbirth, and her elderly parents) but because of its grotesque traits that are excessively masculine and feminine. Because of his weakened position as older husband, Guido rages against any display of feminine independence, threatening to "twist her neck" or to "quietly cut off, clear thro' bone" a portion of her finger (V. 710, 953). Guido incites fear because he projects the unavoidable loss of male power and a man's desperate, scrambling overcompensation to regain it. Margrit Shildrick's critical theories on the monstrous body point out the monster's proximity to traditional bodies. She writes,

> Although the differential and strange embodiment might explain the enduring fascination of the monstrous as an object of knowledge, it does not so easily account for the normative anxiety that they invoke. What disturbs is that for all that it is extra-ordinary and widely characterized as unnatural, the monster is not outside nature. It is, rather, an instance of nature's startling capacity to produce alien forms within. (10)

Guido's monstrous condition, initiated by his age that is, in turn, exacerbated by the January-May marriage, attracts reader's attention from the horribly mutilated, public

exhibited body of Pompilia as she lies dying of her stab wounds.[90] For those advocating gender reversal, Guido is too invested in male privilege, yet, at the same time, for those promoting a restoration of conservative gender roles, he proves too disruptive. It becomes the mission of society and of the poem to witness his execution.

Through a letter written by an eyewitness to the execution, the poem reports the excitement of the mob that is gathered awaiting the arrival of the doomed Guido,

> We had the titillation as we sat
> Assembled, (quality in conclave, ha?)
> Of, minute after minute, some report
> How the slow show was winding on its way. (XII. 150-53)

Eagerly anticipating the spectacle of the punishment of the older male body, the crowd "remained all ears and eyes, could give / Ourselves to Guido undividedly" (XII. 171-72). The poem revels in the fall of the guillotine that beheads the monster and provides instant replays of the death scene for the reader through the perspectives of additional source materials. The executioner holds up Guido's severed head, dismantling the body that has been the source of so much anxiety, and through the eyes of the witness, the reader is reminded that "Indeed, it was no face to please a wife!" (XII. 196). The spectacle of the execution provides the public with assurance that the monstrous affront to gender stability has been contained.

Guido's allegiance to a system of male dominance, one in which husbands are "once more God's representative" in the home and in which wives are "like the typical

[90] William Clyde De Vane's "The Virgin and the Dragon," *Yale Review* 37(1947): 33-46 made an early case for Guido as monster. De Vane details Browning's use of the myth of St. George and the dragon, an analogy that works well within the January-May marriage theme and is employed by Will Ladislaw in his description of Dorothea and Casaubon in *Middlemarch*.

Spouse once more" supports his homicidal behavior and leads to his death (X. 2043, 2044). As older husband, Guido is a marginalized figure, and his frustrations about his gender role arise from his inability to resolve or reject his feminized position. He admits with grief that

> But myself am old,
> O' the wane at least, in all things: what do you say
> To her who frankly thus confirms my doubt?
> I am past the prime I scare the woman-world,
> Done-with that way: you like this piece of news? (XI. 998-1002)

Using his body as sign and symbol of his fallen status, Guido is a pathetic and graphic image of masculinity curtailed.

"Like a death's head skinned over": Looking and Laughing at Casaubon

George Eliot is more often associated with literary realism than with sensationalism, but in *Middlemarch*, the plot's reliance on the January-May marriage to probe gendered power relations attests to Eliot's debt to the more popular genres of sensation fiction. In *The Private Rod*, Marlene Tromp challenges the boundaries distinguishing realism from sensation, dedicating a chapter of her study on sensation fiction to Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. She proposes, "Realist literature reflected the impact of sensation, especially in addressing those issues that were the most intimately connected to women's bodies and the laws that governed them" (240). Following Tromp's lead, I want to revise her argument to incorporate what I have discussed as

sensation literature's interest in the spectacle of the older male body. It is this characteristic that I identify as bridging the sensation literature of the 1860s with Eliot's realism in the 1870s. In *Middlemarch*, Eliot delights in the display of the January husband's body, and, like Guido, Casaubon's body is put on trial for the public gaze.

Thus far, most critical attention has focused on the way embodied power operates through the figure of Dorothea. Presenting a feminist reading of *Middlemarch*, Patricia E. Johnson asserts that, through the novel's portrayal of Dorothea, "Eliot undercuts the assumptions on which the male gaze rests and directly raises questions about the ways in which women are represented" (49). This type of scholarship helps to push forward an understanding of the novel's representation of women, but criticism on *Middlemarch* has yet to offer a nuanced reading of the image of aging masculinity that Eliot constructs of Dorothea's husband and the theatrical display that his body offers to readers of the novel. Despite the legal and social systems that Casaubon enlists to exercise power over Dorothea in the novel, his privileged status within a patriarchal society diminishes when age is understood as a component in the complex machinery of gender and power. Specifically, Casaubon's position as older husband destabilizes his hold on gendered authority, and the effects of such disruption to normative modes of power stretch further than his "dead hand" can reach.

The focus of the gaze on Casaubon in fact begins with the introduction of his character at the dinner party in Book I, and the first description of his physical appearance binds him to a specific work of art, the portrait of John Locke. Dorothea, of course, views this semblance with admiration. The narrator discloses, "His manners, she thought, were very dignified; the set of his iron-grey hair and his deep eye-sockets made

him resemble the portrait of Locke. He had the spare form and the pale complexion which became a student; as different as possible from the blooming Englishman of the red-whiskered type represented by Sir James Chettam" (11). The comparison to Locke continues after the dinner when Celia and Dorothea retire to the drawing room and are able to talk freely about the appearance of their new guest. Celia begins the appraisal,

> "How very ugly Mr Casaubon is!"
>
> "Celia! He is one of the most distinguished-looking men I ever saw. He is remarkably like the portrait of Locke. He has the same deep eye-sockets."
>
> "Had Locke those two white moles with hairs on them?"
>
> "Oh, I daresay! when people of a certain sort looked at him," said Dorothea, walking away a little. (13)

As Dorothea's distancing move suggests, Celia's reading of Casaubon represents more than the perspective of "people of a certain sort"; her perceptions as observer are representative of larger Middlemarch society, with a nod to a Swiftian world in Brobdingnag, where the moles and hairs of others are especially conspicuous. This conversation proves subversive on two fronts: first, it clarifies the normative reading of Casaubon that the reader is to expect from society at large, and second, it distinguishes Dorothea's aesthetic and sexual aspirations as quite dissimilar to the norm.[91]

Critics have thus far overlooked the subversive qualities that Casaubon's association with the portrait of Locke introduces. Hugh Witemeyer's *George Eliot and*

---

[91] Eliot, who often joked about what she perceived as her own shortcomings in appearance, had herself been compared in appearance to John Locke, and Eliot's wit and willingness to make herself and Casaubon the targets of aesthetic attack destabilize any idealization of self or other. For more information on Eliot's appearance and her use of humor in regards to it, see Rosemary Ashton's biography *George Eliot: A Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996) 275-6, 299.

the Visual Arts reads the analogy as a mistaken idealization on the part of the youthful Dorothea. He writes, "Idealizing portraiture provides no coherent vision in this novel of incomplete insights....just as Mr. Casaubon more obviously eludes...Dorothea's comparison of him with 'the portrait of Locke'" (87). While Witemeyer's assessment of Dorothea's critical misjudgment is justified, it neglects to read the portrait of Locke through eyes other than Dorothea's—through the eyes of the narrator, Celia, the other members of Middlemarch, or those of the reader. Moreover, though Casaubon's intellectual prowess is idealized by Dorothea and those in the county who considered him "a man of profound learning," his physical resemblance to Locke never appears as ideal to anyone but Dorothea.

Several portraits of Locke exist, though Witemeyer concludes that the most likely would have been that of Sir Godfrey Kneller, which depicts Locke without a wig, displaying the "iron-grey hair" and "deep eye-sockets" that Dorothea associates with Casaubon (Fig. 13)[92] Locke's appearance in the portrait is certainly far from objectionable. His eyes stray to his left, and he holds himself with a stately air. While Celia deems Casaubon "ugly," perhaps less attractive than the portrait of Locke because the two moles she adds to the image, this representation of the male body is not radically subversive in itself. Aesthetic judgments of a scholar miss their mark, and Locke securely retains command of a power-knowledge system. The disruptive potential emerges as the aging male body, here represented by Locke, is coupled with a youthful female form. The dynamics of heterosexual relations open the possibilities for a valid

[92] Witemeyer notes that Eliot and G.H. Lewes owned a copy of Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: J.F. Dove, 1828), which had an engraving of Kneller's portrait by Robert Graves.

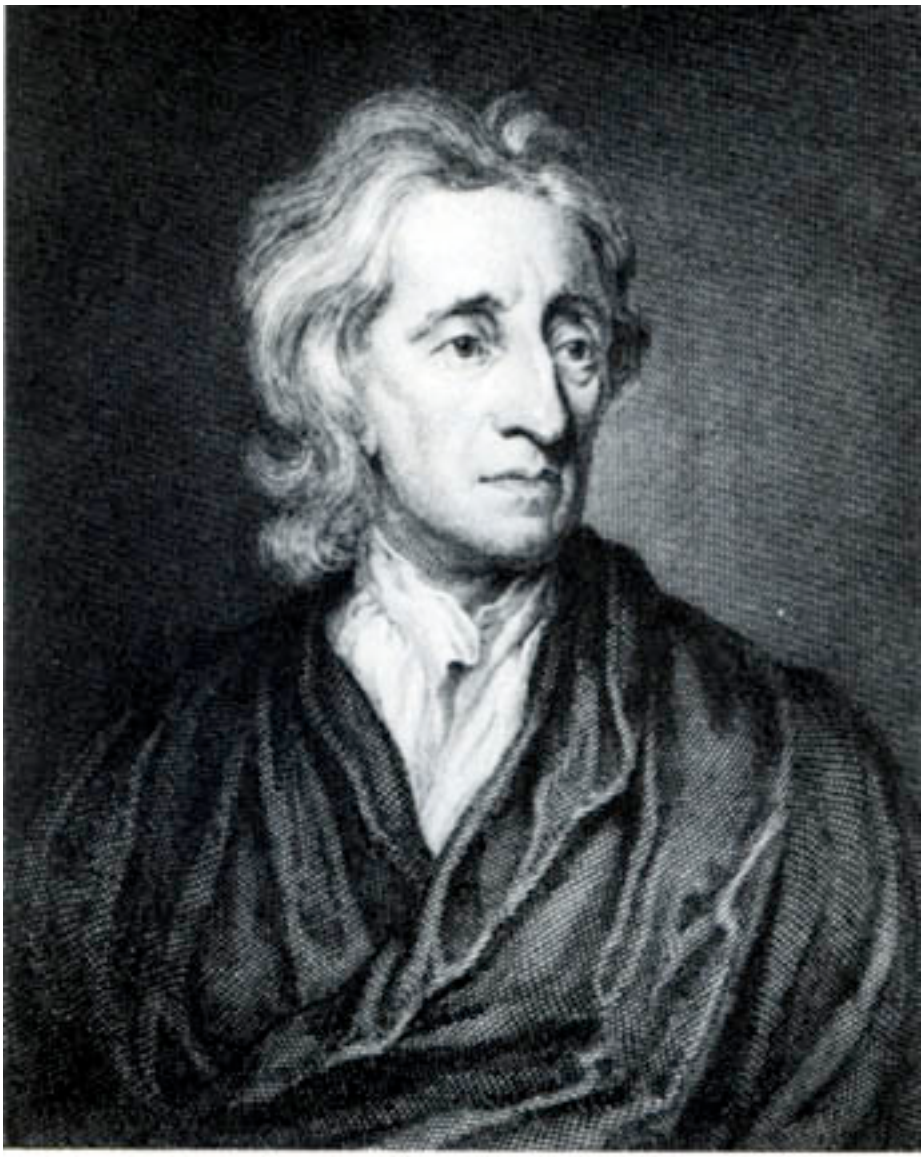


Figure 13. Robert Graves, after Sir Godfrey Kneller, *Portrait of John Locke*, 1697. Engraving, dimensions unknown. Location unknown.

critique of masculinity, and it is the visualization of Casaubon as a lover, not a scholar, that changes his access to power and authority.

Thus, the aesthetic objections to Casaubon increase when his status changes from that of country scholar to the new position of bridegroom; effectually, the characters hold his age and appearance up against those of Dorothea, and it is then that Casaubon is found most wanting. Some characters offer cautions against Dorothea's decision that appear kind and reasonable. Upon the marriage offer, her uncle advises, "Well, but Casaubon, now. There is no hurry—I mean for you. It's true, every year will tell upon him. He is over five-and-forty, you know. I should say a good seven-and-twenty years older than you. To be sure,—if you like learning and standing, and that sort of thing, we can't have everything. . . . Still he is not young" (26). But others barely conceal their alarm and revulsion. Celia experiences "disgust" at the thought of her sister marrying Casaubon and "felt a sort of shame mingled with a sense of the ludicrous" (31). Chettam, as the early rival for Dorothea's affection, reacts even more strongly. He too finds himself appalled at the news of her engagement, and the novel reveals that "Perhaps his face had never before gathered so much concentrated disgust as when he turned to Mrs. Cadwallader and repeated, 'Casaubon?'" (37). He continues, "Good God! It is horrible! He is no better than a mummy!" and Mrs. Cadwallader affirms that Casaubon is a "great bladder for dried peas to rattle in!" Chettam furthers his hyperbolic objections, asking "What business has an old bachelor like that to marry? He has one foot in the grave," to which Mrs. Cadwallader humorously quips, "He means to draw it out again, I suppose" (37).

As readers visualize Casaubon's physicality, the effects of aging on the male body weaken his status within society and within the marriage. His engagement to Dorothea prompts the Middlemarch community to scrutinize his every attribute, and he becomes the target of malignant, though often humorous, gossip. Mrs. Cadwallader and Lady Chettam have a good laugh over his physical appearance in the following exchange. Mrs. Cadwallader begins,

> "*He* does not want drying."
>
> "Who, my dear?" said Lady Chettam, a charming woman, not so quick as to nullify the pleasure of explanation.
>
> "The bridegroom—Casaubon. He has certainly been drying up faster since the engagement: the flame of passion, I suppose." (58)

Mrs. Cadwallader goes on to further contrast Casaubon to a more ideal image of manhood, Lady Chettam's son Sir James: "Really, by the side of Sir James, he looks like a death's head skinned over for the occasion" (58). The pleasure the women garner from their conversation is intrinsically seditious in its intent and is aimed not simply at Casaubon the man, but at a larger system of power, displaying what Eileen Gilooly defines as "feminine humor" in her study *Smile of Discontent*. Feminine humor, Gilooly claims, has "a combative component as well, aimed not at the Other but at the Law—the authority of the 'situation'" (24). The women's mockery of Casaubon's physicality points to a larger weakness among men in general, and their attack is coded by conventions of sexual ability and gender identity.

Mrs. Cadwallader's sarcastic reference to Casaubon's "flame of passion" highlights the sexual tensions and gender subversion that erupt within the marriage. On

various levels, verbal attacks that play on the sexual imagery of Dorothea and Casaubon disrupt the nineteenth-century order of masculine domination and feminine submission. Casaubon's body is marginalized because of his age, and the sexual union between his aging body and Dorothea's youthful flesh suggests sexual deviancy to Middlemarch society, who as we have seen, often engage humor as a weapon to hide their open "disgust" at the thought of a marginalized body mingling with Dorothea's—thought to be stable as a social standard representing youthful female sexuality. Chettam struggles to distance his own desire for Dorothea after her acceptance of Casaubon—intimating that her sexual "perversity" could taint his own normative sexuality: "Sir James said to himself that he had completely resigned her, since with the perversity of a Desdemoma she had not affected a proposed match that was clearly suitable and according to nature" (43). Dorothea's choice of husband and lover is cast as an Othello, who is deemed an unsuitable sexual partner because of his race and his age, and Chettam's determination that such sexuality is not "according to nature" aligns her marriage with nineteenth-century fears of miscegenation, incest, and pedophilia. Additionally, Casaubon is depicted as one who cannot control or satisfy the sexual appetite of his partner. Openly critiquing monogamous marriage, Mrs. Cadwallader suggests, "Casaubon has got a trout-stream, and does not care about fishing in it himself: could there be a better fellow?" (45). Coming several pages before the introduction of young Will Ladislaw, this remark establishes the likelihood that, if Casaubon doesn't visit his trout-stream, someone else will, and the already disempowered position of Casaubon is furthered by the additional threats of Dorothea's youthful feminine sexuality and a young male rival. Casaubon's jealously and sexual anxiety eventually initiate the controversial codicil to his will that

shames not just Dorothea but, perhaps more pointedly, himself, and he effectively writes his own legacy as that of the threatened patriarch who must invoke legal and economic means to enforce a monogamy and loyalty he alone could not effect.

The introduction of Will serves to contrast Casaubon's aging body with that of Will's own youthful frame. As the Brookes tour Lowick, Celia reports with delight that she has seen "some one quite young coming up one of the walks" adding that "I only saw his back. But he was quite young" (49). The male body, even the fully-clothed back of the male body, becomes a image immediately coded by an age association—not only by Celia, but by Mr. Brooke, the narrator, and even Casaubon, as "young" and "youthful" appear over twelve times in less than three pages surrounding his introduction. Will is "young Ladislaw," a "youngster," and a "young relative" as Eliot emphasizes, almost to the point of incredibility, his difference to Casaubon in respect to age and appearance.[93] Nearing the end of the description, Casaubon suggests that they return to the house, "lest the young ladies should be tired of standing" and the youthful associations with Will extend to Dorothea and Celia, categorizing them together as young people and distinctly grouping Casaubon and Mr. Brooke with Mr. Tucker (the just-departed curate) who is "just as old and musty-looking as [Celia] would have expected Casaubon's curate to be." Will, who has been held in a subservient position to his cousin because of Casaubon's claim on the family fortunes, is suddenly empowered by his awareness of the age difference between Casaubon and his bride and by his own age-based advantage. "The

[93] Later, in Rome, Eliot makes the comparison even more explicit: "Mr. Casaubon was less happy than usual, and this perhaps made him look all the dimmer and more faded; else, the effect might easily have been produced by the contrast of his young cousin's appearance. The first impression on seeing Will was one of sunny brightness....Mr Casuabon, on the contrary, stood rayless" (133).

notion of his grave cousin as the lover of that girl" tickles Will's "sense of the ludicrous" and he delights (even without the witty pun on "grave" by the narrator) in the new weakness he sees in one who has hereto oppressed him. The narrator reveals, "When their backs were turned, young Ladislaw sat down to go on with his sketching, and as he did so his face broke into an expression of amusement which increased as he went on drawing, till at last he threw back his head and laughed out loud." So that readers can continue to like Will, and to distinguish him from the gossiping Middlemarchers, the narrator quickly notes that his laughter "had no mixture of sneering and self-exaltation" but was "the pure enjoyment of comicality" (51). Will experiences the entertaining spectacle of seeing his older cousin play the fool.

Casaubon conducts himself foolishly indeed. He has married with the idea that in taking a young wife, he has selected a mate whom he can raise to be his obedient helpmate and fertile producer of his male heirs. The narrator attempts to give him an equal opportunity to express his feelings of the relationship, stating that

> I protest against all our interest, all our effort at understanding being given to the young skins that look blooming in spite of trouble; for these too will get faded, and will know the older and more eating griefs which we are helping to neglect. In spite of the blinking eyes and white moles objectionable to Celia, and the want of muscular curve which was morally painful to Sir James, Mr Casaubon had an intense consciousness within him, and was spiritually a-hungered like the rest of us. He had done nothing exceptional in marrying—nothing but what society sanctions, and considers an occasion for wreaths and bouquets. (175)

Upon the narrator's advice we should read Casaubon's pain compassionately, but if we are to read it honestly, it is nevertheless pain that results from a loss of power that centers upon the shifting of traditional male privilege to the "young skins" who remain distinct from him. Furthermore, though it is pain, it is the pain that emerges from a gendered society (it is, after all a societal problem, as he had done "nothing but what society sanctions") struggling with power, for we see that Casaubon's choice to enter a marriage with a large age difference was a pre-meditated attempt on his part to retain a position of masculine dominance and control. The narrator explains, "It had occurred to him that he must not any longer defer his intension of matrimony, and he had reflected that in taking a wife, a man of good position should expect and carefully choose a blooming young lady—the younger the better, because more educable and submissive" (175). But his plan for maintaining power backfires and, because of the age discrepancy in the marriage, Casaubon finds himself in a newly feminized position: "Mr Casaubon had thought of annexing happiness with a lovely young bride: but even before marriage, as we have seen, he found himself under a new depression in the consciousness that the new bliss was not blissful to him" (177). Casaubon finds himself in a weakened position, both intellectually and sexually, by his young wife, and his actions expose his increased anxiety as his understanding of his gender identity is increasingly threatened.

Dorothea's youthful enthusiasm for Casaubon to complete his enormous *Key to all Mythologies* fosters more unease than encouragement in her husband. Her very presence increases his apprehensions about his abilities, and he finds that "this cruel accuser was there in the shape of a wife—nay, of a young bride, who instead of observing his pen-scratches and amplitude of power with the uncritical awe of an elegant-minded

canary bird, seemed to present herself as a spy watching everything with a malign power of inference" (128). Reversing the gender roles that the audience would have expected from John Stuart Mill's 1869 *Subjection of Women*, he finds marriage "more of a subjection than he had been able to imagine"(129).[94] Once Dorothea has access to the current, or "young," scholarship that displaces Casaubon's outdated theories, he senses another challenge to his authority, and he thus attempts to solicit her promise to complete the *Key* after his death according to his judgment and not her own. This effort to bend her intellectual will to his suggests Casaubon's intimidation at Dorothea's growing prowess as a scholar herself, and the reader is clearly aware of the superiority of Dorothea's abilities because "in spite of her small instruction, her judgment in this matter was truer than his: for she looked with unbiassed comparison and healthy sense at probabilities on which he had risked all his egoism" (297).

Yet Dorothea's youth troubles Casaubon sexually even more than it does intellectually. Unlike some other literary January-May marriages, Casaubon does not seem driven by sexual desire for Dorothea. Though Dorothea aspires to "pour forth her girlish and womanly feeling" on Casaubon, he remains cold and unreceptive. Like "every sweet woman" Dorothea is described as a child who longs to "[shower] kisses on the hard pate of her bald doll, creating a happy soul within that woodenness from the wealth of her own love" (127). But emotionally and physically unresponsive like a bald, wooden doll, Casaubon resists her advances, and Mrs. Cadwallader proves herself

---

[94] Suzanne Graver notes that Eliot read Mill's *Subjection* about the same time that she started *Middlemarch* and views the texts as a dialogue regarding the Woman Question. See "Mill, *Middlemarch*, and Marriage," *Portraits of Marriage in Literature*, eds. Anne C. Hargrove and Maurine Magliocco (Macomb, IL: Western Illinois U, 1984) 55-65.

correct, as Casaubon expresses no wish to go fishing in his trout stream. Although Casaubon had at one time thought that marriage would bestow upon him the "family pleasures" that would allow him to "leave behind that copy of himself which seemed so required of a man—to the sonneteers of the sixteenth century," we soon learn that "Times had altered since then, and no sonneteer had insisted on Mr Casaubon's leaving a copy of himself" (175-6). Dorothea's honeymoon fantasies remain unfulfilled, in which she yearned

> to have kissed Mr Casaubon's coat-sleeve, or to have caressed his shoe-latchet, if he would have made any other sign of acceptance than pronouncing her, with his unfailing propriety, to be of a most affectionate and truly feminine nature, indicating at the same time by politely reaching a chair for her that he regarded these manifestations as rather crude and startling. (127)

Casaubon's lack of sexual interest in Dorothea nevertheless translates to his uneasy awareness of his own sexual inabilities and his fears of Dorothea's sexual desire for another man. Casaubon's anxieties lead to his numerous attempts to exclude Will from their immediate contact, and Casaubon appears more than capable of imagining the sexual possibilities that he physically does not enact. Will's unwelcome appearance at Lowick "brought Mr Casaubon's power of suspicious construction into exasperated activity" and "Suspicion and jealousy of Will Ladislaw's intentions, suspicion and jealousy of Dorothea's impressions, were constantly at their weaving work" (261).

At this point, it is tempting to read Casaubon's reluctance to submit to the more conventional romance between Dorothea and Will as a unconsciously subversive stance

against the powers of patriarchy and privileged masculinity. When Casaubon finds himself subjected as a marginalized, oppressed example of a subordinate masculinity, he rebels against the figure of Will, who embodies traditional virility. Certainly, when Dorothea's body is aligned with Casaubon's, her figure proves much more subversive than when it is paired with Will's. For example, when Dorothea's and Will's youthful bodies are associated with art, they continue to portray a conventional nineteenth-century hierarchy of masculine control and feminine submission. In "'A Microscope Directed on a Water-Drop': Chapter 19" Juliet McMaster unravels the novel's depictions of Dorothea and Will in the Vatican museum by aligning their characters with the museum's sculptures the *Ariadne* and the *Apollo Belvedere*. Both of these pieces portray embodied selves that support conventional readings of masculinity and femininity, essentializing the physical body according to socially constructed gendered norms. The *Adriadne* captures the sleeping mythological figure at Naxos, still unaware that she has been abandoned by Theseus and yet to be rescued from her despair by the god Dionysus, who eventually marries her. This disempowered image of woman is countered by the virile masculinity of Will as the *Apollo Belvedere*. As McMaster observes, Dorothea / Ariadne will eventually be saved from her loneliness by her own young god, "The young god is, in fact, standing by. Will, generally identified with a classical young male deity (his radiance has already aligned him with Apollo, and the *Belvedere Torso* is variously identified as Hercules, Prometheus, and Mars), sees Dorothea" (113). The young bodies of Dorothea and Will play out the traditional, even classical, myth of female passivity and male agency, and, as we ultimately see at the end of the novel, the marriage between these partners of similar ages does conform to conventions of male and female roles

within society and marriage. Describing Dorothea's second marriage, Eliot urges readers to lament the limited possibilities available for married women in the nineteenth century: "Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done" (513).

A vastly different power relationship is realized in Dorothea's relationship with Casaubon. Certainly far from ideal to either Dorothea or Casaubon, or equal in any sense of the word, the distribution of power is nevertheless multi-directional. In a vicious cycle, Casaubon's aging body and the anxieties that it produces feed on one another, and he effectively finds himself in the position he had hoped to cast Dorothea—as a feminized, subservient child-bride. Just as his weakened physicality fosters concerns about his claim to gendered power, his concerns turn and exacerbate the weakened condition of his physicality. In chapter 29, a heated discussion with Dorothea over a letter from Will initiates the heart trouble that foreshadows his oncoming death. When Casaubon offensively instructs Dorothea to refrain from having Will visit Lowick, Dorothea responds with passionate strength at what she feels to be "stupidly undiscerning and odiously unjust." She retaliates against his rule, despite the fact that Casaubon still considers her to be "too young to be on the formidable level of wifehood" and "With her first words, uttered in a tone that shook him, she startled Mr Casaubon into looking at her, and meeting the flash of her eyes" (178). Casaubon again tries to restore her to a feminized position, but she refuses and, in an uneasy silence, they take up their work. As Casaubon tries to write, his body betrays his inward instability and "his hand trembled so

much that the words seemed to be written in an unknown character" (178). Conversely, despite her anger Dorothea remains strong: "She began to work at once, and her hand did not tremble; on the contrary...she felt that she was forming her letters beautifully, and it seemed that she saw the construction of the Latin she was copying, and which she was beginning to understand, more clearly than usual" (178-9). In this crisis of gender roles, initiated by a juxtaposition of aged bodies, Casaubon experiences "bodily distress." Assisted by Dorothea, a feminized Casaubon is helped to the couch in what is described similarly to a swooning heroine's fainting fit. Upon recovering, Casaubon is all too aware of the disempowered position his body continues to place him, and he resents Mr. Brooke's suggestion that he take up a hobby like making toys while recuperating. "In short you recommend me to anticipate the arrival of my second childhood," he retorts "with some bitterness" (180). As Casaubon struggles against the ebbing of his masculine powers, he finds himself unhappily associated with femininity and childishness as a direct result of his age.

Casaubon's illness attracts even more eyes to his physical body, which, now under the care of the physician Lydgate, is increasingly pathologized as diseased.[95] Lydgate explains to Dorothea that her husband's life expectancy is "difficult to pronounce" and that he "may possibly live for fifteen years or more, without much worse health than he has had hitherto." Dorothea, with a polite reference to physical relations, clarifies, "You mean if we are very careful," and Lydgate warns against "excessive application" and also against "mental agitation of all kinds," stressing that "Anxiety of

[95] For more insight into the diseased body and gender subversion in Victorian Literature, see Pamela K. Gilbert's *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997).

any kind would be precisely the most unfavourable condition for him" (182). Unfortunately, anxiety about bodies remains ever-present in their January-May marriage, and Casaubon's efforts to maintain any semblance of masculine authority against the threat to his gender identity posed by his young wife further deteriorate his health. Medical discourse about his body alienates his body parts and objectifies his organs. Consulting with Lydgate privately, Casaubon discovers that he suffers from "fatty degeneration of the heart" and is faced with the realization that he is further losing control of the body that is responsible for his loss of control, and even more frightening to Casaubon than his own demise lurks the pity that Dorothea conveys. The narrator reminds the reader to "Consider that his mind was a mind which shrank from pity," yet it is difficult not to pity Casaubon in his new powerless position.

Ultimately, Casaubon's body fails him, and he is finally objectified as "the dead hand" of Book V, reduced to a fragment of a body that is frozen like sculpture on the stone table on which it rests. This individual body resonates within the social body, and the death of Casaubon expresses both the temporality of the body and the transitory nature of gendered power while symbolizing a greater potential for the overthrow of patriarchal power. Thus, though Dorothea is certainly not free from systems of masculine power (which even her romantic marriage to the Shelley-like Will reinforces), she is granted some degree of freedom, enjoying even more than she had as a young woman, as she now holds a distinctive place in society as a young widow.

Many readers of the novel have too easily followed individual characters' depictions of the January-May marriage between Casaubon and Dorothea as tragic. Deeming the marriage "the most horrible of virgin-sacrifices," Will casts Casuabon as

monster and their union as comparable to the legend of the virgin and the dragon, saving the role of St. George for himself: "And Casaubon had done a wrong to Dorothea in marrying her. A man was bound to know himself better than that, and if he chose to grow grey crunching bones in a cavern, he had no business to be luring a girl into his companionship" (225). Yet *Middlemarch* extends a more seditious fairy-tale than it might appear at first glance. Despite her initial desires to submit herself to a willing patriarch, Dorothea is unaware of the powers her young body holds and their destabilizing effects on the authority tenuously held by her aging husband.

****

The aesthetics of aging highlight the fact that gender is not the only agent of authority, and literary descriptions of January-May marriage partners and artistic representations of intergenerational couples allow the reader-viewer to visualize age as an essential component in gender formation. Thus, when authors prolong the development of their narratives about January-May marriages with detailed renderings of the bodies of the January and May characters, they connect their works to a broader nineteenth-century visual culture and utilize shared assumptions about aesthetically "ill-matched" couples. Like *The Ring and the Book* and *Middlemarch*, many nineteenth-century texts use the January-May image rebelliously against gender norms, and the older husband's body becomes a source for subversive humor as well as symbol of male power isolated and contained. However, Dorian Gray's privileging of youth over aging ultimately leads to his demise, and efforts to replace gender inequities with an age-based hierarchy only shift the focal points of power. *Dorian Gray* also points to limitations of associating outer

bodies with inner realities; Dorian may be outwardly beautiful, but he is inwardly corrupt. His body attests to the collective error in relying on visual perceptions to evaluate power and worth, and January-May bodies that represent happily married couples likewise challenge the validity of using aesthetics as narrative signposts.

Some January-May texts thus reverse the *Dorian Gray* formula. Instead of reading the exterior appearances of husband and wife as aesthetic foreshadowing of the failure of their marriage, these January-May texts delight in refusing to accept an aesthetic norm. Dickens's *David Copperfield* runs counter to readers' expectations because of its teasing non-fulfillment of standard January-May tropes and because of its incestuous subtext, but it also breaks from visual conventions, discordantly holding aging male and younger female bodies in comparison, and then guiding aesthetic judgment by declaring that the unlikely combination works. Similarly, Brontë critiques a tradition of pairing beautiful, same-age bodies in the central romance of *Jane Eyre*. While she is young, Jane is not beautiful in the same way as most popular heroines in nineteenth-century fiction, and Rochester is neither young nor handsome. By the end of the novel, idealized images of husband and wife are even more unsettled when Rochester appears blind and injured. Rochester's aging and disfigured body borders on the monstrous, but Brontë confronts aesthetic standards by depicting the older husband as desiring and desirous and by encouraging the reader to reconsider predictable interpretations of the January-May image. Readers might enjoy the opportunity to mock the aging male body, but the aesthetic surprise of intergenerational relationships that resist conventional plot developments demands that readers reconsider their qualifications as visual interpreters.

January-May aesthetics are in many ways predictable, but some January-May texts defy the tradition and encourage new ways of seeing intergenerational romance. Even texts that remain invested in the objectification and containment of the male body find alternative channels for their visual depictions. In the following chapter, I examine a pattern in the January-May tradition that plays on aesthetic conventions to create a more specific image of the aging husband as monster. January-May texts that exaggerate the physical characteristics of the older spouse, hyperbolically driving him even further into the visually horrific, encourage readings of the January-May marriage as Gothic nightmare. To this spectacle, I turn next.

Chapter Five: The Horror of Aging: The January-May Marriage as Gothic Nightmare

When Sue Bridehead's older husband, Richard Phillotson, accidentally enters her bedroom instead of his own and begins to undress, Sue wakes, cries, and promptly jumps out of her second floor bedroom window. Running outside to her aid, Phillotson finds that Sue has not "broken her neck" as he had feared, and though she is dazed by her fall onto the gravel ground, she immediately tries to account for her drastic actions: "'I was asleep, I think!' she began, her pale face still turned away from him. 'And something frightened me—a terrible dream—I thought I saw you— '" (181). Sue breaks off because waking does not resolve her nightmare, yet Phillotson is a dubious monster. Indeed, Hardy takes care to stress that Sue's dramatic flight was unnecessary; at least on this occasion, it was not sexual desire but rather Phillotson's scholarly "preoccupation" in thinking of "Roman antiquities" that leads to his unintentional intrusion into Sue's room. He is understandably "horrified" by Sue's action, which she commits "before he thought that she meant to do more than get air," and he injures himself on the banister in his haste to help her (180). Nevertheless, Phillotson and especially the idea of marital relations with Phillotson inspire a Gothic horror so terrific that it causes a young bride to effect her escape by wildly leaping out a window. And although Phillotson is distressed by the fact that he has inadvertently caused her panic, he finds that he cannot separate her horror from himself. Like the monster in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, he arouses fear and disgust even though this is not his intention, and he finds that "the significance of all this sickened him of himself and of everything" (181).

Hardy's 1895 *Jude the Obscure* is thus infused with a Gothic horror—expressed most obviously in the novel's somewhat sensational story of child murder and suicide and in the more tedious awfulness of the protagonist's frustrated life. In "Oxford's Ghosts: *Jude the Obscure* and the End of the Gothic," Patrick M. O'Malley also finds Gothic characteristics in the novel's interests in "traditions of sexual and religious deviance" (648). O'Malley's work places Hardy more firmly in the nineteenth century instead of "seeing in him the unambiguous harbinger of modernism" and rightly conjectures that "the Gothic had not yet given up its hold on the Victorian novelist of the 1890s, even a novelist so central to our understanding of the proto-modernist canon as Hardy" (648). But, whereas O'Malley locates Gothic elements in the novel's interplay between Anglo-Catholicism and aberrant sexualities, I want to stress Hardy's participation in the nineteenth century's Gothic tradition by emphasizing his manipulation of the January-May marriage theme as a method for tethering the realistic with the monstrous. Without sinister monks, supernatural forces, or mysterious passageways, Hardy "realistically" positions the Gothic within intergenerational marriage by drawing upon widespread public antipathies that mingle fears of aging, sex and death.

Not all January-May texts emphasize the Gothic aspects of these marriages, but ominous sexual scenarios between older men and younger women were integral to the Gothic tradition from its beginnings in the eighteenth century, and it is easy to see how these two popular nineteenth-century forms could overlap. Much of the terror in Horace Walpole's 1764 *The Castle of Otranto* arises from the sexual threat posed by Manfred to Isabella, who had intended to marry Manfred's son. Similarly, in Elizabeth Helme's 1787 *The History of Louisa, the Lovely Orphan; or, The Cottage on the Moor*, the title

character almost falls into the lecherous clutches of her much-older guardian.[96] Intimidating older men also loom darkly over beautiful young women in Ann Radcliffe's 1791 *The Romance of the Forest* and in her 1794 *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and it seems that part of the Gothic thrill lies in the exposure of these beautiful heroines to the advances or demands of older men. January-May elements were added to Radcliffe's 1790 *A Sicilian Romance* when Henry Siddons adapted it for the London stage in 1794; in the play, the January figure keeps his same-aged first wife confined to a cave while he pursues the much-younger heroine. In fact, predatory older men become such a stock component of Gothic fiction that the trope is mocked by Austen through the young Catherine Morland's belief that General Tilney has murdered or imprisoned his same-aged wife in the 1818 parody *Northanger Abbey*.

Beyond these sinister and threatening older men, other commonalities exist between these two literary traditions. Like the January-May marriage, the Gothic uses its peculiar position on the margins of respectability to comment on power relations in the nineteenth century, and the two traditions share ambivalent agendas regarding gender as well as several narrative strategies that implement their objectives. Gothic tales could be morally instructive and supportive of traditional gender and sexual codes, or they could be radically subversive, as Fred Botting describes of Gothic fiction: "Some moral endings are little more than perfunctory tokens, thin excuses for salacious excesses" (8). Excess is another uniting characteristic of these themes; as I explain more fully in chapter one, the age difference between the marital partners in January-May marriages exaggerates

[96] See Julie Shaffer's discussion of *Louisa* in "Familial Love, Incest, and Female Desire in Late-Eighteenth Century and Early-Nineteenth Century British Women's Novels" (*Criticism* 41.1 (1999) 67-99).

accepted traits of masculinity and femininity—taking experience and innocence, wealth and poverty, and authority and submissiveness to new extremes. Both traditions rely on excessive situations to further their plots, and both opportunely engage the emotions of fear and desire.[97] And finally, I see in these Gothic January-May texts a common interest in historical anachronism, which Robert Mighall finds essential to the Gothic narrative, which "at its emergence and in its development through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, testifies to a concern with the historical past, and adopts a number of rhetorical and textual strategies to locate the past and represent its perceived iniquities, terrors, and survivals" (xiv). In these works, nineteenth-century readers did not need to imagine ancient castles or historical relics because the historical anachronism was present in the January-May couple itself.

Gothic dimensions of the January-May marriage emphasize the complexities of power relations within conventional heterosexual relationships. In one sense, the older husband figures as the stereotypical monster by abusing an unequal power dynamic to elicit fear from his wife—supposedly less powerful because of her youth and gender. Though these narratives play into conventions of masculine domination and feminine submission, they demonstrate a subversive desire to censure and to curtail such monstrous abuses of power. Thus, Gothic versions of the January-May theme require that readers pay attention to the weaknesses of those in power—the older husbands as monsters—and the systems of gender identification that contribute to power. Readers focus on the means to end the power (in)equities: sunlight, the Cross, holy water, a stake

[97] William Patrick Day identifies these two emotions as central to the Gothic. See his book, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985).

through the heart—whatever will stabilize, or destabilize, power. Moreover, some texts highlight the weaknesses of "monsters" like Phillotson to such an extent that their claims to power become entirely questionable. I will return to *Jude the Obscure* later in this chapter as I use it with Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and several other "vampire" texts to illustrate the Gothic dynamics of the January-May marriage theme and their implications regarding gender and power, but I first want to establish a historical and theoretical framework that accounts for Sue's jump from her bedroom window.

Growing Old in the Nineteenth Century

I began the previous chapter with a short discussion of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and its expression of *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about the aesthetics of aging, but I do not intend to argue that aging was always presented by writers and artists in such dismal terms. Robert Browning's famous opening stanza from "Rabbi Ben Ezra" optimistically promises,

> Grow old along with me!
> The best is yet to be,
> The last of life, for which the first was made:
> Our times are in His hand
> Who saith "A whole I planned,
> Youth shows but half; trust God: see all nor be afraid! (1-6)

This pronouncement of the validity of aging is bound with a faith in God, and similar positive depictions of old age across class lines can be found elsewhere in nineteenth-

century literature. Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence," and "The Old Cumberland Beggar" display a reverence for aging working-class masculinity, as does Eliot's *Silas Marner.* Encouraging images of aging do appear throughout the century, but they are largely overshadowed by darker, more troublesome views on "the last of life." In fact, Rabbi Ben Ezra's advice "nor be afraid" presumes that a fear of aging already plagues his listeners, and he is correct. Importantly, I want to stress that I am not suggesting that people in the nineteenth century were, en masse, afraid of the elderly or openly advocating attacks on aging.[98] As Rabbi Ben Ezra demonstrates, worries about aging often translated into renewed praise for the later stages of life. But debates over the Poor Law in the early 1830s reveal that feelings about aging were complex, encompassing a wide range of humanistic and economic issues. Pat Thane explains that "There were conflicting attitudes to the role of the workhouse in the lives of the aged poor, between those who believed…that it should be a grim deterrent designed to force younger people to save for old age, and other who saw it as a haven where the helpless, friendless, aged could…'enjoy their indulgences'" (166). Whether Poor Law reform was viewed as protection or punishment for the Britain's elderly poor population, reforms of public policy drew attention to the "helpless" condition of many aged, and fueled fears about potential burdens that an aging population could place on individual family members or on the nation. These fears conjured their own monsters—an increasing medicalization of the aged body as diseased and a growing association between aberrant

[98] For many examples of older people who took prominent places in society, see Pat Thane's chapter "'An Unfailing Zest for Life': Images and Self-Images of Older People in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries" in *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000).

sexualities and aging—and led to a rising literary interest in the January-May marriage as a Gothic narrative.

While fears of aging are in a sense "ageless" and can be found before and after the nineteenth century, certain historical factors intensified concerns over old age during this period. Contemporary social historians have distanced themselves from previous theories that reductively attributed a "golden age" of social appreciation and familial inclusion of elderly people to pre-industrial society, but the effects of industrialism nevertheless deeply altered public perceptions of aging.[99] Although statistics do not support the idea that things were better for older people before industrialization, literature suggests that public sentiment often coincided with the idea that agrarian systems of extended families diminished problems associated with aging. For example, Wordsworth's "Michael" tells the story of an older couple whose only son does not provide for his parents in their later years. The son instead leaves his parents and their rural life for the "dissolute city," and he, and they, suffer the consequences. Dickens's work in the 1850s for workhouse reform emphasizes the plight of the elderly in an industrial city, painting the urban Gothic with a keen eye on the elderly:

> Aged people were there, in every variety. Mumbling, blear-eyed, spectacled, stupid, deaf, lame; vacantly winking in the gleams of sun that now and then crept in through the open doors, from the paved yard; shading their listening ears or blinking eyes with their withered hands; poring over their books, leering at nothing, going to sleep, crouching and

[99] See *Old Age in Preindustrial Society*. Ed. Peter N. Stearns (New York: Holms and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1982) and "Rethinking Industrialization: Old Age and the Family Economy" by Brian Gratton and Carole Haber in *Voices and Visions of Aging: Toward a Critical Gerontology*. Eds. Thomas R. Cole, et al. (New York: Springer Publishing Co., 1993).

> drooping in corners. There were weird old women, all skeleton within, all bonnet and cloak without, continually wiping their eyes with dirty dusters of pocket-handkerchiefs; and there were ugly old crones, both male and female, with a ghastly kind of contentment upon them which was not at all comforting to see. (88)

Dickens connects this frightening picture to the inability of the elderly to return to "the far-off foreign land called Home" and a familial network of comforts (91). Thus, print culture spread the idea that industrialism had changed the position of the elderly within the family and within society; even if, as contemporary historians claim, there were no "golden age," nineteenth-century citizens who read the literature of the day would have believed not only that one existed, but, more pointedly, that they were no longer in it. Extended family structures that were thought to have provided for the elderly prior to industrialization were perceived as broken. Instead, older people were alone—one could even say astray—and this characterization fueled public fear *for* and *of* them.

Burgeoning cities like London, Manchester and Liverpool brought increasing numbers of older people together, making a collective presence that was more visible and, consequently, in greater need of social regulation and control. Older people often appeared as powerless figures, but, alternately, they wielded power garnered by their age, experience, and financial capital, and they could place demands on the young people around them. Teresa Magnum, one of the foremost literary scholars on aging in the nineteenth century, explains that it was not only fears of masses of poor older people financially encumbering the younger generations that inspired social alarm, but that worries about wealthy older people living too long and denying young people the

enjoyment of their inheritances also emerged in the literature of the period: "one recurring character type hints that older people who held on too tightly to property or to power were more unnerving than those who became burdens" (101). While the average lifespan did not increase in the nineteenth century, a decline in birth rates led to a disproportionate number of older people during the Victorian period, which further contributed to the intimidating notion that there were more elderly people than before the nineteenth century (101). Mangum also links anxieties about aging to Malthusian theories of overpopulation as made popular by the 1798 *An Essay on the Principle of Population* as well as to a "growing Victorian concern over what was falsely perceived to be an increasing 'aged' population in an era obsessed with youth, energy, activity, and progress" (98).

Fears about aging abound in the literature and art of the nineteenth century. Byron's "On This Day I Complete My Thirty Sixth Year" attempts to rouse the poet from succumbing to "the worm, the canker and the grief," but its failure is evident. The answer to Byron's question "If thou regret'st thy youth, why *live*?" is not an invitation to a peaceful and contented later life, but a call for immediate violent death:

> The Land of honourable Death
> Is here—up to the Field! And give
> Away thy Breath! (34-6)

Aging is similarly dreadful to other Romantic poets, who show it to be a time of certain decline. Both Keats's *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* present the shift in power from the "old" Titans to the new Olympians as tragic, though inevitably written into our Western mythology. In *Hyperion* Keats crafts Saturn as "old," "gray-haired" and with

"faded eyes," "palsied tongue," and "wrinkling brow"—linking old age with the necessary, albeit painful, loss of his throne. Victorian writers envisioned other appalling scenarios regarding old age. Tennyson's "Tithonus" recounts the legend of the son of Laomedon who received immortality from the gods so that he could marry Aurora, goddess of the dawn, but did not receive eternal youth. In an interesting twist on the January-May theme, Tithonus ages while Aurora stays the same, and she rejects him: "Coldly thy rosy shadows bathe me, cold / Are all thy lights, and cold my wrinkled feet / Upon thy glimmering thresholds" (66-8). Additionally, Browning's portrayal of aging in "Andrea Del Sarto" is much darker than in his "Rabbi Ben Ezra." While the title character claims that "I am grown peaceful as old age tonight. / I regret little, I would change less," the poem emphasizes the artist's missteps in life—not the least of which is his marriage to the young and beautiful Lucrezia, who leaves him at the end of the poem to be with her "cousin" (244-5). Tithonus and Andrea Del Sarto present pathetic and frightening (or subversive) images of a disempowered and aging masculinity.

New strategies for classifying the populace by age reveal a telling desire in the nineteenth century to manage older people in their various economic and gendered conditions so that their liabilities can be minimized and benefits can be maximized for the larger social good. In "When Does 'Old Age' Begin?: The Evolution of the English Definition," Janet Roebuck points out that the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act that established workhouses in response to widespread poverty fostered a situation that soon called for increasing clarification regarding the designation of old age. Initially, what was meant by terms like "the elderly" and "old age" remained ambiguous, and the elderly were identified merely as a subset of those who were unable to provide for themselves.

But by 1836, Poor Law Commissioners designated that the "impotent poor" in the workhouse over the age of sixty should be allowed small portions of butter, tea and sugar in their dietary provisions, and Roebuck concludes that "the fact that those over sixty were allowed a better diet quickly created a general impression that the 'aged and infirm' were people over sixty" (419). Roebuck finds that the British public continued debates to clarify classifications of the elderly, which culminated again in the 1880s and 90s over public policy regarding governmental pensions for older people. Without established definitions outlining the onset of old age, a unified public assistance program for the elderly would be difficult; however, practical reasons for defining old age obscure a more desperate desire to standardize and to police aging within society.

This type of regulation initiated by larger social fears of aging also resulted in an increased pathologizing of the aged body as abnormal, deviant and diseased. Mangum cites the work of scientists like Jean-Martin Charcot, who stressed the scientific exploration of the aging body rather than the treatment of older people, as a contributing factor to the larger interest in the medicalization of old age. Texts like Sir Anthony Carlisle's 1817 *An Essay on the Disorders of Old Age* and Charcot's 1867 *Clinical Lectures on the Diseases of Old Age* contributed to a proliferation of new medical discourses surrounding aging, as did a larger societal hope that the effects of aging could be held at bay, if not totally overcome.[100] Thus, as the century progressed, skin tissue, body organs, and cells were examined with enhanced microscopic technology to discern how each were altered by the processes of aging, and large charity hospitals that served

[100] Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 1896 story "Good Lady Ducayne" relates the frightening lengths to which older people might go in order to avoid death. Here the title character successively employs young women as her companions, then has them chloroformed so that she can transfuse their "young" blood to replace her own. Many of these young women die, but Lady Ducayne's vampiric techniques prolong her life.

numbers of the aging poor conveniently provided a large pool of aged bodies as objects for scientific inquiry (Mangum 105). Aged bodies were more than ever readily available for widespread scrutiny. The illegal practice of robbing graves for bodies for medical dissection was curbed by The Anatomy Act of 1832, which provided that the bodies of those who died in workhouses and hospitals unable to pay the costs of their burials, many of whom were elderly, would be donated to scientific research (Joseph and Tucker 117). Scientists probed the causes of wrinkles, grey hair, impotency, senility, and death in their formulation of a history of aging, suggesting that if these "abnormal" conditions could be quantified, then the horrors of aging could be mitigated and contained.[101]

But scientific research and discourse failed to assuage public fears of aging and eventually contributed to the staging of old age as a Gothic horror show. Clinical approaches to aging that moved old age from being a natural part of the life cycle to being a repository for various illnesses and diseases did little to control the aging progress or the aging population. However, these scientific studies did bolster public opinion that something was wrong with the aged body. Aged bodies fell into being diseased bodies, and diseased bodies easily slipped into being sexually deviant bodies. This trajectory is most evident in the anti-masturbation literature that proliferated during the nineteenth-century and in the spermatorrhea panic of the second half of the century, when major medical journals like the *Lancet* took up the theory that sperm was an important vital

[101] In "Imagining the Life Span: From Premodern Miracles to Postmodern Fantasies" (*Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life* Eds. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick. New York: Routledge, 1995), Stephen Katz notes that as the nineteenth century progressed, medical records began to shift from attributing death to "old age" toward attributing death to specific diseases and illnesses (66).

fluid for the body and its loss was severely detrimental to the body.[102] Fears of aging and death were compounded when conflated with fears of aberrant sexuality, and old age emerged as a disease that could be brought on, not by sexual contact with another as with syphilis or gonorrhea, but by sexual "abuse" of oneself.

In his recent study *Solitary Sex*, Thomas Laqueur traces increased interest in masturbation to the early eighteenth-century text *Onania* and to cultural consumerism and its associated pleasures of excess, acquisition and gratification. Ostensibly a treatise against "self-pollution," by the end of the eighteenth century *Onania* was "a freestanding work of soft-core pornography," though its contribution to an overt social attack on masturbation had already been achieved (Laqueur 25). *Onania* inspired the Swiss physician Samuel Auguste David Tissot's 1760 *Onanism; or, A Study of the Physical Maladies Produced by Masturbation*, which Laqueur describes as "an instant literary sensation" that fed and shaped nineteenth-century curiosities surrounding masturbation. Though Laqueur does not explicitly connect the public investment in (anti)masturbation literature to fears of aging, his conjecture that "masturbation was an expression of anxiety about a new political economic order writ on the body" highlights a connection between material culture and concerns of the body (280). Fears about older people placing uncomfortable demands upon the financial resources of younger people helped to

[102] For a detailed summary of the subject, see Ellen Bayuk Rosenman's first chapter "Body Doubles: The Spermatorrhea Panic" in her book *Unauthorized Pleasures* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003) and Robert Darby's "Pathologizing Male Sexuality: Lallemand, Spermatorrhea, and the Rise of Male Circumcision" in *The Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 60.3 (2005): 283-319. The spermatorrhea panic led to the widespread circumcision of British men after the 1860s because friction caused by the foreskin was thought to increase male excitement. Other forms of genital mutilation were endorsed and exercised, including cauterization of the urethral canal with silver nitrate. Darby notes that John Addinton Symonds was one of many who volunteered themselves for this procedure in hopes of curing themselves of the desire to masturbate.

encourage scientific exploration of the aging body in the nineteenth century, which included great fascination with sexual decline, and thus aging and sexual deviancy became dual outlets for economic apprehensions.[103] Masturbation opportunely converges these two foci into one social "vice," as premature aging is promoted as a definitive symptom of the unrepentant masturbator.

The nineteenth-century French anti-masturbation pamphlet from the 1840s *Le Livre Sans Titre* calls attention to the correlation between sexual deviancy and aging through word and image, eroticizing the male body even as it invites readers' disgust.[104] The book describes the "Successive States of a Masturbator" and supports its warning with sixteen colored engravings. The narrative begins with a drawing of a handsome, "healthy" young man who is "the hope of his mother" (Fig. 14.a). After masturbation, he begins to age quickly: "He corrupted himself!... soon he carries the punishment of his sin, premature aging... his back curves" (Fig. 14.b). In a subsequent image, his "teeth are damaged and fall out" (Fig. 14.c). Soon, "his beautiful hair falls off like in old age" and "his head is prematurely bald" (Fig. 14.d). Unable to stop abusing himself, the decline into old age and death is sure and fast; "His body becomes all stiff" and "his members stop functioning" (Fig. 14.e). Finally, at seventeen, he dies in horrible pain (Fig. 14.f).

---

[103] Because of their tacit associations with pedophilia and incest, January-May marriages were already linked in the public imagination with non-standard sexualities, and assumptions about older man-younger woman sex fulfilling only male desires encourage multiple readings of masturbation within intergenerational marriage.

[104] Anti-masturbation literature became a cultural obsession in the nineteenth century. Rosenman makes an interesting claim that this body of literature defined an area of expertise for medical "professionals" otherwise regarded as quacks. The theories supported by the French doctor Claude Francois Lallemand were practiced in England as early as the 1830s, and his *A Practical Treatise on the Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment of Spermatorrhea* was translated into English in 1847. Other important works on masturbation include William Acton's 1857 *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Childhood, Youth, Adult Age, and Advanced Life*. See *Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror* by Jean Stengers and Anne Van Neck (New York: Palgrave, 2001), which includes more images from *Le Livre Sans Titre*.



a.

Figure 14. Anon., untitled from *Le Livre Sans Titre*, ca. 1840. Color engraving, dimensions unknown. Location unknown.



b.

Figure 14 cont.



c.

Figure 14 cont.



d.

Figure 14 cont.



e.

Figure 14 cont.



f.

Fig 14 cont.

Notably, sexually deviant behavior does not lead to simple death, but it initiates a rapid tour of expected visual signifiers of the aging process: curvature of the spine, loss of teeth, male pattern balding, wrinkles and stiff joints.[105] Aging is the "punishment of his sin" and, as such, is inextricable from his unnatural sex acts. Moreover, the images of his aging body are captivating and they are meant to frighten. The strangely erotic display of the aging male body, bare-chested to reveal his withered and frail physique, excites and horrifies as it (con)fuses the effects of masturbation and physical decline. The text constructs the aging male body as monstrous, but because the body we see is not really old—only seventeen—it emphasizes the consanguinity between the young and old, the "normal" and the "deviant." Youth is permeated with the effects of aging, and the effects of aging are tainted with sexual perversity.

A similar conflation of aging and sexual deviancy runs parallel with nineteenth-century fears of masturbation through the theme of the January-May marriage in literature, which provides—like anti-masturbatory tracts—a unified site for attacking and enjoying the monstrous powers of aging, death, and aberrant sexuality. As I have discussed in Chapter One, January-May marriages were also regarded as problematically sexual because they necessarily toyed with social taboos against pedophilia and incest. And because the January-May theme played upon ageist stereotypes within a masculine social hierarchy that implied these marriages were orchestrated to appease the male

---

[105] I was surprised to find in my research that many people continue to link masturbation with premature aging in the twenty-first century. On a website promoting herbal medicine for sexual concerns, an article entitled "Reversing the Effects of Over Masturbation—A Painful Journey of Recovery" details one young man's story of premature aging due to "excessive" masturbation. He believes masturbation made him to look older than he was and caused his hair to fall out (www.herbolove.com). Another website encourages self-abusers to come to their Gnostic Center to be cured of masturbation, which they also cite as responsible for premature aging, among other dramatic consequences (www.anael.org/english/masturbation/consequences.htm).

partner's sexual desire, which often appears as independent, if not entirely at odds with the female partner's desire, January-May sex acts were, in a sense, also perceived as masturbatory practices that left only one partner satisfied.[106] Though texts that take on the January-May theme often titillated audiences with the threat of intergenerational sex only to avert the horror at the last moment, the terrible suggestion of deviant sexualities initiated by the age difference inevitably corrupts "normal" marital sexual practices. Thinking about intergenerational sex required that readers openly confront the terrors of aging and sexuality within the normalizing framework of traditional heterosexual marriage and allowed for both the spread and control of subversive sexualities.

Gothic elements of January-May marriages thereby complicate how critics should approach these uniquely gendered power structures. Centering on the sexual pursuit of beautiful young women, Gothic January-May marriages play into misogynist fantasies of male domination; however, these texts also serve to focus attention on abusive male behavior—making masculinity appear villainous by collapsing it with other dangerous identifiers like old age and perverse sexualities. In January-May texts, older husbands often enjoy positions of intellectual, physical, psychological, economic, and even supernatural powers over their younger wives, but when they are snubbed as hideous sexual threats by their wives, their power to inspire fear actually decreases their ability to exercise the powers of their gender. Like Phillotson, who discovers that being objectified

[106] In Chapter Three, I cover several of Dickens's January-May marriages in which the younger wife openly desires her husband. However, some of Dickens's incestuous January-May marriages do encourage Gothic readings of the marriages as disruptive, even masturbatory sexual acts on the part of the older husbands. Arthur Gride's sexual fantasies of Madeline Gride and Quilp's comments about Little Nell's body are the most blatant suggestions of one-sided sexual projections in Dickens, but even John Jarndyce takes regular "cold baths," one of the methods used to discourage masturbation (*Bleak House* 63).

as a monstrous figure in his marriage "sickened him of himself and of everything," older husbands find masculine privileges do not guarantee sexual or romantic success.

On one level, these Gothic January-May marriages encourage an ageist demonizing of the older husband as a sexual monstrosity, but I believe that the January-May marriage's critique of gender inequities within nineteenth-century society is more intricate than a simple power reversal of the victimization of women and more complex than driving a figurative stake through the heart of aging masculinity. These monstrous older men do wield some power, even if they are shown to abuse it, and yet, when they are deprived of power, they elicit pity for what is presented as their hideous condition. Additionally, these texts implicate the readers in gendered power inequities and in sexually deviant behaviors. In *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*, Margrit Shildrick theorizes that

> although the very word 'monster' is a common term of abuse, implying a denial of any likeness between self and other such that a barrier is put in place between the two, the very force of rejection of such otherness cannot but suggest a level of disturbing familiarity, even similarity. The monster is not just abhorrent, it is also enticing, a figure that calls to us, that invites recognition. (5)

January-May texts reveal a cultural tendency to proscribe the horrors of aging, deviant sexuality to the aging male figure because that figure already embodies expectations of the having and the loss of gendered power, but they depend on moments when age transgresses the boundaries of the older husband's body and threatens to penetrate the young bodies around him—most poignantly through sexual intercourse. Like the way

age infects the body of the young masturbator, aging bodies similarly threaten to contaminate young bodies as the married couple unites as "one flesh." Thus, while I recognize an attempt in these texts to classify and regulate the monstrous body as distinct and isolated, these segregating strategies always fail. They point to the instability of categories such as the normal and the deviant, and they emphasize where their boundaries are permeable.

Thus, the January-May marriage encapsulates the historical anachronism that Mighall deems essential to the Gothic while the consummation of these marriages threatens the viability of any clear divisions between past and present. Moreover, the power struggle represented by these Gothic marriages is laden with conflicting social desires. Nineteenth-century antipathies toward aging and deviant sexualities compete with a cultural compulsion to confirm the sanctity of marriage, which, as I have pointed out in earlier chapters, was marked socially, religiously, and legally by a man's conjugal rights to his wife's body. I want to return here to the Gothic drama of *Jude the Obscure* as a case study of how these various objectives operate within the January-May marriage theme.

"And now the ultimate horror has come": Sex, Marriage and the Monster in Jude the Obscure

Phillotson's January-May marriage to Sue inspires its own horrors, and I believe it helps to read it in conjunction with the century's larger Gothic interest in intergenerational sex. Before Sue jumps out the window, Hardy provides several hints that her marriage with Phillotson will be problematic, and he explicitly links their

troubles to their age difference and to sex. Sue and Phillotson are eighteen years apart—hardly the largest age difference in this study—though the gap between them is emphasized by the text to such an extent that it seems much larger. When Phillotson first enters his relationship with Sue as her employer and teacher, he finds the necessity that "a respectable, elderly woman should be present at these lessons when the teacher and the taught were of different sexes" absurd since he is "old enough to be the girl's father," but Phillotson soon overcomes his fatherly inclinations and makes romantic advances on Sue. When Sue and Phillotson exit the vicarage as "two figures under one umbrella" the image of their bodies in close proximity is intended to shock, and Jude and the reader watch with trepidation as Phillotson twice puts his arm around Sue's waist—rejected at first but then accepted. The horror of intergenerational sexual relations overwhelms Jude, who voices the expected ageist condemnation of what he has witnessed: "O, he's too old for her—too old!" (89).[107] When Jude questions Sue about Phillotson, she rejects the idea that she would consider the affections of "an old man like him," though, when pressed, admits a few lines later that she has agreed to marry Phillotson in two years (107).

Jude and Sue try to accept the idea of sexual relations between old and young bodies, but these efforts always fail. This cyclic reconsideration of the possibility of normative sexual relations between Sue and Phillotson provide a convenient means for perpetuating the sexually perverse. The characters explore intergenerational sex, decide it's horrible, and explore it again, ad infinitum. Jude seems perversely committed to

[107] The irony that Jude introduces the woman he loves to her future husband has been discussed by several Hardy scholars, perhaps most interestingly by Richard Dellamora, who emphasizes the homosocial/sexual bonding embedded in this triangularity. Dellamora comments on the age difference between Jude and Phillotson in relation to Jude's search for a male mentor and connects their relationship to Hardy's with Henry Moule. See "Male Relations in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*," *Jude the Obscure*, ed. Penny Boumelha (New York: St. Martin's, 2000) 145-65.

playing devil's advocate to his own expressed opinion, rationalizing that "many a happy marriage had been made in such conditions of age" and that "he's not so very old" (89, 107), but spitefully reflects again on Phillotson's age prior to the wedding ceremony and reaffirms the fact that Phillotson is old enough to be Sue's "father" (137). Sue argues with Jude that their case is atypical: "He's as good to me as a man can be, and gives me perfect liberty—which elderly husbands don't do in general….If you think I'm not happy because he's too old for me, you are wrong" (152). But, shortly thereafter, she admits that she "ought not to have married" (153). While the text first presents Phillotson as a "spare and thoughtful personage of five-and-forty," it later casts Phillotson as unattractive and anachronistic, explaining that "the schoolmaster's was an unhealthy-looking, old-fashioned face, rendered more old-fashioned by his style of shaving," and Aunt Drusilla, an old woman herself, states her loathing of Sue's husband openly: "I don't want to wownd your feelings, but—there be certain men here and there that no woman of any niceness can stomach" (83, 129,153).[108] Ultimately, Sue acknowledges "a physical objection" to her husband, and though she attributes her disgust to her own "wickedness," the novel has so firmly linked Phillotson's body with social prejudices against the aged that Sue's avowal that she feels "a repugnance on my part, for a reason I cannot disclose" needs no further explanation because it is already justified by a cultural horror of (and longing for) intergenerational sex (167, 169). When Sue confesses to Jude that "[w]hat tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he

[108] This depiction also fulfills stereotypical physical images of the scholar. See my discussion of Casaubon in Chapter Four.

wishes," she titillates Jude and the reader with an image of her compulsive participation in repulsive sexual acts.

Hostility towards Phillotson's aging male body and the privilege it represents results in much of the blame for the marriage being directed toward him. Not only does Phillotson appear to be depriving young Jude the normative sexual relationship that he desires with Sue, but Phillotson marries Sue through an abuse of his age and gender based power. Sue suggests Phillotson was unethical to marry outside of his age group, pointedly asking, "Do you think, Jude, that a man ought to marry a woman his own age, or one younger than himself—eighteen years—as I am than he?" (169). Hardy critiques the legal rights a husband maintained in the nineteenth-century over his wife's body on various occasions, soliciting sympathy for Sue when she confides to Jude that "it is a torture for me to—live with him as a husband," and he undermines faulty assumptions that law or religion can guarantee desire when Phillotson unscrupulously declares to Sue that she is "committing a sin in not liking me" (169, 177). Most of the power seems in Phillotson's grasp as Sue begs to be released from her wifely duties. She urges her husband as she would a master: "But cannot you have pity on me? I beg you to be merciful!" (179). The novel suggests that as a middle-aged man, Phillotson should have known better than to have wed a young woman and that he exploits his position of gender and age authority to get what he wants. In this sense, Phillotson is the monster of the plot, who must be overcome for abuses of power to be stopped.

Sue's efforts to escape from sexual relations with her aging husband move the narrative further into Gothic conventions. Without telling Phillotson of her plans, Sue leaves their marital bed and creates a "nest" for herself in the back of their closet. Her

provisions for her security are odd, and, moreover, they are ineffective; she ties the door to the closet with a piece of string because it has no lock, and Phillotson easily breaks the string and opens the door. The scene is awkward and even a bit ridiculous, though laden with Gothic horror. When the door opens, Sue "[springs] out of her lair, great-eyed and trembling," and upbraids Phillotson for further abusing his power: "You ought not to have pulled open the door!" (176). She laments a universe that is "horrid and cruel," and returns to sleep in the closet, which Phillotson discovers the next day is full of spider webs. Phillotson begins to surmise his position as monstrous husband, remarking darkly: "What must a woman's aversion be when it is stronger than her fear of spiders!" (176). Sue's horror of her husband culminates in the bedroom scene that is discussed at the beginning of this chapter: a scene in which the horror of her husband's naked body is so overwhelming that Sue jumps out her window.

But if Phillotson is a monster—more terrible than spiders—he is not all powerful, nor is he alone. His display of force in the closet scene is minimal at best in breaking a "piece of string" rather than ropes and chains. Upon discovering Sue in the closet, he calls her behavior "monstrous," and though this is certainly an act of psychological manipulation, it points to his own powerlessness and pain within his marriage. Phillotson rejects his role as monster within the marriage, concluding that he should divorce Sue even though it goes against the "doctrines [he] was brought up in" (183). He sees what his age, his gender, and his January-May marriage have created for him, and he chooses to withdraw: "Now when a woman jumps out of a window without caring whether she breaks her neck or no, she's not to be mistaken; and this being the case I have come to a conclusion: that it is wrong to torture a fellow-creature any longer; and I won't be the

inhuman wretch to do it, cost what it may!" (183). Phillotson relinquishes Sue to Jude, and even Sue must admit, "He's a good fellow, isn't he!" (191).[109] When Phillotson reenters the narrative years later, he is an object for pity more than terror. He is an "elderly man" with a "slovenl[y]" appearance who has lost his reputation and employment because of his scandalous divorce—an isolated and disempowered man "who was his own housekeeper, purveyor, and friend" (250).

Intergenerational sex with Phillotson returns as a method of penance and self-flagellation for Sue and an opportunity for more sexual terror for the reader. Sue returns to Phillotson and asks that he take her back. Phillotson, naturally forgiving and likely lonely, "did more than he meant to do" and kisses Sue on the cheek. Sue's reaction is strong and immediate: "Sue imperceptibly shrank away, her flesh quivering under the touch of his lips" (288). Hardy's descriptions of Sue's quivering flesh and Phillotson's "renascent" desire are meant to send shivers (and fantasies) through the reader, but the possibility of reading intergenerational sex as an abuse of male power has been complicated. Phillotson is hurt by Sue's lingering "aversion" to him, and only agrees to their remarriage if Sue is certain. Moreover, even though Phillotson desires Sue sexually, he sees their remarriage primarily as an opportunity to improve his standing in the community, and he flatly tells Sue that he will not demand his conjugal rights, promising, "I shan't expect to intrude upon your personal privacy any more than I did before" (293). Sue "brightens" at this clarification but later when struggling over her feelings for Jude, decides she must consummate her remarriage to Phillotson. Sue "begs" to be admitted

[109] This "gifting" of women from older man to younger man is a common January-May theme, found in *Bleak House* and *An Old Man's Love* as well.

into her husband's separate bedroom, and it is a nightmarish seduction that she conducts. Phillotson repeatedly protests that he does not want her "against [her] impulses," but Sue persists and eventually convinces Phillotson as he reflects on her "thin and fragile figure" beneath her nightgown. Phillotson advances and Sue retreats in disgust until "[p]lacing the candlestick on the chest of drawers he led her through the doorway, and lifting her bodily, kissed her. A quick look of aversion passed over her face, but clenching her teeth she uttered no cry" (316). When Jude learns of Sue's resumption of sexual relations with Phillotson, he cries, "And now the ultimate horror has come" (317).[110]

While *Jude the Obscure* plays on ageist stereotypes of intergenerational sex to effect this tragic conclusion, the novel also connects much of the "horror" to social and religious doctrines surrounding marriage and divorce rather than attributing the abuse of power solely to aging masculinity. Sue is bound by conventions of matrimony and by realities of law despite her aspirations towards a "New Woman" ideal. She returns to Phillotson because she sees herself the victim of a divine persecution for her subversion of gender and marital norms; in her mind, the death of her children is a "judgment—the right slaying the wrong" (277). But if the social, religious, and legal customs that bind individuals in marriage are corrupt, then the January-May marriage becomes an easy means of displaying broader issues in marriage. Though the January-May marriage is not entirely at fault, it contributes to the horror conveniently and in a well-established pattern. In *Jude*, crossing generational boundaries is problematic, and the January-May

[110] The fact that Jude identifies sex with Phillotson as the ultimate horror after the murder-suicide of his children is telling.

marriage's associations with sexual deviance lead to premature aging and death.[111] When Arabella visits Jude before his death, she calls him "old man," and Mrs. Eldin describes Sue as "[y]ears and years older than when you saw her last" at the close of the novel (295, 324). Expected horrors that surround fears of the aging male body penetrating youth drive the plot, and it is impossible to read *Jude* without considering its participation in the January-May marriage theme.

Jude the Obscure demonstrates how Gothic elements are concealed within the January-May theme, but, perhaps more importantly, how the January-May marriage was already embedded in traditional Gothic forms. As I briefly explained earlier in this chapter, fear of older men and the contradictory economic and sexual powers and weaknesses they embodied were integral parts of Gothic tales from the eighteenth century. But an examination of the vampire motif as a dominant Gothic theme reveals how crucial age is to the Gothic's negotiation of gender and power. Throughout the nineteenth century, from Polodori's vampire, to Varney, to Dracula, the vampire motif allows for a January-May marriage that is consummated by blood rather than by religion and the state. Ageist fears rally against the gluttonous penetration of youth by one, in these cases, who is *hundreds* of years her senior, and these vampire stories provide a controlled medium for exaggerating, perpetuating and regulating the horrors of aging, of power inequities, and of non-traditional sexual practices.

[111] Sue's decision to use sex with Phillotson as a type of self-punishment is tantamount to sadomasochism.

Vampires and the January-May Marriage

It was only after reading dozens of nineteenth-century January-May texts that I began to notice a number of similarities between the narratives of intergenerational marriages and those of vampires. On the surface, these two themes seem to have little in common, but, in fact, they share several characteristics, and each displays an intertextual understanding of the expectations and conventions of the other tradition. Both themes work in excess, in anachronism, in sexual improprieties and in triangular romances. Both themes respond to nineteenth-century fears of aging and the points through which aging can breech the boundaries of youth. I do not contend that all texts that take up the theme of the January-May marriage draw upon the popularity of the vampire legend in nineteenth-century fiction. Comparing older husbands with blood-sucking monsters would certainly seem to harm the cause of texts that take up the January-May theme as a conservative measure for reaffirming the paternal role of husbands, but January-May texts that strive to cast older husbands as villains have much to gain by drawing upon connections between intergenerational relationships and the paranormal thirst for young blood. Dickens's depiction of Arthur Gride in *Nicholas Nickleby*, for example, touches on the vampiric when he calls Madeline a "delicate morsel" and fantasies about devouring her (710). Vampires can be sympathetic figures, but the tradition also benefits from the rise of ageist fears that I have detailed and from the contrasting feelings of loathing and pity that accompany those fears. The nineteenth-century vampire legend likewise capitalizes, quite clearly, on the January-May marriage tradition in literature, and some vampire texts participate in the tradition to such an extent that they merit readings as January-May texts.

Several critics, most notably Carol Senf, James Twitchell, and Nina Auerbach, have described the evolution of the vampire figure throughout history and literature. Auerbach stresses the difference between different vampire characters and their correlation to different social and political movements, asserting that "there is no such creature as 'The Vampire'; there are only vampires," but I find in nineteenth-century vampire narratives a remarkably similar interest in casting these monsters as aged creatures who are striving to defy death through drinking blood (5). Vampires may vary, as do their motivations, weaknesses, and techniques, but they can be identified in the nineteenth century by their depictions as "old" as much as by their desire for blood.[112] Vampires need not be associated with old age; Twitchell explains that in folklore, vampires were dead bodies made to rise and attack because their souls were trapped in their bodies by the devil (7-10). It stands to reason that the deathlessness of vampires' existences would lead to "old" vampires, though, in vampire myth, old age is not an integral characteristic of the vampire. But early nineteenth-century literary and artistic

[112] It is necessary for me to clarify that I am primarily addressing the nineteenth-century tradition of *male* vampires. Several female vampires also exist in the nineteenth century, most notably Coleridge's Christabel and LeFanu's Carmilla. These women are, like the male vampires, hundreds of years old, but the texts do not construct images of them as old women. To the contrary, these female vampires look young, and these texts thrive on eroticized scenes in which female vampires and their female victims act out thinly veiled lesbian love-making scenes. In Stoker's *Dracula*, the female vampires who threaten to seduce Harker in Dracula's castle as well as Dracula's victim Lucy also appear young and beautiful. Only Braddon's Lady Ducayne, mentioned in a previous note, is an older female "vampire." I have several theories about why ageist fears are less likely to be grafted onto the female vampire. First, I believe that Gothic fantasies of lesbian relationships and unbridled female sexuality rivaled interests in January-May marriages: lesbian narratives contained their own sexual deviancies and gender subversions, and it was therefore unnecessary to "age" the female vampire. Secondly, aging the male vampire links the "horror" of aging to male privilege. There was less need to exaggerate the monstrosity of aging women because they wielded less economic and social power in nineteenth-century culture. Moreover, what I find especially intriguing about the connections between the January-May and vampire themes is the intrinsic homoeroticism of the love triangle. Homosocial/sexual bonds that are submerged in January-May motifs become more explicit in vampire tales, as Aubrey, Harker, and other men are penetrated by male vampires as they fight to save young women from the clutches of their older rivals.

depictions of vampires are distinctly interested in how age works within the vampire motif.

Ageist fears are evident in Henry Fuseli's 1781 *The Nightmare*, which Twitchell describes as a proto-vampiric image (28-9). The demonic figure's face is markedly wrinkled, and though his masculine body is largely shielded by darkness and his crouched position, his eye-catching grimace resembles an aged and toothless mouth (Fig. 15). Associations between the demonic figure and old age increase as Fuseli's painting resonates within nineteenth-century culture. Twitchell explains how Fuseli's *Nightmare* spawns a number of imitative images, including the 1830 illustration "Cauchemar" for a novel by Michel Raymond. In "Cauchemar" the male figure who sits upon the female victim is even more clearly cast as aged than in Fuseli's; his thin arms grasp at the unconscious woman's breast, and his wrinkled face leers lecherously down upon her sprawled figure (Fig. 16). Twitchell uses these illustrations to support his argument regarding the "sharpening of the vampire image…within the first fifty years of the nineteenth century," but I want to further his claim by pointing to the increasing nineteenth-century interest in cultivating a horrific image of aging—specifically, a sexualized image that juxtaposes an older male body with a younger female body. The nightmare that the Gothic vampire produces is distinctly erotic, as many critics like Eve Sedwick and Judith Halberstam have already noted, but it also is distinctly coded by age, as one generation stands poised to penetrate the other either by tooth or phallus.



Figure 15. Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1871. Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 126.7 cm. The Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 16. Anon., *Cauchemar*, from novel by Michel Raymond, title unknown, 1830. Engraving.

John Polidori's 1819 *The Vampyre* is the first substantial treatment of the vampire theme in British literature, and it reveals the growth of nineteenth-century interests in teaming January-May dynamics with the monstrous.[113] Beyond the nineteenth-century cultural impetus towards youth, Polidori privately nursed his own jealous admiration of an "older" and more powerful man, Byron, who became a model for Lord Ruthven, the vampire of his story.[114] Lord Ruthven is simultaneously attractive and repulsive; his "dead grey eye" and "the deadly hue of his face" contrast with the "beautiful" form and outline of his body (3). Painting Byron as one step from the grave gave Polidori more than a method for publicly ridiculing his nemesis from a safe distance. It established a correlation between the demonic and the necrophilic in the vampire literary tradition, and it lent to the emerging vampire tradition a slew of ageist associations that had already developed over centuries through the January-May theme.

As I explain in my discussion of *Don Juan*, Byron was also interested in January-May relationships. He furnished much of the material for *The Vampyre* during the famous 1816 storytelling contest that led to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Polidori's *The Vampyre* was first attributed to Byron. In June of 1816, Byron wrote the fragment of a novel very similar to Polidori's *The Vampyre*. In Byron's tale, the narrator's friend, the slightly older Darvell, suffers from a mysterious ailment. Though "in early life more than usually robust," Darvell "had been for some time gradually giving away, without the intervention of any apparent disease: he had neither cough nor hectic, yet he became daily more enfeebled" (19). Darvell's inexplicable physical demise is remarkably similar

[113] Though many critics read Coleridge's 1800 *Christabel* as a female vampire or *lamia*, she is not explicitly referred to as one.

[114] Polidori traveled with Byron and the Shelleys for a short period as Byron's physician. For information about Polidori and Byron, see Benita Eisler's *Byron*, 518-9.

to the premature decline of the uncontrollable masturbator depicted in *Le Livre Sans Titre*. Unfortunately, Byron leaves off his story before Darvell can rise as a vampiric masturbator.

Byron's brief reference to vampire lore in *The Giaour* (1813) does not dictate that the vampire be old or that the victim be young:

> But first, on earth as Vampire sent,
> Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent;
> Then ghastly haunt thy native place,
> And suck the blood of all thy race,
> There from thy daughter, sister, wife,
> At midnight drain the stream of life. (755-60)

In later lines, Byron lingers over the death of the Giaour's youngest child, but his inclusion of the victims as "sister" and "wife," presumably similarly aged as the Giaour, yet rather than emphasizing the age difference between the vampire and his victims, Byron adheres to the Greek belief that vampires devoured those closest to them as their first victims. But in Polidori's version, intergenerational coupling is made a vital part of the myth. Aubrey's love-interest, the Greek maiden Ianthe whom Polidori depicts as "an uneducated Greek girl," full of "innocence" and even "infantile," becomes one of the vampire's victims, but not before she relates to Aubrey the legend of the vampire with distinct reference to the monster's age. As evidence of her story, she pointedly refers to specific "old men, who had at last detected one [a vampire] living among themselves" (9). In order to "prolong his existence for the ensuing months," Ruthven seduces and replenishes himself with Ianthe and then with other young women. After Ianthe, he takes

an "innocent, though thoughtless girl" as his victim in Rome before focusing his attentions on Aubrey's eighteen-year-old sister.

Polidori's decisions to heighten the nightmarish implications of the story by emphasizing an age difference and by making Ruthven's advances towards Miss Aubrey not just amorous, but matrimonial in design, are important. By the time he meets Miss Aubrey, Ruthven has already "ruined" several women in the narrative, but has not yet found it necessary to attach himself in marriage to satisfy his desires. Ruthven's proposal of marriage ups the ante of horror by locating sexual perversion within the sanctity of marriage. Moreover, the conclusion situates the decision to allow a January-May marriage (and, in this case, the sexual perversion and death that accompany it) within a morally relative society. Miss Aubrey's January-May marriage to Ruthven is consummated because other social and moral codes permit and in fact require it. Aubrey has promised not to reveal the vampiric identity of Ruthven until one year has passed since Ruthven's supposed death, and, because of his oath, Aubrey feels that he is unable to provide the evidence that will stop his beloved sister from marrying a vampire. When Aubrey considers breaking his oath to save his sister, Ruthven uses another social code against him. Warning Aubrey that his sister will be "dishonoured" if their engagement is broken, Ruthven insinuates that he has already had sexual relations with her. Aubrey is quick to believe Ruthven's assertion that "Women are frail," and, to preserve his sister's honor, he fails to remit the information that could save her (22). Polidori clearly intends his readers to writhe at the double binds that Aubrey faces, and he frames the conclusion so that the January-May marriage and its horrors are the only moral solutions to the situation at hand. Aubrey and the readers are forced by principle to consider the

intergenerational "bride and bridegroom" on their honeymoon and to reflect on a union initially demanded by society and ultimately "solemnized" by religion and the state (23).

Unsurprisingly, this January-May marriage proves destructive on multiple levels, and though *The Vampyre* critiques a system in which masculinity and age exploit power, these imbalances ultimately remain unchecked at the story's closing when Ruthven vanishes. Old age may have been demonized, but here it is victorious. Symbolically penetrated by the vampire, Aubrey breaks a blood-vessel in his frustrated and helpless condition and dies, making youthful masculinity another feminized victim in the narrative. Thus *The Vampyre* equivocates in the implications of its plot. When masculinity triumphs, it is bound with sexual perversity and aging, and the presumptive hero of the story dies an ineffectual and feminized death. The homoeroticism of Aubrey's figurative penetration by Ruthven, the depiction of marriage as an imperfect arrangement in an immoral world, and the criticism directed towards the abuse of masculine power work subversively in the text, though the open-ended conclusion revels in the fear it produces from so much gender and power instability. The ending captures the contrary incentives that abound in the January-May marriage theme, and *The Vampyre*'s ability to terrify demonstrates the effects of incorporating age into the vampire legend. Although Polidori has often been criticized as a fawning plagiarist of Byron, Polidori moves the vampire legend beyond Byron's conception. Polidori's emphasis on age dynamics within the vampire narrative takes advantage of a synthesis of the aged and the monstrous that had already been festering in Gothic narratives and thereby influences

the future of the vampire legend in nineteenth-century literature as an outlet for negotiating anxieties regarding gender and power through age.[115]

In her preface to Devendra Varma's edition of *Varney the Vampire*, Margaret Carter deems that "the fatal Lord Ruthven is the ancestor not only of Sir Francis Varney and Count Dracula, but of all the vampires who have since crept through the pages of English fiction" (xxxi). *Varney the Vampire*, originally published serially as a penny dreadful in 1845, then issued in novel form in 1847, and Stoker's 1897 *Dracula* do capitalize on many of Polidori's details—the practice of biting victims on the neck, the power of moonlight, the vampire's superhuman strength—but what I find most interesting is that they incorporate and manipulate images of intergenerational sex to thrill and terrify readers. These mid and late nineteenth-century texts reveal how vampires became increasingly associated with old age in literature and in the public imagination, and in turn, how the January-May marriage theme worked in conjunction with the Gothic tradition.

In case readers neglected to envision the January-May connotations of the vampire motif, *Varney the Vampire* provided illustrations throughout the serial's publication to encourage shared visions of an old, even skeletal, vampire forcing himself upon the body of a young woman, and the success of the serial can not be separated from its participation in the nineteenth-century obsession with older man-younger woman relationships.[116] The cover of the story snares readers' attention with the central image of

---

[115] See Patricia Skarde's "Vampirism and Plagiarism: Byron's Influence and Polidori's Practice" in *Studies in Romanticism* 28.2 (1989): 249-69.

[116] Scholarly opinions differ over the authorship of *Varney*. Varma's 1970 edition of *Varney* cites Thomas Preskett Prest (1810-1879) as the author, but Humphrey Liu, one of the contributors to the online "Varney Project," and other Varney experts believe the author to be James Malcolm Rymer. Both Prest and Rymer

the shrouded, death-like figure hovering menacingly over the sleeping figure of a young woman, and if the novel's subtitle, *A Feast of Blood*, or its promise to be "A Romance of Exciting Interest" failed to entice buyers to relinquish their pennies, the threat encompassed by an aged male looming over a defenseless female body was sure to draw a riveted audience (Fig. 17). The illustrations of Varney ravishing young women worked with the text to conjure images that invite readers to condemn perverse sexualities while fostering violent and mildly pornographic scenes of sexual aggression towards women.[117]

In one of the most extreme versions of a January-May relationship imaginable, Varney is a very old lover. Dating him through an old family portrait, characters in the novel guess Varney's age to be about one hundred and fifty, and the initial scene of his violation of Flora in chapter one stresses the signifiers of aging on his body. As she crouches in bed paralyzed by fear, she hears his "long nails, that appear as if the growth of many years untouched" scratching on the windowpane before "a long gaunt hand, which seems utterly destitute of flesh" creeps into her bedroom (3). Soon, "a hissing sound comes from the throat of the hideous being, and he raises his long, gaunt arms—the lips move" (4). Flora tries to move, but Varney drags her back to the bed by her hair, where he runs his "horrible, glassy eyes" over her "beautifully rounded limbs" with "hideous satisfaction" before he bites her neck (4). The opening illustration for chapter one shows Flora sprawled upside down across her bed with her leg cocked. Varney conveniently manages to grasp her breast while en route to her neck, keeping one hand and leg poised towards the door for a quick getaway from the scene of his crime while his

---

were writers employed by the publisher Edward Lloyd. I have followed recent scholars in my listing of *Varney* in the bibliography.

[117] I can find no record of illustrators for *Varney*.

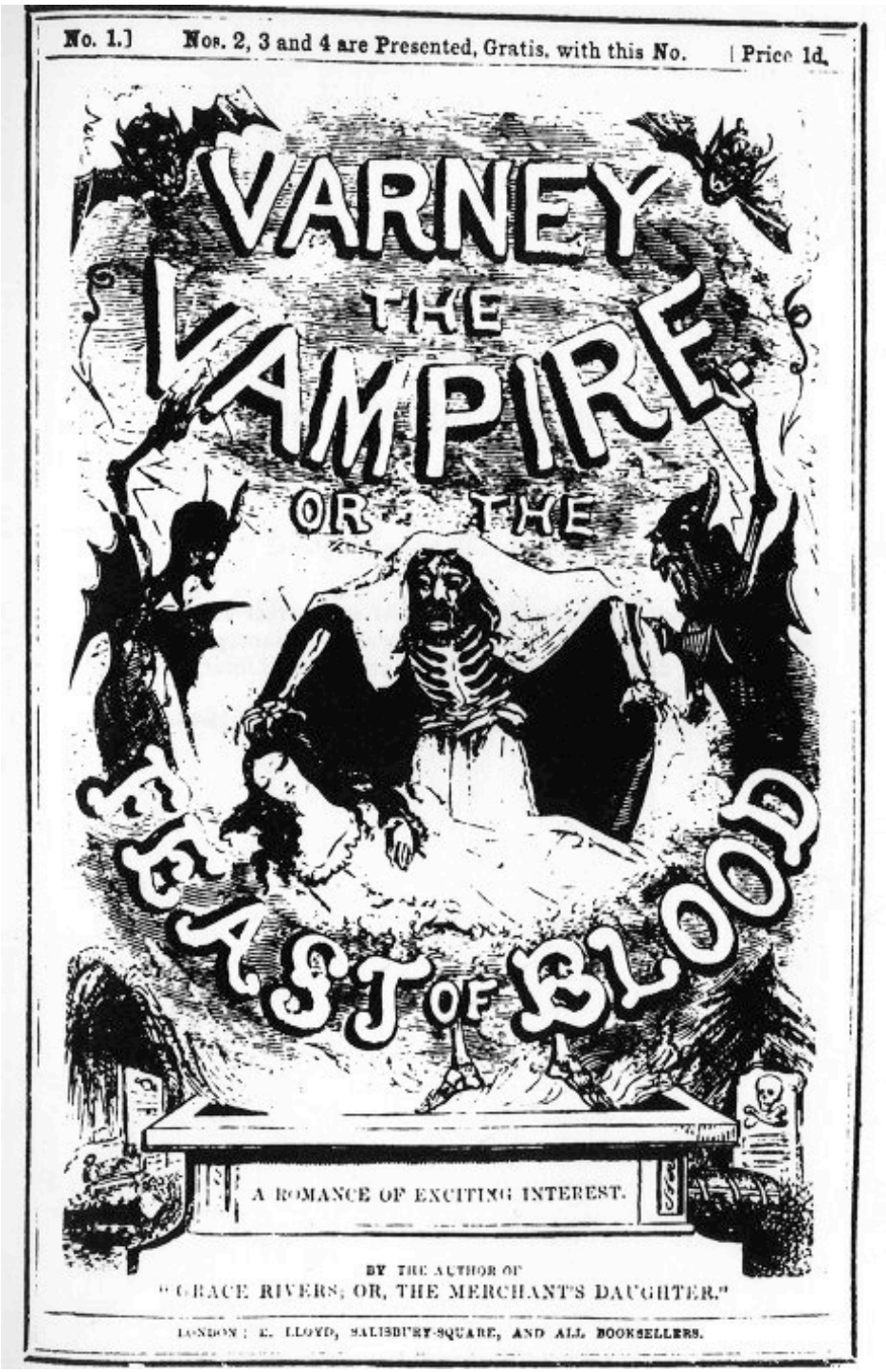


Figure 17. Anon., Frontispiece, from James Malcolm Rymer, *Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood.* 1845. Engraving.

victim ineffectively struggles (Fig. 18).[118] This image of vampiric rape proposes that old age is the agent and the result of sexual sin. Because vampirism was thought to be infectious, once bitten Flora faces the prospect of becoming a vampire and suffering its age-associated curses. Indeed, focusing outside of the text to examine the effects of Varney on the reading public, one could argue a cyclical pattern of fear of perversion and fear of aging though such an illustration; because of the misinformation promoted by anti-masturbation literature, an image of an "old" vampire groping a young woman could provide cheap masturbatory material for a young man who ironically fears that premature aging could be the likely result of his solitary vice. Although the repulsive image of Varney ravishing Flora urges that standards of normalcy like youth and sexual propriety need to be protected and stabilized, it also proliferates desire and thereby ironically destroys the possibility of that protection and stabilization. Chapter One ends with this image of Flora's body about to be penetrated by Varney's, and the horror that this narrative has taken as its theme inspires fear and awe in readers.

Certainly, *Varney* is participating in an earlier nineteenth-century movement through such scenes, which Diane Long Hoeveler identifies in *Gothic Feminism* as the "gendering [of] victimization" (51). But I want to move what is happening in this image and in this novel beyond a fixation on the violence against women that is, undoubtedly, present in the text. If we focus on the body of Varney rather than the body of his female victims, the signs of aging that are meant to intensify the perverse signal a parallel social investment in violence against the aging male body. Even in his daylight identity as Sir

[118] The groping of her breast seems to be an imaginative addition by the illustrator; the actual text describes Varney holding Flora down on the bed by her long hair, a dominating gesture used by Hans Baldung Grien in several of his *Death and the Maiden* paintings.



VARNEY, THE VAMPYRE;

OR,

THE FEAST OF BLOOD

A Romance.

CHAPTER I.

——" How graves give up their dead,
And how the night air hideous grows
With shrieks!"

MIDNIGHT. — THE HAIL-STORM. — THE DREADFUL VISITOR.—THE VAMPYRE.

THE solemn tones of an old cathedral clock have announced midnight—the air is thick and heavy—a strange, death-like stillness pervades all nature. Like the ominous calm which precedes some more than usually terrific outbreak of the elements, they seem to have paused even in their ordinary fluctuations, to gather a terrific strength for the great effort. A faint peal of thunder now comes from far off. Like a signal gun for the battle of the winds to begin, it appeared to awaken them from their lethargy, and one awful, warring hurricane swept over a whole city, producing more devastation in the four or five minutes it lasted, than would a half century of ordinary phenomena.

It was as if some giant had blown upon some toy town, and scattered many of the buildings before the hot blast of his terrific

Figure 18. Anon., Heading for Chapter 1, from James Malcolm Rymer, *Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood.* 1845. Engraving.

Francis, Varney's aged male body is marginalized by Flora's brother Henry and her lover Charles who both represent standard masculinity and normative sexuality, and Varney's place outside of masculine conventions and the public demand for his death inevitably feminizes him as he emerges as a potential victim. If Varney is at first the "hunter," he becomes the "hunted" as young male characters in the novel and the readers' collective resentment unite to seek his destruction, and the plot thrives on moments that contemplate the penetration of his aging male body. For example, an angry mob storms Varney's house, driving a stake through a dead male body that they assume to be one of Varney's victims along the way. The image of the stake through this dead body captures the mob's sexual desire to violate Varney (Fig. 19), though the text carefully constructs the mob as ignorant, riotous, and even "maniacal" (216). *Varney* solicits readers' sympathy for Varney's condition, and the conflicting tendencies to demonize and to victimize the vampire contribute to similar propensities to ridicule and to sympathize with images of older husbands in nineteenth-century literature. *Varney* delights in the contradictory urges to kill and to save its protagonist throughout the novel. The plot repeatedly leads to scenes in which Varney is trapped and outnumbered, most certainly to be destroyed by the representatives of normalcy and civilization that surround him, only to delight readers with his narrow escapes. These tantalizing episodes in which the monster is always almost captured and disempowered are unbelievably fantastic, though the supernatural elements of the Gothic and readers' ambivalent feelings about Varney encourage a willing suspension of disbelief that necessitates such elusiveness. In one scene, Varney is surrounded by townspeople ready to annihilate him, but he charms them with his "gentlemanly and collected behavior" while he effects his getaway (228). The

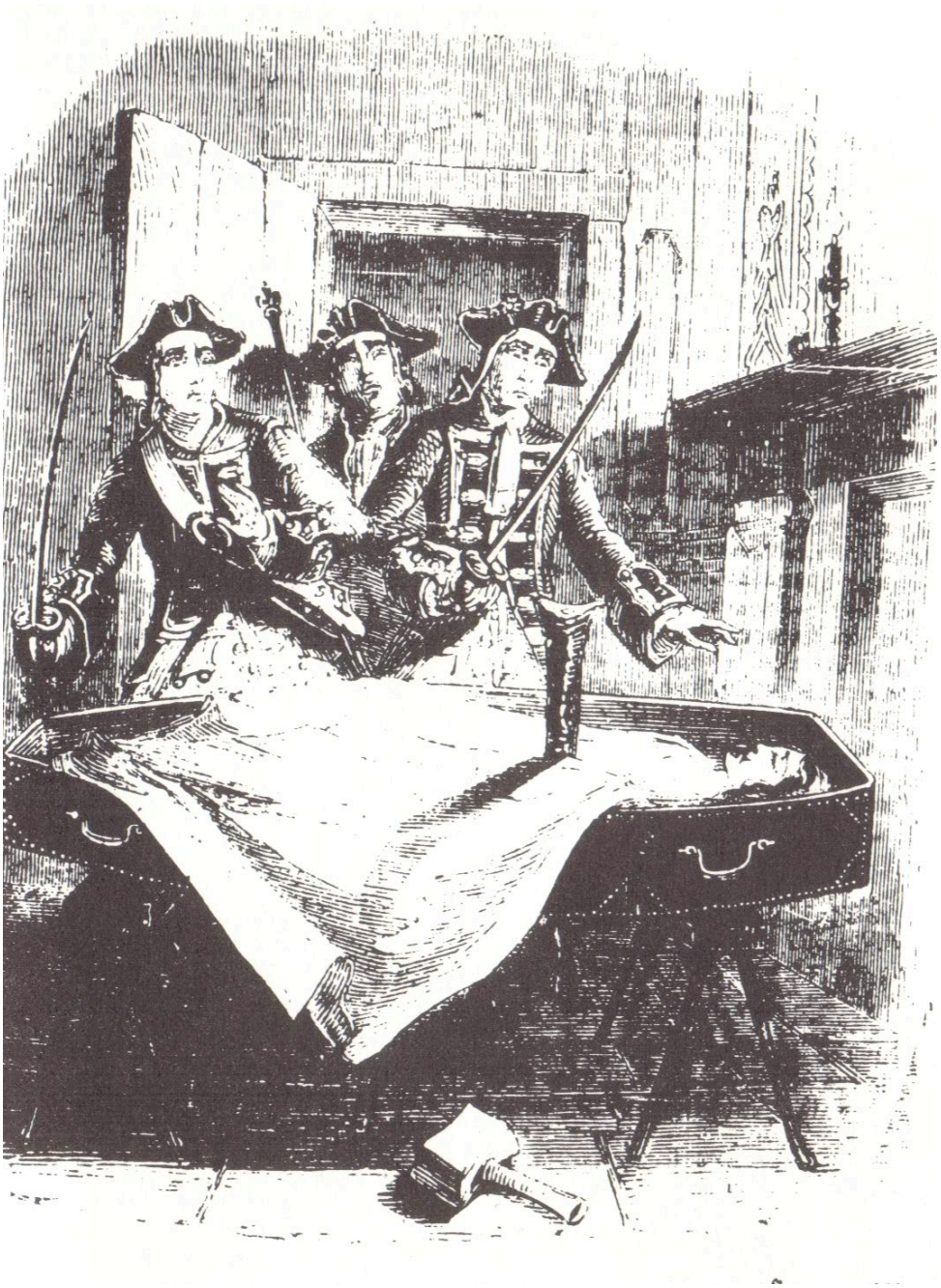


Figure 19. Anon., "Staking the Vampire," from James Malcolm Rymer, *Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood.* 1845. Engraving.

illustration draws attention to a number of scythes and other pointed weapons that are held ready for the retribution that Varney eludes. Presenting Varney from the front while the townspeople blend together in an angry mass, this image supports the text's intermittent support of its villain (Fig. 20). Even the main characters who are opposed to Varney begin to sympathize with his position at certain points in the text. Immediately after a physical struggle between himself and Varney, Henry awaits the mob's search for Varney with "a strange mixture of feeling" (191). While Henry recognizes that the "destruction of Sir Francis Varney would certainly have been an effectual means of preventing him from continuing to be the incubus he then was upon the Bannerworth family," he recoils "with horror from seeing even such a creature as Varney sacrificed at the shrine of popular resentment, and murdered by an infuriated populace" (191). Henry's "generous nature" senses the power inequities that characterize this unified attack on a single representative of aging masculinity, and against his reason, he cries, "I do hope, after all, the vampyre will get the better of them. It's like a whole flotilla attacking one vessel" (191).

Sympathy for Varney becomes so central to the story that the text toys with the idea of advocating the January-May marriage between the young heroine Flora and the aged vampire, and *Varney* introduces the idea that a January-May love can free the vampire from his curse. This move has extremely subversive implications since it suggests that legitimizing the sexually "perverse," as the text presents Varney's relationship with Flora, is a potential method for coping with sexual deviancies. Varney expresses his own disgust at his "hateful" condition that forces him "in a paroxysm of wild insanity" to need "the gushing fountain of another's veins" (157). He begs Flora to



Figure 20. Anon., "Varney Faces the Mob," from James Malcolm Rymer, *Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood.* 1845. Engraving.

accept his proposal, because "if we can find one human heart to love us, we are free" (156). Flora refuses Varney's "horrible proposition," but she realizes that her inability to love him will likely lead to a chain of destruction as Varney remains "doomed yet, perhaps, for many a cycle of years, to spread misery and desolation around me" (157). While Varney is initially angry with Flora for her refusal, he quickly accepts her rejection and actually instructs her how she should best escape from him. Thus, Flora's denial of Varney's salvation and his resigned acceptance of his plight increases pity for his cursed condition. Moreover, as Varney continues his pursuit of a young woman's "true love," the text raises questions of moral relativism when the sexual marketplace shades his January-May engagements with more mercenary blood-sucking. Subsequent volumes show Varney on the verge of marriage to several young women whose families are conveniently focused on his financial worth rather than his undead body, allowing readers to vacillate between desire and disgust for these potential intergenerational unions.

By evoking readers' sympathy for the sexually deviant, Varney moves the vampire legend even closer to the theme of the January-May marriage. Varney ultimately escapes those who want to kill and contain his aging body by committing suicide—jumping dramatically into Mount Vesuvius in an overwhelmingly inspiring yet pitiful act of defying the physical body and his cursed sexual desire for young women. By the end of the novel, readers are as much sorry as relieved to see him go, a sentiment that Bette B. Roberts also endorses in her essay "*Varney, the Vampire*, or, Rather, *Varney*, the Victim," in which she describes Varney as a character "whose name inspires more a smile than a shiver" (1). Though Stoker's *Dracula* is unquestionably darker and

more threatening than *Varney*, the late nineteenth-century vampire encompasses the same ambivalent feelings about the sexual deviancy of January-May relationships. What Dracula wants to do to young women is horrific and awful, but the text nevertheless encourages some degree of commiseration for the aging male body even as it necessitates its destruction.

Stoker's *Dracula* emphasizes the appearance of the vampire as an elderly man more than any of its predecessors. When Jonathan Harker writes in his journal detailing his first glimpse of Count Dracula when the door to the castle swings open, the sketch he provides uses age as a method of recalling a visual stereotype, and what will later be a sexual signifier. He describes, "Within, stood a tall old man, clean-shaven save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour about him anywhere (21). Although Dracula appears much younger later when he arrives in London, the reader is encouraged to think of him as an old man from his first introduction, and Stoker emphasizes Dracula's advanced years throughout the initial depiction of his character so that his aged body becomes a vital component of his character. Harker explains that the "old man motioned me in," and later qualifies his description of the ruddy color of Dracula's lips with the phrase "in a man of his years" (22, 23-24). What follows Harker's entrance to the castle is a detailed analysis of the aging—as the Undead, or Almost Dead—male body. Though Dracula's grip is powerful, it is "as cold as ice—more like the hand of a dead than living man" (22). His eyebrows are "very massive," with "bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion" (23). And Harker can not help but record the fact that Dracula's "breath was rank," so revolting that "a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which, do what I would, I

could not conceal" (24). Harker has secured an "old and big" estate for Dracula to inhabit in England, but the anachronistic setting of Carfax diminishes in importance when compared with the anachronism of Dracula himself who readily admits to Harker, "I seek not gaiety nor mirth, not the bright voluptuousness of much sunshine and sparkling waters which please the young and gay. I am no longer young" (29).

Dracula's insinuation that he is a benign and resigned elderly man is, of course, false. While he does not seek the same things as the young, he seeks the young themselves, and it is his need for intergenerational commingling and the power that he derives from it that drives the terror of the plot. When Dracula repeatedly refers to Harker as "my dear/good young friend," he praises the worth of the youthful body that he plans to possess and enjoy, and Dracula's taste for children dangerously hints of pedophilic tendencies.[119] The reason that Dracula needs young blood remains unclear in the text, and throughout vampire lore, the unstated bias towards young blood seems so explicit that it requires no explanation. Apparently, young blood is the secret to restoring youth as well as prolonging life because youth is associated with power throughout the text. The "weird sisters" find that Harker is "young and strong," and consequently reflect age-based stereotypes of sexual potency that "there are kisses for us all" (42). When Lucy requires a blood transfusion to save her life, Arthur volunteers to donate his blood, not because he is her fiancé, but because he is "younger and stronger" (113). During the transfusion, the value of young blood is reaffirmed. Van Helsing remarks with surprise that Arthur "is so young and strong and of blood so pure that we need not defibrinate it"

[119] I have yet to find a satisfactory explanation for Dracula's decision to satisfy his thirst with a child in chapter four, whose determined mother is devoured by wolves in the castle courtyard. One would think that an adult would have better capacity to drench a vampire's thirst. But Dracula (as well as the "weird sisters" in the novel) displays a clear preference for young bodies.

(114). As Harker first discovers that Dracula's successful exploits make him younger, the anachronism of youth and age frighteningly culminates within the vampire's body. Investigating Dracula's "great box," Harker finds a body that defies age categorization: "There lay the Count, but looking as if his youth had been half-renewed, for the white hair and moustache were changed to dark iron-grey; the cheeks were fuller, and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath" (53). Dracula is younger and, as such, he is more powerful; however, the real horror of the novel is that this is an unnatural power of youth is assumed by an "old man" through his sexual deviancies.

Though earlier vampire texts stressed the necessity of blood to prolong life, and Le Fanu's "Carmilla" (1872) reveals how vampirism can make a woman who is 150 years old look attractive and young, *Dracula* stresses the appearance of youth and age as a visual barometer of sexual deviance. Rejecting the myth of bodily decline through sexual perversion that anti-masturbation texts like *Le Livre Sans Titre* touted, *Dracula* suggests that if sexual perversity can lead to premature aging and death, then more sexual perversity might be the solution to securing another chance at youth. When in pursuit of Dracula in London, Harker hears a carter's description of Dracula as "a old feller, with a white moustache," and Harker is "thrilled" that Dracula has apparently not found a recent victim (231). Yet moments when Harker sees Dracula with his white hair turned "iron-grey" promote the troubling idea that a false youth can disguise true age. Indeed, it is the shock of the transformation from an elderly man appearing to be young, the implications that he has revived himself by blood, and the deceptiveness of such false appearances that terrifies Harker when he first sees him in London: "I believe it is the Count, but he has grown young. My God, if this be so! Oh, my God! my God!" (155). Dracula's

appearance is indicative of his unnatural acts, and though he appears as a much more sinister figure than Varney, his ability to bend age, and later gender, norms by pointing to the theatrical nature of appearances is so subversive that it is terrifying.

Youth is penetrated by age not only through the aged body of Dracula but also through the text's treatment of his peculiar January-May "marriage" to Mina Harker when the sharing of blood makes them representative of the "one flesh" associated with a married couple. Already, *Dracula* flouts orthodox notions of marriage. Lucy's often cited suggestion: "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?" has provided material for a number of gender critiques of the novel, and Robert Tracy identifies the polygamous union that Dracula shares with Mina: "If Lucy has five husbands, and Dracula five wives, Mina has six husbands, the five crusaders and Dracula" (60, 46).[120] Mina takes a blood oath when Dracula drinks her blood and she reciprocates the act by drinking blood from his chest, and according to Tracy, Mina is very much Dracula's "wife." This January-May union, made while Harker sleeps ineffectually beside them on the bed, overrides the same-age marriage Mina has with Harker until Dracula's death. Corruption and sexual perversion enters the sanctity of marriage, and Mina laments that she is "Unclean, unclean!" and can "touch [Harker] or kiss him no more" (248).[121]

---

[120] For a good summary of the field, see Ross Murfin's "Gender Criticism and Dracula" in *Dracula* ed. John Paul Riquelme, (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 434-49.

[121] I find it fascinating that during Mina's abstinence from sexual relations with Harker because of her "unclean" state, Harker manifests the classic symptoms of premature aging described in *Le Livre*. Dr. Seward describes Harker in his diary: "Last night he was a frank, happy-looking man, with strong youthful face, full of energy, and with dark brown hair. Today he is a drawn, haggard old man, whose white hair matches well with the hollow burning eyes and grief-written lines of his face" (263). The rapid change of Harker's hair from brown to white could be from grief, but also could allude to his own masturbatory acts when deprived of his conjugal rights.

This January-May union proves troubling to gender and age identities on multiple levels, and it becomes the central component in a larger vying for power. Intergenerational sex becomes a strategic method of power that the old (Dracula) can exercise over the young (Harker). In this sense, the young wife becomes the sexual prize in a male-male competition. Dracula articulates this perspective neatly, tying his struggle specifically to his age: "My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you love are mine already; and through them you and others shall be mine—my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed" (267). The "girls" are the point of entry into the power realm of the young, but the January-May marriage provides a means to further homoerotic deviancies. In *Dracula*, the homosociality of the relationship between the older and younger men in the January-May triangle is more explicit than in most examples in the tradition. Saving Harker from the weird sisters' attempts to kiss him, Dracula unabashedly identifies Harker as an object of his sexual desire, saying "in a soft whisper" that "I too can love" (43).[122] Consequently, the January-May marriage seems a convenient method to bring old and young male bodies together as though the ultimate objective of the heterosexual January-May union is to effect a homosexual end: "through them you and others shall be mine" (267). Dracula's intergenerational penetration of Mina, and, conversely, her intergenerational penetration of him also initiates a potential for sympathy, even empathy, with the sexually perverse. Dracula deems Mina "flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood, kin of my kin," and as his "wife," she can share his thoughts and

[122] Queer readings of *Dracula* abound, including Talia Schaffer's "'A Wilde Desire Took Me': The Homoerotic History of Dracula" in *English Literary History* 61.2 (1994): 381-425 to Judith Halberstam's *Skin Shows*.

experiences—a method for important moments of reconciliation with the aging male body, as well as the means for its destruction (252).

Because Mina now shares Dracula's understanding of nontraditional sexualities, she pities him, and she takes up the case of her older husband to those who seek his destruction. She reasons that the "poor soul who has wrought all this misery is the saddest case of all. Just think what will be his joy when he too is destroyed in his worser part that his better part may have spiritual immortality" (269). She urges that the group "must be pitiful to him too, though it may not hold your hands from his destruction" (269). Since youth and age have been so confused through the vampire legend, in this January-May triangle, Harker at times assumes the jealous position of a threatened older husband. Mina reminds the reader of the premature "poor white hairs" that serve as "evidence of what [Harker] has suffered," but when Harker damns Dracula's soul, Mina recoils with "fear and horror" that Harker's wrath would be so severe on her and her lover (269). Though Mina is an "outcast from God" because of her unclean state, she nonetheless appeals to Christian forgiveness and redemption for herself as well as Dracula. She begs, "Oh, hush! oh, hush! in the name of the good God….I have been thinking all this long, long day of it—that…perhaps…some day…I too may need such pity; and that some other like you—and with equal cause for anger—may deny it to me!" (269). Mina's moral superiority identifies her as the prototypical Victorian heroine, but her affinity with Dracula via sexual sin transgresses perspectives of gender and age. Her plea demands sympathy with the aging male body of Dracula, just as Harker's aging body solicits compassion, yet Mina's wifely request simultaneously allows for the vindication of his annihilation by granting him a spiritual immortality that projects an

equalizing of power into the hereafter. Because she has been infiltrated by and has infiltrated the aging male body, she is privy to its strengths and to its weaknesses. Her interests are now vested with Dracula's, and, conversely, his are with hers.

The disintegration of Dracula's body at the end of the novel caters to cultural fears of aging and death, but, instead of restoring youth and age, masculinity and femininity, to conventional boundaries, the disappearance of his body encourages further confusion of age and gender identities. Mina watches her same-age husband plunge a knife into the "deadly pale" throat of her January husband while another young man thrusts a knife into his heart, but these vengeful penetrations of age by youth do not lead to gender and age stability. Apart from the homoerotic implications of such acts that I have alluded to earlier, Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal note that Dracula's "supposed" death is "riddled with ambiguity" rather than resolution, and Stoker purposefully revised the conclusion of the novel to remove a paragraph in which Dracula's castle explodes in answer to his death (325). Dracula's "dissolution" leaves gender and age categories unfixed. Mina describes a look of "triumph" in his eyes before the knives enter his body, and suggests that in this moment of intergenerational, transgendered penetration, there is a kind of "peace" (325).

Thus, while *Dracula* participates in a larger nineteenth-century horror of the aging male body and intergenerational and deviant sexualities, the novel resists redrawing static formulations of gender and aging and instead delights in moments where such divisions fracture. The birth of Mina's child that concludes the novel is Dracula's as well as Harker's; the child's body contains the blood of all three parental bodies, and through the novel's sexual history of blood transfusions and blood suckings, other parents who are

male and female, young and old as well.[123] The veneer of security that *Dracula* leaves at its conclusion is all too thin, and perhaps this is where the real horror of the novel lies. Beneath the nineteenth-century hostility towards aging is a concurrent sympathy with the aged fostered by those who, like Mina, see the interests of the old and the young intertwined. Vampire lore and January-May marriages provide opportunities for animosity and longing about intergenerational union.

[123] In "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Representations* 8 (1984): 107-33, Cristopher Craft reads Mina's son Quincy Harker as "the unacknowledged son of the Crew of Light's displaced homoerotic union" (133).

Chapter Six: Money and Love in January-May Marriages

Sexual Economies and the January-May Marriage

It would be a glaring oversight in any study of January-May marriages to neglect a discussion of the sexual economies contributing to the larger control and exchange of power in the nineteenth century. As we have seen, literature since the age of Chaucer has anticipated and fulfilled tacitly understood social expectations of the exchange of youth for material wealth. Even in contemporary society where women have made enormous strides in professional fields, images in popular culture of January-May romances often hinge upon an economic framework and frequently depict beautiful young women marrying rich old men. Operating via a parodic rendering of the American family, the film comedy *Addams Family Values* (1993), for example, relates the story of how Debbie the governess (known to police as the "black widow" because she has married and buried several husbands) weds the seemingly primordial Uncle Fester, and her gold-digging motivations are clear to all, even the children in the audience, who recognize a familiar social exchange of youth and sex for money. The sexual economies of these marriages remain commonly accepted today, and it would be difficult to argue that real life nineteenth-century January-May marriages were more prevalent, or more mercenary, than those of the periods before or after. Nonetheless, the history of sexuality inevitably places individual marriage choices within historicized gender identities and specific social frameworks, and while economic motivations present an apparently stabilizing constant in the theme throughout the centuries, the pliability of the January-May marriage

theme's use of money, wealth and class over the course of time suggests that the trope can be manipulated to express shifting and destabilized ideas about gender.

Nineteenth-century literature that employs the January-May theme enlists age as another method for interpreting the gender / class nexus that appeared in the wake of rapid industrialism and the rise of the middle class.[124] As Michael McKeon describes in "Historicizing Patriarchy," modern patriarchy emerged as political and territorial changes increasingly distinguished between the labor and opportunities of men and women. Women in nineteenth-century Britain maneuvered within a unique form of patriarchy in a long established system of Western male domination, and McKeon explains how the rise of modern capitalism and demise of an agrarian economy throughout the eighteenth century separated women from traditional means of economic livelihood (298-301). Responding to these conditions, nineteenth-century January-May marriages comment upon a historically explicit social dynamic by recognizing an extensive male economic privilege, although they ultimately undermine the gender restrictions of that economy by devaluing conventions of masculinity like strength and virility and upholding a capitalist arrangement in which privilege can be transferred across gender lines.

Nineteenth-century literary treatments of the January-May theme thus depict the marriage partners within a distinctly gendered economy. Limited options for female education and employment and legal inequities grounded in property law forced nineteenth-century women, and especially middle-class women and those striving to be middle-class, to regard marriage to well-to-do men as the key to their financial security.

[124] In *The Culture of Love* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992) Stephen Kern writes, "Compared with twentieth-century women, young Victorian women had fewer educational and professional opportunities and were therefore more susceptible to parental or social pressures to marry older men for the money and security that they could not provide for themselves" (384).

Of this trend, McKeon observes that among the middle class the "decrease of female employment in the latter half of the eighteenth century is closely correlated with a rise in fertility, whose principal causes are a fall in the age of women at first marriage and a rise in the number of women who married" (299). Unsurprisingly, in literature the younger wife often enters the plot in a lower social station than her future husband, often as a governess or dependant ward, and she gains fortune and status through her marriage to an older man. This structure, however predictable, highlights the nineteenth-century construction of gender as a composite category that would include age and class. While materialist associations that hierarchically rank gender, age, and class in terms of "upper" and "lower" or less verbally explicit binaries might appear to preserve inequities of power, situations posed by the January-May marriage actually undermine the integrity of those concepts as codifying agents of authority. By placing value on specific ages and stations while simultaneously suggesting these commodities can be interchanged and exchanged, society encourages the negotiation of gendered power.

In the nineteenth century not all marriages, nor even all January-May marriages, were made for the wife's economic convenience, though the general literary emphasis on the financial aspects of January-May relationships indicates a underlying social desire for so pat and therefore controllable an explanation of intergenerational romance. But, just as other single-vector analyses fail to convey complete explanations, material interests alone cannot explicate the motives for a broad and varied trend in marriage. If money did reside at the base of each and every January-May marriage, then there would be no need to confront hidden agendas of incest, racial horror, or gender subversion. Such a reading would be reductive, and unjustly blind, to the complexities of January-May marriages.

Though women were largely unequal participants in the nineteenth-century economy, they were not always financially disadvantaged. Reversing the theme's gender and financial norms in *The Woman in White*, Sir Percival Glyde marries beautiful Laura Fairlie who is twenty-four years younger than he, not for her youth and beauty, but solely for her money, and the surprisingly nonsexual incentives of Sir Percival increase the sensational peculiarity and criminal motivations surrounding his marriage. In other novels, money appears to be of little concern in the selection of husbands. Dorothea Brooke and Emma Woodhouse represent young wives who marry older men by following their emotions, and they are allowed this freedom of choice because of their own financial independence. They marry, these works suggest, for love.

The love between fictional husbands and wives is difficult to approach intellectually; despite the numerous theories of love that have circulated since Plato's *Symposium*, current literary scholars largely ignore love as a critical approach on a par with textbook theories like Marxism or deconstruction.[125] This critical dilemma is especially true regarding January-May marriages, which have been so long subjected to pragmatic or cynical interpretations involving sex and money that it has become hard to believe that they could be founded on compassionate feelings, selfless emotions or reciprocated desire. The temptation was to pass over the question of love in January-May marriages altogether, since theorizing about the January-May theme's psychoanalytical dimension, Gothic elements, or its visual aesthetics seems much more scholarly and more

[125] Near the end of *Child-Loving*, James Kincaid notes the problems of theorizing about love: "Love as a center has a nice ring to it but it is no less a dragon than power, should we let it take up permanent residence. We really have no notion of what it would be like to center love, I think, since the forms of love we have now all seem perverse and battering" (389). For a three-volume review of the historical development of theories of love, see Irving Singer's *The Nature of Love* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984-7), which examines love from Plato to the modern world.

critically established than talk about love. As it has developed in the Western imagination, romantic love often encourages an irrational narrative logic that counters or at least complicates rational discourse and, defying reason, proves difficult to reason about.[126] Whereas individual jockeying for economic superiority over another person, class, race, or gender captures the quintessential struggle for the preservation of self-interests, love often redirects the focus away from the self and, counter to evolutionary logic, emphasizes instead the preservation of something outside of self.[127] Yet love persists in the texts that I examine, and to ignore love and its relationship to power would be to render an inaccurate summary of the theme's dynamics. Love of a wife for a husband, husband for a wife, and love that is mutually shared surfaces in numerous nineteenth-century January-May plots, and love forms an interesting counterpoint to the motives initiated by monetary concerns, a counterpoint that I assert is no less integral than wealth and class to the formation of gender identities within January-May triangles.

However, before turning to January-May love, this chapter will explore more conventional aspects of the exchange of youth for money that fulfills readers' expectations regarding these relationships. Unfortunately, many of these assumptions about this market have become so familiar that they are taken for granted and hence misunderstood. Because the traffic in young women has been so prevalent in Western

---

[126] Margaret Anne Doody's reclamation of the romance as an integral part of the history of the novel in *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1996) resists the lack of academic attention to narratives of love.

[127] Some historical and anthropological studies of love suggest that the apparent paradox presented by economic and emotional reasons for marriage is less contradictory than binary characterization would imply. In *The Culture of Capitalism* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), Alan MacFarlane maintains the correlation established by theorists like Frederick Engels and Lawrence Stone between capitalism and romantic love by identifying the emergence of capitalism earlier in the middle ages and by crediting Christianity with the emergence of marriages for love because of the delimitation of sex to marriage.

society and its literature, one must actively defamiliarize the text from a male-dominated sexual economy that one has been taught to expect in order to appreciate the complexities that such exchanges encapsulate. Gayle Rubin describes the traditional exchange of women as a system in which "women are the gifts...it is men who are the exchange partners," and while she illuminates how economic, psychological and kinship systems support this male-controlled market, I believe that the emphasis on age in January-May texts reveals how these interrelated systems also contribute to a traffic in men (542). Although some texts do present the January-May exchange as a bad bargain for women that relegates them to a powerless and objectified position, other works emphasize masculinity or the lack thereof as the commodity that can be bought and sold.[128] And when women like Jane Eyre or Lady Audley settle their own engagements to older men, they challenge a masculine economy in which fathers or father figures orchestrate marital and kinship ties by emerging as active negotiators who control their own sexual assets in the marriage contract.[129] Rather than reading January-May marriages as evidence of a hegemonic system of women's oppression, critics must reconsider what these marriages suggest about men's precarious worth in a nineteenth-century economy in the full bloom of industrial capitalism and its alienations and how age increasingly destabilizes notions of value, class and gender.

---

[128] An overemphasis on younger women marrying older men also unjustly ignores the possibility and reality of women marrying younger men. Throughout the nineteenth century, women (often widowed from an earlier marriage) married younger men, sometimes with as much as a twenty-year difference. In literature, *Madame Bovary* attests to the arrangement, as Charles's first marriage was to a wealthy widow much older than himself. Literary criticism, however, lacks a substantive critique of this age/gender dynamic.

[129] *Jane Eyre* and *Lady Audley's Secret* present more fully realized versions of romantic fantasies of self-disposal that were popular on the eighteenth-century stage in plays like *The Rover*, *The Lucky Chance*, *The Busy Body*, and *The Country Wife*.

The economic climate of the nineteenth century legitimized marriages between older men and younger women as a common necessity of financial security and social mobility and was therefore embraced by a burgeoning middle class that exercised increased cultural authority. As nineteenth-century economic expansion raised the expectations of many and increased living expenses, more and more men waited until later in life to be married.[130] James Eli Adams notes, "Middle-class men—and those with ambitions to be such—increasingly postponed marriage until they achieved a modicum of economic security requisite to 'respectability'" (133). Jane Austen's *Emma* records this trend when Emma tells Harriet that Robert Martin, who is twenty-six, must wait at least six more years to garner the financial capital to be a respectable husband: "that is as early as most men can afford to marry, who are not born to an independence. Mr. Martin, I imagine, has his fortune entirely to make" (17). Teasing Harriet towards the prospect of Mr. Elton, Emma effectively presents a bourgeois family model for the upwardly mobile like Harriet to emulate, part of a larger political pattern of transcribing middle-class values on the working class that Nancy Armstrong traces in the nineteenth-century novel.[131] Although sporadic recording of men and women's ages at marriage during the nineteenth century prevents an accurate summary of real-life January May marriages, J.A. Banks claims that the average age for middle and upper-class men between 1840 and 1870 was just under thirty years, and other studies suggest that men were often expected to be around three to seven years older than their wives (48).[132] Pat Jalland finds that

---

[130] See Chapter One, "Charles Darwin and Thomas Malthus" in Alan Macfarlane's *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 3-19.
[131] See *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 19-26.
[132] See N.F.R. Crafts' "Average Age at First Marriage for Women in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England and Wales: A Cross-Section Study," *Population Studies* 32.1 (1978): 21-5.

upper middle-class women were often significantly younger than their husbands, and that a twenty-five-year difference was not uncommon between spouses (79-84). Indeed, in nineteenth century-literature interclass and intergenerational relationships thrived in the wake of this booming middle class, and it is easy to draw parallels between the growth of the middle class and the prevalence of literary age-disparate marriages.[133] In literature and life, many older middle-class men found that they could afford the luxury of a young working-class bride if she could expect to find her class position significantly raised, and the records of breach of promise suits indicate that many older middle-class men married much younger women who were in their domestic employment.[134]

Without suggesting that literary January-May marriages correspond with an actual surge in marriages between real men and real women, I believe that the evidence indicates that men of all ages found themselves under increasing pressure to bring a sense of financial security to relationships in the midst of higher standards of living, and that instead of unifying masculinity with a theoretically "natural" male responsibility to provide and protect, the emphasis on affluence further fragmented the idea of masculinity as a unified marker of an empowered identity. In an increasingly material culture, society esteemed power affiliated with wealth and rank over power linked to an embodied, physical masculinity. While the social structure maintained an economic system that

---

[133] However, because of incomplete statistical evidence, to what extent the literature reflects a social desire, rather than a social phenomenon, for age-disparate marriages remains unclear.

[134] In real life, class differences between romantic partners often proportionately correspond to their age differences. In *The Evolution of Desire* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), David Buss examines an international trend for wealthy men to pursue women much younger than themselves. In a study of German men, Buss found that men in higher income brackets wanted younger and younger women. Framing the claim in the terms of economic capital, Buss writes, "Men who enjoy high status and income are apparently aware of their ability to attract women of higher value" (64). For more information about age differences in breach of promise suits, see Ginger S. Frost's *Promises Broken: Courtship, Class, and Gender in Victorian England*. (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995) 59, 83, 94.

largely held riches in male hands, images of older men marrying younger women conveyed the message that it was not manliness that afforded power. Older, apparently effeminized men repeatedly challenged, and triumphed over, their younger, apparently more masculine rivals. Thus, the rending of masculinity from naturalized power works in a succession of subversive moves. First, the physicality of manhood loses viability when compared with the power of financial clout. Secondly, the inherent transferability of wealth reinforces the elusive nature of the phallus. In a culture fascinated with rags to riches stories like *Great Expectations*, the dual realization that embodied masculinity could be supplanted by disembodied fortune and that fortune was a genderless vehicle for power alternately presented a threatening or liberating take on gender, depending on one's personal investment in maintaining male privilege.

In John Everett Millias's drawing *Married for Rank* (1853), the desire for riches proves stronger than traditional male power (Fig. 21). Though the drawing appears to be a conservative critique of feminine power, in highlighting the January-May marriage as a source of social insecurity, it nevertheless attests to the disruptive effects of age and class on gendered identities. The sketch captures the January-May couple, apparently recently wed, entering a social gathering. Cultural assumptions about age clearly drive the image's subversion of gendered power; if the husband were not depicted as elderly, but instead as a young man, the insinuations that the wife has "married for rank" would be visually lost. The drawing operates from a mutual understanding engendered by their difference in age and the shared logic (however biased against the elderly) between artist and viewer is that there are no qualities present in the husband other than his social



Figure 21. John Everett Millais, *Married for Rank*, 1853. Pen and ink, dimensions unknown. Location unknown.

al position that could possibly attract such a woman. The rest of the image completes the already implicit interpretation. In contrast with the other men in the image, the older husband conveys few markers of physical masculinity.[135] His stature, likely stooped because of his age, is noticeably more diminutive than the other men in the room, and even his wife towers above him as he deferentially nods to his host. Though he extends his arm to lead his wife into the room, the drawing suggests that he is not supporting, but rather being supported by his wife. While the host whispers his congratulations to the husband, the wife haughtily revels in her glory. With raised chin, she ignores the numerous sets of male eyes directed toward her and allows a young gentleman to scrutinize the ring, presumably large, on her finger. It is important to note how the older husband's successful exchange of affluence, and not physical masculinity, for his beautiful young wife (clearly the trophy in the image) marginalizes the established representatives of masculinity to the peripheries of the scene. Beneath the bitterly didactic and misogynistic message offered by the drawing that suggests women craftily plot mercenary marriages resides the unsettling idea that masculinity does not offer a guaranteed access to power or to what one desires. Instead, masculinity appears as a disenfranchised presence, dislocated by both the older husband's effeminacy and the wife's assumption of control.

Even the title, *Married for Rank*, hints at the limitations of masculine advantages. Though the wife is seemingly objectified by both the male gazes that surround her and the sexual economy that encourages an exchange of oneself for financial and social gain,

---

[135] For an excellent account of several types of masculinity in nineteenth-century art, see Joseph Kestner's *Masculinities in Victorian Painting* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1995).

the wife does not remain in an object position. The title stresses her agency in the marriage decision; she has elected to marry for rank, and it is her subjectivity that resonates in the image, since viewers are never encouraged to consider the painting from the husband's vantage as *Married for Beauty* or, more crassly, *Married for Sex*. Even a romantic retelling of the story entitled *Married for Love* could effectively decrease the subjectivity of the wife; while she inhabits a strategically pragmatic position in *Married for Rank*, an image of the younger wife marrying an older man for love might suggest she has been "swept off her feet," passively submitting to eros despite the numerous reasons against such a marriage. Instead, in Millais's drawing, the wife occupies the central position, and the lines of her dress and stretched arms work in conjunction with the light coloring of her costume to illuminate her from the darker, and less important, figures that surround her. If the drawing intends to delimit femininity to an object of male exchange, it loses control of its mission and instead reveals a mounting anxiety about the role of female choice in marriage.

Similar patterns of insecurity surrounding the prerogatives of women surface in Charles Darwin's theories of natural selection.[136] Rosemary Jann details in "Darwin and the Anthropologists: Sexual Selection and Its Discontents" how Darwin grafted middle-class ideals of masculinity and femininity onto his theories of evolution, often contradicting himself to make a system in which males selected their female mates coincide with biological evidence to the contrary. Although Darwin concludes that in the

[136] Later in the century, Darwin's theories regarding sexual selection support movements in favor of eugenics, which further emphasized the reproductive necessity of marriage and the need for the middle and upper classes to breed in order to counter what appeared to be a dangerously rapid population growth of the poor. See Angelique Richardson's *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003).

animal kingdom female selection encourages the propagation of the strongest, most attractive males, he finds this system of female agency in conflict with a present human mating system in which he believed females to be naturally passive and inferior. He reasons, for example, that among the European aristocracy, male selection of the most attractive females over successive generations has resulted in the physical superiority of the aristocracy as a whole. Yet Darwin finds little scientific evidence to support this shift from female agency in animals to male agency in humans, and Jann concludes, "Darwin's attempts to use this form of choice to explain human gender roles wound up destabilizing some of the arguments for continuity that it was theorized to support" (85).

Although the problematic logic supporting masculine authority revealed its inherent weaknesses, Darwin's theories and Millais's drawing both attempt to convey the notion that men control the mating process and women are bought and sold as passive creatures for their beauty, which they are expected to pass to their children and thereby strengthen the patrilineal family stock. While I agree that the selection of wives—and in the case of January-May marriages—young wives, plays an important part in the nineteenth-century sex market, I maintain that prospective wives and husbands slip in and out of subject and object positions within the exchange. In a society that esteemed financial worth over physical prowess, a rich older husband could offer a better mate for a woman than a penniless (however gallant) young lover. The older husband's usefulness as economic provider becomes a commodity on par with the wife's sexual and reproductive capacities. Notably, I do not claim that the January-May marriage maneuvers in a society in which women and men are equally empowered; women in the nineteenth century were the victims of a multifaceted orchestration of male power. But

within the male-dominated system, the January-May marriage discloses where weaknesses in masculinity and gender identities reside. Rather than depicting a unidirectional traffic in women, January-May marriages present what is often a ruthless pecuniary system, seemingly far-removed from ideals of marriage for love, but a system that engages in the traffic of both genders nonetheless.

Several of the basic dynamics of the economies of age and money develop in Jane Austen's 1811 *Sense and Sensibility*, which relates the story of the Dashwood women who find themselves in financial straits after Mr. Dashwood's death.[137] Because Marianne faces such dismal prospects at securing her own financial security (as do all the women in the Dashwood family), the novel suggests that she must turn her attentions to marrying as well as she possibly can. She initially hopes that she can marry for love, and not for money, and Austen teases the reader and Marianne with the young romantic figure of Willoughby. But her sister Elinor explains why Marianne's first love would have proven to be little security to a wife in marriage:

> Had you married, you must have been always poor. His expensiveness is acknowledged even by himself, and his whole conduct declares that self-denial is a word hardly understood by him. His demands and your inexperience together on a small, very small income, must have brought on distresses which would not be the *less* grievous to you, from having been entirely unknown and unthought of before. (Austen's emphasis 249)

[137] Like the women in the Dashwood family, Austen experienced similar circumstances when her father died, leaving herself, her sister Cassandra, and her mother to manage on £500 a year. See Edward Copeland's "Money" in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, eds. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 135-6.

Despite Willoughby's numerous masculine traits, which include his untamable and often inappropriate behavior, his financial instability removes him from a position of real power in the nineteenth-century economy. The marriage of Marianne, who is seventeen, to Colonel Brandon, who is "on the wrong side of five and thirty" is, on the other hand, "an excellent match" in the eyes of the affectionate busybody Mrs. Jennings, and by the end of the novel, even Marianne herself.[138] As Elinor instructs Marianne, the novel similarly inculcates the reader to appreciate a practical approach to matrimony; upon rational reflection, irrational love pales in comparison with the economic necessities of life. Much of the novel, in fact, aims to prove that sense about financial realities should prevail over sensibility, affinities, or sexual desire in women's selection of marriage partners because marriage remains one of the few opportunities middle-class women have to control their economic futures.

The excellence of the marriage prospect between Marianne and Colonel Brandon centers upon the equivalency of the exchange, which must negotiate the values of wealth, desire, and age. Mrs. Jennings' proclamation as matchmaker about the prospective contract makes more sense in its full context: "It would be an excellent match, for *he* was rich and *she* was handsome" (Austen's emphasis 29). Yet, from the first proposition of the marriage, the age difference threatens to undermine the trade of wealth for beauty. When Marianne first understands what is being suggested, "she hardly knew whether to laugh at its absurdity, or censure its impertinence, for she considered it as an unfeeling reflection on the colonel's advanced years, and on his forlorn condition as an old

[138] For an interesting reading of Austen's broader views on "old" versus "new" things, see Clarie Lamont's "Jane Austen and the Old," *Review of English Studies* 54 (2003): 661-74.

bachelor" (29). Notably, as a young romantic Marianne privileges the value of her own youth and beauty far above the age and wealth of Colonel Brandon, and she pities him for being so "exceedingly ancient" (29). Even Elinor, the more practical of the sisters, views the age difference as a detriment to Marianne's half of the bargain, theorizing that "Perhaps thirty-five and seventeen had better not have any thing to do with matrimony together" (30).

Despite Elinor's initial reaction, the story of Marianne and Colonel Brandon encourages the sisters and the novel's readers to reconsider what stands as fair exchange in marriage. The novel foregrounds the contract of marriage as one that is open to discussion, especially on the terms of age-based desirability and money. In response to Marianne's abrupt dismissal of Colonel Brandon due to his age, Elinor proposes that a smaller age difference would even the scales and acknowledges that it is no more Colonel Brandon's age than Marianne's that poses a problem to their union. She concludes theoretically that it would be fine for him to marry a twenty-seven-year-old woman—supposedly less desirable than her younger counterpart and therefore more fitting in exchange for Brandon's advanced years. Like her sister, Marianne realizes that the terms of marriage are negotiable, but it is precisely the fiscal component of marriage that she detests. Displaying little sympathy for the imaginary twenty-seven-year-old or Colonel Brandon, Marianne reveals that her romantic preference for love and desire over pecuniary matters is founded upon her reflection on, and rejection of, a marriage market that traffics in women *and* men. Regarding the hypothetical marriage of the twenty-seven-year-old and Brandon, Marianne reasons,

> if her home be uncomfortable, or her fortune small, I can suppose that she

> might bring herself to submit to the offices of a nurse, for the sake of the provision and security of a wife....It would be a compact of convenience, and the world would be satisfied. In my eyes it would be no marriage at all, but that would be nothing. To me it would seem only a commercial exchange, in which each wished to be benefited at the expense of the other. (30)

But as the plot unfolds, Marianne learns that even idealized romances must face economic realities. Because of his own straitened circumstances, Willoughby mirrors Marianne's feminized economic position, and despite his love for Marianne and his power over her, marries Miss Grey for her fifty thousand pounds and casts himself as a kept husband. Marianne ultimately discovers that money is a powerful force behind marriage for both men and women—in the words of Mrs. Jennings, "when there is plenty of money on one side, and next to none on the other, Lord bless you!" (137).

Some critics have characterized "the old bachelor" Colonel Brandon with his rheumatism and flannel waistcoats as due punishment for Marianne's youthful romantic inclinations.[139] While the text suggests that Marianne has grown into a more realistic outlook on marriage, it never gives evidence that Marianne suffers from her acceptance of Brandon's proposal. At the novel's conclusion, we learn that Marianne's "whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby" (268). Moreover, instead of languishing from her rejection by Willoughby or struggling to make ends meet with her mother, Marianne finds herself "the mistress of a family, and

---

[139] See for example Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) 183-94.

the patroness of a village" (268). By first choosing financial stability, Marianne finds that a steady love follows, and Austen offers this rational ideal to her readers as a way to have the best of both love and money, though it is clear that economic security is of primary concern and that love is clearly a bonus to the real contract. Though it is far from the fairytale ending that Marianne once envisioned for herself, she has, when all is said and done, successfully negotiated a happy and secure marriage, and after enduring the gender inequities of the early nineteenth century, Marianne survives to determine how to make the best of them. Thus, Austen's declaration that "Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate" must be read ironically. Marianne's fate, Austen suggests, is realized by all women who come to understand the mercenary dynamics of marriage. Retaining Marianne's initial objection to the "commercial exchange," Austen nonetheless shows how the exchange can be made to women's advantage.

Like Austen's *Emma*, *Sense and Sensibility* provides instruction for its readers concerning the negotiation of age, gender, and finances from a distinctly middle-class vantage, and it is important to view Austen's message in light of the rise of the middle class and the corresponding gendering of labor as the rapid growth of industrialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries encouraged a shift in labor markets.[140] Sonya Rose details in *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England*, "Employers patterned their work forces and hiring practices, structured work opportunities, and managed their enterprises in ways that expressed pervasive meanings of gender difference, class relations, and a developing ideology of family life" (22).

---

[140] See J.D. Chambers' *The Workshop of the World: British Economic History from 1820-1880* (London: Oxford UP, 1968).

McKeon further connects the disappearance of women's agricultural opportunities for income like gleaning and grazing livestock that followed the enclosure acts to a larger separation of women from access to economic capital (299). Class and labor divisions reinforced dissolving gender divisions, and the middle class, with many of its members newly positioned, demonstrated most fervently how these lines could be redrawn.

The question posed by Eliza Lynn Linton in her 1868 article "What Is Woman's Work?" thus represented a central query in the literature of the nineteenth century, and it connects gender with a larger social interest in the often-contradictory aims of understanding how middle-class status could be defined, attained and maintained. Although some works like Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* presented a social order neatly divided into the "populace," "barbarians," and "philistines," much of the literature from Austen to Stoker depicts permeable social groups that uncomfortably elude tidy classifications. Many nineteenth-century January-May texts present young women who are dangerously perched between middle-class respectability and working-class disgrace, and the successful penetration or return to the middle-class often depends upon whether or not the women really belong there, which was usually deemed by their having middle-class, however distant, heritage. Because women, unlike men who could strive to be heroic captains of industry, were actively discouraged from carving their success within the new economy, options for social betterment among women were largely limited to fantasies of inheritances from rich distant relatives or the more practical reality of social climbing via marriage. Much of women's work depended, it seemed, upon the success or failure of finding a good (read financially well-to-do) husband. The possibilities for social improvement via marriage are captured throughout nineteenth-

century literature, and rags to riches stories through fortunate marriages inspired the dreams of many nineteenth-century readers, while tales of treacherous interlopers into the middle class nursed class fears of social mobility.

Linton's question "What is Woman's Work?" withholds several related but unspoken queries, including "What is the middle class?" and "What is a woman / man?" Markers of class, gender and labor became increasingly (con)fused, and women's work evolved into a class issue, as those aspiring to middle-class respectability increasingly held feminine idleness as a necessary display of financial security. Though nineteenth-century literature frequently depicts middle-class women as busy, their occupations are shown to be superfluous to their own households' domestic economies; they embroidered, they ministered to the poor, and they modeled feminine grace, but they did not work in the sense of actively contributing to their financial support or to the support of their families. McKeon observes, "At the higher social levels, the differential process of class formation led women (and men) who aspired to a proto-'bourgeois' gentility to value idleness in women. In such households, women's work was increasingly oriented toward female accomplishments, while cheap wage labor did what was once the inside work of wives" (299). These strictures on women's work served multiple purposes. They distinguished middle-class families from the working poor and aligned a gendered half of the middle class with upper-class idleness. They preserved a system of male economic privilege. And they grafted beliefs about labor and class onto gender to help assuage escalating insecurities about sexual difference.

As the century progressed, increasing numbers of women objected to restrictions on women's abilities to achieve financial independence. Florence Nightingale harshly

criticizes the relegation of middle-class women to a life of leisure in *Cassandra* (1852) and angrily questions "why is it more ridiculous for a man than for a woman to do worsted work and drive out every day in the carriage? Why should we laugh if we were to see a parcel of men sitting round a drawing-room table in the morning, and think it all right if they were women?" (123). Summarizing the social conditions that validated women's work, Nightingale writes, "Widowhood, ill-health, or want of bread, these three explanations or excuses are supposed to justify a woman in taking up an occupation. In some cases, no doubt, an indomitable force of character will suffice without any of these three, but such are rare" (124). If women were unfortunate enough to lose their husbands, suffer from sickness, or to find themselves destitute, they could work, but, these conditions carried their own social stigmas with them and consequently distanced women from middle-class respectability. Only a small percentage of middle-class women managed to successfully merge their careers and class affiliations in the nineteenth century.

Limited educational opportunities for women and a legal system protecting men's control of finances fortified the social dishonor linked to women's work and ensured that middle-class women would have limited control of their economic well-being.[141] John Killham describes a paradoxical education system for women, in which they are trained to be active entertainers on the marriage market—singing, playing, drawing—only to find that as wives they were expected to assume a position of graceful idleness. Even in the late 1880's women like Edith Simcox publicly debated the right of women to equal

[141] See Ellen Jordan's *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999)

educations and the right to seek employment outside the home. In "The Capacity of Women," Simcox details the blighted education of "poor Miss Fairfax" and, foreshadowing Virginia Woolf's story of Judith Shakespeare in *A Room of One's Own*, details how girls are "choked off into contented obscurity in each case at an earlier stage of their intellectual development than would be the case with a boy of corresponding character" (592). Social expectations and restrictions thus led middle-class women to believe that marriage was the key to their financial security, but this solution trapped women in a ironic double-bind since for much of the nineteenth century property law relegated a wife's possessions and earnings to her husband upon marriage. Few middle-class families could afford the costly legal measures required to designate a wife as a *feme sole*, and, under the system of coverture, women had no recourse through law to their material wealth. Effectually, for most of the century there was little sense in married women working to ensure their financial security, since they had no legal right to their earnings.[142]

Poor women could work because they had to, but even that was ideally restricted to a domestic realm of household chores and unpaid labor, and from a middle-class perspective, even poverty or "want of bread" proved to be insufficient reason for women to enter the public workforce since female labor jeopardized stable constructions of the home as well as masculine and feminine identities. Eliza Lynn Linton, a vocal opponent of women's employment and increased women's rights, declares,

---

[142] For important developments affecting the system of coverture including the famous Caroline Norton case, the 1857 Divorce Act, and the 1882 Married Women's Property Act, see Mary Lyndon Shanley's *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England*. Different courts addressed different issues of married women's property; The courts of common law was in charge of issues concerning a husband's right to married women's property, but the courts of equity were responsible for women's separate estates. The confusion of jurisdiction was one hurdle in the movement for reform of women's property law.

> The more women are employed where men used to be the sole wage-earners, the fewer marriages there will be, and the yet more and more number of women will be left unprovided for. Women work for less than men, and undercut wages all round. Their employment necessitates the exodus of the stronger sex; and so the vicious circle goes, ever increasing in evil consequences to society. ("Nearing the Rapids" 383)

Mary Poovey has explained how working-class women's participation in the labor force formed a persistent point of anxiety for middle-class Victorians and their understandings of gender: "the increasing numbers of women entering the labor force and the threat they potentially posed to male employment was most often submerged in arguments about social stability, a natural division of labor, and the welfare of marriage as an institution" (153). As McKeon and Poovey have noted, because work was bound to deeply held notions of gender and class, a degree of gender bending was inherent to all women's work, and a series of legislative acts throughout the century consequently "protected" working-class women from working outside the home. Rough and physical labor appeared particularly dangerous to nineteenth-century notions of gendered realms, and reformers often attempted to keep women from participating in employment that emphasized the body or exposed them to aspects of life detached from the domestic realm. To preserve the idea as well as the reality of the male as breadwinner of the family, labor unions forced women, who often worked for lower wages, out of workplaces.[143] The regulation of women's work was a well-orchestrated movement that

[143] Working–class women did not view work in the same light as the middle class; working-class women frequently worked outside the home to contribute to the family income. See Rose, pages 135-53.

operated through several layers of society. Through Parliament, the 1842 Mines Regulation Act restricted women's employment in underground mines, the Factory Act of 1850 limited the number of hours women were able to work in factories, and the 1874 Health of Women Act cut the hours women were allowed to work in factories (Shanley 93-102). While all of these measures appeared to hold the interests of women as their central concern, they in fact imposed middle-class limitations regarding gender on working-class women and reinforced the gendered divisions of labor that often prevented women from financial independence. Furthermore, they operated through a unified tenant: working women were dangerous to existing gender identities while idle married women preserved them.

Like Millais's drawing and Darwin's theories of gender differentiation, the binary created by the nineteenth-century middle class between working women and married women contained the tools for its own dismantling, and the very system designed to maintain gender identities consequently led to their further unraveling. If women's work challenged the gender identities of the middle class, then little could be done to ensure gender stability unless social and financial reforms could keep women from employment altogether or unless impermeable divisions could be erected between the classes.[144] But neither of these solutions could be implemented. Although working-class women were often liberated by necessity from the strictures placed on middle-class women, the disjunctures between class understandings of masculinity and femininity arose when class boundaries proved permeable, either because middle-class families fell into embarrassed

[144] See Chapter Two, "The Interlocked Coding of Class and Gender," in Patricia Ingham's *The Language of Gender and Class: Transformation in the Victorian Novel* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 20-30.

circumstances or because working-class individuals found ways to break into the middle class. Additionally, many middle-class women who did not marry early had to find employment for their support until they found husbands or, if they did not marry, had to support themselves for the rest of their lives. Although the middle-class would have preferred clear boundaries around the terms "working-class women" and "middle-class women," economic realities fostered a third category of "working middle-class women." Weakening the boundaries further, the idea of marriage as the most legitimate alternative to work paradoxically developed a troublesome equivalency between marriage and work. Tracing the anxieties and fears surrounding two of the most troubling types of women's work for nineteenth-century society—being a governess and being a prostitute—we find direct correlations to being a wife.

The instruction of children provided an ambiguous area of employment for women in the nineteenth-century, as it provided work for women both on their way up and on their way down the social ladder. For middle-class women, being a governess would have signaled a loss in caste. Before her marriage, *Emma*'s Jane Fairfax woefully envisions that she will become a governess, and Emily Brontë's Agnes Grey stoically models the path chosen by countless unmarried middle-class women. Yet for working-class women, being a governess was a step up in society. Traditionally a position reserved for unmarried daughters of the gentry, by the 1840's, the rise of the middle-class created new positions for governesses who had historically been primarily employed by the aristocracy, and many working-class women deprived by industrialism from

traditional forms of labor viewed being a governess as a rise in social position.[145] Governesses' work also proved troubling on yet another front. While the nature of governesses' work resigned women to the home and seemingly distanced women from the male economy, their fusion of gendered understandings of work rendered them troubling presences in middle-class homes. Mary Poovey asserts, "Because the governess was like the middle-class mother in the work she performed, but like both a working-class woman and man in the wages she received, the very figure who theoretically should have defended the naturalness of separate spheres threatened to collapse the difference between them" (170). As keepers of middle-class children and thereby keepers of the future, governesses exhibited important influence and power upon the middle class, and Poovey describes the middle-class desire to employ strictly middle-class women as guardians of their children because fears of working-class women usurping their class positions through marriage and disrupting middle-class stability were widespread.

Rebecca Solomon's 1854 painting *The Governess* conveys this threat by depicting the governess as stealing a look that is both longing and covetous toward her male employer while he, at least for the moment, manages to focus his gaze on his wife (Fig. 22). Poovey maintains that images of governesses "brought to her contemporaries' minds not just the middle-class ideal she was meant to reproduce, but the sexualized and often working-class women against whom she was expected to defend, [and] reveals the middle-class fear that the governess could not protect middle-class values because she could not be trusted to regulate her own sexuality" (173). Working outside the home and

[145] See Kathryn Hughes's *The Victorian Governess* (London: The Hambledon P: 1993) 11-25.

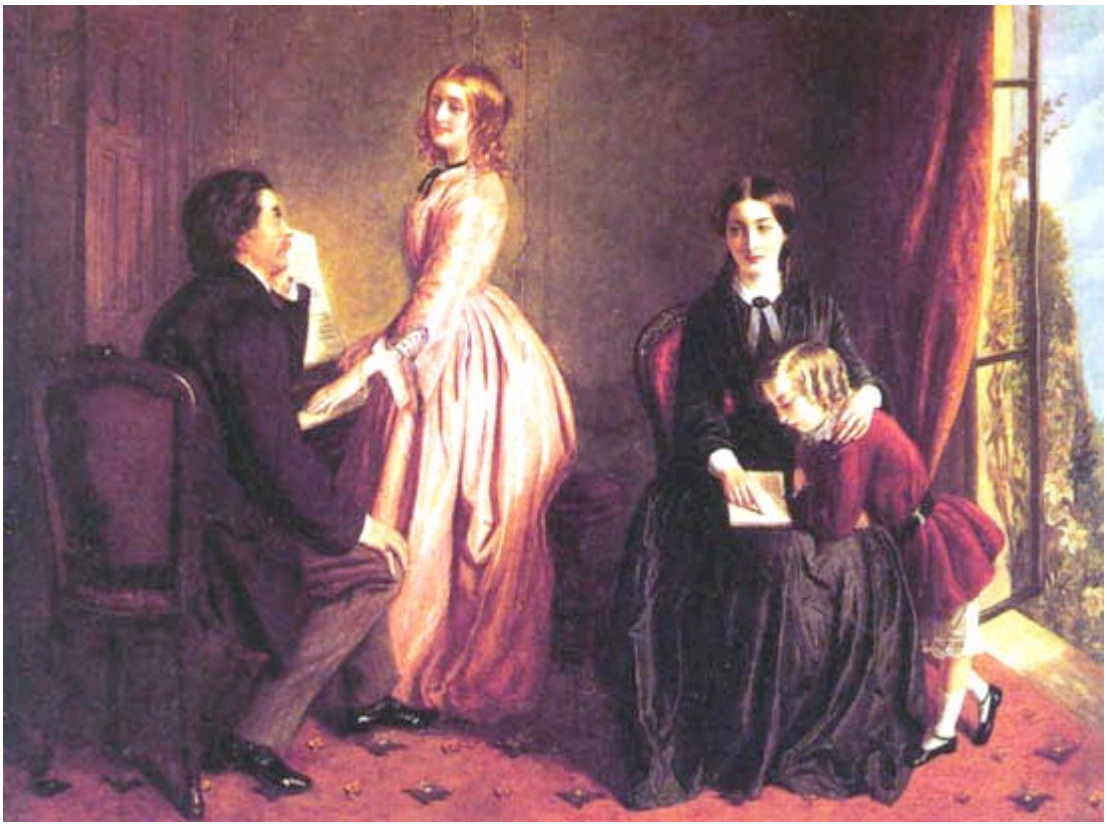


Figure 22. Rebecca Solomon, *The Governess*, 1851. Oil on canvas, 26 x 34 in. The Suzanne and Edmund J. McCormick Collection.

marked by the social fear that sex could be exchanged for money, governesses raised uncomfortable connections between working/middle-class women and prostitutes. Unsurprisingly, several of the women from nineteenth-century fiction, including Jane Eyre, Becky Sharp, and Lucy Graham (Lady Audley), who enter or consider entering January-May marriages find themselves among the middle-class because of their positions as governesses.

The age differences in these relationships emphasize the economic structures hidden beneath sexual desire since the large differences in age seem to justify a correspondingly large leap in wealth and position. The valuation of the woman's youth originates from motivations both pleasurable and practical. Since the younger woman's age titillates desire by challenging social taboos like incest, child molestation, and homosexuality, she provides a normalized point of access to otherwise deviant behaviors. Secondly, the younger wife's theoretically higher potential for reproduction gives her husband a greater likelihood of producing a male heir. Thus, as both "babies" and "baby-makers," young wives proved a valuable commodity to older husbands.[146] The commercial reciprocity inherent in these relationships appears obvious, and, in one sense, age thereby rationalizes the overturning of class identities. Yet, because class barriers also serve to demarcate notions of gender like work, the transgression of those boundaries, even for age-based desire, prove unsettling.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* illustrates the uncomfortable tension surrounding governesses, youth, sex, and money and the efforts of women to maintain the guises of

---

[146] Buss explains that women's limited reproductive years have encouraged a cross-cultural valuation of younger women among men who hope to produce offspring. See *The Evolution of Desire* 51-2.

morality and respectability in a blatantly sexual economy. Youth is appraised and valued in both of Rochester's romantic interests. Jane's initial rival for Rochester's affection, Blanche Ingram, is much younger than he, and the housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax explains her understanding that the age difference between Rochester and Blanche is clearly too great: "Oh! yes. But you see there is a considerable difference in age: Mr. Rochester is near forty; she is but twenty-five" (163). Yet Blanche Ingram and Rochester belong to the same social class. When Rochester reveals his desire to make Jane his "girl-bride," Mrs. Fairfax is even more surprised by the much greater disparity in age and position. Initially she is convinced that she merely dreamt Rochester told her he was to marry Jane, and she asks that Jane not laugh at her ludicrous query, "Now, can you tell me whether it actually true that Mr. Rochester has asked you to marry him? Don't laugh at me. But I really thought he came in here five minutes ago, and said, that in a month you would be his wife" (262). In the following exchange, she expresses her incredulity, musing "he. . . has always been called careful" (262). Convinced of the offer at last, she discouragingly states, "there are twenty years of difference in your ages. He might almost be your father" (263). Mrs. Fairfax also evidences Poovey's explanation that a governess "could not be trusted to regulate her own sexuality" when she repeatedly warns Jane to "keep Mr. Rochester at a distance" and voices her uneasiness at finding Jane and Rochester both missing the night before (262). For Mrs. Fairfax, Jane and Rochester's engagement seems the flaunting of a doubly violated social taboo in which class and age boundaries, and their accompanying gender norms, will be subverted through sexuality and legitimized through marriage.

The hitch in the marriage plot temporarily forestalls their wedding though it reminds the reader of the economic implications of the match. Immediately after Bertha's existence has been revealed to Jane and Rochester proposes keeping Jane as his mistress, Jane decides to flee Thornfield because Rochester's first marriage ruptures the delicate balance between legitimate and illegitimate sexual exchanges. What was already a socially precarious leap for Jane from her lower position as governess to a higher position as wife is now impossible. Rochester's attempted bigamy forces her recognition of the illegitimacy of their overt sexual exchange and destabilizes both positions of governess and wife by equating them with common prostitution.[147] Even Rochester places her departure in economic terms, suggesting that he can no longer pay enough for the "kisses" and "caresses" that are now "forbidden" (295). Hoping their relationship to be immune to base economics, he scathingly derides the terms that he fears has led to their broken contract; "It was only my station, and the rank of my wife, that you valued? Now that you think me disqualified to become your husband, you recoil from my touch as if I were some toad or ape" (299). Without the social and legal legitimatization that accompanies marriage, Jane knows that she risks collapsing the thin barriers between serving Rochester as his governess, serving him as his wife, and serving him as his personal prostitute. Because she desires to stay, she wrestles with her wishes and the uncertain future that a position as a wife would provide, and Jane confirms her resolution to leave only after she hears Rochester's deprecating remarks about his former

[147] Comparisons between marriage and prostitution were not uncommon in the nineteenth century. In "Womanly Dependence," *Ourselves: A Series of Essays on Women*, 2nd ed. (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1870), Eliza Lynn Linton, by no means a feminist advocate, notes the inequalities of the gendered economy: "As it is, men have the right to demand from their wives absolute attention to their wishes, because they are their property, their dependent creatures whom they feed and clothe in return for certain services"(226-7).

mistresses. She envisions no financial or emotional security as his prostitute, projecting that she will "become the successor of those poor girls" and that "he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory" (308-9).

Convinced that her position would be precarious, Jane then fortifies her resolution to leave by enlisting the social "laws and principles" that attempt to control and prohibit the exchange of money for sex. She declares she will "keep the law given by God; sanctioned by Man" (312). Notably, the immorality of the proposal merely supports her knowledge of its financial precariousness, but she uses this dual system of expediency and morality to brace her will to leave and to reinforce her own understanding that she is not a mistress or a prostitute. Knowing that she will need money to remove herself from the area, she nonetheless leaves "the beads of a pearl necklace Mr. Rochester had forced me to accept a few days ago" behind (315). Though Jane nearly faces starvation on her journey because she has no money, the importance of maintaining the boundaries between governess, prostitute, and wife dictates her actions. The risk Jane runs regarding her health and life might appear irrational in retrospect but it makes perfect sense to Jane, and Brontë clearly intends that readers will applaud Jane's decision to place herself in physical jeopardy rather than collapse categories of women's work. It is not until Jane inherits her own fortune, and Rochester has lost much of his, that she can return to him and resume their relationship. The transgression of class boundaries dissolves when Jane becomes his financial equal, and, like Emma Woodhouse and Dorothea Brooke, Jane can now afford to marry for love. Indeed, *Jane Eyre*'s success as a love story stems from Jane's return to Rochester despite the lack of financial necessity, and Jane's move from

following reason to emotion facilitates the sentimental ending that was so popular with nineteenth-century audiences and that remains so problematic to feminist readers today.

A look at one of the Victorian period's most infamous governesses, Lucy Graham, exposes how the construction of femininity collapsed under the social pressures of distinguishing between governess, prostitute and wife, as the age difference of the January-May marriage underscored the permeable boundaries between the three. On multiple levels, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's sensational thriller *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) attacks Victorian assumptions about gendered identities, and though it conforms to a sense of morality that murder will out, the novel so successfully strips away the illogic and hypocrisy disguising the sexual economies of marriage that it ultimately unsettles any ideal that justice or righteousness sustains gender divisions. In contrast to the helpless and vapid model of the angel in the house (like *The Woman in White*'s Laura Fairlie), Lucy Graham defies the expectations afforded her fair-haired, fair-skinned body to protect her position and revenge her desertion.[148] *Lady Audley's Secret* shocks audiences with its unpleasant revelations about masculinity and femininity and its unflinching reflection of nineteenth-century sexual economies. Reviewers of the 1860s attempted to isolate the implications of Braddon's message to the working-class. W. F. Rae quips,

> Others before her have written stories of blood and lust, of atrocious crimes and hardened criminals, and these have excited the interest of a very wide circle of readers. But the class that welcomed them was the

[148] See Lynn Voskuil's "Acts of Madness: Lady Audley and the Meanings of Victorian Femininity." *Feminist Studies* 27.3 (2001): need page #s.

> lowest in the social scale, as well as mental capacity....She may boast...of having temporarily succeeded in making the literature of the Kitchen the favorite reading of the drawing room. (204)[149]

Such sentiments attempted to ameliorate the effects of Braddon's sensational tale, but in truth, the discomfiture surrounding the novel stemmed more from its realistic approach to mercenary marriages and not its sensationalism.

Lady Audley's Secret relates the rise and fall of Lucy Graham, a beautiful twenty-one-year-old governess for the Dawson family. In their employment, she comes into the society of Sir Michael Audley, the fifty-five-year-old baronet of Audley Court. He proposes to Lucy, and she accepts, rising considerably in her social position to become Lady Audley. Her "secret" is that she has already been married, though she has not heard from her husband in over three years. When her roaming first husband returns, the chain of violence begins, as she struggles to preserve her new position and separate herself from her past. The overwhelming influence of material wealth on the plot is unmistakable, but, in case the reader overlooks the economics of the exchange, Braddon calls attention to the marriage market. Braddon writes, "The truth was that Lady Audley had, in becoming the wife of Sir Michael, made one of those apparently advantageous matches which are apt to draw upon a woman the envy and hatred of her sex" (11). Because of Sir Michael's age (from his first marriage, he has a daughter, Alicia, only three years younger than Lucy), the marital bargain appears cut and dried; he will gain the sexual pleasure of a young wife, and she will gain the social advantages of a higher

---

[149] Rae ignores the popularity of earlier literary works like *Moll Flanders* and *The Newgate Calendar* among the middle class.

station. However, Braddon openly challenges reductive readings of the terms of the exchange, pointing out that it was only an "apparently" advantageous match and that, because of the age difference, other women would be quick to recognize and condemn the mercenary motivations behind the marriage. Yet instead of placing all of the blame on Lucy, as Millais attempts to do to the young wife in *Married for Rank*, Braddon holds Sir Michael responsible for his willing participation in the sexual exchange.[150]

Braddon succinctly establishes that sexual desire resides at the base of Sir Michael's "love" for Lucy. Her beauty, after all, is pervasive and its powers are not limited to middle-aged men: "For you see, Miss Lucy Graham was blessed with that magic power of fascination by which a woman can charm with a word or intoxicate with a smile. Every one loved, admired, and praised her" (11-12). Although Lucy, quite disturbed, objects to the possibility that she could have ever knowingly encouraged Sir Michael's affections, he falls victim to her charms, and

> He could no more resist the tender fascination of those soft and melting blue eyes; the graceful beauty of that slender throat and drooping head, with its wealth of showering flaxen curls; the low music of that gentle voice; the perfect harmony which pervaded every charm, and made all doubly charming in this woman; than he could resist his destiny. (12)

Noting that his first marriage, which ended in his wife's death seventeen years ago, had not been love but a "poor, pitiful, smouldering spark, too dull to be extinguished, too feeble to burn," Sir Michael finds that his pent up desire is ready to burst for Lucy, for

---

[150] Harriet Blodgett's "The Greying of *Lady Audley's Secret*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 37.2 (2001): 132-46 discusses how the novel blurs contemporary standards of right and wrong.

whom he feels "this fever, this longing, this restless, uncertain, miserable hesitation" (12). But Sir Michael realizes that his desires may not be fulfilled, and the "hesitation" that he acknowledges festers from his awareness of the large difference between their ages. He, in fact, is not quite sure how old Lucy is. Though "she looked little more than twenty," he is painfully certain of his own years (13). In a turbulent panic, Sir Michael faces the contradictory forces of age and desire. Before he can propose to her, he must recognize even if he cannot control "these cruel fears that his age was an insurmountable barrier to his happiness; this sick hatred of his white beard; this frenzied wish to be young again, with glistening raven hair, and a slim waist, such as he had had twenty years before; these wakeful nights and melancholy days, so gloriously brightened if he chanced to catch a glimpse of her sweet face" (12). Despite his station and wealth, Sir Michael realizes that he might not be sexually desirable, and while he accepts his superior financial position, he bewails how age has effeminized his value as a husband. As an embodied self, Sir Michael realizes that the gendered power he has enjoyed as a biological male is not stable and that other physical markers challenge his claim to a masculinity that remains theoretically centered on the body. Even in their absence, Sir Michael's attention to his lack of "glistening raven hair" and a "slim waist" links him to popular characteristics of female beauty. Weighing the strength of his sexual desire and his lack of physical masculinity, Sir Michael steels himself to make a bargain for sex.

Sir Michael's proposal is alternately poignant and ludicrous as he attempts to release himself from the economic implications of the marriage and his participation in a transaction that closely models legitimized prostitution. He circles around his proposition, "knowing that he could hardly expect to be the choice of a beautiful young

girl, and praying rather that she would reject him, even though she broke his heart by doing so, than that she would accept his offer if she did not love him" (15). Sir Michael hopes that, in rejecting him, Lucy will save him from himself and his willingness to trade money for sex. He consequently opens his proposal of marriage with the following admonition to Lucy:

> I scarcely think there is a greater sin, Lucy, than that of the woman who marries a man she does not love. You are so precious to me, my beloved, that deeply as my heart is set on this, and bitter as the mere thought of disappointment is to me, I would not have you commit such a sin for any happiness of mine. If my happiness could be achieved by such an act, which it could not—which it never could, nothing by misery can result from a marriage dictated by any motive but truth and love. (15)

Lucy responds passionately that his conditions are "noble" and "generous," but she speaks truthfully and simply when she replies to his request for love, "you ask too much of me. You ask too much of *me*!" (16). Lucy describes her childhood and the conditions that drove her to seeking employment as a governess, and despite the other lies she constructs throughout the story, her story here matches the one she tells Sir Michael in confession at the end of the novel:

> From my very babyhood I have never seen anything but poverty. My father was a gentleman; clever, accomplished, generous, handsome—but poor. My mother—But do not let me speak of her. Poverty, poverty, trials, vexations, humiliations, deprivations! *You* cannot tell; you, who are amongst those for whom life is smooth and easy; you can never guess

> what is endured by such as we. Do not ask too much of me, then. I *cannot* be disinterested; I cannot be blind to the advantages of such an alliance. I cannot, I cannot! (16)

Whatever one feels for Lucy later in the novel (when she pushes her first husband to the bottom of a well and abandons him to die) should be tempered by her initial honesty and by her accurate description of the economic frustrations of a woman in the nineteenth century.[151]

By the end of the proposal, Lucy's honest revelation of her material and materialistic concerns appears much more deserving of respect than Sir Michael's "noble and generous" disclaimer to his proposal. Contradicting his aforementioned requirement of reciprocated love from his wife, he begins to hedge away from his ideal. Though he had hoped to be relieved of an awareness of his willing exchange of money for relief of his sexual desires by Lucy's profession of love, he artfully rescinds his stipulation as he continues to barter for her acceptance of his hand:

> "Lucy, Lucy, speak plainly. Do you dislike me?"
>
> "Dislike you! No, no!"
>
> "But is there any one else whom you love?"
>
> She laughed aloud at his question. "I do not love any one in the world," she answered. (16-7).

---

[151] Braddon had first-hand experience of the economic challenges facing women in the nineteenth century as well as the limited abilities of traditional marriage to resolve them. After her father failed to provide economic security to their home and eventually separated from her mother, Braddon eventually turned to her writing to support herself and her mother. See Robert Wolf's *Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon* (New York: Garland, 1979).

Braddon describes that Sir Michael is "silent for some moments" before he returns, "Well, Lucy, I will not ask too much of you. I dare say I am a romantic old fool; but if you do not dislike me, and if you do not love any one else, I see no reason why we should not make a very happy couple. Is it a bargain, Lucy?" (17). Sir Michael's rapid backsliding from viewing women marrying men for their money as a "sin" to a "bargain" encourages the reader to reconsider his ability to stand by his principles manfully. And the new fiancé Sir Michael is not without a degree of self-disgust. Though he had hoped he retained enough of his masculinity to select a bride to fulfill his desires, he finds that "he must be contented, like other men of his age, to be married for his fortune and his position" (17).

Braddon explains that Sir Michael's knowledge that he has lost his grasp on conventional masculinity caused a "strong emotion at work in his heart—neither joy, nor triumph, but something almost akin to disappointment" (17). Braddon further describes that disappointment as "some stifled and unsatisfied longing which lay heavy and dull at his heart, as if he carried a corpse in his bosom" (17). The abjection that Sir Michael experiences grows not only from the consciousness of his personal loss of masculinity, but also from the loss of the stability that arises from the termination of a larger faith in a construction of masculinity. Both of these losses center upon the body, though one stems from an increased appreciation of male embodiment, and the other from an overall devaluation of the physical body. First, Sir Michael finds that his access to a masculine identity and authority has changed with time as his body has aged, and, secondly, that masculine power is more clearly linked with the power of money and class than with the physical body. Neither privileging or transcending the body offer Sir Michael much hope

for the future of his or a more ideal masculinity, and "he carried the corpse of that hope which had died at the sound of Lucy's words" (17). Sir Michael realizes that linking masculinity to the body, whether beard, waist, or phallus, leads to the dissolution of masculinity through either aging or death. Yet the power of money is remarkably similar to the power of the phallus; power arises from one's apparent possession of wealth or phallic authority and often is not related to actual wealth or a physical penis. Moreover, linking masculinity to wealth and position reveals that masculinity is a product, or commodity, that can readily be exchanged or redistributed to serve other ends—like sexual desire, and it is this disturbing two-fold realization that Sir Michael takes from his proposal to Lucy and her qualified acceptance.

The age difference between Sir Michael and Lucy initiates the novel's challenges to broader male power, and therefore Braddon frames the January-May marriage with the hard economic realities facing nineteenth-century women and does not temper even same age male-female relationships with idealized or unnecessarily sensational features. Moreover, she removes the image of working/middle-class woman from economic neutrality and portrays women as active, however limited, agents in a commercial economy. Though Lucy self-critically remonstrates that she has been "selfish from my babyhood," the narrative reveals that her selfishness has been nurtured out of necessity, as Lucy has been forced because of the insufficiencies of both father and husband to fend for herself in a society ill at ease with the idea of working women. That Lucy was quick to recognize the inevitable link between marriage and money is also resolved by the novel's conclusion; speaking of her childhood, Lucy articulates during her confession what is often left unsaid regarding women and marriage, "I had learnt that which in some

indefinite manner or other every schoolgirl learns sooner or later—I learned that my ultimate fate in life depended on my marriage" (345). Lucy reasons that in such a culture, it is difficult to marry for love. Even her first husband, the young and dashing George Talboys, can only be deemed her rescuing "prince" with bitter sarcasm. Despite George's embodiment of the physical traits of conventional masculinity—"a dark face, bronzed by exposure to the sun," "handsome brown eyes," height and a powerful build—his worth fades under economic hardship. Too realistic to be romantic about love, Lucy explains, "I loved him very well, quite well enough to be happy with him as long as his money lasted" (347). Clearly, George acutely feels the threat that poverty poses to his manhood. When Lucy criticizes him for misleading her into an unfortunate marriage, he abandons her and their infant son and leaves them penniless, with only a note explaining he had gone in search of his fortune and would not return until he was a rich man. At eighteen years of age, Lucy had no financial security from her marriage, and no legal recourse to seek a divorce. Three and a half years pass with no word from George, and yet he believes as he returns on the ship from South Africa that she will welcome him back in spite of his desertion. He muses, "Poor little girl, how pleased she'll be!...how pleased and surprised!" (18). The surprise, of course, is for George when he finds that he is still without masculine power, which has been overthrown by the dynamics of the January-May marriage.

Lucy's mercenary tactics and willing admission of the motivations behind her marriage(s) are too much for the men in the novel as well as for most readers. To her step-daughter, she is "a practised and consummate flirt" (106). To her nephew Robert Audley, she is a "poor unhappy little golden-haired sinner" (250). The painting of Lucy

that reveals her identity to George conveys her as the men would have her—not as legitimate wife but as brazen prostitute. The portrait depicts Lucy with "a lurid lightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes" (72). The "pre-Raphaelite" painting has also given Lucy's "pretty pouting mouth [an] almost wicked look" and "as if you had burned strange-coloured fires before my lady's face" turned her into a "beautiful fiend" (72). Depicting her as they secretly want her to be, the artist and those who interpret Lucy's portrait imagine her sexually on fire:

> Her crimson dress, exaggerated like all the rest in this strange picture, hung about her in folds that looked like flames, her fair head peeing out of the lurid mass of colour, as if out of a raging furnace. Indeed, the crimson dress, the sunshine on the face, the red gold gleaming in the yellow hair, the ripe scarlet of the pouting lips, the glowing colours of each accessory of the minutely-painted background, all combined to render the first effect of the painting by no means an agreeable one. (72)

Metaphorically aflame from the sexual desire of those around her and the implosion of the roles of governess, wife, and prostitute, Lucy is a fearful sight, and the text suggests that the men in the novel would like the wages of Lucy's sins to be everlasting death, burning in hell for her unwomanly privileging of her economic well-being over love.

Without love, sexual exchange becomes a pecuniary matter even in marriage, and throughout the nineteenth century, the age differences of January-May marriages often underlined the blurry division between wife and prostitute.[152] In his *An Essay on the*

[152] Boundaries between wives and prostitutes were troubled by various other means. Reports of nineteenth-century "wife sales" (like the one that opens Thomas Hardy's 1886 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*) deeply

Principle of Population (1798), Malthus notes with disapproval marriages that were made to raise the wife's economic position, claiming that unions of young women and older men are "little better than legal prostitutions" (184). Near the end of the century, the same analogy continued to operate in texts like Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1894), which draws explicit connections between January-May marriages and prostitution and was banned by the Lord Chamberlain because of its radical treatment of the sex market. Much of the concern about the play arose not from its depiction of prostitution through the character of Mrs. Warren, but through the proposed January-May marriage of Sir George Crofts to Mrs. Warren's daughter Vivie. He negotiates the marriage with Mrs. Warren, who is used to the exchange of money for the gratification of sexual desire. Crofts urges his case, reasoning that "I'm not fifty yet; and my property is as good as ever it was....And a baronet isn't to be picked up every day...Why shouldn't she marry me?" (58). Hoping to shelter her daughter from the sexual economics of her life, Mrs. Warren refuses to entertain the idea, but Crofts continues his argument: "I'd die before her and leave her a bouncing widow with plenty of money. Why not?" (59).[153] When Mrs. Warren remains firm, Crofts "suddenly becom[es] anxious and urgent as he sees no sign of sympathy in her" and begs, "Look here, Kitty: you're a sensible woman: you needn't put on any moral airs. I'll ask no more questions; and you need answer none. I'll settle the whole property on her; and if you want a cheque for yourself on the

---

troubled the middle-classes. See Joan Perkin's *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989) 117.

[153] Young and wealthy widows from January-May marriages are not uncommon figures in nineteenth-century literature, and they can present a unique state of female financial independence. See, for example, Margaret Hale's Aunt Shaw in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) and Lady Mason in Anthony Trollope's *Orley Farm* (1862). Becky Sharp even regrets missing her chance at becoming Sir Pitt Crawley's young widow in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847).

wedding day, you can name any figure you like—in reason" (59). Though as a late nineteenth-century "new woman," Vivie rejects Crofts's offer of marriage to forge her career in the male-dominated business world of Chancery Lane, the implicit link between mercenary marriages and prostitution remains powerful, keeping the play from print until 1898 and off the public stage until 1926. In the play's preface, Shaw explains that his intent was

> to draw attention to the truth that prostitution is caused, not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing, and overworking women so shamefully that the poorest of them are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together. Indeed all attractive unpropertied women lose money by being infallibly virtuous or contracting marriages that are not more or less venal. If on the large social scale we get what we call vice instead of what we call virtue it is simply because we are paying more for it. (3)

With the remarks of Malthus and Shaw framing the broader period of study, mid-nineteenth-century legal efforts such as the Contagious Disease Acts of the 1860s, which endorsed the detention and examination of prostitutes under the pretexts of medical precautions, can be read in context of a larger social effort to distinguish between prostitution and culturally sanctioned sexual exchanges.

In most of these marriage proposals, the young women are active agents in a larger sexual economy. However, some works emphasize young wives as innocent victims in a system of exchange in which they have neither choice nor agency, and adhere more closely to Rubin's theories about the traffic in women because the young wives are betrothed to

their husbands by their fathers or families, and not by any choice of their own. Though less subversive in respect to male agency than some of the other January-May marriages, these marriages nonetheless offer protests against the traditional system of male economic superiority, even as they indulge in reinstating male systems of power by assigning the "saving" of the younger wife (or would-be wife) to her younger male lover. Presenting the male-dominated sexual economy as corrupt, Dickens's 1839 *Nicholas Nickleby* attempts to correct the problem of the passive female victim via the story of Madeline Bray and Arthur Gride, who are prevented from completing their January-May marriage vows by Nicholas' timely intervention. This moment is dramatically rendered in the illustration, "Nicholas congratulates Arthur Gride on his Wedding Morning," in which the younger male figure restores a semblance of masculinity in the wake of feminized or otherwise corrupt older male representations (Fig. 23). Here, the failure of the January-May engagement is vital to the novel's happy ending and to readers' expectations, since the novel construes the relationship between Madeline, who is eighteen, and Gride, who is "seventy or seventy-five years of age," as sexual perversion not to be bought at any price. The January-May marriage plot provides Dickens with the material to execute a number of objectives; he criticizes old men and their corrupt economy, he preserves wifely submission and a feminine ideal, and he attempts to restore a noble masculinity through the figure of the rightful young lover. [154]

---

[154] Importantly, Dickens's treatment of older men and January-May relationships changes dramatically as he ages. Eleven years after *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dickens esteems the older husband Dr. Strong and his relationship with his young wife in *David Copperfield* (1850). *Bleak House* (1853), *Little Dorrit* (1857), and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) all include positive accounts of January-May romances, which implies that Dickens grew more sympathetic with older men and their attraction to younger women as he faced the reality of his own unhappy marriage and sought happiness with a woman twenty years his younger. See Fred Kaplan's *Dickens: A Biography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988).

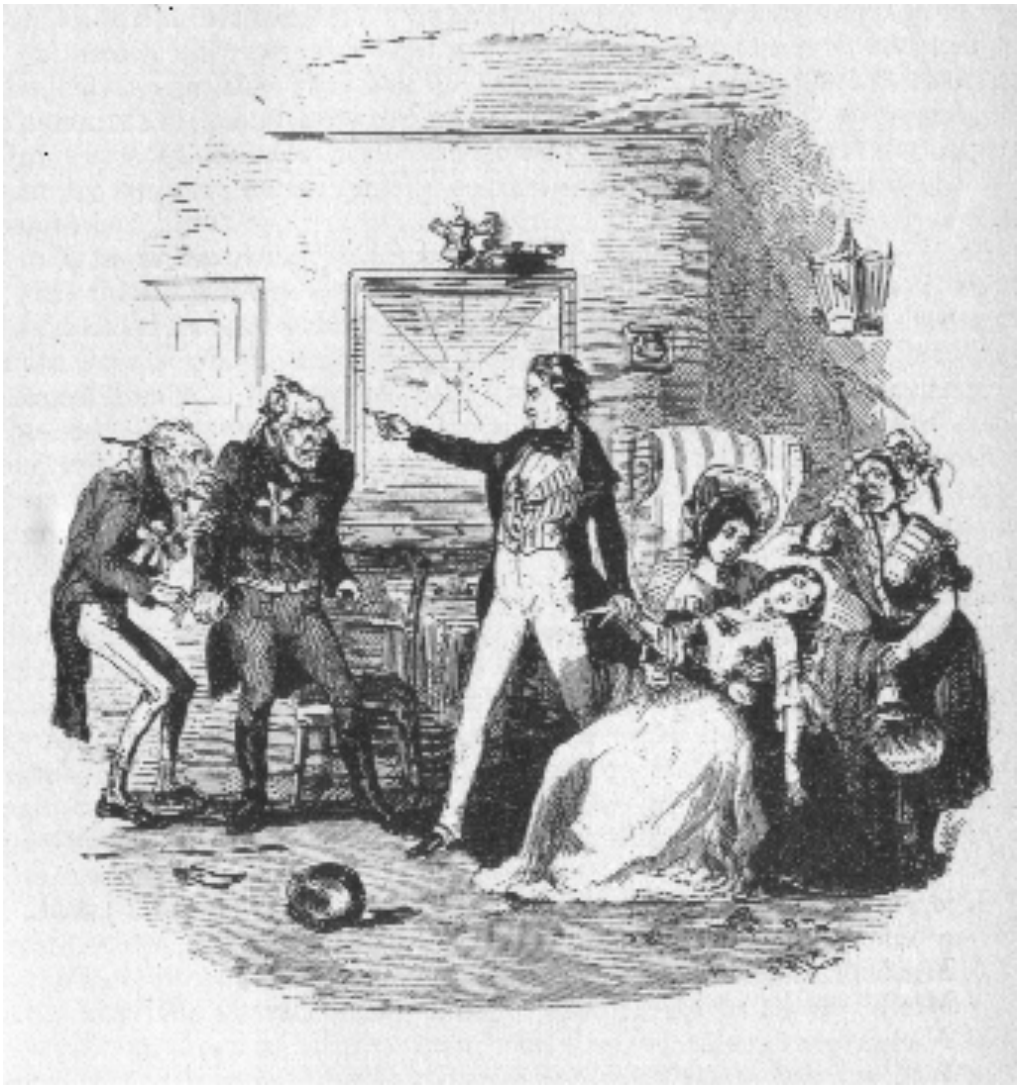


Figure 23. Hablot K. Browne, "Nicolas congratulates Arthur Gride on his Wedding Morning," from *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1839. Engraving.

On the surface, the marriage between Madeline and Gride follows the economic pattern of the other January-May marriages examined in this chapter. Madeline's father owes Gride and his friend Ralph Nickleby a substantial amount of money, and they promise to forgive his debt if he arranges the marriage between his daughter and Gride. Addressing Gride, Ralph Nickleby explains that he considers the exchange "fair and easy" because "you have money, and Miss Madeline has beauty and worth. She has youth, you have money. She has not money, you have not youth. Tit for tat—quits—a match of Heaven's own making" (714). The incentives for the marriage clearly draw upon the broader associations between wives and prostitutes, and the intent of the father to sell his daughter for his own financial gain allows Dickens to criticize simultaneously failing patriarchal and economic systems. His mission, however, is not to overturn or disrupt the gender binary that exists, but to replace the flawed patriarch with a younger and hopefully less problematic masculine figure. Thus, Dickens paints the sexual dimension of the exchange with grotesque and horrifying detail—hoping to disgust the reader to the extent that his idealized young masculinity can be accepted with open arms.

Dickens portrays Gride with one foot from the grave, a "shriveled and yellow" corpse whose "jaws had fallen inwards from loss of teeth." Gride embodies neither masculinity nor humanity: "The whole air and attitude of the form, was one of stealthy cat-like obsequiousness; the whole expression of the face was concentrated in a wrinkled leer, compounded of cunning, lecherousness, and avarice" (703-4). In contrast, Madeline is not "some old hag," as Ralph predicts, but "a young and beautiful girl; fresh, lovely, bewitching, and not nineteen" (707). Her status as a commodity that can be consumed is

clear when Gride catalogs her physical attributes with continual nods to their sexual delectability:

> Dark eyes—long eyelashes—ripe and ruddy lips that to look at is to long to kiss—beautiful clustering hair that one's fingers itch to play with—such a waist as might make a man clasp the air involuntarily, thinking of twining his arm about it—little feet that tread so lightly they hardly seem to walk upon the ground—to marry all this, sir,—this—hey, hey! (707)

Food imagery abounds in Gride's descriptions of his desire for Madeline. For him she is a "delicate morsel," and Gride, as capitalistic and metaphorical cannibal, is willing to part with seventeen hundred pounds to eat her up. As Gride fantasies about the marriage, the sing-song meter of his banter lends an especially eerie dreadfulness to readers' expectations of the sexual union to come. He repulsively queries, "pretty Mrs. Arthur Gride—a tit-bit—a dainty chick—shouldn't I have her Mr. Arthur Gride in a week, a month, a day—any time I chose to name?" (710).

Despite the horror that Gride's proposal inspires, Madeline remains steadfast in her role as dutiful daughter and prepares herself for the sacrifice of her body so that her father can prosper. Dickens needs to keep Madeline untainted from the problematic associations of the sexual economy, and he therefore stresses the fact that Madeline is marrying for the financial gain of her father, and not for herself. She explains to Nicholas, "I do *not* love this gentleman; the difference between our ages, tastes, and habits, forbids it. This he knows, and knowing, still offers me his hand. By accepting it, and by that step alone, I can release my father who is dying in this place, prolong his life, perhaps, for many years, restore his life" (797). Madeline's refusal to go against her

father's wishes initiates Nicholas's intervention in her engagement. He personally goes to Gride and asks how much money he would be willing to take to break his engagement with Madeline. Though Nicholas has little financial capital himself, he relies on the good will of the Cheeryble brothers and his own threatening physicality to urge Gride, "Bate some expected gain, for the risk you save, and say what is your price" (803). As Madeline's savior, Nicholas enters the commercial exchange in women. He reasons that he descends to financial bargaining because he is left with no other choice, "I take the only ground that can be taken with men like you, and ask what money will buy you off," but he bargains nevertheless and advances his own desires to make Madeline his own.

Dickens intends the January-May marriage plot to stabilize masculine and feminine constructions through its failure and the subsequent normalizing of male and female relations through the same-age union of Madeline and Nicholas. Madeline's father's timely death acts as the *deus ex machina* and allows Nicholas (literally) to carry Madeline off to the home in which he functions as head of the household. The older men, Gride and Ralph, find their circumstances altered for the worse. Madeline is no longer bound by duty to marry Gride, and both Gride and Ralph immediately suffer disastrous financial setbacks. With aging, troubled masculinity overthrown (Nicholas tells Gride and Ralph, "Your day is past, and night is coming on") and conventional domestic femininity preserved, Nicholas's path is cleared to fulfill the psychological and mythic fantasy of fathering a new and more just masculinity for society. In a Dickensian sense, he succeeds, becoming "a rich and prosperous merchant," purchasing back the home his father's financial mismanagement had lost, and fathering numerous children with Madeline, who sweetly place flowers on the grave of Smike, the unfortunate

offspring of the representative of older masculinity, Ralph. It is a picturesque fairytale ending of domestic relations restored, of normative sexuality reaffirmed, and of gender identities clarified, yet the thinness of the picture remains apparent, as Madeline's close encounter with legitimized prostitution and Nicholas's desire to participate in her exchange reveal. Although Dickens intends to address and resolve nineteenth-century anxieties about gender by adapting the January-May plot to allow for the restoration of masculine power and the absolution of femininity from the sexual exchange, he effectually reminds readers of the instability of gender identities and their inevitable associations with economic realities.

Unlike the January-May plots of *The Ring and the Book* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, the majority of nineteenth-century literature's January-May marriages are not unions in which the younger wives relinquish their agency in the negotiations of their marriages. Often, the women are independent individuals, either literally or metaphorically orphaned like Jane Eyre and Lucy Graham, and must maneuver for their economic well-being in an economic system that severely limits women's options for employment. However, though pecuniary matters usually influence January-May romances in nineteenth-century literature, they do not always capture the complexity of the participants' motivations.

Indeed, as Christopher Herbert suggests in "Filthy Lucre: Victorian Ideas of Money," by mid-century, many individuals felt deeply ambivalent about money, and its acquisition formed a Victorian social taboo—revered as a key to power, yet viewed as polluting, dirty, and at odds with a Christian lifestyle. Herbert writes, "Christianity idealizes poverty and anathematizes money; it teaches Christians to recoil from the contaminating uncleanness of worldly riches" (190). Herbert theorizes that a nineteenth-

century love of money and adherence to Christianity led to a cultural schizophrenia, in which individuals were torn between money worship and a non-materialistic religion. Many nineteenth-century texts consequently uphold New Testament ideals of selflessness and love, and the January-May marriages that successfully secure money and love convey the literary ideal to the reader. The marriages of Emma, Jane Eyre and Marianne Dashwood, for example, emerge as instructional models for real life, while Lucy Graham's marriage leads to disaster due to her inability to love (though Braddon suggests this is not entirely her fault). In the most successful January-May relationships, love develops amid the more practical elements of the relationships, complicating readings of January-May marriages and their implications for gendered constructions. Anthony Trollope's last completed novel *An Old Man's Love* (1884) merges money matters with real affection, suggesting that the two seemingly contradictory motivations for marriage do not have to exist apart.[155]

Beyond Money: The Destabilizing Effects of Love

When Mary Lawrie, at age twenty-five, is left "all alone in the world" with no other prospect but to become a governess, her dead father's best friend William Whittlestaff invites her into his comfortable bachelor home. Though Mary intimates "she

[155] Though a great deal of scholarship exists concerning Trollope's sympathy with women's concerns about marriage, little attention has been given to *An Old Man's Love* or to the use of January-May relationships in his works. In *Orley Farm,* the marriage between Sir Joseph Mason and Lady Mason has a forty-five year age difference, and money is an important part of their marital contract as well, since she is the daughter of a bankrupt associate, and her subversion of his will after his death is crucial to the novel's plot. *He Knew He Was Right* offers an interesting twist to the January-May theme, as the same-age husband Louis Trevelyan grows insanely jealous of his wife's friendship with the middle-aged friend of her father, Colonel Osborne. In *Barchester Towers,* Trollope also plays with the standard monetary basis of the January-May marriage; Elinor Bold possesses the fortune when she comes to marry Arabin. See Margaret Markwick's *Trollope and Women* (London: Hambledon P, 1997).

had always been intended for a governess," she has received no training to prepare her for such employment, and Whittlestaff concludes, "that plan he was quite sure would not answer" (2, 3). To Whittlestaff, the twenty-five year age difference between them would prohibit any sense of impropriety, and he reasons, "I can do just what I please with her as though she were my own girl" (4). Trollope emphasizes Whittlestaff's non-sexual intentions: "By this he meant to imply that he would not be expected to fall in love with her, and that it would be quite out of the question that she should fall in love with him," but, as readers are already aware from the title of the novel, Whittlestaff protests too much about the romantic impossibilities of his actions from their very inception (4). When he announces his plan to bring Mary into the home "as though she were my own daughter" to his housekeeper Mrs. Baggett, she expresses her doubts about the platonic arrangement he envisions and warns Whittlestaff about his naivety, "You ain't a young man—nor you ain't an old un; and she ain't no relation to you. That's the worst part of it. As sure as my name is Dorothy Baggett, you'll be falling in love with her" (5-6). Mrs. Baggett, of course, is right.

The platonic, familial nature of their relationship lasts for over a year, but the novel makes it clear that it is Mary's resistance rather than Whittlestaff's that prevents things from developing. Trollope explains that

> An old gentleman will seldom fall in love without some encouragement; or at any rate, will not tell his love. Mary Lawrie was as cold to him as though he had been seventy-five instead of fifty. And she was also as dutiful,—by which she showed Mrs. Baggett more strongly even than by

> her coldness, that any idea of marriage was on her part out of the question (7-8).

Nonetheless, if Whittlestaff had really hoped that his age would protect him from the complications of a romantic attachment, he finds that, at fifty years, he occupies an ambiguous masculine position between a safer, effeminized elderly position and a riskier, youthful virility. Though the novel's title and repeated descriptions throughout the work characterize Whittlestaff as "old," the text also indicates that perceptions of age, like perceptions of gender, are subjective. While Whittlestaff's hair is beginning to turn gray, he is nonetheless an "impressive" man; in fact, the novel attests that he was "a much better looking man than he had been at thirty" (21). He is also healthy, "as fit, bodily and mentally, for hard work as ever he had been" (12). Whittlestaff equivocates about how he should interpret his own age, not because he wants to deceive himself or Mary, but because the implications of his age on his sexuality are truly confusing: "He was not a young man, because he was fifty; but he was not quite an old man, because he was only fifty" (16).[156] Whittlestaff comes to understand that the ambiguities of his age offer him two very different approaches to Mary; he could exaggerate his age and take on the role of a seventy-five-year-old (though this presumes that seventy-five-year-old men are not sexual, which Arthur Gride's character would refute) or he could accentuate his youthfulness. Speaking of their present guardian/ward arrangement, he muses, "She might come to accept it all and not think much of it, if he would take before himself the guise of an old man. But were he to appear before her as a suitor for her hand, would she

[156] Trollope was sixty-seven-years-old when he began *An Old Man's Love* and in very poor health. He had to dictate much of the novel to his niece Florence Nightingale Bland, who could have served as inspiration for Mary Lawrie.

refuse him?" (16). As time passes and he debates over which role to assume with Mary, he finds himself increasingly desirous of replacing his role as guardian with that of husband.

The pecuniary aspects of their relationship prove just as unsettling to Whittlestaff as his age. He, like Sir Michael Audley, initially rejects the idea of effectively purchasing a wife with the financial security that he offers. He generously reasons to himself, "as the girl did receive from his hands all that she had—her bread and meat, her bed, her very clothes—would it not be better for her that he should stand to her in the place of a father than a lover?" (16). Whittlestaff wants to marry for love and to find that love reciprocated. He distances himself and the wife he envisions from a working-class perspective that would place mercenary motivations on the marriage: "Mrs. Baggett looks on [the marriage] only as a question of butchers and bakers. There are, no doubt, circumstances in which butchers and bakers do come uppermost. But here the butchers and bakers are provided." He continues, "I wouldn't have her marry me for that sake. Love, I fear, is out of the question. But for gratitude I would not have her do it" (19). Whittlestaff clearly privileges love over money, but like Marianne Dashwood, Jane Eyre and Sir Michael, Whittlestaff discovers that it is difficult to rise above economics.

Despite Whittlestaff's professions, the "bread and meat" and "butchers and bakers" affect all of the characters' outlooks on Mary's obligations to Whittlestaff, and they interestingly couch their sense of her dependence using the same economic metaphor as Whittlestaff. For her own complex reasons, Mrs. Baggett is the one who initially encourages Mary to "sit close up" to Whittlestaff as a sign of her willingness to accept his affections (31). Correctly reading Whittlestaff's hereto unexpressed longings

for Mary, Mrs. Baggett tells Mary that she should let him "have his own way" because she is a young woman "who has had so much done for her" (31). After all, "Mary had eaten his bread, as bestowed upon her from sheer charity" (57). After Mrs. Baggett's urging, Mary reflects on the possibility of becoming Whittlestaff's wife. She inwardly muses,

> Did she not eat his bread; did she not wear his clothes; were not the very boots on her feet his property? And she was there in his house without the slightest tie of blood or family connection. He had taken her from sheer dependency of becoming a friendless governess. Looking out to the life which she had avoided, it seemed to her to be full of abject misery. And he had brought her to his own house, and had made her the mistress of everything. She knew that she had been undemonstrative in her manner, and that such was her nature. But her heart welled over with gratitude as she thought of the sweetness of the life which he had prepared for her. (32-33).

Despite the repetition of food imagery, Whittlestaff, unlike Gride, does not seem to want to consume Mary as a delicate morsel; and neither does the erotically suggestive fact that he owns her clothes give him moral license to make her take them off. Yet it is difficult even for Whittlestaff to keep to his honorable intentions. When he does eventually propose, he reminds her of her "ambition" and clearly outlines the social and material advantages he can offer her: "As my wife, you will fill a position more honourable, and more suitable to your gifts, than could belong to you as a governess or a companion" (54). The financial benefits that their marriage would afford never fade into the

background of the text, and practical concerns over money are addressed throughout the entire novel.

Yet the pervasiveness of money matters does not prevent love from shaping the plot even though Mary clearly struggles with the question of her love for Whittlestaff. Following the conventions of the January-May plot, her reluctance to commit herself to Whittlestaff originates from her affections for a younger man named John Gordon, whom she had known at home but who had gone away to seek his fortune. John had often visited her, and Mary considered him to be "the personification of manliness" (44). But John had not given her a promise of his love or any reason to expect his return. John's memory nonetheless keeps her from fully committing to Whittlestaff; she tells herself repeatedly that "she could in truth have loved him,—had it not been for John Gordon" (54). The tangled interrelationship between sexual desire and love also proves problematic for Mary, as she contemplates their legal and physical union as man and wife. On the one hand, she reads her body as a part of the economic exchange—a material object that is subject to a binding legal contract. She affirms to herself that she would not be sexually unfaithful if she were to marry him: "She was sure that she would be true to him, as far as truth to his material interests were concerned," but she assumes she will have to feign interest concerning their sexual relations (43). Directly alluding to the age difference, she pledges to herself that "she would be as tender to him as the circumstances would admit. She would not begrudge him kisses if he cared for them. They were his by all the right of contract" (43). Mary's allusion to sexual intimacy reminds readers that a husband had a legal right to more than kisses, and though she seems to prepare herself mentally for this aspect of married life, she physically recoils

from Whittlestaff when he asks her to kiss him "as a wife kisses her husband" (51).[157] Mary's reluctant willingness to consummate their relationship suggests that she cannot love this man who is not, for her, the "personification of manliness," yet she wavers back and forth over the question of her love.

To be forthright, she tells Whittlestaff of her love for John Gordon before she accepts his proposal. Though she verbally agrees with Whittlestaff's suggestion that her feelings for John were "just a fancy," she later assumes that her confession of love for John releases her from any expectations of loving Whittlestaff. When she later half-heartedly attempts to break the engagement and he urges her "not to accept any man that you cannot love," she silently protests, "Had she not told him that she did not love him;—even that she loved another?" (55). But Mary has not told Whittlestaff that she did not or cannot love him and her frustrated and confused memory overly relies on a monogamous ideal of love. She has even told herself that she loves Whittlestaff: "it is not that I hate him. I do love him. He is all good" (45). Mary's befuddled "love" for Whittlestaff fluctuates as she compares him against her sexualized masculine ideal.

At first, Mary's ability to love Whittlestaff is inseparable from his age and its associations with conventional masculinity, though, like Whittlestaff, she finds his fifty years to be an ambiguous marker of gendered power. Immediately after she accepts his proposal, she finds that he looks "older than she had ever remarked him to be before," but later, when she reveals that she is considering breaking the engagement and he sternly objects, she thinks "he did not now appear so old" (43, 54). Associating masculinity and

[157] A husband's right to his wife's body was reinforced through British law, which even guaranteed the legality of marital rape. In *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill argued that in this respect, a wife had fewer rights that a slave. See chapter six "A Husband's Right to His Wife's Body: Wife Abuse, The Restitution of Conjugal Rights, and Marital Rape" in Shanley 156-88.

age with power, she envisions Whittlestaff as older when he submits, as when he accepts her confession of love for John, and younger when he acts more aggressively. When Whittlestaff appears younger, Mary becomes aware that "There was a power of speech about the man, and a dignity" and later admits after he forcefully kisses her on the lips that "he had displayed more of power than she had ever guessed at his possessing. A woman always loves this display of power in a man" (54, 56). Mary's appreciation of Whittlestaff's power changes, however, when John Gordon returns just hours after Mary has engaged herself to Whittlestaff.

When John arrives and officially declares his love for Mary, he embodies a youthful and sexual masculinity and, for the rest of the novel, serves as a foil to the aging Whittlestaff. During the three years he has been gone, he has mined diamonds in South Africa and returned rich, having "carried his purpose through with a manly resolution" (69). Mary also reflects on his masculine appearance and "How like a man he had looked" (89). Though Mary's use of the simile "like a man" nods to the unstable and transitory nature of John's phallic masculinity, which will eventually fade with time, others recognize the value of John's youthful masculinity and deem Mary's choice between her older and younger suitors an easy one. Speaking to his own fiancée, the Reverend Montagu Blake declares, "A lady always prefers a young gentleman to an old one. Only think what you'd feel if you were married to Mr. Whittlestaff" (143). Though Mary clearly regrets her untimely decision to marry Whittlestaff, she resolves to keep her

word by marrying him, and Whittlestaff, meanwhile, struggles with the question of whether or not he should release Mary from her commitment.[158]

The decision of whether or not to break off the engagement becomes a question of sacrifice—of whether Mary should suppress her love for John or whether Whittlestaff should suppress his love for Mary—and it evolves as a gendered issue. Dutiful sacrifice was an accepted component of being a woman, as Sarah Stickney Ellis advised British women "to suffer and be still" in her 1842 *The Daughters of England*. Expecting conventional feminine submissiveness, Mrs. Baggett believes that "Mary was bound to deliver herself body and soul to Mr. Whittlestaff, were 'soul sacrifice' demanded from her" (57). Society expects sacrifice from women, not from men. Indeed, Mrs. Baggett reveals that self-sacrifice can be an effeminizing characteristic as she rallies Whittlestaff to hold Mary to her engagement: "When you've said that you'll do a thing, you ought not to go back for any other man, let him be who it may,—especially not in respect of a female. It's weak, and nobody wouldn't think a straw of you for doing it. It's some idea of being generous that you have got in into your head....I say it ain't manly, and that's what a man ought to be" (212). Whittlestaff likewise recognizes that letting Mary go would compromise his manhood: "as it came to be known that he himself had given up the girl whom he loved, he could read the ridicule which would be conveyed by the smiles of his neighbors" (218). Mary fulfills the feminine role expected of her, and she acknowledges that she is willing to lie to Whittlestaff and perform wifely affection to keep him from any regret regarding their marriage. Whittlestaff, on the other hand, finds

---

[158] For the social and linguistic implications of promises to marry, see Randall Craig's *Promising Language: Betrothal in Victorian Law and Fiction* (New York: State U of New York P, 2000).

masculine selfishness difficult to accept. Aware that "it behoved him to learn to become stern and cruel," he discovers that he cannot hold Mary to her promise. Despite Mary's objections, Whittlestaff assumes a feminized position and willingly makes the sacrifice.[159]

Although Whittlestaff desperately wants to make Mary his wife, he comes to realize "He could not alter his own self. He could not turn round upon himself, and bid himself be other than he was" (117). He cannot perform the sternness and cruelty required of him, and he is guided to his rejection of masculine norms, regardless of public opinion, by his love for Mary. Unlike Mary, Whittlestaff commits to the sacrifice not from a sense of obligation from eating someone's bread, but from a less material concern for her happiness more in line with the ideal of Christian sacrifice identified by Herbert. Trollope writes, "He could not conceive it possible that he should be required by duty to make such a sacrifice; but he knew of himself that if her happiness, her true and permanent happiness, would require it, then the sacrifice should be made" (168). Thus, January-May love initiates the possibility for Whittlestaff to move beyond the framework of material logic or advantage while both maintaining the ideology of gender and age and producing the terms of its revision. When Whittlestaff tells John that he is willing to step aside and release Mary from the engagement, he makes it clear that it is a painful

---

[159] In *He Knew She Was Right: The Independent Woman in the Novels of Anthony Trollope* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989), Jane Nardin traces a chronological development in Trollope's attitude toward men and women as his later works become increasing sympathetic to women. Though Nardin does not consider *An Old Man's Love* in her critique, this last novel follows the subversive trend that Nardin identifies in more popular works like *Can You Forgive Her?* and *Orley Farm*. Rajiva Wijesinha and other critics have also noted Trollope's relatively subversive stance in comparison with other Victorian novelists. See Wijesinha's *The Androgynous Trollope: Attitudes to Women Amongst Early Victorian Novelists* (Washington: UP of America, 1982).

acquiescence on his behalf. He tells John, "If I know what love is, I loved her. If I know what love is, I do love her still. She is all the world to me" (231). Relying again on the ambiguities of his age, Whittlestaff determines to be a father if not a lover to Mary and continues to welcome Mary in his home until her wedding to John can be arranged. He promises to be her friend if she needs him in the future and, treating her as his daughter, he even takes care of the "money matters" that are necessary to prepare for her wedding to his young rival. While it is difficult, Whittlestaff fully assumes a sacrificial position and relinquishes the masculine legal and social power he holds, and when Mary refers to him as an "angel," she correctly appropriates the metaphor commonly associated with Victorian women.

Whittlestaff joins numerous January figures in nineteenth-century literature who prove true the adage that a young wife is often "a young man's slave and an old man's darling" (232). His actions recall Sir Leicester's unqualified defense of Lady Dedlock against her public shame and the sacrificial measures of John Jarndyce when he facilitates the marriage of Esther Summerson and Allan Woodcourt in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), and the selfless act of Sydney Carton to save Lucy's husband in the dramatic conclusion of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). In addition to undermining gendered notions of sacrifice and duty, these submissions by January "husbands" to their May "wives" endorse feminine sexuality as a powerful and genuine social force, since they often include the older man's acceptance of the young woman's sexual life with another. Though these sacrifices often result in the breaking of January-May engagements, their contributions are critical to the broader implications of the theme's disruption of gender

identities, and they directly contradict the machinations of a sexual economy that were explored earlier in the chapter.

Love's destabilizing effects are not limited to the actions of the older men in January-May relationships; love works less predictably than money, and in works that capture the passionate love of younger wives for their older husbands, the erratic irrationality of love also troubles gendered norms. In Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), Annie Strong's love for her much-older husband defies everyone's logic, and even innocent young David seems to believe it quite natural that she would rather have sex with Jack Maldon than be in a monogamous relationship with her elderly husband, however disturbing feminine infidelity might be. Depictions of the January-May marriage like that of Annie and Dr. Strong destabilize understandings of aesthetics and sexual desire, playing with perversity while simultaneously mitigating that play by crediting it to the theoretically transcendent nature of love. For example, in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872) Dorothea Brooke is free to marry whom she wants, since she has been left financially well off after the deaths of her parents. She astounds her family and neighbors in accepting the proposal of the aging scholar Casaubon over the young and handsome suitor Sir James Chettam. Despite Chettam's masculine virtues, Dorothea bluntly explains, "If he thinks of marrying me, he has made a great mistake" (26). She prefers Casaubon, regardless of his stooping shoulders, sunken eyes, and hairy moles. Perplexed, Mr. Brooke scrambles to reground his valuation of youthful masculinity: "One never knows. I should have thought Chettam was just the sort of man a woman would like, now" (26).

The possibility of Dorothea's love for Casaubon has been largely dismissed. Dorothea's actions are considered a "perversity" contrary to nature by Sir James and "the most horrible of virgin-sacrifices" by Will Ladislaw (43, 225). Literary critics have been only slightly less unkind. Bert Hornback reads the marriage between Dorothea and Casaubon as a great mistake that derives from Dorothea's misconception of her husband and herself. Hornback deems the marriage "not a relationship at all" and asserts that "because her marriage has taught her what love is not, she is ready—almost—to learn what love is" (125). Though the marriage obviously fails at bringing Dorothea any sexual, emotional, or intellectual satisfaction, it does not follow that Dorothea does not love her husband. In fact, *Middlemarch* revels in the irrationality of love, which can be seen through various other matches, such as Mary Garth's preference of Fred Vincy over Farebrother or Lydgate's illogical attachment to Rosamond, that don't make "sense" but are driven by inexplicable motives. Having fallen in love, Dorothea is "childlike" and "stupid" in spite of "all her reputed cleverness" and the Middlemarch community derides her for "throwing herself, metaphorically speaking, at Mr. Casaubon's feet, and kissing his unfashionable shoe-ties as if he were a Prostestant Pope" (33). Nevertheless, "from the wealth of her own love" she would have liked "to have kissed Mr. Casaubon's coat-sleeve, or to have caressed his shoe-latchet" (127). Even the sexual disappointments that begin during her honeymoon do not prevent Dorothea from repeatedly attempting to instigate physical intimacy with her husband, and Eliot often describes Dorothea's hands as seeking contact with Casaubon's body, though her efforts are usually met with little or no response from her husband. In Book IV: "Three Love Problems," we see Dorothea softly wrapping her arm around Casaubon's "rigid" arm after he has spoken with Lydgate

about his failing health, and later that night, she waits for Casaubon to come upstairs so that she can "put her hand into her husband's" to accompany him to bed. Eliot provides several other illustrations of Dorothea's love for Casaubon. She is slow to understand the nature of Casaubon's jealousy towards Ladislaw; if she finds Ladislaw attractive, she never contemplates the possibility of Ladislaw's youthful masculinity overturning her affections for her husband. Like the sacrificial older husbands, Dorothea is prepared to give up her happiness for the happiness of another, and she resolves to bind herself to Casaubon's selfish request that she follow his instructions after his death regarding the chaotic mess that is his *Key to all Mythologies*. And she truly laments his death, as her painfully shocked response to finding his lifeless body suggests: "Wake, dear, wake! Listen to me. I am come to answer" (299).

I am not suggesting that Dorothea *should* feel or behave this way, or that Casaubon is deserving of Dorothea's love. Love defies intellectual "shoulds" and rational readings. Thus, because of love, Dorothea's dutiful allegiance to her wifely role is more subversive than not. Though it superficially fulfills conventions of womanly obedience, selflessness, and submission, it undermines conventional masculinity by demonstrating how love can value what "rationally," via reason, or "naturally" via biology should not be valued. Many of the wives who fall in love with older husbands illustrate this seemingly illogical rejection of masculinity. Jane Eyre refuses St. John Rivers, who projects a youthful masculinity typical of Charles Kingsley's muscular Christianity, to wed Rochester, who is feminized by his blindness and disabled body as well as his age. Annie Strong rejects Jack Maldon, the quintessential Victorian bad boy, in favor of her girlishly naive older husband, Dr. Strong. Just as the January-May

marriage illustrates how money shifted power away from masculine control, so January-May love also reveals how masculinity fails to fulfill predictable outcomes within heterosexual romance narratives.

In the unique social and economic climate of the nineteenth century, money and love provide distinct but complementary methods of accessing and evaluating the worth of masculinity and femininity to the middle class. Age proves to be a volatile commodity, specifically coded by gender, but capable of holding drastically variant values in the markets of sex, security, and love. Importantly, the January-May marriage works from within the existing economy, and, in following a heterosexual marriage plot, plays its game with gender identities by the rules. Much of the theme's subversive potential comes from its superficial acceptance of established nineteenth-century constructions like class-aligned gender differences, a male-dominated economic world, and the overwhelming power of love. Yet, by grafting age onto these already overburdened concepts, the January-May marriage theme reveals their underlying fragility and encourages readers to reconsider the distribution of power across the lines of gender, class and generation.

Conclusion: The January-May Marriage in Other Contexts

My examination of the dynamics of nineteenth-century January-May marriages in literature has revealed a number of dominant patterns that characterize and drive the negotiation of power along age and gender lines. January-May marriages are difficult to separate from father-daughter dynamics, and rather than resisting the incestuous implications of these relationships, I challenge the existing critical tradition by reading the incest narrative's potential for restructuring identity formation and masculine organizations of power. An aesthetic dimension also directs nineteenth-century depictions of January-May marriages. Attention to the January-May image provides a opportunity for critique of the aging male body, acknowledging a physical basis for gendered power though emphasizing a connection that is transitory rather than static—and thus less tied to genitalia as marker of gender difference. This aesthetic focus on the aging husband correlates with Gothic elements that are embedded in the January-May tradition. The older husband, rendered almost monstrous under close scrutiny, appears even more horrific when imagined as an anachronistic—even vampiric—figure within the January-May marriage. Opposing motivations of money and love also routinely structure January-May texts. Though gendered economies have permeated the theme since Chaucer, nineteenth-century versions of the theme to contest women's objectification in the sexual marketplace. And January-May love seems to have a unique vantage for negotiating gendered power. Male sacrifice prompted by an older man's love of a younger woman reverses myths of feminine selflessness and submission. The January-May marriage theme is not always subversive in its objectives, but these chapters

demonstrate that there is much more to intergenerational relationships than the oppression of women in a masculine hierarchy. Age manipulates gender in intricate ways, and, as often as not, women are shown to be more powerful in nineteenth-century January-May marriages than they would be in a same-age alternative.

Apart from the two prevailing elements of January-May marriages that I discuss in Chapter One—the use of parodic excess and the exploration of a triangular romance—that bind these intergenerational relationships together, the dissertation's topic-driven structure highlights the fact that January-May marriages might have little in common or a great deal in common; thus, more importantly than providing organizing strategies for contemplating January-May marriages, it is my intention that the patterns that I have identified within the broader theme demonstrate the need to read these marriages in their unique contexts. Some January-May texts incorporate a number of different patterns within their retelling of the theme. Some might incorporate only a few. I recognize the challenges and limitations of the classifications that I have formed, and, happily, at the end of this project I realize that there is much more to be said about the significance of the January-May marriage in nineteenth-century literature.

Because this study is focused on literature rather than biography, I have not attempted to offer any cohesive coverage of real life examples of January-May marriages and romances of the period. Although the establishment in 1837 of a national civil registration system did require a record of whether or not a woman was twenty-one years old at marriage, nineteenth-century marriage records are inconsistent—often citing "of full age" instead of a number—and it is therefore difficult to formulate theories about

January-May marriages as a complex social reality.[160] Several famous literary January-May romances, however, repeatedly creep into conversations whenever I share my work in academic circles, and it seems fitting to briefly mention some of the most interesting here. In 1858, John Ruskin, aged thirty-nine, met Rose La Touche, aged nine. Ruskin waited nine more years before he proposed to Rose, and though they never married, their January-May romance—characterized by both pedophilia and frustration—has been an important touchstone in my study of the literature of the period.[161] Robert Polhemus has tied Dickens's scandalous relationship with the eighteen-year-old Ellen Ternan to the author's "Lot complex," and biography is certainly one way of making sense of Dickens's investment in the January-May marriage theme. The pornographic exploits of "Walter" in the anonymous account *My Secret Life: An Erotic Diary of Victorian London* also extends some insight into a middle-aged man's sexual infatuation with young women and girls. Beyond these canonical biographical examples, I am intrigued by relationships that appear to manifest January-May tendencies in non-conventional ways. For example, sixteen years separate the partners in the lesbian relationship between Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, who are best known by their united pseudonym "Michael Field," and I am interested in how their age difference affects their efforts to negotiate gender and power beyond a heterosexual frame.[162] Similarly, the fifteen-year gap between Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas offers another real-life revision of the theme. Though queer theorists point out that older partners have

---

[160] Women under twenty-one years of age would need their parents' or guardians' permission to marry.
[161] I refer the reader again to Robson's *Men in Wonderland*, which offers an interesting reading of Ruskin's relationship with Rose in the context of his *Praeterita*.
[162] Bradley is Cooper's aunt and fourteen years her senior, and Bradley moved into Cooper's home when she was very young, taking on many of the responsibilities of raising the child because her mother (Bradley's sister) was ill.

traditionally introduced those who are younger into homosexual encounters, I believe that queer readings of age, gender and power in such relationships would benefit from considering similarities to and departures from the larger January-May tradition.[163]

Many other nineteenth-century January-May texts influenced my thinking for this project, but, due to the constraints of time and space, I was not able to discuss them in any length. Austen's *Emma* (1816) remains one of my favorite examples of the struggle for age and gender-based power in marriage, and I should note Kathleen Anderson's article "Fathers and Lovers: The Gender Dynamics of Relational Influence in *Emma*" for its insightful discussion of the "little disparity in age" between Emma and John Knightley, which has been widely overlooked in critical readings of the novel (Austen, *Emma* 144). Browning's *Pippa Passes* (1841) contains the January-May marriage of Luca and Ottima and is significant for being, as far as I know, the only Victorian January-May text that allows for the consummation of the extramarital affair with the younger lover in addition to being the only nineteenth-century January-May text that tells of the murder of the older husband by the younger man and woman. Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) and *The Professor* (1857) participate in the January-May tradition to varying extents. Both novels emphasize the husband as teacher, and *Villette* teases the reader with "a marriage between a poor and unselfish man of forty, and his wealthy ward of eighteen" just as it teases the reader with the potential marriage between the same "unselfish man of forty" and Lucy Snow, little more than five years older than the wealthy ward (566). Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) illuminates life after a

[163] See Steven Bruhm's and Natasha Hurley's *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004).

January-May marriage; Mrs. Shaw, Margaret Hale's aunt, is a widow of a much-older husband, and though she asserts that "disparity of age is a drawback" in marriage, she presents an image of Victorian widowhood that stresses women's freedom after a January-May marriage (6).

Several of Trollope's novels include January-May marriages, most notably the much sentimentalized marriage of Eleanor Bold to Francis Arobin in *Barchester Towers* (1867), and the novel also includes in its humorous portrayal of Mr. Thorne's fascination with Madeline Neroni the following commentary on January-May love, which is so revealing about the tradition that it must be quoted at length:

> It is, we believe, common with young men of five-and-twenty to look on their seniors—on men, say, double their own age—as so many stocks and stones—stocks and stones, that is, in regard to feminine beauty. There was never a greater mistake….Men of fifty don't dance mazurkas, being generally too fat and wheezy; nor do they sit for the hour together on river banks at their mistresses' feet, being somewhat afraid of rheumatism. But for real true love—love at first sight, love to devotion, love that robs a man of his sleep, love that will 'gaze an eagle blind,' love that 'will hear the lowest sound when the suspicious thread of theft is stopped', love that is 'like a Hercules, still climbing trees in the Hesperides'—we believe that the best age is from forty-five to seventy; up to that men are generally given to flirting. (358-59)

Trollope's January figures are in many ways parodies of middle-aged and middle-class masculinity, but, as in the passage above where he moves assumptions about older men's

motivations from lust to love, they also challenge the tradition in remarkable ways. In *He Knew He Was Right* (1869), Trollope twists the typical January-May scenario, making the same-aged husband of Emily Trevelyan the jealous spouse, while Colonel Osborne, "nearly sixty," figures as the extramarital third (180).[164] Osborne does not feel "true love" for Emily, but his flirtation with Emily toys with social expectations about the feminized position of older men. Emily is not romantically interested in Osborne, but through this alteration of the January-May triangle, Louis Trevelyan is shown to be entirely in the wrong despite the fact that "he knew he was right."

Other texts employ the January-May theme to manipulate their audiences' responses against older husbands. Because of widespread fears of aging and nonstandard sexual relationships, the January-May marriage was prone to assumptions about wicked aging men who abuse and destroy beautiful and young heroines, and recalling such abuses of power via the January-May marriage opportunely funneled readers' sympathy toward same-aged, however problematically adulterous, desire. Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860) tells the story of Laura Fairlie, aged twenty, who marries Sir Percival Glyde, aged forty-five. Glyde physically and emotionally abuses Laura while he robs her of her private fortune until finally, needing even more funds, he stages her death and has her locked into an insane asylum. In case this was not enough to prejudice the readers against Glyde, the age difference drives the point home. Walter Hartright, the young lover of Laura, clarifies the effects of the January-May frame on reader response

[164] Much of the gender fun in the novel comes from mixed social stereotypes about aging masculinity and the propriety of "innocent" friendships between younger women and older men. Colonel Osborne has known Emily her entire life; he is both a friend of her father and "old enough to be the lady's father," which is the argument used to diffuse Louis Trevelyan's jealous actions throughout the plot (347). However, Trollope's revelation that Osborne's intentions are not entirely void of romance reject myths of male sexual decline and affirm nontraditional portrayals of later life.

to the older husband neatly: "even the mention of his age, when I contrasted it with hers, added to my blind hatred and disgust of him" (78). George du Maurier's wildly famous *Trilby* (1894) also capitalizes on tacit aged-based alliances to guide readers' sympathies, using this occasion to graft anti-Semitic hostility onto prevalent enmities surrounding the January husband. By the end of the novel the menacing and decidedly Jewish Svengali is "nearly fifty" while Trilby is only twenty-three, and interracial and intergenerational tensions heighten the problems associated with Svengali's use of hypnotism to control Trilby's mind and body (223, 238). Swept up in both age and race discrimination, Svengali becomes one of the most infamous January husbands in English literature, entering the English language as Svengali, *noun*: "one who exercises a controlling or mesmeric influence on another, frequently, for some sinister purpose." *The Wyvern Mystery* (1869) by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu boasts not just one, but two frightening January figures in its Gothic thriller. Twenty-year-old Alice Maybell escapes the amorous advances of her aging guardian "the old squire," whose "Come, lass, do ye like me?" is prefaced by this description: "She saw no object in the room but the tall figure of the old man, flushed with punch, and leering with horrid jollity, straight before her like a vivid magic-lantern figure in the dark" (21). Alice eventually elopes with the old squire's son, but as the novel makes clear, at age forty-three, "young Mr Fairfield is old enough, I think, to be your father" (1). Fairfield's age and their January-May marriage introduces her to terrible plot developments, including bigamy, attempted murder, and child abduction.

Chapter One provides a general overview of the January-May marriage theme's early tradition in British literature, but it is also helpful to view nineteenth-century

January-May marriages in comparison with other literary and cultural frameworks. As I first began to explore this subject, I considered writing a transatlantic study of nineteenth-century intergenerational marriages. Set in seventeenth-century America, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) by Nathaniel Hawthorne has much in common with the dreadful portrayals of older husbands in nineteenth-century British novels like *The Woman in White* and *Trilby*. *The Scarlet Letter* adheres to formulaic conventions of the January-May triangle, pitting the young reverend Arthur Dimmesdale against the aging and manipulative Roger Chillingsworth for Hester Prynne's loyalty, but the text raises questions of the power of youthful masculinity through Dimmesdale's profound emotional and spiritual crises of responsibility. Henry James's *Watch and Ward*, published serially in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1871, is also an important American contribution to the theme in literature. *Watch and Ward* is closely linked to Dickens's *Bleak House* and Trollope's *An Old Man's Love* in its assessment of the slippery borders between guardian-ward and husband-wife identities. Unlike its British counterparts, however, *Watch and Ward* concludes with an endorsement of the January-May marriage between the older guardian, Roger Lawrence, and his young ward, Nora Lambert. These American examples are interesting revisions of the British fascination with the theme, but I found that January-May marriages were not as integral to nineteenth-century negotiations of gender in America as they were in Britain, perhaps because nineteenth-century America had a more uniquely American range of opportunities for investigating gender via the literature of the expanding frontier, the Civil War, and slavery.

Early twentieth-century British and American writers contribute to the January-May tradition by adapting the theme to more modern sensibilities with more explicit tales

of sex and violence. *Summer* (1917) by Edith Wharton openly addresses aberrant sexualities surrounding the January-May marriage of Lawyer Royall to his ward Charity Royall (who need not change her surname upon marriage). Lawyer's desire for Charity is close to both pedophilia and incest, but their timely January-May marriage saves Charity from the consequences of other sexual improprieties: her same-aged sexual relations with Lucius Harney. As in *Summer*, other twentieth-century versions of the theme seem more likely than their nineteenth-century counterparts to promote intergenerational relationships as promising alternatives to same-aged marriages. Though these texts present their own deviancies within the January-May connections, they privilege these alliances over same-age relationships, reversing the implicit sympathies toward youth that prevail in nineteenth-century texts like *Nicholas Nickleby*. For example, Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* reveals the same-age marriage of Maxim and Rebecca de Winter to be fraught with lies and deceit.[165] Rebecca fosters an image of herself as the perfect upper-class wife, though her performance as "angel in the house" masks a violently nontraditional femininity that is marked by an unapologetic individualism, cunning, and sexual promiscuity. As Maxim explains, "she was not even normal" (255). Meanwhile, Maxim plays the role of dutiful husband, but the truth is that he murders Rebecca, finding love with the much younger narrator of the story.

Post-war works also capitalize on dissatisfaction with same-age relationships. Many of these versions of the older man-younger woman motif are clearly invested in male fantasies of middle-age revitalization, but not all. *Lolita* (1955), Vladimir

[165] Daphne du Maurier is the daughter of George du Maurier. The fact that their most famous works both feature January-May marriages is curious.

Nabokov's controversial narrative of Humbert Humbert's sexual infatuation with his twelve-year-old stepdaughter Lolita, met with criticism for its eroticizing of children, but the same-age relationships that frame the January-May romance strike a chord in readers for being scathingly realistic. Humbert is immensely bored with Lolita's mother Charlotte, and Lolita's marriage at the end of the novel is depressingly bleak, ultimately ending in her early death. Idealization of intergenerational relationships predominate as the theme moves into film; though by no means the first, Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1979) is one of the most famous scene adaptations of the January-May romance, and one of a number of the director's creations that center on a middle-aged man's love of a beautiful young woman, a subject so visually successful on the big screen that countless revisions and responses have emerged.[166] Some recent works featuring January-May romances that are among my personal favorites in this genre include *Addams Family Values* (1993), *Greedy* (1994), *The First Wives Club* (1997), *The Human Stain* (2003), *Lost in Translation* (2004), and the television series *Northern Exposure* (1990-1995). While many of the patterns that characterize nineteenth-century January-May marriages continue to emerge in these examples, the theme adapts itself to changing legal, financial, and social strictures governing gender and marriage. Increased possibilities for divorce, either from January-May marriages or same-age matches, complicate contemporary fictional accounts of intergenerational romance, eliminating much of the feelings of permanence surrounding marriage in the nineteenth century. And advances in women's equality and GLBTQ activism shifts the points of anxiety to which nineteenth-century

[166] Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* was adapted to film in 1940 by Alfred Hitchcock, winning the Oscar for Best Picture that year, and is one of earliest cinematic successes of the theme. Also, in *Lot's Daughters*, Polhemus dedicates an entire chapter to the Woody Allen and Mia Farrow saga, providing an important biographical context for Allen's interest in young women.

January-May marriages responded.[167] Historical and cultural influences will differentiate these texts from the ones I have examined in this dissertation; for example, Arthur Golden's 1997 novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* extends an account of a January-May romance in 1940s Japan, contributing to the broader January-May tradition, but necessitating a different critical framework for its analysis.

The January-May marriage theme continues to resonate within contemporary culture, and a number of celebrity January-May marriages and popular images keep older man-younger woman relationships in the public eye. As I write this conclusion, the U.S. Supreme Court is reviewing Anna Nicole Smith's lawsuit over the estate of her deceased billionaire husband J. Howard Marshall II. Smith, a former *Playboy* centerfold, married Marshall in 1994 when she was twenty-six and he was eighty-nine. Upon his death fourteen months later, Marshall's son fought Smith in a Texas state probate court for his father's estate, reported to be worth 1.6 billion dollars, and won, but a federal court later overturned this decision (Griffith). While Smith's case legally will settle questions of federal jurisdiction over state probate rulings, in the public imagination the debate centers on the January-May marriage's peculiar negotiation of age, sex, money and power. Less acrimonious January-May marriages also permeate contemporary media. These include the marriage between talk show host Larry King and Shawn Southwick, with a twenty-six year age difference; the marriage between actor Tony Randall and Heather Harlan, with a fifty-year age difference; the marriage of director Woody Allen to Soon-Yi Previn, with a thirty-five-year age difference; the marriage of musician Billy Joel to Kate Lee, with a

[167] See, for example, the same-sex January-May desire presented in the 1998 film *Gods and Monsters* (Dir. Bill Condon. BBC).

thirty-two-year age difference; and the marriage of former Beatle Paul McCartney to Heather Mills, with a twenty-six-year age difference. Public surveillance of such marriages in popular culture increases the familiarity with intergenerational relationships, though January-May aesthetics continue to pull from deeply embedded assumptions about how and why such marriages occur. A Radio Shack advertisement from 2003 uses a photo of a recently wed January-May couple to promote their new electronic adapter, and the tagline for the photo reads: "To hook up the old with the new, you need the right accessory" (Fig. 25). Ostensibly, the phrase refers to his vintage television and her new PlayStation 2, but the sexual implications overwhelm the practical message to make you look at the advertisement.

In academic discussions of my work, I have often been asked to comment upon scenarios that reverse the age and gender structure of January-May marriages so that the fuller context for these marriages might be better understood. Older woman-younger man relationships do occur in nineteenth-century literature, although they are much less frequent and generally have much smaller differences in age. Byron's *Don Juan* contains a number of older woman-younger man sexual encounters; as I note in Chapter Two, Juan is seven years younger than Donna Julia, and his youthful inexperience in contrast with her sexual experience alters conventionally gendered distributions of knowledge and power. Juan has same-age romances with a number of women, including his beloved Haidee, but also enters sexual relationships the Sultana Gulbeyaz and Catherine the Great, both powerful older women who use their rank and authority to gain access to

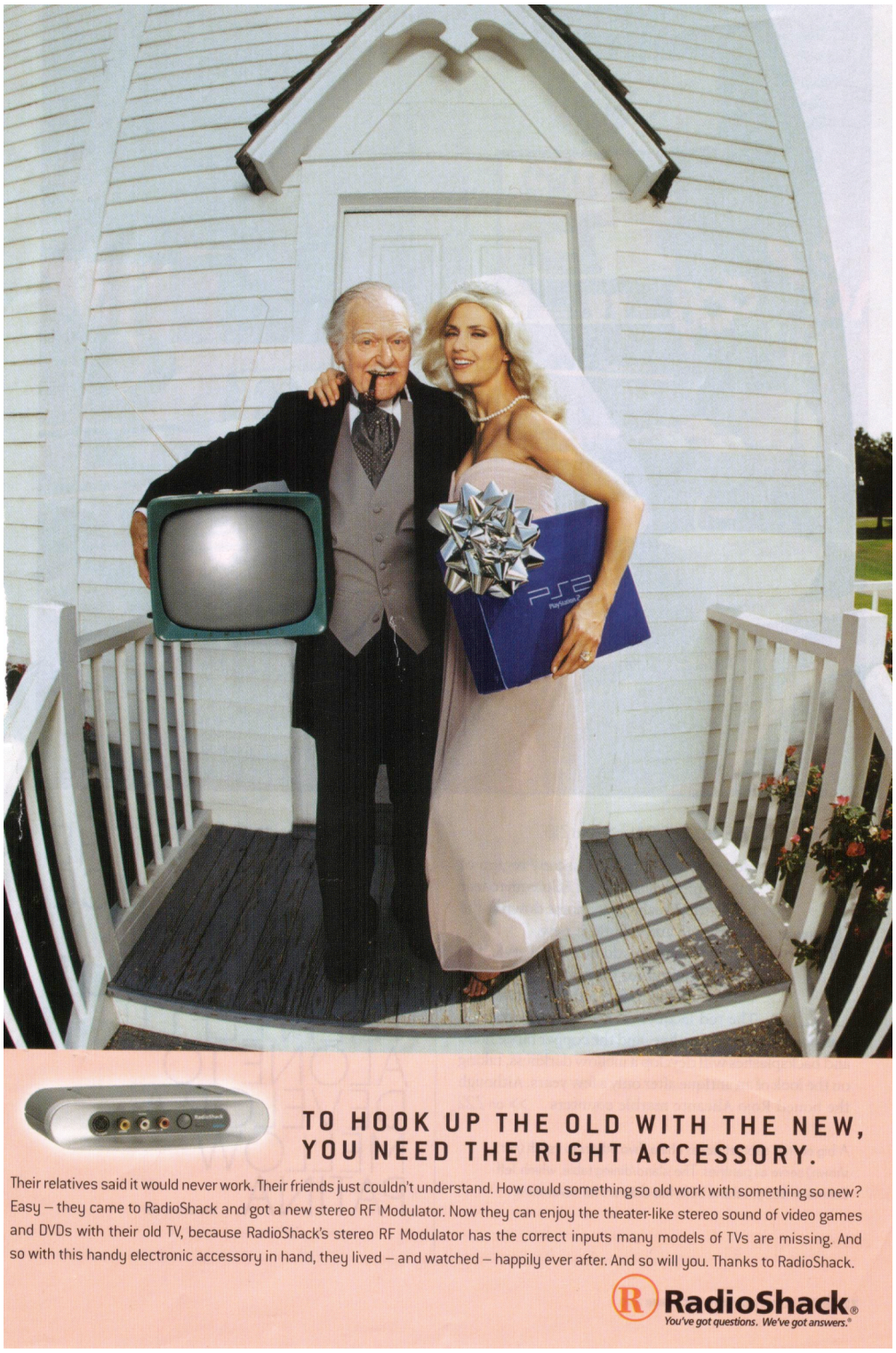


Figure 24. Anon., "To Hook up the Old with the New," 2003. Photo advertisement, 8 x 10 in.

Juan's body.[168] Juan does not object, and the narrator interrupts the plot to explain Juan's relationship with Catherine and to praise older women:

> Besides, he had some qualities which fix
>
> Middle-aged ladies even more than young:
>
> The former know what's what; while new-fledged chicks
>
> Know little more of Love than what is sung
>
> In rhymes, or dreamt (for Fancy will play tricks)
>
> In visions of those skies from whence Love sprung.
>
> Some reckon women by their Sun or Years,
>
> I rather think the Moon should date the dears. (X: 73-80)

Byron endorses older woman-younger man relationships and thereby ingratiates himself with many of his female readers, but these love affairs are not likely to lead to marriage. Kidderminster, a member of Sleary's circus troop in Dickens's *Hard Times* does enter a gender-reversed January-May marriage. With his characteristic lisp, Sleary updates Sissy and Louisa about Kidderminster's life: "He'th married too. Married a widder. Old enough to be hith mother" (209). Sleary's description of this marriage comes only in passing, and though Sleary adds that the couple had two children together and that the wife, once a tightrope walker, is now too fat for the job, Dickens does not offer enough information for much further analysis of their marriage. Another example that deserves comment is Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* (1852). In this novel, Henry is torn between his

[168] Of these examples, only Juan's relationship with Catherine could be truly called "January-May." She is forty-eight while Juan is in his early twenties.

love for his mistress Rachel, who is eight years his senior, and her daughter Beatrix, eight years his junior. Henry eventually marries Rachel, and though their age difference is not that large, their relationship is invariably complicated by their ages. When Henry meets Rachel, he is twelve and she is twenty, and the maternal role she first assumes with him affects her later claims to power as an ideal wife.[169]

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, relationships between older women and younger men have assumed a more prominent place in literature and culture. The films *The Graduate* (1967) and *Harold and Maude* (1971) explore sexual relationships between older women and younger men that boast significant age gaps, and the raunchy teen flick *American Pie* (1999) popularized the acronym MILF: "Mom I'd like to fuck." Though the tabloid coverage was relatively positive, actor Demi Moore's marriage to Ashton Kutcher in 2005 received additional scrutiny because of their fifteen year age difference. But the most scandalous older woman-younger man romance, and eventually marriage, of recent years is unquestionably Mary Kay Letourneau's relationship with Vili Fualaau; Mary Kay, Vili's schoolteacher, was thirty-four years old and he thirteen when they began their sexual relationship in 1996. She served over seven years in prison, having two daughters with Vili while in custody, before being released in 2004 and marrying Vili in 2005.[170] In contemporary literature, there are a number of recent works that respond to the increased popularity of this theme. *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (1991) by Peter Hedges includes an older woman-younger man affair between the title

---

[169] Kate Chopin's novella *The Awakening* is a late nineteenth-century example of older woman-younger man love in American literature, though again, the age difference is less than ten years.

[170] See the sensationally titled *If Loving You Is Wrong: The Shocking True Story of Mary Kay Letourneau* by Gregg Olsen (New York: St. Martin's P, 1999).

character and Betty Carver, wife of the local insurance agent. Antonya Nelson's *Nobody's Girl* (1998) has a number of similarities to the Letourneau-Fualaau case. In this novel, Birdy Stone, a high school English teacher in her thirties, has an affair with her seventeen-year-old student Mark. The aptly named *A Much Younger Man* (1998) by Australian author Dianne Highbridge has a strikingly familiar plot; Aly, a thirty-five year old English teacher, has a passionate romance with Tom, the fifteen-year-old son of her best friend.[171] Additionally, there is a three novel series entitled *The Cradle Robbers* (2003-2004) that explores several comparable romances.[172] Even in contemporary literature, the narratives usually avoid marriage, focusing on sexual relationships outside of marriage in a manner that has much more in common with Byron than with most Victorian writers, and thus I would argue that while these texts do contribute to the theme's negotiation of power through age and gender, the patterns and implications of these works are very different from those in which marriage is proposed, considered, and finalized.

In thinking about the ways in which age affects gender, my research into critical gerontology led me to consider how other cultures link time's effects on the body to issues of gender identity. One of the most striking examples I have encountered is that of the Gabra Nomads of East Africa, a tribe whose older men become *d'abella*, commanding figures in Gabra culture who are distinctly gendered as women. John

[171] The reason why these two authors make the older women in their novels English teachers is a curious stumbling point for me.
[172] There are three novels in this series by Sadorian Publications: *Bloom* by Linda Dominique Grosvenor, *Class Act* by T.C. Matthews, and *Misdemeanor* by Tanya Marie Lewis.

Colman Wood's fascinating study *When Men are Women* (1999) explores this subject at length, explaining that

> D'abella are regarded as women (nad'eni). They do not dress like women or act like women, though they regard their dress and aspects of their behavior as feminine. D'abella are not transvestites or transgendered. They *say* they are women. Others refer to them with feminine pronouns. There are special rules governing their behavior, and that of others toward them, which place d'abella in the same category as women. Offenses against d'abella, for instance, are adjudicated and punished the same as those against women. D'abella tie their cloth on the left side, like women. They walk behind men, like women. When a d'abella urinates, he squats and does not hold his penis, as if, like a woman, he did not have one. (72)

Wood points out that, as women, d'abella oversee rituals and advance peace, placing crucial social responsibilities in the hands of "women" in an otherwise distinctly male hierarchy. As I believe my preceding chapters make clear, I do not intend to argue that aging masculinity demands that older men become feminized. However, my readings about the Gabra d'abella encouraged me to consider more closely how age constructs gender and destabilizes its position as a monolithic category that is inextricably tied to the body.

Considering these other contexts for age-based gender negotiation has helped me to theorize about nineteenth-century marriages like the one between Jane Eyre and

Edward Rochester beyond the assumptions of second-wave feminism. While I value efforts to call attention to the economic and legal inequalities that often contribute to age disparities in marriage, narrowing the focus to one element of the complex gender-age-power nexus blinds critical efforts to understand the forces that created and consumed this literature. My goal for this project is that it will begin to expand the scholarly discussion about January-May marriages, and in this sense, I extend more of an introduction than a conclusion, because, as I stated earlier, there remains so much more to be said.

Works Cited

Adams, James Eli. "Victorian Sexualities." *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*. Ed. Herbert F. Tucker. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999. 125-38.

Addams Family Values. Dir. Barry Sonnenfeld. Paramount, 1993.

American Pie. Dir. Paul Weitz. Newmarket Capital Group, 1999.

Anderson, Kathleen. "Fathers and Lovers: The Gender Dynamics of Relational Influence in *Emma*." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal On-line*. 21.2 (2000). <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol21no2/anderson.html>.

Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. 1869. *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold.* Riverside Editions. Ed. A. Dwight Culler. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961. 407-75.

Art Journal. 1 July 1884, 210.

Auerbach, Nina. *Our Vampires, Ourselves*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995.

--- and David J. Skal. Footnotes. *Dracula*. New York: Norton, 1997.

Austen, Jane. *Emma*. 1816. New York: Norton, 2000.

---. *Northanger Abbey*. 1818. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1990.

---. *Sense and Sensibility*. 1811. New York: Norton, 2002.

Ayres, Brenda. *Dissenting Women in Dickens' Novels: The Subversion of Domestic Ideology*. Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1998.

Baird, John D. "'Divorce and Matrimonial Causes': An Aspect of 'Hard Times.'" *Victorian Studies* 20 (1977): 401-12.

Banks, J.A. *Prosperity and Parenthood: A Study of Family Planning Among the*

Victorian Middle Classes. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1954.

Behn. Aphra. *The Lucky Chance*. 1686. *The Rover and Other Plays*. Ed. Jane Spencer. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995. 183-270.

---. *The Rover*. 1677. The Rover *and Other Plays*. Ed. Jane Spencer. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995. 183-270.

---. *Sir Patient Fancy.* 1678. *The Plays: 1678-1682*. The Words of Aphra Behn 6. Ed. Janet Todd. Columbus: Ohio UP, 1992. 1-81.

Bentley's Miscellany. Review of *Bleak House.* Reprinted in *Dickens Bleak House: A Casebook*. Ed. A.E. Dyson. London: Macmillan, 1969.

Blum, Martin. "Negotiating Masculinities: Erotic Triangles in the *Miller's Tale*." *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the* Canterbury Tales *and* Troilus and Criseyde. Ed Peter G. Beidler. Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk: St Edmundsbury P Ltd, 1998. 37-52.

Booth, Alison. "*Middlemarch, Bleak House*, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century Novel Course." *Approaches to Teaching Eliot's* Middlemarch. Ed. Kathleen Blake. New York: Mod. Lang. Assn. of America, 1990. 129-37.

Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. "Good Lady Ducayne." *Vampires: Two Centuries of Great Vampire Stories*. Ed. Alan Ryan. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1987.

---. *Lady Audley's Secret*. 1862. Ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor. London: Penguin, 1998.

Brady, Ann P. "The Metaphysics of Pornography in *The Ring and the Book*." *Browning Institute Studies* 13 (1985): 137-64.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Boston: Bedford, 1996.

---. *The Professor*. 1857. New York: Penguin, 1989.

---. *Villette*. 1853. New York: Penguin, 1979.

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. *Aurora Leigh*. 1856. New York: Norton, 1996.

Browning, Robert. "Andrea Del Sarto." 1855. Riverside editions. Ed. Donald Smalley. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956.

---. *Pippa Passes.* 1841. *Poems of Robert Browning*. Riverside editions. Ed. Donald Smalley. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956.

---. "Rabbi Ben Ezra." 1864. *Poems of Robert Browning*. Riverside editions. Ed. Donald Smalley. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956.

---. *The Ring and The Book*. 1869. Ontario: Broadview P, 2001.

Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000.

---. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 10th anniversary edition. New York: Routledge, 1999.

---. "Imitation and Gender Subordination." *Inside / Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories.* Ed. Diana Fuss. New York: Routledge, 1991. 13-31.

---. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Byron, George Gordon. *Beppo.* 1818. *The Complete Poetical Works: Vol. 4.* Ed. Jerome J. McGann. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

---. *The Blues*. *The Complete Poetical Works: Vol. 6.* Eds. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

---. *Byron's Letters and Journals.* Vol. 6. Ed. Leslie A. Marchand. Cambridge: Belknap P, 1976.

---. *Byron's Letters and Journals.* Vol. 7. Ed. Leslie A. Marchand. Cambridge: Belknap

P, 1977.

---. *Don Juan*. *The Complete Poetical Works: Vol. 5.* Ed. Jerome J. McGann. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

---. *The Giour*. 1813. *Byron*. Ed. Jerome J. McGann. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986.

---. *Mazeppa*. 1819. *The Complete Poetical Works: Vol. 4.* Ed. Jerome J.McGann. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

---. "On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year." 1824. *Byron*. Ed. Jerome J. McGann. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986.

Caine, Barbara. *English Feminism: 1780-1980.* New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

Carter, Margaret L. Preface. *Varney the Vampire*. Vol. I. Ed. Devendra P. Varma. New York: Arno Books, 1970. xxxi-xlii.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. "The Merchant's Tale." *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd ed. Ed. Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. 154-68.

---"The Miller's Tale." *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd ed. Ed. Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. 68-78.

---"The Wife of Bath's Prologue." *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd ed. Ed. Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. 105-16.

Collins, Wilkie. *The Woman in White*. 1860. New York: Modern Library, 2002.

Congreve, William. *Love for Love*. *The Complete Plays of William Congreve*. Ed. Herbert Davis. Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1967. 205-316.

---. *The Old Batchelour*. *The Complete Plays of William Congreve*. Ed. Herbert Davis. Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1967. 24-113.

Cowles, David L. "Having it Both Ways: Gender and Paradox in *Hard Times*." *Dickens*

Quarterly 8.2 (1991): 79-84.

Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: MIT P, 1992.

Croft, Christopher. "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula.*" *Representations* 8 (1984): 107-33

Crompton, Louis. *Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in 19th Century England.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1985.

Cruikshank, Margaret. *Learning to be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging*. Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

Deneau, Daniel P. "The Brother-Sister Relationship in *Hard Times*." *Dickensian* 60 (1964): 173-77.

Dentith, Simon. *Parody*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. New York: Norton, 1977.

---. *The Cricket on the Hearth.* 1843. *A Christmas Carol, The Chimes, and The Cricket on the Hearth*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004.

---. *David Copperfield*. 1850. New York: Penguin, 2000.

---. *Great Expectations.* 1861. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.

---. *Hard Times*. 1854. New York: Norton, 2001.

---. *Little Dorrit*. 1857. New York: Penguin, 2003.

---. *Nicholas Nickleby*. 1839. New York: Penguin, 1978.

---. *Old Curiosity Shop*. 1841. New York: Penguin, 2000.

---. "A Walk in a Workhouse." 1850. *The Portable Victorian Reader*. Ed. Gordon. Haight. New York: Penguin, 1976. 84-91.

du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1938.

du Maurier, George. *Trilby*. 1894. New York: Penguin, 1994.

Eliot, George. *Middlemarch*. 1872. New York: Norton, 2000.

Ellis, Sarah Stickney. *The Daughters of England, Their Position in Society, Character, and Responsibilities*. London: Fisher, Son and Co., 1842.

Engels, Friedrich. *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. 1846. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973.

The First Wives Club. Dir. Hugh Wilson. Paramount, 1996.

Fleishman, Avrom. "Master and Servant in *Little Dorrit*." *SEL* 14.4 (1974): 575-86.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1979.

---. *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1990.

Franklin, Caroline. *Byron's Heroines*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1992.

---. "Juan's Sea Changes: Class, Race, and Gender in Byron's *Don Juan*." *Don Juan*. Ed. Nigel Wood. Buckingham: Open UP, 1993.

---. "'Quiet Cruising o'er the Ocean Woman': Byron's *Don Juan* and the Woman Question." *Studies in Romanticism* 29 (1990): 603-31.

Friedan, Betty. *The Fountain of Age*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.

Gardiner, Judith Kegan. "Theorizing Age with Gender: Bly's Boys, Feminism, and Maturity Masculinity." *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory*. Ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner. New York: Columbia UP, 2002. 90-118.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. *North and South*. 1855. New York: Oxford World Classics, 1982.

Gibson, Mary Ellis. "The Criminal Body in Victorian Britain: The Case of *The Ring and the Book.*" *Browning Institute Studies* 18 (1990): 73-93.

Gitter, Elizabeth. "The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth*." *SEL* 39.4 (1999): 675-89.

Gillooly, Eileen. *Smile of Discontent: Humor, Gender, and Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999.

Golden, Arthur. *Memoirs of a Geisha*. New York: Knopf, 1997.

Goldfarb. Russell M. *Sexual Repression and Victorian Literature*. Lewisburg, Bucknell UP, 1970.

Gottfried, Barbara. "Father and Suitors: Narratives of Desire in *Bleak House*." *Dickens Studies Annual* 19 (1990): 169-203.

The Graduate. Dir. Mike Nichols. Embassy Pictures Corp., 1967.

Greedy. Dir. Jonathan Lynn. Imagine Entertainment, 1994.

Griffith, Rob. "Anna Nicole Smith's Legal War Continues." *USA Today: Online*. 25 February 2006. 5 March 2006. <http://www.usatoday.com/life/people/2006-02-25-anna-nicole_x.htm>.

Gross, Jonathan David. *Byron: The Erotic Liberal*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001.

Grosskurth, Phyllis. *Byron: The Flawed Angel*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Gullette, Margaret Morganroth. *Aged by Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004.

Hager, Kelly. "Estranging *David Copperfield*: Reading the Novel of Divorce." *ELH* 63.6

(1996): 989-1019.

Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998.

Hallissy, Margaret. "Widow-To-Be: May in Chaucer's 'The Merchant's Tale'." *Studies in Short Fiction* 26.3 (1989): 295-304.

Hammerton, A. James. *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Hardy, Barbara. "The Miserable Marriages in *Middlemarch*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Effi Briest*. *George Eliot and Europe*. Ed. John Rignall. Aldershot, England: Scolar, 1997. 64-83.

Hardy, Thomas. *Jude the Obscure*. 1895. New York: Norton, 1978.

Harold and Maude. Dir. Hal Ashby. Paramount, 1971.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. 1850. New York: Modern Library, 2000.

Hays, Mary. *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women*. 1798. Garland Series: The Feminist Controversy in England 1788-1810. New York: Garland, 1974.

Hedges, Peter. *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*. New York: Poseidon, 1991.

Helme, Elizabeth. *The History of Louisa, the Lovely Orphan; or, The Cottage on the Moor.* 1787. Wilmington, DE: Samuel and John Adams, 1795.

Herbert, Christopher. "Filthy Lucre: Victorian Ideas of Money." *Victorian Studies* 44.2 (Winter 2002): 185-213.

Highbridge, Dianne. *A Much Younger Man*. New York: Soho P, 1999.

Hoeveler, Diane Long. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalism of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1998.

Hornback, Bert G. *Middlemarch: A Novel of Reform*. Boston: Twayne, 1988.

The Human Stain. Dir. Robert Benton. Miramax, 2003.

Humphreys, Anne. "Louisa Gradgrind's Secret: Marriage and Divorce in *Hard Times.*" *Dickens Studies Annual* 25 (1996): 177-95.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody*. New York: Methuen, 1985.

Inchbald, Elizabeth. *A Simple Story*. 1791. New York: Oxford World Classics, 1988.

Jalland, Pat. *Women, Marriage, and Politics, 1860-1914.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986.

James, Henry. *Watch and Ward*. 1871. New York: Grove Press, 1960.

Jann, Rosemary. "Darwin and the Anthropologists: Sexual Selection and Its Discontents." *Sexualities in Victorian Britain.* Eds. Andrew H. Miller and James Eli Adams. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1996. 79-95.

Jewsbury, Geraldine Ensor. *Zoe*. 1845. New York: Garland, 1975.

Johnson, Patricia E. "The Gendered Politics of the Gaze: Henry James and George Eliot." *Mosaic*. 30 (1997): 39-54.

Joseph, Gerhard and Herbert F. Tucker. "Passing On: Death." *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture.* Ed. Herbert F. Tucker. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999. 110-24.

Jost, Jean E. "May's Mismarriage of Youth and Elde: The Poetics of Sexual Desire in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*." *Reprentations of the Feminine in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Bonnie Wheeler. Cambridge: Academia P, 1993. 117-37.

Kelleher, Paul. "How to Do Things with Perversion: Psychoanalysis and the "Child in Danger." *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*. Eds. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004. 151-71.

Kestner, Joseph. *Masculinities in Victorian Painting.* Brookfield, VT: Scolar P, 1995.

Killham, John. *Tennyson and* The Princess*: Reflections of an Age*. London: Athlone P, 1958.

Kincaid, James R. *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

Lacqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1990.

---. *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*. New York: Zone Books, 2003.

Le Fanu, J. Sheridan. "Carmilla." 1872. *Three Vampire Tales*. Ed. Anne Williams. New Riverside Editions. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003. 86-146.

---. *The Wyvern Mystery*. 1869. Phoenix Mill, Sutton Publishing, 1994.

Linton, Eliza Lynn. "Nearing the Rapids." *Prose by Victorian Women: An Anthology.* Eds. Andrea Broomfield and Sally Mitchell. New York: Garland, 1996. 377-86.

---. "What is Woman's Work?" *The Voice of Toil: Nineteenth-Century British Writings about Work*. Eds. David J. Bradshaw and Suzanne Ozment. Athens: Ohio UP, 2000. 698-703.

Lonoff, Sue. "Multiple Narratives & Relative Truths: A Study of *The Ring and the Book*, *The Woman in White*, and *The Moonstone*." *Browning Institute Studies* 10 (1982): 143-61.

Lost in Translation. Dir. Sofia Coppola. American Zoetrope, 2003.

Macaulay, Catherine. *Letters on Education*. 1790. Garland Series: The Feminist Controversy in England 1788-1810. New York: Garland, 1974.

Macdonald, Barbara. *Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism*. Denver:

Spinster Ink Books, 1991.

MacFarlane, Alan. *The Culture of Capitalism*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

Malthus, T.R. *An Essay on Population*. 1798. 2 vols. Everyman Library, 1913.

Mangum, Teresa. "Growing Old: Age." *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture.* Ed. Herbert F. Tucker. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999. 97-109.

Manhattan. Dir. Woody Allen. UA, 1979.

McKeon, Michael. "Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660-1760." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28.3 (1995): 295-322.

McNester, Juliet. "'A Microscope Directed on a Water-Drop': Chapter 19." *Approaches to Teaching Eliot's Middlemarch*. Ed. Kathleen Blake. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1990.

Medwin, Thomas. *Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron*. 1824. Ed. Ernest J. Lovell. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966.

Mighall, Robert. *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.

Milbank, Alison. *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1992.

Mill, John Stuart. *The Subjection of Women*. 1969. *Mill: Text, Commentaries*. Ed. Alan Ryan. New York: Norton, 1997.

My Secret Life. Ed. James Kincaid. New York: Signet, 1996.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita*. 1955. New York: Knopf, 1992.

Nelson, Antonya. *Nobody's Girl*. New York: Scribner, 1999.

Newton, Judith Lowder. *Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British*

Fiction, 1778-1860. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1981.

Nelson, Antonya. *Nobody's Girl*. New York: Scribner, 1999.

Nightingale, Florence. *Cassandra*. 1860. *The Voice of Toil: Nineteenth-Century British Writings about Work*. Eds. David J. Bradshaw and Suzanne Ozment. Athens: Ohio UP, 2000. 118-38.

Northern Exposure. Television series. Created by Joshua Brand and John Falsey, Universal TV, 1990-95.

O'Malley, Patrick M. "Ghosts: *Jude the Obscure* and the End of the Gothic." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 46.3 (2000): 646-71.

Origo, Iris. *The Last Attachment*. London: Cape, 1949.

Patmore, Coventry. *The Angel in the House*. 1854. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1892.

Polhemus, Robert M. "The Favorite Child: *David Copperfield* and the Scriptural Issue of Child-Wives." *Homes and Homelessness in the Victorian Imagination*. Ed. Murray Baumgarten and H. M. Daleski. New York: AMS, 1998. 3-20.

---. *Lot's Daughters*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005.

Polidori, John. *The Vampyre.* 1819. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1997.

Polwhele, Richard. *The Unsex'd Females*. 1798. Garland Series: The Feminist Controversy in England 1788-1810. New York: Garland, 1974.

Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.

Radcliffe, Ann. 1794. *The Mysteries of Uldolpho*. London: Penguin, 2001.

---. 1791. *The Romance of the Forest*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.

---. 1790. *A Sicilian Romance*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.

Rae, W. F. [anon.] "Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon." *North British Review* 4 (1865): 180-204.

Rank, Otto. *The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend: Fundamentals of a Psychology of Literary Creation.* Trans. Gregory C. Richter. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992.

Riga, Frank P. "Dismantling Traditionalist Gender Roles: An Exotic Counter-World in Byron's *Don Juan*." *The Foreign Woman in British Literature: Exotics, Aliens, and Outsiders*. Eds. Marilyn Demarest Button and Toni Reed. Westport: Greenwood P, 1999. 1-15.

Roberts, Bette B. "*Varney, the Vampire*, or, Rather, *Varney*, the Victim." *Gothic* 2 (1987): 1-5.

Robson, Catherine. *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001.

Roebuck, Janet. "When Does 'Old Age' Begin?: The Evolution of the English Definition." *Journal of Social History* 12 (1979): 416-28.

Rose, Sonya. *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1992.

Roth, Phyllis. "Suddenly Sexual Women in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." *Literature and Psychology* 27 (1977): 113-21.

Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998. 533-60.

Rymer, James Malcolm. *Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood*. 1840. Vols. 1-3. New York: Arno P, 1970.

The Sack-full of Newes. London: Andrew Clark, 1673.

Sadoff, Dianne F. "The Dead Father: *Barnaby Rudge*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*." *Papers on Language and Literature* 18.1 (1982): 36-57.

---. *Monsters of Affection: Dickens, Eliot & Bronte on Fatherhood.* Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1982.

---. "Storytelling and the Figure of the Father in *Little Dorrit*." *PMLA* 95.2 (1980): 234-45.

Schor. Hillary M. *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.

Scott, Joan Wallach. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *American Historical Review* 91.5 (1986): 1053-75.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men*. New York: Columbia UP, 1985.

Senf, Carol. *The Vampire in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1988.

Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. 4th ed. Ed. David Bevington. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992. 1117-66.

---. *The Taming of the Shrew*. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. 4th ed. Ed. David Bevington. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992. 108-46.

Shanley, Mary Lyndon. *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989.

Shaw, George Bernard. *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. 1898. *Seven Plays.* New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1951. 3-105.

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein*. 1818. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview P,

1994.

---. *Mathilda*. 1819. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1959.

Shelley, Percy. *The Cenci.* 1819. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. Eds. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers. New York: Norton, 1977.

Sheridan, Richard Brinsley. *The School for Scandal*. *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy.* Ed. Scott McMillin. New York: Norton, 1973.

Sterling, Anne Fausto. *Sexing the Body*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.

Shildrick, Margrit. *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. London: SAGE Publications, 2002.

Simcox, Edith Jemima. "The Capacity of Women." *Prose by Victorian Women: An Anthology.* Eds. Andrea Broomfield and Sally Mitchell. New York: Garland, 1996. 583-97.

Stengers, Jean and Anne Van Neck. *Masturbation: The History of A Great Terror*. Trans. Kathryn Hoffmann. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. 1897. New York: Norton, 1997.

Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

Taylor, Thomas. *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*. 1792. Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1966.

Thackeray, William Makepeace. *Vanity Fair*. 1847. New York: Norton, 1994.

Tennyson, Alfred. *The Princess*. 1847. *Poems of Tennyson*. Riverside Editions. Ed. Jerome Buckley. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958.

---. "Tithonus." 1860. *Poems of Tennyson*. Riverside Editions. Ed. Jerome Buckley.

Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958.

Tonna, Charlotte Elizabeth. *The Perils of the Nation*. London: Seeley, 1843.

Tracy, Robert. "Loving You All Ways: Vamps, Vampires, Necrophiles and Necrofilles In Nineteenth-Century Fiction." *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*. Ed. Reginia Barreca. London: Macmillan, 1990. 32-59.

Trollope, Anthony. *An Old Man's Love*. 1884. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1991.

---. *Barchester Towers*. 1857. New York: Penguin, 1994.

---. *He Knew He Was Right*. 1869. New York: Penguin, 1994.

Tromp, Marlene. *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law in Victorian Britain.* Charlottesville, U P of Virginia, 2000.

Twitchell, James. *The Living Dead: A Study of The Vampire in Romantic Literature.* Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1980.

Wall, Stephen. Introduction. *Little Dorrit*. By Charles Dickens. New York: Penguin, 2003. xi-xxvii.

Walpole, Horace. *The Castle of Otranto*. 1764. London: Penguin, 2001.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 1890. Ontario: Broadview P, 1998.

Witemeyer, Hugh. George Eliot and the Visual Arts. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.

Wharton, Edith. *Summer*. 1917. New York: Signet Classic, 1993.

Wolfson, Susan. "'Their She Condition': Cross-Dressing and the Politics of Gender in *Don Juan*." *ELH* 54 (1987): 585-617.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. 1787. Garland Series: The Feminist Controversy in England 1788-1810. New York: Garland, 1974.

Wood, John Colman. *When Men are Women: Manhood Among Gabra Nomads of East*

Africa. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1999.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. 1929. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989.

Wycherley, William. *The Country Wife*. 1675. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996.

Vita

Esther Liu Godfrey was born in Greeneville, TN on July 6, 1973. After graduating from Greeneville High School, she attended the University of Tennessee and spent her junior year at the University of Manchester. After receiving a B.A. from the University of Tennessee in 1995, she attended Western Carolina University, where she received a M.A. in English in 1998 and taught until 2001. Returning to the University of Tennessee for her doctoral work, Esther completed her Ph.D. in English in 2006 and is currently working as an Assistant Professor of British Literature at Longwood University in Virginia.