

MODERN LIFE SUBJECTS IN BRITISH PAINTING 1840-60

Vol.I - text

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ABSTRACT

A small number of paintings with modern settings and figures in modern dress can be identified in the exhibitions of the 1840s. During the 1850s such pictures became far more common, particularly in the wake of the success of William Powell Frith's outdoor crowd scene, Ramsgate Sands, exhibited at the Royal Academy of 1854, and distributed as an Art Union engraving in 1859. This thesis locates those modern life scenes in the broader context of mid-nineteenth century genre painting. Examining the critical debates of the 1840s, it is possible to identify anxieties concerning the appeal and value of genre painting, as an aspect of the political and ideological construction of the bourgeoisie. The expansion of the art-buying and art-viewing public generated critical concern over the status and powers of discrimination of middle-class patrons. Genre painting was thought to present a special danger because it offered viewers sensory stimulation, in the form of visual excitement, untempered by the moral and intellectual qualities of high art.

Rather than proceeding by compiling a catalogue of modern life paintings this thesis examines in depth a number of pictures produced in the 1850s. It considers, as case studies, two pictures exhibited in 1854: Ramsgate Sands by Frith, and The Awakening Conscience by William Holman Hunt. As a third example a picture by William Maw Egley, Omnibus Life In London, is investigated. This was exhibited at the British Institution, and engraved for the Illustrated London News, in 1859. These case studies develop new frameworks for the analysis of Victorian

paintings. Social and political history is not presented as background, but as integral to the construction and deployment of meaning in the pictures. The analysis draws on psychoanalytic writing and on structuralist theory. It argues that the choice of modern subjects posed particular problems for both artists and audiences. Whether the representations were of private morality and immorality, or of public situations where sexual propriety became an issue, there was an engagement by the paintings with questions of sexuality and its regulation. At the same time the viewing of these genre paintings was, in terms of contemporary critical theory, already a sexualised activity. The thesis looks at the interface between sexuality and vision in the pictures. Developments in portraiture are mapped on to changing attitudes to genre subjects in a discussion of the relationship between realism and the narrative qualities of painting in the mid-nineteenth century.

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CHAPTER ONE: PAINTING FOR THE EYE ALONE.

In Victorian art distinctions between different categories of painting implied more than a simple variation in choice of subject. Art's purpose, its capacity for intellectual and moral content, the mode of perception proper to it, the scale of work and even the handling of paint, were held to differ between historical and genre painting. This chapter examines critical debates around the nature and status of genre painting. The area of discussion was highly charged in political terms. Behind the formal, aesthetic terms of art criticism lay concern with the class address of art. Mid-nineteenth century critics assumed the role of public educators, and were conscious of the expansion of the art market and the appearance of new patrons and exhibition-goers drawn from the middle class. The critics' efforts to instruct these consumers in art appreciation were underpinned by attempts to define, and mould the cultural identity of a newly empowered class. A close reading of the critical debates of the period reveals a preoccupation with the susceptibility of this public to the pernicious effects of visual excitation, which was construed as a quasi-sexual phenomenon. The discussion revolved around questions of class, and extended to questions of national identity. Since it was widely recognised that the British School of art was dominated by genre painting, contests over genre were

felt to have ramifications for the international standing of the nation.

THE SCOPE OF GENRE PAINTING

In 1841 four categories were proposed for British Institution prizes. They were: 'Historical', 'Fancy or Picturesque', 'Landscape and Cattle' and 'Still Life'.(1) Of the first two categories 'Historical' is self-explanatory but it is not so clear what constituted 'Fancy or Picturesque'. To some extent it is a category that finds its definition by exclusion, consisting of subjects that did not belong in the more specific categories of history, landscape and still life. Looking elsewhere, we can find other specialised categories that would also have been excluded. In the Publishers' Circular, for instance, the categories 'Religious', 'Shipping', 'Sporting', and 'Portraits' appear.(2) Genre painting occupied an indeterminate position between high art, on one hand, and landscape and portraiture, on the other. In an article on the 1857 Manchester Exhibition, the critic Layard discusses the failure of the British school of painting in 'high' art and their strength in other areas of painting.

The English school having been founded upon the feelings and demands of the day ...it was to be expected that the three branches of painting in which it would excel would be the representation of scenes of domestic life, to be classed under the general name, to adopt a French expression of 'tableaux de genre', landscape and portraiture. (3)

We see that Layard adopts the term 'genre' that eventually became

(1) Art Union, Jan 1841, p.7.

(2) Publishers' Circular, vol. 2-4, 1839-41.

(3) Quarterly Review, vol.102, July 1857, pp.165-204.

the standard description for scenes of rustic or urban life, or domestic interiors, or scenes from literature, that were anecdotal rather than heroic. His article, which was published in the Quarterly Review, goes on to discuss the distinction between high and low art, and the position of genre. Historical painting, and high art in general, are said to spring from the Italian school of painting, while low art springs from the German. The review explains the different characteristics of these schools.

In the one case the art-student will observe an earnest struggle to attain the highest aim of art, by the expression of the loftiest, purest and noblest sentiments in the human countenance and attitude, as well as by general treatment and composition, all other things being considered secondary to this one great object; in the other he will find that expression and sentiment, although not discarded altogether, are made subservient to a careful and exact imitation of nature and surrounding objects. (p.181)

The distinction being made was the conventional one, in the period: German or Dutch painting was invariably referred to as the model for genre painting. Layard's initial gloss on genre painting is that it is the representation of scenes of domestic life in the context of exact imitation of nature and objects, rather than the expression of pure and noble sentiments. However, by setting up the models of Hogarth and Wilkie as the basis of the English genre tradition Layard suggests that genre can move away from the low German towards the qualities of high art. Wilkie is seen to be an advance on Hogarth, whose merit was the accuracy of his observation, but whose work was marred insofar as it took the form of keen satire that involved a degree of coarseness. Wilkie rises above this to 'refined ...representation of common subjects', truthful rendering of details and purity of colouring.'(p.195) The terms in which

Wilkie is praised: refinement, truth and purity, seem to belong rather to historical or Italian terms of reference than to a notion of genre as low art. It is from this superior standpoint that the review aims its criticism at modern examples of genre, and here the range of application of the term is suggested. Sharp criticism is made of banal domestic scenes by Cope. These are held up as symptoms of a general failing extending to Landseer, Mulready, Webster, Roberts and Stanfield.

Mr Cope paints some trivial domestic subject which amuses the visitors to the exhibition, and is favourably noticed by the critics. He abandons a class of painting in which he gave good promise, and prostitutes undoubted talents to painting 'Baby's turn' and a succession of babies bobbing at cherries and sucking sugar. Surely even if the higher aims of art be altogether discarded, there is something better to be done in its most humble sphere than to amuse nursery maids and their charges.

The 'romantic school' of scenes from literature is classed as a subsection of genre by Layard, and comes in for censure as consisting of nothing but the comic and sentimental grimace and the usual allowance of velvet tights and hat and feathers. Smirke, Briggs, Hinton and Frith are mentioned in this context, as lacking in truth and earnestness. The Pre Raphaelites are also classed as genre painters. Their truth and earnestness of intent is not questioned: they are praised for conscientiously studying nature and rendering details, and it is granted that they seek to teach. They are criticised, however, for painting the most important things the most carelessly, in other words for failing to paint the human form and human flesh, falling down on atmosphere and wilfully ignoring all rules of composition. Moreover their method of conveying moral truths is criticised as being either obscure and over-subtle, or improper in directly portraying the horrors of vice.

Layard's Quarterly Review article therefore lays out the conventional basis for distinction between high art and genre. It also indicates the range of paintings and artists bracketed in genre. Hogarth's streets, drawing rooms and garrets, Wilkie's cottage firesides, Cope's nurseries, various Vicar of Wakefield and Shakespearean scenes, and Hunt's modern bourgeois drawing room are all directly referred to. There is also a gesture towards Landseer's highland and animal scenes, Mulready's and Webster's playground and schoolroom scenes and even Roberts's exotic scenes and Stanfield's shipping. Even where not explicitly categorised as genre painting they are criticised for the same failings.

The specific examples mentioned by Layard can be compared to the engravings included under various headings in the Publishers' Circular. That publication listed engravings that appeared, alongside new fiction in its fortnightly issues. Genre subjects are included in the "Miscellaneous" section, where for example Landseer's Highland Drovers and Harvey's Examination of a Village School are listed. But this category also includes Raleigh's First Pipe In England by R.W.Buss which, from the title might be expected to be found in the "Historical" section with the Trial of Charles I in Westminster Hall after John Burnett. Despite its historical setting however, Buss's subject was a comic anecdote. His comic style that made him seem an appropriate choice to illustrate The Pickwick Papers would have shifted his historical subjects into the hat and feathers category of genre.

VISUAL STIMULUS: THE ABSENCE OF EMOTIONAL AND DRAMATIC CONTENT

Even as late as 1857 Layard was using genre as a foreign term. In place of this unfamiliar term mid-nineteenth century critics used a variety of formulations. Genre paintings could be described as subject paintings, fancy pictures or picturesque scenes. The title of an Art Union article in 1841 was 'Pictures of Fancy Subjects and Familiar Life'. In this Art Union article the principle of the purely visual content of genre painting is spelt out. The article is the second in a major series discussing technical features of different types of painting. The first, of course, dealt with historical painting.

In a former number of the Art Union we endeavoured to define the leading features, and character of the historical or grand style of art; in this we shall attempt to explain, as briefly as possible, the best mode of treating subjects of familiar life - a class of works which come more within the vortex of an English fireside than any other, and has, therefore, met with greater encouragement ...the principles upon which the various works are successfully conducted, are borrowed entirely from the contemplation of the best pictures of the Dutch school: for as it is to the eye alone that the works of this school are addressed, we naturally find the most effective mode of gratifying this sense; though often to the exclusion of every other requisite in art. (4)

The writer's authority is Reynolds, and Reynolds is quoted, trying to explain the strange phenomenon of interest being taken in the representation of things without inherent interest.

There is still (he adds) entertainment even in such pictures, however uninteresting their subjects; there is some pleasure in the contemplation of the truth of the imitation.

Here "truth" tempers the disturbing element of sensual gratification upon which this form of painting seems to depend.

(4) Art Union, Jan 1841, p.3

Physicality remains an undercurrent in all discussion of genre though. There was thought to be a danger of genre painting being dragged down by its appeal to the uneducated, to the "nurserymaids and their charges"; the lower classes were considered equivalent to infants when it came to appreciating art, and were thought to respond to pictures like babies reaching out for enticingly red cherries or contentedly sucking at sugar.

A John Cassell publication of 1854, issued in parts and filled with engravings to give a comprehensive popular education in painting, commented on Van Ostade; and deliberated on the same problem: how it was that the artist selected inherently valueless subjects.

One might ask, however, what could induce an artist to select a scene so vulgar, types which boasted no beauty, and accessories which have nothing to recommend them but their rudeness and rusticity? To this Van Ostade would reply by showing you the jet of light which plays across the figures, the harmonious shading which reigns in the background, and the thousand streaks and sparkles on the linen, the basket or the basin. The painter Lubeck found here a whole course of art. Attracted by the variety of lines and the melody of colour, if he found these he needed nothing else. His pencil reproduced what had charmed his eye and not what had found favour with his thoughts. (5)

The question is posed so that the emphasis falls on the subjects. The writer does not ask what pleasure is taken in these subjects, and offer in reply - the truth of imitation, but asks why these low subjects were chosen, and answers - because the concern is purely visual. The argument concludes

...hence the tendency among painters of the Dutch and Flemish schools to scenes of what we call "low life". They are the painters of material life, but hardly ever attain to the poetic sublimity of the Italians.

(5) Anon., The Works of Eminent Masters, John Cassell, London, 1854, vol. I, p. 157.

There is a gap in the logic. The writer does not succeed in explaining why low life scenes should fulfil the function of charming the eye any better than sublime scenes. The Art Union article on 'Fancy subjects and Familiar Life' goes further towards rationalising this position. It embarks on the discussion when it makes the claim that British genre painting has moved on to a higher plane than Dutch. Again the standard references are to Hogarth and Wilkie. The article suggests that scenes without dramatic interest, either in telling a story, or in displaying a range of human emotions, are easier to group in visually pleasing ways than dramatic scenes. The demands of drama are said to interfere with the simple surface variations typical of Dutch genre.

The Dutch pictures seldom embrace the varieties of action or expression, but are confined to brawls, merry-meetings, figures smoking or playing at tric-trac; and where, if the general character is given, the colour or handling is never disturbed by endeavouring to give a more intricate or correct definition of the passions; neither do their figures require to occupy that situation which a dramatic story, or a complicated composition demands, but merely serve the purpose of an effect of light and shade, or a beauteous combination of colour.

This, it is claimed, did not deter Hogarth from combining detail with dramatic incident, nor Wilkie from going one step further and mastering the colouring and delicacy of handling of the Dutch, combining it with dramatic incidents even more impelling than Hogarth, in compositions less cluttered, but still attractively 'embellished' with detailed accessories. In this way Wilkie is said to have laid the foundations for a school of British genre which had moved on from mechanical wonders of Dutch painting.

These are the incidents that ennoble a work and place it on a level with the great productions of the Italian school.

But the suggestion is that, while Wilkie had shown the possibilities for ennobled and purified genre, this potential was being ignored. The prevailing attitude was that there was a temptation for artists to take the easy solution, and rest contented with the less demanding task of perfecting imitation. The temptation was a financial one too. Commentators thought that the picture market was being swamped by small-minded picture buyers, buyers with no more understanding of the sublime than 'nurserymaids and their charges'.

MIDDLE CLASS PATRONAGE

A speculative article in the Athenaeum in 1840 described the age in all its productions: industrial, literary and artistic, as an 'Age of Tinsel', characterised by glitter and superficiality. It laid the blame squarely on the character of modern patronage. It dismissed the notion that there was any absolute lack of patronage.

No. It is not patronage that is wanting but patronage of the right kind. Art enjoys now, we apprehend, far more patronage, total against total, than it did under Leo or Lorenzo, but a corruptive instead of a beneficial: the public stands as the great patron, but the great patron of little things - patron of its own inexhaustible physiognomy, favourite-spaniel or pug dog pieces, glittering outlays of ruddle and gambouge called landscapes, sentimentalities ad nauseam, Storms in the Atlantic a foot square, and Falls of Niagara that will fit over the cupboard. (6)

The nursery-maids respond to the image of their own nurseries. We see here that a notion of the middle classes' own physiognomy can be extended beyond individualised portraits to the small genre pictures of trivial domestic subjects that reflected the

(6) Athenaeum, 1 Feb 1840, pp.95-6.

limits of their own life. Once again reference is made to Dutch painting.

What did ancient art produce among the Dutch masters? Little miracles of mechanism, parlour scenes, rural corners, dead game and low drolleries. Why? Because its patrons were shopkeepers, dairy-men, wind-millers, proprietors of demesnes each somewhat bigger than a good village pond irrigated by a green ditch, planted with four pollard willows, and commended by a house the size of Polyphemus's pigeon-box. Could anything nobler than cabinet pictures be expected from a country cut up into paddocks like a table of 'fox and geese' which a Middle Class, whose ideas were as squared and contracted, held under open or occult sway?

The great characteristic of cabinet pictures is their size. They are small enough to fit into a private room. Great play is here made with the comparison between the squares of the flat Dutch landscape divided into smallholdings, and the small squares which are pictures. The image of the chequer board of 'fox and geese' is used, with perhaps the idea that the middle classes are limited to the low craft of foxes or the silliness of geese. As a corollary of limited size goes limited intellectual and moral powers. The greatest achievement of Dutch painting was held to be 'mechanism'.

In an 1842 discussion on the state of English painting, remarks by the artist and art administrator Eastlake throw some light on the supposed relation between the size of cabinet paintings and the limitation to a purely visual interest. Unlike the writer of the Athenaeum article, Eastlake did not consider the state of English painting to be entirely corrupt. He talks of the danger posed to the development of historical painting by a school 'exclusively devoted to indiscriminate imitation', but considers that English genre painting has advanced beyond purely visual concerns. He says of 'pictures of familiar subjects which

have been of late years predominant and deservedly attractive' that they are to some extent elevated in treatment or subject matter.

...the productions in question oftener approach the dignity of history than the vulgarity of the lower order of subjects and either by the choice of incidents, or by their treatment, still attest the character of the national taste. The evidence of an intellectual aim in familiar subjects, may be therefore considered as an additional proof that the artists of England want only the opportunities which those of other nations have enjoyed in order to distinguish themselves in the worthiest undertakings. (7)

This is reminiscent of the standard praise accorded to Wilkie. It is based on the position that successors of Wilkie had lived up to his example. However the aim of the piece is to plead for state encouragement of historical painting. Eastlake allows that there may be genre painting that rises above pure imitation, or historical painting which

admits, picturesque materials, thus combining the attractions of familiar subjects with the dignity of the historic style.

However, at the same time he makes it clear that there are fundamental differences between the two kinds of painting. He admits that most modern English historical painting is of this quasi-familiar type, and is on a small scale - but insofar as it is like this it belies the principles of historical painting. Properly speaking historical painting is on a grand scale, and has a corresponding grandeur of treatment, which involves suppression of detail. Historical paintings are not for hanging in private rooms of normal size, consequently they are not to be

(7) Report of Commission on Fine Art, 1842. Eastlake (as Secretary of Commission), 'Introduction: the State and Prospects of the English School of Painting', reprinted in Art Union, Sept 1842.

looked at close to, and there is no need for minute details.

Eastlake says of historical painting

it must still tend to exclude certain refinements of imitation which are appreciable in pictures requiring to be seen near - refinements capable of conferring an interest on details that may be unimportant in themselves...the familiar subject, as fullest of accidental circumstance, must be best displayed in dimensions fitted for near inspection.

The argument goes that as a small scale invites close viewing and demands comprehensive detail, so magnitude in scale distances the viewer and demands selection, and emphasis on a few important accessories. There is no place for the unimportant. Every attribute of the picture must be part of the grand theme. In recommending state patronage of historical painting Eastlake does not wish to denigrate 'that domestic art which is now so successfully cultivated', 'the hitherto more thriving and popular branch of art', but he wishes clearly to separate it from historical art. Historical painting is not small scale painting of scenes from the past, full of details of dress and setting, nor is it large scale painting of the same.

it may be remarked that large works when elaborate in detail, and full of accidental circumstance, have the unpleasing effect of magnified cabinet pictures.

To paint historically is to generalise and idealise, not slavishly to imitate every accidental detail of the actual.

ELEVATED GENRE

The distinction insisted on by Eastlake, between true historical painting and that which has a historical subject but is closer to genre, underpins a plaintive letter to the Art Union in 1840. The writer, S.T., represents himself as a young artist, bewildered by the discrepancy between the theory of historical

painting generally preached and the examples put before him by the respected artists of the day in the Royal Academy. He cannot convince himself that the works of Wilkie, Landseer, Turner, Uwins, Chalon, Lee and Mulready are historical.

He (the young artist) does not presume to doubt the excellence of the works I have named, but the doubt arises in his mind "Are these historical?" He feels he cannot paint dogs, and baskets, and draperies as he sees them, and is sometimes in despair that he has wasted his precious time; and is as far as ever from knowing 'what is historical'.
(8)

He refers to a term coined in Blackwood's

are we to come home and paint what Blackwood calls 'The Elegant Familiar Style'?

The Blackwood's reviewer coined the term approvingly in 1840 and returned to it in later years. He applied it to Redgrave, Maclise and Lauder, reserving it especially for Redgrave. It was a style of painting where instead of "Low Life" mechanically painted, intellectual and moral elements enter into the painting.

The wonderful mechanism of the Flemish school, the admiration and high value set upon works merely on that account, in defiance of subject, have too long fostered a bad taste; we are happy to see that the more gross and vulgar of that school are less sought after, and a growing competition for the elegant familiar. It is in this particular line that our present artists excel: and as it is one that admits much feeling, tenderness and beauty its ascendancy may be admitted without regret. (9)

Feeling, tenderness and beauty may not immediately strike us as intellectual or moral but in the terms of the Blackwood's reviewer they certainly were, and to be set against purely visual representation. Even when not overtly vulgar and 'low life', purely visual qualities in painting were inadequate, as he explains the following year.

(8) Art Union, Sep 1840, p.140.

(9) Blackwood's, Sept 1840, p.374

Mere vulgarity is certainly disappearing. Insipidity, however, not works of sentiment and thought, fill too large a space. For whom are these things of no meaning, which crowd the walls, painted, is a question we annually ask ourselves? That the painter should be pleased with his own manual dexterity, and mere power of representing objects, if he be uncultivated for higher aim, is not surprising; but that the public should be pleased with such works, does excite our wonder. It surely argues no good public taste, when the eye seeks a gratification unconnected with intellectual and moral feeling. (10)

We can see from these various sources that the gratification of the eye, the unselective painting of insignificant details, with scrupulous accuracy, of 'dogs and baskets and draperies' as the eye sees them, was considered the lowest element in art, and one that could not coexist with nobler aims. We also see considerable negotiation going on over those pictures where the two did coexist. It is clearly shown by the relation of S.T.'s letter to the Blackwood's reviews. In the first the 'elegant familiar' embodies the failure of British painting to match up to its own theory of the grand style. In the second it embodies the achievement of sections of British art to pull itself above the dangerous model of Dutch genre, and the corrupt nature of public taste.

Behind all the comments quoted from the 1840s and 1850s stand Reynolds's pronouncements on high and low art. Reynolds's Discourses were lectures delivered from 1769-90, and collected and published in 1801. The Discourses lay out principles that continued to be vitally important for artists and critics throughout the nineteenth century. Reynolds distinguished between painting for the eye and painting for the heart and mind.

(10) Blackwood's, Sep 1841, p.340.

If deceiving the eye were the only business of the art, there is no doubt, indeed, but the minute painter would be more apt to succeed; but it is not the eye, it is the mind which the painter of genius desires to address; nor will he waste a moment upon those smaller objects, which serve only to catch the sense, to divide the attention, and to counteract his great design of speaking to the heart. (11)

The historical painter generalises, paints the ideal, knowing that local details are examples of the deformities produced by local accident. Reynolds concedes the possibility of, for some reason or other, a historical painter descending to lower subjects, which are concerned with local details. In this case the low subject will be ennobled.

if ...he is obliged to descend lower, he will bring into the lower sphere of art a grandeur of composition and character, that will raise and ennoble his works far above their natural rank. (Discourse III, p.52)

This is the source for the position accorded to Wilkie in early Victorian art criticism. Short of this ennobled genre, a genre painter can be praised for accurately differentiating between characters' expressions.

The painters who have applied themselves more particularly to low and vulgar characters, and who express with precision the various shades of passion, as they are exhibited by vulgar minds, (such as we see in the works of Hogarth) deserve great praise. (Discourse III, p.51)

Within the limited aims of genre painting the details have a function. They would interfere with a higher purpose, but in genre subjects they are necessary adornments.

as the natural dignity of the subject is less, the more all the little ornamental helps are necessary to its embellishment. (Discourse IV, p.70)

Reynolds also touches on the differing audiences for low and high

(11) Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses On Art, ed. R.R.Wark, Huntington Library, San Marino, California, 1959, Discourse III, p.50.

art.

In works of the lower kind everything appears studied and encumbered; it is all boastful art, and open affectation. The ignorant often part from such pictures with wonder in their mouths and indifference in their hearts. (Discourse IV, p.59)

This notion of the lower art easily winning acclaim of the ignorant is one which gets developed, as we have seen, in the atmosphere of the 1840s and 1850s of extended public access to art and calls for popular education . The dicta of Reynolds are inscribed in the statements of the '40s and '50s but they are not merely repeated. I have used the term 'negotiation' of the middle ground between low and high art in this period, but the term is perhaps too mild to describe the conflicts involving fear, scorn, moral reprobation and triumphant acclaim.

RUSKIN AND REYNOLDS

Ruskin's role in the debate over the position accorded to the eye in appreciating art, the function of detail and the status of genre painting must be considered. It is tempting to claim that Ruskin overthrew Reynolds's tenet that the general is more important than the particular, championed the depiction of accurate and minute detail and successfully won critical opinion over to his views; creating a critical climate favourable to the detailed representations of modern life scenes that became more common in the 1850s. According to this argument pictures such as Ford Madox Brown's Last of England exhibited at the Liverpool Academy in 1856, Abraham Solomon's Waiting for the Verdict exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1857, Augustus Egg's Past and Present exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858, and William Maw Egley's Omnibus Life in London exhibited at the British

Institution in 1859 could all be said to derive from the critical revolution instituted by Ruskin. After all Ruskin did say, in Modern Painters,

It is carelessly and falsely said that general ideas are more important than particular ones. (12)

But I would rather suggest that Ruskin's views form part of a more general appropriation and transformation of Reynolds's arguments. Even in the section of Modern Painters where he is disputing Reynolds's position on general versus particular he makes it clear that he is not trying to overthrow Reynolds's hierarchy of types of painting and the subjects fitted to each. He is trying to retain the conclusions and alter the the grounds of the argument. This leads him into convoluted discussion, which the Blackwood's reviewer of volume I summed up as a quibble on the word important, claiming that it could be dismissed by a simple statement of what Reynolds really meant.(13) It is significant that Ruskin does not deny the famous example given by Reynolds that in historical painting drapery should be generalised.

...with him (the historical painter) the cloathing is neither woollen, nor linen, nor silk, satin, or velvet, it is drapery it is nothing more. (14)

Ruskin lets Reynolds's judgement stand. First he puts forward a quirky argument claiming that the actual type of material is incidental to the qualities which distinguish drapery as drapery. These qualities he lists out as "extension, non-elastic flexibility, unity and comparative thinness". The only other

(12) John Ruskin, Modern Painters (vol.I), Library Edition, vol.III, George Allen, London, 1907, p.152.

(13) Blackwood's, Sept 1841, p.340.

(14) Reynolds, op.cit., Discourse IV, p.62.

relevant distinction that can be made in the context of historical painting, he claims, is that which differentiates individual examples within the species 'drapery'. According to this argument woolliness, silkiness etc are irrelevant because though not common to the whole of it, they are common to indefinite numbers of it. The only feature distinguishing any individual instance of drapery is the way it happens to fall into folds. Moreover the qualities of woolliness, silkiness etc, or of colour, are incidental because as well as covering a range of instances within the group 'drapery' they apply to other things outside the group. By arguing in this way, Ruskin manages to adhere to Reynolds's dictum: to advocate generalisation in historical painting, but by redefining what counts as general and what is particular he shifts the application of the rule. He claims 'generality' for the woolliness etc, (which Reynolds would have called particular qualities), and 'distinctiveness' or specificity for the quality of being drapery (which Reynolds would have called a general quality).(15)

The feature of Ruskin's position is that it does not depart from the notion that historical painting was concerned with elevated ideas and not incidental detail. Such detail plays the role of a source of entertainment in lower subjects and of improper disturbance in higher subjects. Modern Painters is concerned with denouncing flashy visual entertainment and with the promotion of art that fulfills a serious moral function. It is true that Ruskin is instituting radical departures from

(15) Ruskin, op.cit., p.61.

Reynolds's doctrine - and that his use of the drapery example is somewhat disingenuous, because it sets up drapery as a single, generic category, indivisible except in the individual instance. This is exactly what he refuses to do with clouds, rocks, plants etc. He insists that the generic unit flower as flower has no meaning unless an individual type of flower is identified - taking the example of animal as animal to prove his point.

An animal must be either one animal or another animal it cannot be a general animal, or it is no animal... there were a creature in the foreground of a picture of which he could not decide whether it were a pony or a pig, the Athenaeum critic would perhaps affirm it to be a generalisation of a pony and pig. (16)

But his insistence on the specific quality of each natural phenomenon, and the duty of the painter to register the important differentiating features is not a simple reversal or denial of Reynolds's hierarchies. Ruskin too wishes to encourage the representation of the ideal rather than the accidental or deformed individual case, but he sees the ideal in the various forms of natural objects. They are not accidental features which distinguish them but structural differences, which evidence the scope of God's work.

It is not therefore detail sought for its own sake - not the calculable bricks of the Dutch house painters, nor the numbered hairs and mapped wrinkles of Denver, which constitute great art - they are the lowest and most contemptible art; but it is detail referred to a great end - sought for the sake of the inestimable beauty which exists in the slightest and least of God's works. (17)

I wish to stress that Ruskin's arguments fit into a widespread

(16) Ruskin, op.cit., Preface to the Second Edition (1844), Library Edition, vol.III, p.34.

(17) Ibid., p.32.

discussion on the role and value of different kinds of art - discussion generated by the changing class composition of the art market. Modern Painters was conceived as 'a small pamphlet defending a noble artist against a strong current of erring public opinion.' (18) It grew to be considerably more than that, but it must, nonetheless, be read primarily as an attempt to redirect popular taste. For Ruskin this was an urgent task.

When public taste seems plunging deeper and deeper into degradation day by day, and when the press universally exerts such powers as it possesses to direct the feeling of the nation more completely to all that is theatrical, affected and false in art. (19)

His aim was to refute the judgements made by the press and to guide public opinion to an appreciation of the truths and beauties of nature. The conclusion to Vol.I of Modern Painters asserts that the public has the power of discerning 'rank of intellect' in painters within a particular type of painting. The task of the critics therefore is not to promote the better artist against the more popular, inferior artist, but to promote the worthier type of painting. Once the public are convinced of what is worth looking for, Ruskin is convinced that they will be able to see it.

The press therefore and all who pretend to lead the public taste, have not so much to direct the multitude whom to go to, as what to ask for. (20)

In the meantime Turner appeals only to those who have developed the power of distinguishing true representations of landscape

(18) Ruskin, letter to H.G.Liddell, Oct 12 1844, Library Edition, vol.III, p.669. See also Preface to the First Edition (1843), 'The work now laid before the public originated in indignation at the shallow and false criticisms of the periodicals of the day', op.cit.,p.3.

(19) Ibid., p.4

(20) Ibid., p.618.

from false. Ultimately the most elevated aspects of his pictures; emotion and thought, will be inaccessible to all but a few comparable minds. The necessary concomitant of these elevated qualities however is true representation of nature, and this can be comprehended by everybody, once they have learnt to see. In other words Ruskin was trying to establish a method of art criticism which was at once democratising and scientific - one with which all people could compare all pictures. This seems far removed from the Reynolds's hierarchical categories, historical painting and low subjects, but in fact it is framed in a Reynoldsian mould. The strict comparability of pictures only goes for the basic, common denominator: one that is crucial and in some sense an indicator of high qualities, but these higher qualities lie outside the scientific system proposed. As for the democratisation offered by the method, again it is constrained by the limited application of the method. Also the democratisation is only potential. The situation where all learn to see is only hypothetical.

In a letter to the Artist and Amateur's Magazine Ruskin considers the extent of the public who can appreciate truths in painting, and concludes that it is extremely limited.

There are many subjects with respect to which the multitude are cognizant of the truth, or at least of some truth; and those subjects may be generally characterised as everything which materially concerns themselves or their own interests. The public are acquainted with the nature of their own passions, and the point of their own calamities, - can laugh at the weakness they feel, and weep at the miseries they have experienced. (21)

(21) Ruskin, letter to Artist and Amateur's Magazine, Jan 1844, in Library Edition, vol.III, p.650.

His conclusion is that the general public can go no further than this. They are at present incapable of seeing beyond their own passions to the sublime truths of nature.

When will they learn it? Hardly, we fear, in this age of steam and iron, luxury and selfishness. We grow more and more artificial day by day, and see less and less worthiness in those pleasures which bring with them no morbid excitement, in that knowledge which affords us no opportunity of display.

Ruskin, with his distinction between mere language and expressive speech, between imitation and truth, denounces low and trashy art in a way which bears comparison with the discussions I have quoted from the Art Union, Blackwood's and the Athenaeum.

Corrupt popular taste is based on the physical, and not the intellectual; on personal 'passions', and 'morbid excitement' derived from detail which is not accurate in a structural, analytic sense, but is simply startlingly lifelike, and pleases the spectator for that reason alone. He says:

Ideas of imitation, then, act by producing the simple pleasure of surprise, and that not of surprise in its higher sense and function, but of the mean and paltry surprise which is felt in jugglery. These ideas and pleasures are the most contemptible which can be received from art; first, because it is necessary to their enjoyment that the mind should reject the impression and address of the thing represented, and fix itself only upon the reflection that it is not what it seems to be. All high or noble emotion or thought is thus rendered physically impossible, while the mind exults in what is very like a strictly sensual pleasure. (22)

We are back at the frightening sensuality of the uneducated; babies bobbing at cherries; sexual excitement; art as prostitution. Moreover the whole of Modern Painters is concerned with that middle ground where, as we have seen, art criticism's

(22) Ruskin, Modern Painters (vol.I), Library Edition, vol.11, p.102.

terms and criteria were being renegotiated. Modern Painters is not concerned with genre but with landscape, but in the limits it sets on its scientificity, it develops a logical paradox that fits exactly with the problematic status of genre in the period. It claims that spiritual content is equally important in low art as in high art, but at the same time it denies the ability of that system to encompass the great achievements of high art.

Ruskin therefore should not be taken out of the context of contemporary art criticism, for all his own overt opposition to methods of reviewers in established journals, his coining of new terms, and elaboration of systems. Nor should his influence be exaggerated. It is possible to overestimate his authority by retrospectively applying to the beginning of his career comments such as those made by Whistler on the occasion of the libel trial of 1878. Whistler was able to state that Ruskin's disapproval could wreck an artist's chances. In the 1840s and 1850s Ruskin's authority had not been established to such a degree. He clearly aspired to a position of infallibility, as a statement he made in the early 1850s shows.

Until people are ready to receive all I say about art as 'unquestionable', just as they receive what Faraday tells them about chemistry, I don't consider myself to have any reputation at all worth caring about. (23)

However, as Robertson has pointed out, even by the end of the 1850s Ruskin's opinions were widely discounted. He quotes the sculptor Thomas Woolner as saying that in 1859 he and Carlyle agreed that Ruskin was 'an unsafe guide for women and the youths

(23) Ruskin to F.J.Furnivall, 9 June 1854, quoted in D.Robertson, Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1978.

of England' and that 'besides these, his trusting admirers are few'.(24) Ruskin's Academy Notes, produced from 1855 to 1859, should not be read as authoritative statements of a new position in art criticism, but should be compared with the routine reviews in the Art Journal, Athenaeum, major dailies and other periodicals.

MR. AND MRS. DOBBS

A cartoon published in Punch in 1842 shows an artist with a large-scale mythological canvas, and the prospective buyers (fig.1). The couple examining the painting are indicated as a loud and domineering wife, with coarse and overblown features, and a shrivelled, henpecked husband. The caricatures are familiar from the lower-middle-class protagonists of Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures, a comic series in Punch by Douglas Jerrold, published in book form in 1846. They have a short unaristocratic name 'Dobbs'. Their string of badly behaved children has no nurse or governess to keep them in check. They are shown as entirely incapable of understanding the significance of the painting, their concern is only with the colour. The husband approaches the picture in the context of the colour scheme of his house, the wife simply has a personal partiality for gaudy shades. This amounts to an illustration of Eastlake's distinction between the scale of historical and of humble art. This couple is standing so close to the painting that they are rendered physically incapable of taking in its meaning. The point is emphasised by the way the husband short-sightedly peers

(24) Ibid., p.385.

through his spectacles, and the fact that the wife is holding a monocle. The lower classes are represented as responding only to simple visual stimuli, divorced from any intellectual accompaniments. The association of these buyers with children is interesting too, in the light of the "nursery maids and their charges" of the Quarterly Review where this discussion started. The parents are shown to have no greater understanding than their children. On the left of the picture a child excitedly waves an umbrella, and his gesture threatens to damage the canvas. The proximity of Mr. Dobbs to the canvas offers a parallel threat, but it is a threat to painting in general, rather than to this particular canvas. The artist is saddened and perplexed. His appearance is not very smart, he evidently needs the custom of these people, but he realises that he is wasting his time painting high art pictures for them. The danger is that such patrons will encourage artists to abandon high art and turn out small scale canvases with no intellectual content whatever.

The Punch manoeuvre of bathos is two edged. It can be used to make fun of Mr. and Mrs. Dobbs, with their pretensions, or it can be used to deflate the institutions in which we see them, to insist on the existence of classes which many of the institutions of Victorian England chose to ignore. In this case there is an element of derision directed at the hopelessly ambitious and unrealistic young artist. But the misery with which we are invited to sympathise is his. We stand back far enough to take in the whole of the canvas, as he does. Had the frame of the cartoon been closed in to exclude the artist, and the breadth of the painting the effect of the joke would have been entirely

different.

Evidently the discussion round the distinctions between genre and historical painting hinges on questions of social class. The emphasis of the Athenaeum article on "The Age of Tinsel", with its talk of corruptive public patronage, and scornful appraisal of the mere mechanism of Dutch painting, is on the changing class nature of patronage.(25) The patrons of Dutch painting were held to be middle-class shopkeepers, dairymen etc. The patronage in post-1832 Britain is held to be similarly middle-class, because the whole balance of power was thought to have changed after the Reform Act, which enfranchised sections of the middle class with moderate property. The Athenaeum article denies total opposition to middle class ascendancy

We may lament one effect of Middle Class domination without pronouncing every other calamitous,

but is insistent on the all pervasiveness of the cultural effects of that middle-class domination. In other words the article does not take the attitude that the extension of the franchise is necessarily politically calamitous, but makes it clear that culturally speaking it considers it an unmitigated disaster. The writer holds it responsible even for failures in aristocratic or royal patronage, by its permeating effect.

the mean and miserable taste which must prevail where eight-roomed housekeepers and half-acre freeholders give law in such measure to the country

He does not blame artists for a failure in genius but for giving in to the temptation which the market for pictures inevitably holds out.

(25) Athenaeum, 1 Feb 1840, p.95-6.

But again we say, it is neither want of genius in the painters, nor of patronage in the public; which has brought about this degraded condition of the Arts: it is a second cause, the servility of that genius pandering to a false and frivolous public taste, by whose impurity itself has been tainted; as a prime cause, the indiscriminate, little minded, retail character of that patronage, that Middle Class patronage, expending hundreds of thousands upon prettinesses and pettinesses.

The Quarterly Review article on the Manchester Exhibition talked of artists 'prostituting' their talents. Here the word is not 'prostitute' but 'pander' which also has a sexual reference, carried over into the word 'taint'. The [Athenaeum] uses this image of prostitution in 1840 when it complains that the colouring of English painting is too bright.

...that harsh, garish, overloaded, style of colour, perpetually enhanced in successive exhibitions, which gives to our English school its strumpet character, and vitiates the public eye till it disrelishes the pure as insipid, the chaste as frigid, the natural as feeble. (26)

The garish colouring of pictures is being compared to the gaudy clothing and make-up of prostitutes. Even taking into account the prevalence of sexual reference in language and metaphor generally, this collection of images is striking. The threat of lower classes entering the art market is seen as sexual. The type of art they are thought to demand is art for the eye along, requiring a sensory response which gets translated into or associated with sexual response. The sexual metaphors tie in with images of pollution and disease.

The publications in which these articles appeared were, without exception, vehicles of bourgeois opinion, aimed at a predominantly middle-class urban readership. It is paradoxical

(26) Athenaeum, 8 Feb 1840, p.112.

that these publications express such scornful opinions of the cultural capabilities of the middle class. It would, at first sight, seem to contradict the commonly repeated ideological construct which cast the middle class in the role of repository of moral and intellectual integrity, and bearer of a grave responsibility to influence the classes above and below them. The aristocracy, in this construct, were represented as brutal and dissolute, wilfully bent on extravagance and pleasure. The working class were represented as bestial in another way: improvident and addicted to low pleasures of drink and sexual indulgence, because they had not been given the education or moral instruction to resist these impulses. But the paradox is partially resolved if the critical commentary we have been investigating is related to the anxieties attached to that assumption of responsibility. There has been much debate as to whether the English bourgeoisie were ideologically incorporated into the aristocracy, as they moved into a position of economic power in the nineteenth century. Perry Anderson's notion that the English middle class fell into the arms of aristocracy, and abdicated political and ideological control, can be criticised for underestimating the extent to which aristocratic institutions and groupings were used by the bourgeoisie for new and class-specific purposes.(27) It is useful to refer to Gramsci's analysis of a social formation where a newly dominant class makes use of residual institutions (such as the priesthood) to bulwark

(27) Perry Anderson, 'The origins of the present crisis' (1962), in P.Anderson and R.Blackburn, eds., Towards Socialism, Cornell University Press, Ithica and New York, 1965, pp.11-52.

its own hegemonic position.(28)

The model for bourgeois behaviour and achievement was undoubtedly aristocratic, and so, to some extent, as a class, the bourgeoisie obscured its own cultural identity. Aristocratic modes of etiquette were adopted, accompanied by a striving for gentility, albeit within a revised, modern notion of what constituted a gentleman or lady.(29) Social position was calculated using a complex equation in which level of income, source of income, family pedigree and standard of education were just some of the variables. The rhetoric of the Athenaeum reflects an attempt to define and locate the ruling class in terms of the aristocracy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A function of this mode of self-definition was anxiety about any sections of the middle class that refused or failed to adopt these self-imposed patterns of behaviour. There was an attempt to draw a definite line between the genteel upper-middle class and the vulgar lower-middle class; and the impossibility of establishing any fixed point of separation made anxiety about social distinctions endemic. At the same time that the bourgeoisie assumed the responsibility for guiding the minds and souls of the nation it was plagued by doubts as to its own moral and intellectual standing. If the middle class included such figures as Mr. and Mrs. Dobbs then it was unfit for its task.

(28) see R.Gray, 'Bourgeois hegemony in Victorian Britain', in Bennett et. al., eds., Culture Ideology and Social Process, Batsford/Open University, London, 1981, pp.235-60.

(29) A novel such as D.Mulock's John Halifax Gentleman, is clearly one site of this process of redefinition, with its argument that gentility consisted in character rather than birth.

The political affirmation of a new ruling class was based upon simultaneous acts of incorporation and exclusion. Arriviste elements from increasingly diverse social, religious and economic positions had to be incorporated into polite society, and yet the identity of that society had to be established, and its credentials protected, by a rigorous exclusion of fringe elements. Culture played a key role in this dual process, and the formulation of the stereotype of the tasteless, narrow-minded, lower-middle-class consumer was instrumental in imposing acceptable behaviour on a new middle-class public. Terry Eagleton has suggested that Victorian literary criticism represented an attempt to reconstitute the consensus of the eighteenth century public sphere.(30) Victorian art criticism can be viewed in the same way, as a means of instructing the middle class in visual literacy, in order to draft diverse elements into a unitary class position.

This chapter has drawn a parallel between the anxiety in mid-nineteenth century art criticism as to the status of genre painting, and a more generalised anxiety concerning the social status and cultural identity of the middle class. Critical commentary assumed a connection between the sensibilities and degree of refinement of the art consuming public and the level at which genre paintings were pitched. The contested standing of genre made it the focus for much anxious debate. Worries about the composition of the middle class were displaced onto the realm of art, and, since the indeterminate status of genre matched the

(30) T.Eagleton, The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-Structuralism, Verso, London, 1984, pp.48-9.

indeterminate status of the middle class, genre painting provoked extremes of praise and criticism. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s 'low' subjects that appeared in the annual London exhibitions were denounced as disgraceful, while there was great praise for genre pictures that moved above the base level of genre to encompass variety of emotion and expression and some dramatic interest. The annual exhibition of the pictures chosen by the prize-winners of the London Art Union was a particularly sensitive index because there, it was felt, popular taste was displayed. A guide book to the 1843 exhibition stated unequivocally that 'from the Art Union Prizes we learn what is the taste of persons in the middle class of society'.(31) The art unions worked as lotteries. For a one guinea subscription to the London Art Union an individual received a copy of an engraving, and a chance to win a prize from £10 to £200, the prize money to be spent on the purchase of a painting from one of the London exhibitions.

There was a widespread fear that the operation of the art unions would have the effect of dragging down the general standard of exhibitions. The fresh purchasing power injected into the art market was considerable. It was estimated that the addition of funds, in the region of £15,000 per annum, to the art market of London, more than doubled the money spent on pictures.(32) It was also suggested that the extra interest in

(31) Henry G. Clarke, The Art Union Exhibition for 1843: a Hand-book Guide for Visitors (sic), Clarke & Co., London, 1843, preliminary remarks.

(32) Art Union, Jan 1842, p.10. This calculation excluded pictures that had previously been commissioned.

art generated by the lottery led to an additional increase in the amount of money spent on pictures - amounting to another £15,000.(33) However most of the prizes were small, and it was said that artists deliberately submitted many small, banal genre pictures to the exhibitions, priced in the region of £10, in the hope of attracting art union prizewinners. It was repeatedly suggested that a committee should choose the pictures for the winners, and so ensure the elevation rather than the degradation of taste, but the suggestion was never taken up. When the prizes chosen by the London Art Union winners were assembled and offered for exhibition to the public therefore, the critics felt considerable apprehension because this exhibition was felt to be a decisive indicator of the progression or decline of popular taste. One journal felt that the 1844 exhibition indicated decisively the depravity of public taste.

...true Art, at least for some time to come must hope for little from a patronage of this nature: and ...the public taste (if we may judge of it by these selections) is so abject, and totally unfit, of itself alone, for the exercise of the trust reposed in it. (34)

The Art Union journal, by contrast, felt that the exhibitions, at least by 1845, demonstrated an improved understanding and appreciation of the higher qualities of art, on the part of the middle class prize-winners.

...taken as a whole it is a good collection and a wise selection, and, as contrasted with the gatherings of four years back, affords conclusive evidence of increasing taste, and the beneficial working of the Institution; not alone as "giving encouragement to artists beyond that afforded by the patronage of individuals," but as essentially aiding "to extend a love of the Arts of Design throughout the United Kingdom". (35)

(33) Ibid., Sep 1842.

(34) Critic, Oct 1844, p.132.

To some extent the exhibitions continue to stand as a valuable indicator, for modern commentators, of the type of painting most favoured by the lower range of middle-class patrons. The exhibition of 1845 offers a unique opportunity for art historians to investigate the meaning of the 'popular' for mid-nineteenth century art patronage, because every work in that exhibition was illustrated by a small wood engraving in the catalogue. For once the art historian has access to a visual record of the full range of works in an exhibition, rather than to a list of titles and a few exceptional survivals in the form of pictures that were selected for engraving by printsellers or for periodicals, or works that entered public collections or have survived to pass through modern salerooms.

The names of the prize-winners are included in the catalogue, and only one winner has an aristocratic title: Lady Lushington, who won a £30 prize. Otherwise there are a handful of doctors, clergymen and Royal Academicians among plain Esquires, Mrs. and Misses. The pictures chosen are mainly landscapes and genre paintings. There were over a hundred landscapes and over a hundred genre paintings in the exhibition, but only three historical and four scriptural subjects. A page from the catalogue gives a representative sample of the pictures on display (fig.2). A Scottish landscape by E.F.Buckley has a literary component, and is titled Loch Katrine: Scene from Scott's Lady of the Lake. The other paintings on the page are by A.Egg, A.H.Taylor, A.J.Woolmer and T.Clater. The picture by Egg

could be categorised as historical genre painting. It represents a scene from the life of Cromwell. Woolmer's painting, The Admonition, shows a domestic incident in a setting indicated as from an earlier century. A matronly figure, reading a book which is no doubt a Bible, is giving two young women a moral lecture as they set out to meet their beaux, who can be seen outside the door. Woolmer's single genre figure is a French fisherwoman in regional costume, which is picturesque and timeless. Only Clater's scene of a servant girl and a gentleman customer at an inn is set in modern dress. Overall, the catalogue gives a vivid picture of the nature and popularity of genre painting in the 1840s. At this date modern scenes were the exception in genre painting. The vast majority of genre paintings had timeless, rustic or exotic settings, or displayed the period trappings appropriate to a historical or literary incident. In the following decade, as will be seen in subsequent chapters of this thesis, modern life scenes became more common. This chapter has outlined the critical debates surrounding the growth of the art market, and the popularity of genre painting. Modern life painting must be understood in the context of these debates, and firmly located within the contested sphere of genre painting.

CHAPTER TWO: RAMSGATE SANDS BY WILLIAM POWELL FRITH

William Powell Frith exhibited Ramsgate Sands in 1854, and he describes it in his autobiography as one of the pioneering works of modern life painting. He gives the impression that his decision to use modern dress, and a modern setting, was daring and entirely novel.(36) However recent studies of Victorian painting show quite clearly that a substantial number of modern subjects had already appeared in exhibitions of the 1840s and 1850s.(37) Frith's Ramsgate Sands (fig.3) was not, therefore, as original a conception as his account suggested, yet it was unusual in the very large number of figures included in the composition, and its choice of a public, exterior location for the setting. These two features together make it possible for it to be not just a scene of modern life, but a representation of a modern crowd. The figures in the picture constitute a crowd because of their heterogeneity, and their anonymity. The figures are not the identifiable gentlemen of a gathering of sportsmen or agriculturalists that could be seen in in paintings by Richard

(36) W.P.Frith, My Autobiography and Reminiscences, (2 vols.), Bentley, London, 1887, vol.I, ch.XX.

(37) see H.Rodee, Scenes of Rural and Urban Poverty in Victorian Painting and their Development 1850-1890, Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University 1975, University Microfilms International, and T.J.Edelstein, 'But who shall paint the griefs of those oppress'd?': the Social Theme in Victorian Painting, Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1979.
L. Errington, Social and Religious Themes in English Art 1840-60, Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1973.

Andsell, for example, in the 1840s. A painting by Andsell of 1840 showed a large group of gentlemen gathering for a greyhound racing meeting. There were over a hundred distinct figures in The Waterloo Cup Coursing Meeting, all wearing modern dress, but these figures were identifiable as a cohesive group, and many of them were identifiable as portraits of individuals, for instance the Earls of Eglinton, Selton and Stradbroke can all be picked out. (38) Ramsgate Sands is a very different kind of painting. The picture is not the record of a particular body of people, at a particular event on a specific date, but presents, rather, anonymous Londoners, on any summer day at the seaside. The picture was influential. Its success encouraged Frith to embark on other crowd scenes. He exhibited a race-course scene, Derby Day, in 1857 and a picture called The Railway Station in 1861. His example was followed by some other genre painters, such as George Elgar Hicks and William Maw Egley, creating a minor current of modern crowd scenes within the continuing production of genre paintings. Frith was widely acknowledged as the originator of this type of painting; for example, the Saturday Review mentions him when discussing modern life scenes by Hicks and Charles Rossiter in 1859.

His [Frith's] success, has ...brought this kind of subject a good-deal into vogue. (39)

ART AS A MIRROR OF LIFE

(38) see Arts Council exhibition catalogue, British Sporting Paintings, Leicester, Liverpool and London, Dec 1974-May 1975, pp.115-6.

(39) Saturday Review, 4 June 1859, p.683.

The growing popularity of modern life subjects among genre painters has led art historians to some hasty conclusions. Graham Reynolds described the direct encounter with the modern as a vitalising experience for mid-Victorian artists. According to him, artists who could no longer find any visual stimulus in historical subject matter could enter 'with a sense of participation' into the world surrounding them.(40) Artists could observe and document what they knew rather than rely on invention. Such an account fastens on the verisimilitude of mid-nineteenth century painting and, in the case of modern life subjects, infers an unmediated relationship between observation and artistic production. Unsophisticated accounts of Victorian painting are frequently underpinned by this sort of assumption. Modern life pictures are taken as documents of Victorian life and behaviour.(41) The popularity of modern life subjects is then ascribed to the pleasure felt by the middle classes in contemplating paintings that showed them an accurate picture of their own activities. The discussion in Chapter One of this thesis shows that the root of this notion can be found in the critical discourse of the mid-nineteenth century.

Some art historical accounts move one step beyond the idea of modern life scenes as mirrors of life, to the notion of these paintings as distorting ideological mirrors. This is the model used by Raymond Lister in his comments on narrative painting.

(40) G.Reynolds, Victorian Painters, Studio Vista, London, 1966, p.111.

(41) This assumption runs throughout Victorian Panorama, by C.Wood, Faber & Faber, London 1976. See below Chapter Five for the persistence of this line of thought from S.Sitwell in the 1930s to E.D.H.Johnson in the 1980s.

The narrative picture was an escapist art - as it were, a reassuring series of distorting mirrors held up by the Victorians to the world around them, glossing over what was nasty and frequently distorting real feeling into mushy sentimentality. (42)

Such a reading would see Ramsgate Sands as an entirely positive view of middle-class life, and would describe it in terms such as those chosen by R.S.Holmes, as 'the very portrait of gentility'.(43) This study of Ramsgate Sands opposes the idea that any art work can be an unmediated appropriation of the real. It works on the assumption that all representations are constructed, and received, on the basis of shared codes. Art can neither be a simple reflex of the real nor even a partial presentation of reality. The detailed analysis of Ramsgate Sands in this chapter investigates questions of pleasure in viewing, both as a thematic concern of the painting and in terms of the access and positioning afforded to the viewer of the painting. Psychoanalytic concepts are drawn upon to articulate the term 'pleasure'. The analysis casts doubt upon the idea that Frith's success was based on the pleasure felt by the middle classes in gazing on their own image (44), because it identifies sources of unpleasure as well as pleasure in the viewing process. The painting is shown to be something more than simply a comforting, wish-fulfilling fantasy. It functions as a therapeutic mastering of fears. There is a mechanism at work in Ramsgate Sands of deliberately giving play to anxieties and then neutralising or

(42) R.Lister, Victorian Narrative Painting, Museum Press, London, 1966, p.11.

(43) R.S.Holmes, Continuity and Change in a Mid-Victorian Resort: Ramsgate, 1851-1871, PhD thesis, University of Kent, 1977, p.74.

(44) M.C.Cowling, The Conception and Interpretation of Character in Victorian Modern Life Art, Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, 1982, p.179.

containing them. The ideological functioning of the image can best be understood in the context of this structure, rather than by any attempt to monitor its ideological status by assessing the degree to which it conforms to reality.

In the early 1850s the seaside was not an unproblematic leisure space for the middle classes. It was a location where men and women appeared together in public and engaged in pursuits that involved a display of their bodies. Problems of sexual propriety were involved in the practice and conduct of sea-bathing. The sea shore was also a site where the regulation of trading was in dispute. Vendors of wares and services, and entertainers were by and large free to operate on the beach, and so middle class visitors were brought into possibly undesired contact with these lower class figures. The class position of the visitors and the social tone of the resort was also an unsettled question. As the popularity of seaside resorts grew, and transport links with cities were improved, different resorts were developed in different ways, to attract distinct types of visitors. In Ramsgate in particular there was an additional factor affecting the social tone of the resort, which was that the town had Jewish associations. All these issues and areas of tension and conflict are encountered by Frith's painting Ramsgate Sands. This chapter examines the ways in which the picture deals with those problems.

BATHING CONDUCT

At the beginning of the mid-nineteenth century, nude bathing was the norm both for river and sea bathing. Men and women were

segregated onto different bathing beaches, and the use of bathing machines made it possible for the bather to be immersed almost immediately and hidden in deep water, rather than slowly entering from shallow water. An engraving of 1805, reproduced in James Walvin's history of the seaside, shows a female bather at Ramsgate (fig.4). Even at that date there was some discussion as to the impropriety involved in women bathing where they might be seen. involved in women bathing where they might be seen. The engraving itself is apparently part of that discussion. A letter to The Times in 1796, from Ramsgate spoke in satirical vein of ladies exposing themselves, emulating Venus and imitating Eve. Novel writing ladies were said to

have retired hither to display not naval but navel discoveries, to the vast pleasure and edification of some ancient enamoratas. (45)

By the middle of the nineteenth century it was normal for middle class women to wear voluminous bathing dresses, made of dark material, gathered at the neck and with short sleeves. There was a much slower increase in the use of bathing costumes among men. While women shrouded themselves from the public gaze, men almost invariably bathed nude. Bathing costumes for men were advocated on occasion. In a letter to The Times in 1856 'A BATHER' suggested, as a novel solution, 'short trousers of blue or any dark coloured linen, fastened round the waist with a running string and extending to within a couple of inches or so of the knee'.(46) Some resorts attempted to make the wearing of such garments compulsory in the 1860s, but met resistance from

(45) The Times, 8 July 1796, quoted in R.S.Holmes, op.cit.
(46) The Times, 27 August 1856.

bathers. For instance, in Scarborough in 1866 there was opposition from the bathing machine operators to the introduction of such a byelaw, on the grounds that 'First class visitors object to wear drawers while bathing'.(47) That there was this differential in customary bathing wear makes it possible to consider attitudes to women looking at male bathers separately from attitudes to men watching women bathing.

MALE NUDITY

There was a continual current of disquiet in the middle years of the nineteenth century at the indecency involved in men swimming nude. No sense of indecency was attached to the act in itself, nor to the idea of male participants seeing each other unclothed. The problem was that middle class women might see them. So when a letter expressing outrage at men bathing in the Thames was published in 1852, the middle class women on board passing steamers were the viewers identified as the focus of the offence.

We trust that the authorities will forthwith issue orders to prevent the disgraceful and unblushing conduct of persons availing themselves of the river Thames for the purpose of bathing at this season.... on Sunday last, when there were not only the usual disgraceful exhibitions on the shores of the river, but numerous persons had the audacity to engage boats and undress and expose themselves in the most indecent manner in the very centre of the stream, and seemed to take the opportunity of the approach of one of the numerous steamers throughout the day to perpetrate their indecent behaviour, in order to insult and shock the feelings of a large number of respectable women on board. (48)

The respectability of the women is insisted upon; the possibly

(47) J.K.Walton, The English Seaside Resort: a Social History, 1750-1914, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1983, p.193.
(48) The Times, 22 July 1852.

working class origins of the 'persons' bathing is implied. In the case of the anxiety surrounding male bathing at seaside resorts, the outrage could not be imputed to the insolence and aggression of the lower classes. It was not simply an intolerable example of the rowdyism and impropriety entailed in popular sports and recreations, which could be stamped out in the way bullrunning, street football, or nude footracing were in the course of the nineteenth century.(49) In some resorts where there was a tradition of working class excursions to the seaside this was the case. The Lancashire coast had drawn Lancashire artisans to it from as early as the mid-eighteenth century. There the nineteenth century debate about propriety included a strong element of class opposition to the abandoned way working class trippers bathed nude and in mixed groups of men and women.(50) However, Lancashire was unique in having this tradition. By the 1840s, with the establishment of railways and the improvement of other transport, there were growing numbers of working class trippers in other areas but their distribution among the resorts was uneven. As will be discussed later, Ramsgate was a markedly genteel resort and any shock was generated by the bathing of the middle class visitors.

Like all seaside resorts, the Kent bathing towns were developed on the model of spas such as Bath and Harrogate. They

(49) see R.W.Malcolmson, Popular Recreations In English Society, 1700-1850, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1973 and P.Bailey, Leisure and Class in Victorian England, Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control 1830-1885, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1978.

(50) J.Walvin, Beside the Seaside, Allen Lane, London, 1978, pp.23, 31, and J.K.Walton, op.cit., p.11.

were originally fashionable resorts for the wealthy. Sea bathing was part of the regime recommended by medical authorities, which included drinking the sea water, and, increasingly as the nineteenth century progressed, breathing the sea air. The chemical properties of the water were thought to be beneficial, and A.B.Granville, a doctor, documents, as well as common salt, muriate of magnesia, potassium chloride, Epsom salts, lime sulphate and lime carbonate, and the chemically imprecise 'volatile animal particles', deriving from diverse forms of sea life. These last were thought to be specially stimulating. The active constituents of sea water were said to be absorbed through the skin while bathing, and the movement of the water and the impact of waves to produce electric and magnetic currents which acted on the body.(51) Sea bathing then, was a medically endorsed, socially respectable activity, to which the aristocratic and middle class clientele of the resorts were committed. As blame could not be attached to the men who exposed their bodies, the problem was located in the fact that women watched them. Frith's painting of Ramsgate Sands fits into a mid-nineteenth century discussion of women at the seaside looking, or not looking.

It was desirable to separate the locations of male and female bathing places, to prevent women from being brought within sight of naked men. A Saturday Review article in 1856, on 'Bathing Towns', called on the local authorities to ensure that bathing beaches were segregated.

(51) A.B.Granville, Spas of England, (2 vols. 1841), Adams and Dart, Somerset, 1971, pp.6-9.

We in England are gradually introducing the same marine fusion of the sexes - only, unfortunately, while in America and France everybody has an appropriate costume, the attire is confined in England to the weaker half of creation. Really this is a delicate subject, and some excuse must be asked for handling it. We are quite aware that Paterfamilias who writes indignation-letters from Margate to the Times, is a bit of a prude; but it is not necessary to go to the crowded Kentish watering-places to convince oneself that in this case he is more than justified. It really does seem as if English ladies, in addition to those curious hats, put on a new set of manners and morals during their annual visit to the seaside. No doubt, the appearance is worse than the reality, but the scandal to third persons is not the less for that; and surely it is not desirable that these bathing customs should be the first thing to strike an intelligent foreigner on his landing at Newhaven, Folkestone, or Dover. If the corporations of bathing-towns will not exert themselves to mark out separate localities for bathers, and to enforce the separation, there will be nothing left except for gentlemen to remedy a scandal which is certainly not of their creation, and to consent to go into the water in much the same costume which the PRINCE-CONSORT is said, we believe unjustly, to have devised for the undress of a heavy dragoon. (52)

This article substantiates the point made above that, since the demand for men to wear bathing costumes was considered unreasonable, the alternative was to charge women with a lapse of moral standards. The comments of Dr Spencer Thomson in 1860 make exactly the same progression.

One more word upon the almost heathen indecency of our sea-bathing places... In most places but Britain, male bathers are compelled to wear some sort of decent covering, such as short drawers...the present indecency is not diminished by the unblushing intrusiveness of some of the fair sex. (53)

It was a point made in the correspondence in The Times about the indecent and disgusting exhibition on the bathing beaches of Margate.

Sir - I hasten to confirm the truth of the assertion of "A Father of a Family", whose note relating to the bathing at Margate appears in your paper of this date. The exhibition is truly disgusting but what is more disgusting still is the

(52) Saturday Review, 30 August 1856, p.391.

(53) quoted in J.Walvin, op.cit., p.69.

fact that these exhibitions are witnessed daily by large numbers of ladies, who spend their mornings in close proximity to scores of naked men. I can only account for this by supposing them all to be artists, and that they are studying from the life. The whole affair is most abominable, and ought to be abated. Surely if a Society for the Suppression of Vice exists here is ample scope for its exertion.

AN EYE WITNESS (54)

This particular correspondence was the starting point for various journals' discussion of bathing conduct, including the Saturday Review article already cited. Such material cannot be offered as 'source material' for Frith's painting, since it appeared two years after the completion of the picture. It is useful as evidence of attitudes current in the years of the production and original exposure of the image, and there does not seem to be any indication of a major shift of attitudes on this question in the broad period 1840-1860.

In the columns of Punch in 1856 the discussion took the form of a report on a fictitious lecture by a Professor Snuffin on the effects of salt. The lecture noted the toughening effect of brine on bacon, and moved on to describe the effect of seaside salt on women.

Salt did confer upon the female system, a hardness and rigidity of fibre, moral and physical, unknown to the same constitution when located in the Metropolis or in any of the midland districts. (55)

He concludes that the phenomenon of ladies sitting close to the sea when bathing was taking place, was due to the 'emboldening process of merum salum'. The female audience decide to present Professor Snuffin with a handsome testimonial salt-cellar,

(54) The Times, 23 August 1856.

(55) Punch, vol.XXI, 20 September 1856, p.113.

formed as a silver-gilt statue of Lot's wife. Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt because she broke the injunction not to look.

LOT'S WIFE: CASTRATION FEAR AND DISAVOWAL

The context in which the legend of Lot's wife is invoked is one in which social, moral sanctions are brought to bear on individuals who witness a forbidden, indecent display. This context of knowledge and censorship encourages us to investigate the psychoanalytic structures mobilised by the myth. A psychoanalytic reading of the legend would have to connect the fearful punishment for illicit looking with the threat of castration involved in viewing the female genitals. Lot himself escapes, but the woman looks and is punished. The punishment itself would confirm to Lot the fearful sight and knowledge he was avoiding, if it consisted in the castrating of the woman, but, instead of a death symbolising castration, she is given a death that makes her into a permanent phallic object, so for Lot the disavowal of female castration can continue. This is a variation on Freud's reading of the Medusa's head myth. He explained the terror aroused by the Medusa as 'a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something'. This terror is identified with the terror of a boy when he sees the female genitals and interprets them as evidence of castration. The hair surrounding them is transformed, in the myth, into snakes, which are phallic symbols, and so mitigate the fear. A similar mitigation of fear is involved in the legend of the turning to stone.

The sight of the Medusa's head makes the spectator stiff

with terror, turns him to stone. Observe that we have once again the same origin from the castration complex and the same transformation effect! For becoming stiff means an erection. Thus in the original situation it offers consolation to the spectator: he is still in possession of a penis, and the stiffening reassures him of the fact.(56)

In the case of Lot the consoling stiffness is in his wife rather than in himself. I hope to show that in Frith's painting Ramsgate Sands there is a prohibition on female looking, analogous to the prohibition in the story of Lot and his wife, and a concomitant enactment of punishment which makes it possible for the picture to allow a limited degree of safe looking. In this respect it is very different from the direct confrontation of the male viewer with a dangerous view that I suggest, in later chapters of this thesis, is the effect of The Awakening Conscience and of Omnibus Life In London.

RAMSGATE: THE LOCATION OF THE BATHING BEACHES

The choice of Ramsgate for this seaside scene makes the issue of bathing particularly relevant. Bathing was restricted to sandy beaches where bathing machines could move in and out of the water. Among the Kent resorts Ramsgate was distinguished by the limited extent of its beach. The central section of the town's sea edge was taken up by the harbour, enclosed by two piers. On one side of the harbour was the West Cliff, characterised by rocky outcrops at sea level. On the other side was the East Cliff, and the beach at the foot of that cliff was sandy, but only for about a third of a mile, until more rocks interrupted the sands. This stretch of sand, close to the harbour wall, is

(56) S.Freud, 'Medusa's Head', (1940), Works, Standard Edition, Vol.18, ed. J.Strachey, London, Hogarth Press, 1955, p.272.

the site of the scene in Frith's picture. The disposition of sand and rocks can be seen quite clearly in the 1858-73 Ordnance Survey map of Kent (fig.5). Into this short stretch was concentrated the beach for adults to sit, and for children to play, which was combined with the beach for female bathing, and, a little further to the east, the beach for male bathing. This geographical limitation was pointed out in a magazine survey of the different Kent resorts in 1853.

The worst of Margate as a bathing-place is, that the beach is very shallow. But its extent is far greater on either side of the town than that of Ramsgate; and probably from this circumstance it is that the Margatians are enabled to bathe with far more decency than the Ramsgatians, who really on some occasions, seem to leave all sense of delicacy behind them in their bathing machines....[In Ramsgate] the morning bathing, when comparatively few people are on the beach is pleasant and comfortable; but the scene when it is highwater at noon, or later, is of a description which would give a stranger a strange idea of Ramsgate delicacy. The ladies bathe nearest the pier, and the space between them and the gentlemen is often not more than the width of two machines. (57)

On the left of the Frith painting is a wall which marks the beginning of the East Pier. Several masts of ships can be seen behind the wall, in the harbour or in the dry dock. On the right of the picture are some bathing machines which indicate the start of the ladies' bathing area. The shadows point almost due north, so it is close to noon, and the time shown on the clock tower in the harbour seems to be one o'clock, so the picture is set at the most crowded bathing time. A Punch description links Ramsgate with a particularly crowded beach, with women witnessing indecent bathing, and (by means of a facetious denial) asserts the immodesty and culpability of these women.

(57) Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, vol. XX, 12 November 1853, p.306.

So dense is the crowd, that it extends to the very edge of the beautiful lace-borders that the sea draws on the sand with each new wave it unrolls for inspection. OUR SEA-SIDE CORRESPONDENT comes to the conclusion that there must be a dreadful want of accommodation at Ramsgate, or else he is positive, as the bathing takes place on the sands, that ladies would never think of going there if there was any other place within reasonable distance where they could possibly go. The town is so overflowing, that their mammas and daughters are driven to the sea-shore as the only bit of unoccupied ground, and so are compelled to be involuntary spectators of sights they would much rather not see. The authorities should devise some measures for preventing the modesty of women from being shocked in this manner. (58)

These associations of Ramsgate, and particularly of this bathing beach, would seem to threaten the propriety of Frith's image. There is the possibility that the middle class ladies sitting on the beach could be read as immodest women, salaciously viewing nude male bathers out to the right of the picture. They could be read as the embittered old maids of the cartoon, 'SIX OF ONE AND HALF A DOZEN OF THE OTHER', which appeared in Punch in 1856.(59) The old ladies sit and stare disapprovingly at a man in the sea, not acknowledging that their staring is at least as blameworthy as his nudity (fig.6).

THE REGULATION OF THE FEMALE GAZE

Ramsgate Sands does not allow these readings because nearly all the female glances in the picture are innocent. The vendors

(58) Punch, vol. XXXV, 11 Sep 1858, p.103.

(59) This thesis frequently cites engravings from illustrated periodicals such as Punch in connection with the themes and concerns of the oil paintings under discussion. These citations are not intended to indicate that the engravings are 'sources' for the paintings, nor are the brief descriptions intended to stand as adequate accounts of the complexities of these representations. Specific motifs are picked out, or visual parallels indicated, in order to clarify particular issues. The comic mode of Punch means that it consistently picks out the embarrassing and the socially deviant.

in the picture provide occasions for the women sitting on the beach to turn their attention from the sea to some harmless diversion. The entertainer with a tall Italian hat, kneeling at the very centre of the front row of characters, and the group of finely dressed ladies to his right are the main instance of this. The ladies are young, and, from the pale colours of their dresses, unmarried except for the woman on the left, and so especially to be protected from immodesty. These women are staring, but not at an indecent display; all their faces are turned away from the direction of the bathing and they are looking at two little white mice belonging to the entertainer, who also has a guinea pig on his shoulder. A woman on the far left of the picture has turned her attention to the sailor with a parrot on his arm, behind her. A young woman, perhaps a nursemaid, on the right is fascinated by a hawker or publicist distributing handbills, on which the word 'magic' can be made out. There is a mother on the left of the picture who is staring, similarly entranced, at her child who is standing on a chair, reaching out its little hands. Most of the women in the picture have dropped their eyes to look at the crochet work they are doing, the novels they are reading, or at the children they are in charge of. The aristocratic looking old lady just to the left of centre seems to have closed her eyes and to be dozing. There are only four exceptions among some thirty five women. The young widow in black in the left foreground whose eyes are hidden by her parasol, and the young lady further back, to the left of the naval looking gentleman, both have their heads raised slightly and their faces turned to the right. The widow's glance may be directed at the young man in brown at her side, and the

other young lady seems to be watching her companion's reaction to the naval gentleman. These glances are tied in with the local narrative interest of small groups within the picture, and suggestions of romance and grief. They cannot be said to be significant exceptions from the general presentation of female figures in the picture.

There are two other figures in the picture which do not follow the formula used elsewhere. These are two elderly ladies; one on the left being offered a pottery figure, probably a toy, but identified as a Mandarin in one review (60), and the other on the right, behind and to the left of the widow. She has her parasol set up at an eccentric angle. These two do seem to be deliberate exceptions to the formula, and they are mirror images of each other on the two extremes of the picture, one looking and one not looking. Their mouths are set in the same obstinate grim expression. They both appear to be women alone, not tied in to family groups as we see elsewhere. They function as an essential reference to the theme of witnessing outrageous nudity. The Frith picture is not one that avoids the theme; its very setting insists upon it. Instead it allows the warning figure of Lot's wife to appear on the margins of the picture. If these two old ladies are mirror images of one another, the one on the right who is looking out to the bathing area is a faint reflection. She is far more sketchily drawn in than the other figures at that level of recession. The effect of placing her in front of the more carefully finished naval looking man is that a trick is played

(60) Athenaeum, 6 May 1854, p. 560.

with the perspective. He seems to come forward, and she is made to recede into a non-existent space. Such spatial inconsistency is most unusual for Frith. This almost effaced image is in marked contrast to the solid presence of the woman ignoring the toby jug seller. The obvious joke of this, of course, is that her stiff posture and dumpy shape resemble the pottery figure. If we read the picture psychoanalytically, in terms of the danger of looking, she is not refusing to look. She has already looked and has been turned to stone. She sits directly below the stone obelisk, which marks her as the object of punishment, where castration has been commuted to fetishisation, and has transformed her into a pillar of salt.

The animation and absorption of the other female figures in the picture is dependent on their strict adherence to the injunction not to look. Their pursuit of feminine activities, (childcare, needlework, novel reading), is therefore given an overtone of compulsion. The painting starts from the joke that women are amusing in their complete commitment to specifically female activities. The Punch cartoon of young women listening with bated breath as one of them reads out a crochet pattern is part of the same amused incomprehension of the fanaticism of female enthusiasms (fig.7). The pattern is like a foreign language or an unknown code for any man. Within the framework of Frith's picture this joke does exist, but alongside is a threat to the female figures that is the pictorial equivalent of the actual compulsions and prohibitions entailed in social constraints upon female behaviour.

MALE VOYEURS

There are fewer men than women among the visitors on the beach in Ramsgate Sands: only just over half the number. These figures are not under the constraints put on the women. If we look at the 'front row' of men we see that all the gentlemen are turned in the direction of the bathing area, and those at the sides of the picture are overtly staring towards it. The man in the middle is reading a paper, and the man in brown is staring out to sea, but with a vague, unfocused gaze. On the far left of the picture the man has a telescope and is pointing it at the bathing area, and on the right two gentlemen look in that direction, one of them holding up his monocle, and the other turning his head round to look. This group on the right was more strongly marked in the initial sketches for the picture. The mother and child and the female bathing attendant are only present in the final version. In the pencil sketch there are two male figures standing alone on the right (fig.8). In the oil sketch there are three gentlemen, and a smaller figure behind (fig.9). The status of this man is hard to determine, since all we see is his face and half of his hat, and he does not participate in their ogling. In the progression from pencil sketch to finished version, the man with a monocle is gradually made less important. In the pencil sketch he is much more strongly indicated than the figure on his right, and he stands further forward than any other figure in the picture. In the oil sketch he has been moved back slightly, to the same level as the little girl paddling, but he still stands out, by virtue of the outline of his figure, and of his cane, against the empty sand behind. All the other figures

in the sketch have their outlines swallowed up by the way he figures are clustered. The addition of a third gentleman to this group also makes the group as a whole a strongly emphasised feature. In the finished picture these male figures have been moved even further back, they are reduced to two again, and they are masked by the two females and the child in front of them. The effect is to make the theme of male voyeurism more muted. What had been the dominant element becomes, in the final version, a more subdued reference.

I have suggested that some reassurance is offered to the male looker by the transference of the problem onto the female looker within the picture. The resolution of the Lot story, in particular, offered a reassuring fetishistic transformation which seems to be enacted by two of the figures in Ramsgate Sands. The whole point of this is to enable the male viewer to gain pleasure from looking and to minimise the fear and threat involved. The presence of patently voyeuristic males within the picture signals that this is indeed possible. The act never becomes entirely safe, and that is why the male voyeurs are relegated to a marginal position. Also the activity of staring at women bathers was not entirely socially acceptable. A letter to The Times in 1850 accused men who stared through telescopes, or even hired boats to get a closer view, of being 'brutal', and ungentlemanly.(61) A collusion with these figures emerges from the picture but it is a cautious collusion. In terms of the narrative the object of their scrutiny is the bathing outside the

(61) The Times, 4 September 1850.

picture. In terms of the viewing of the picture a position is constructed from which the male viewer can safely admire the female beauties in the painting. This is further facilitated by elaborate precautions turning on the notion of the veiled female bather.

THE CONDUCT OF FEMALE BATHING

Despite the widespread use of bathing costumes for women, women's bathing provoked its share of anxious commentary in the mid-nineteenth century. There was an anxiety that women might be seen by men, parallel but not identical to the commentary on women seeing men bathing. One aspect of this was that women's conduct in bathing was often stated to be immodest. Complete immersion in deep water guaranteed modesty, but this was not feasible if the sea was rough, and the Observer published this account of women bathing in such conditions:

[on rough days] the females do not venture beyond the surf, and lay themselves on their backs, waiting for the incoming waves, with their bathing dresses in a most degage style. The waves come, and in the majority of instances, not only cover the fair bathers, but literally carry their dresses up to their neck, so that as far as decency is concerned, they might as well be without any dresses at all. (62)

Even in calm weather women could display themselves if they jumped in and out of the water, as the wet costumes would cling to their bodies. This was the problem identified as particularly acute at Ramsgate, where the bathing was so close to the part of the beach used for sitting.

The portion of the beach apportioned to the ladies [for bathing] is perfectly crammed both with ladies and gentlemen of every age, sitting in long rows of chairs, or pushing

(62) Observer, 1856, quoted in J.Walvin, op.cit., p.71.

about, and not five yards from the lady-bathers; who, on their part, jump up and down, and splash each other, apparently with a perfect disregard of the crowd of spectators, male and female. Frequent complaints are made in that grand depository of grievances, the Times, generally signed 'The Father of a Family', of the bathing doings at Ramsgate, and especially of the disgraceful practice of using telescopes with perfect sang-froid and freedom. (63)

Guilt is attributed both to male viewers and to female bathers, in contrast to the pattern of exclusive blame on female viewers in the case of (middle class) men bathing.

There is an underlying suggestion that women deliberately sought to display themselves in order to attract male admiration. This is not surprising given the constantly recurring attribution of this motive to women, not just in nineteenth century British sources but from ancient times throughout western culture. The way this is worked out in the material relating to bathing is interesting. A cartoon in Punch shows a view down the beach at Ramsgate towards the harbour (fig.10). The obelisk can be seen on the right. A young woman bather is teasing her short-sighted aunt by making her believe that two dummies used as archery targets are in fact officers rudely staring at them. Part of the joke lies in the idea that the reason the elderly aunt is so easily fooled is that she is indulging in wishful thinking, and that she hopes to be looked at, despite the fact that real officers would have no interest in her unattractive figure. Another cartoon, 'THE RACE FOR THE BATHING MACHINE', shows young ladies hurrying down to the beach to secure bathing machines (fig.11). The results of the race are given as 'ALICE FIRST, CLARA SECOND, MISS TODDLES A BAD THIRD; AND THE REST NOWHERE'.

(63) Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, vol. XX, 12 Nov 1853, p.307.

Attention to the faces and figures of these young ladies shows that the race is for something more. The winners are the prettiest, Miss Toddles is too stout to be pretty, and wears a hat that was fashionable two years earlier, the other ladies coming down the path have big chins or receding foreheads. The race is evidently the race for an admirer, punned with the race for the opportunity to display their bodies in the sea. The other way in which Punch alluded to women bathing was by referring to the way women remained bare-headed and allowed their long hair to hang loose while it dried after bathing. This is jokingly referred to as irresistably attractive, and Punch characterises these women with loose hair as mermaids. It is noteworthy that in a scene entitled 'THE MERMAIDS' HAUNT' where most of the girls are busy with needlework, sketching, novel reading, or fossil hunting, the two central figures stare directly out of the picture at the viewer, in a complete contrast to the young ladies of the painting Ramsgate Sands (fig.12). These women are sitting among the rocks in reference to the legends of sirens luring sailors to their death on rocks. In the nineteenth century there was an association between sirens, or mermaids, and prostitutes, which, while it is not brought out in this image, may be operating on some level within the intimation that the young ladies are not as innocent as they look.(64) In one other cartoon the figure of Punch is drawn by the enticing loose hair of a woman to approach stealthily, and to try to snip off a lock. What he has not noticed is the fish tail that peeps

(64) see below Chapter Three on the associations of sirens with the woman in The Awakening Conscience.

out from beneath her dress (fig.13). I would suggest that the playful identification of the loose-haired women as mermaids is linked, via the idea that they have been in the water, to the frightening knowledge of their physical shape that might be received by any man who sees them bathing.

SYSTEMATIC VEILING IN RAMSGATE SANDS

In Ramsgate Sands there is no free-flowing long hair to indicate that the women have been bathing. In this respect, as in many others, the picture contrasts with the view of Ramsgate Sands by W.McConnell, published in the Illustrated Times in 1856 (fig.14) There a number of women have their hair loose under their bonnets, notably the independent looking young woman who is carrying a folding chair or an easel and is walking unchaperoned off to the right of the picture. The point is emphasised by some of the vignettes on the opposite page (fig.15), one of which shows a young lady's hairstyle "before and after bathing". Another shows four women with bare heads and loose hair "bobbing around in the sea" - a practice which, as we have noted, met with disapproval as the bathers were exposed when they jumped up. To reemphasise the point a third vignette shows a man holding a monocle and grinning. This is captioned "The gentleman who passed the morning near the ladies' bathing machines". In Frith's painting of Ramsgate Sands the fact that the young ladies may have been bathing is not alluded to. The female figures are, without exception, bonneted, and in many cases they are further covered by a parasol, or by a cloth draped over a bonnet. This shrouding of the figures, which extends, to a lesser extent, to the men, is particularly emphasised by the way some heads are

partially hidden by the parasols, as the widow's is on the right of the picture. Other heads are completely hidden, for example the woman in the centre of the picture, just behind the centrally placed man reading his newspaper. All we see of her is the front of her green parasol, part of a pink dress, and her hands holding a novel. This blocking of a figure right in the middle of a composition almost amounts to a joke, especially when it is compared to the ingenuity with which background figures are displayed to the viewer in other elaborate compositions by Frith. In Coming of Age in Olden Times (1849), for example, figures are stacked one above the other in pyramids, so that the full variety of character and incident are accessible to the viewer (fig.16). The child hoisted onto his father's shoulder forms the apex of one group, the man at the top of the steps another, and the young man standing up on the table holding out his drinking goblet a third. The extra recession afforded by the open gateway to the courtyard makes possible the view of still more characters. Nearly every face is turned towards the front of the picture.

Ramsgate Sands is not devoid of these compositional devices, but there does seem to be a deliberate, thematic veiling of figures. If we look at the figures to the left of the pink dressed lady hidden by her parasol, for example, we see a whole series of obscurations. The man beside her has his face hidden by his brown hat tipped forward. The father and child behind him have turned away to look at the performing hare, so all we see of them is the back of their hats. Below them the large brown umbrella hides the eyes of the personal servant who holds it. The old lady whom it shades has closed her eyes. To the left of

them there is one young lady's face which we can see, but we only see it beneath three successive parasols, which are painted overlapping one another. Next to her the woman's head is completely hidden, further to the left a young lady has half her face hidden by the cloth over her bonnet, and beside her a gentleman is completely hidden by his copy of the Illustrated London News.

The cumulative effect is of a scene where everything is draped and partially masked. The predominant shape is the overhanging curve of the parasol, which is echoed by the shapes of women's cloaks, or tasselled shawls hanging over their dresses, and by their bonnets hanging over their faces. In the foreground group of a child paddling we see the skirts of the mother and of the child lifted to form yet more overhanging canopies. The same effect is produced by the child to their left, seen from behind, whose skirts make a cloth frame for his or her lacy pantaloons. The inanimate objects in the picture also tie in with this overall pattern. The hooded fronts of the bathing machines, in particular, offer a visual parallel. (Their inclusion in the pencil sketch, which otherwise consisted exclusively of figures, is an indication of their importance.) Similarly the green coverings pulled down over the balconies on the houses behind, the green window shades pulled out over windows, and the buff blinds pulled part of the way down inside many windows are visual echoes. Even the bunched up curtains hanging above the legs of the Punch and Judy stage might be said to participate in this. One final aspect of the background is the way the harbour wall continues right across the picture, from the group on the far

left to the foot of the Harbour Police buildings below the castellated Pier Castle. This is not in itself particularly remarkable, but it forms an interesting contrast to the oil sketch, where a gate in the wall was open, and showed an area of recession at the back of the picture, opening out to the foot of the obelisk. This would have been equivalent to the gateway in Coming of Age In Olden Times. In the finished picture the gate is closed, it has been moved to the right, and is behind a pile of masonry, so there is no chance of it opening.

In a slightly different way, the building alongside the Punch and Judy booth relates to the theme of covering up bathers, because, on the front can be seen the signs 'BAZAAR', 'ROYAL BATHS' and 'HARLING FOXE'S WARM SHOWER B[aths]'. Entirely decorous indoor sea bathing was possible in establishments like this. There was another one in Ramsgate, below the West Cliff, called the Paragon Baths, built in 1814-17. The fashion for these baths declined, perhaps as a result of a shift in medical opinion, which, by mid-century, was putting an increasing stress on breathing sea air, and experiencing the motion of sea water as well as on the chemical effects of drinking it, and being submerged in it.(65) The Paragon Baths had closed down by the late 1850s.(66)

By these means Ramsgate Sands denies that shocking exposure of the female body was possible in sea bathing. By the force of its denial it also asserts the possibility. The visual punning of

(65) J.Walvin, op.cit., p.66.

(66) R.S.Holmes, op.cit., p.92.

head coverings and bathing machine hoods in particular make the picture at once insistently refer to bathing and yet deny exposure. The hood of a bathing machine was important in preventing the bather being seen as he or she moved in or out of the water. A.B.Granville deplored the lack of hoods on Brighton bathing machines in 1841, saying that male bathers hesitating on the steps of their machines before taking the plunge were wholly exposed

owing to the want of hood that ought to project over the steps, as is the case at all decent sea-bathing places.
(67)

We can therefore read the pervasive hood shapes in the picture as the guarantee of decency. The pun between the bonnet hood and the bathing machine is made explicit in a Punch cartoon from 1849. The folding rim of the silk bonnets that many of the women in Ramsgate Sands are wearing was ridiculed, in the form it took in 1849. It proposes the absurd notion is that a lady could stand in the water, extend the folds of her bonnet hood, and make a shelter under which her naked children could bathe (fig.17) The point is reinforced by the way the hoods of the bathing machines behind her echo the shape of her bonnet. The rocks of the cliffs are given watching eyes and the man with his telescope stands by, stressing the necessity for protection against voyeurs. In 1854, another style of seaside hat is the subject of several cartoons, which do not allude specifically to bathing but which continue the theme of hoods and voyeurism in a seaside context. One shows a mother using her broad rimmed hat as a sunshade for an entire donkey-carriage load of children, including a grown up daughter,

(67) A.B.Granville, op.cit., p.562.

who we can presume is being protected from improper glances as well as from the sun (fig.18). A second shows an 'ugly' lady whose broad brimmed hat has induced two 'gents' to believe her a beauty, and they are following her, hoping to get a glimpse (fig.19). A third shows a young lady and gentleman sitting close together, and both benefiting from the shade of her hat (fig.20). Their intimate closeness is sanctioned by the shading function of her hat, and partly obscured from the public view by it. In all these examples the issues of propriety, and of the visible and the obscured are involved. Ramsgate Sands addresses the same issues and the legibility of its discussion depends on the existence of this sort of representation.

VOYEURISM MADE SAFE

The nearest Ramsgate Sands gets to women with hair streaming in the wind is the hair in ringlets that appears from under the bonnet of one of the young ladies watching the white mice. It is fitting that she show this vestigial sign (of the female bather) because she is the most prominent example of female beauty in the picture. She is made a particular focus of attention by the disposition of pale and dark colours, and of light and shade across the picture. As such she is the object of the viewer's voyeurism. But we have seen how the theme is subdued. Those men looking out to the female bathing area are pushed to the edges of the picture and slightly back from the foreground. The primary incident on the left is not the middle aged man staring through his telescope, but the boy in front who is playing at looking out to sea. His right eye is open, not closed to enable him to look through the telescope, and he seems to be staring straight out at

the viewer, rather than in the direction in which his telescope points. His expression is humorous, and he almost gives the impression of winking. The effect is that the action of the adult - potentially construed as improper - is presented in a softened, jokey way through the presence of the child. Similarly the possibility of female bathers is introduced in a humorous way via the figures of children. The paddling child is the main instance of this. In this figure we see bare flesh, and the legs are reflected in the film of water below. For all the veiling and hiding of figures elsewhere in the picture, this figure shows that revelation is possible for the voyeur. The skirts of the child may form a hood, but we are allowed to see beneath it. The safe pleasure in viewing the child is equivalent to the safe pleasure in contemplating the young lady with ringlets, or the face of the woman that can be seen below three layers of overlapping parasols.

On the right of the picture the motif of the adult leaning over the child is repeated twice, once where the assiduous donkey man picks up the child of the couple harrassed by various competing donkey owners, and in the foreground where a bathing woman leans over to pick up a reluctant child. These two sets of figures link the paddling child specifically to the question of bathing. The donkey man's action mimics the dipping in and out of the water performed by bathing attendants, and the bathing woman's presence directly refers to it. Her big nose and her lined face, and the child's frightened reaction, recall the 1850 Punch cartoon where a huge, hideous bathing woman is coaxing a small boy to bathe (fig.21). He is kicking and screaming,

obviously terrified. The paddling child is a moderated version of the child on the right. The fear of the child on the right, that can be read via the Punch image as outright panic, is converted into wide eyed uncertainty in the centre. The threatening approach of a strange lower-class woman is replaced by the reassuring guidance of the family governess, nurse or humble relation, and the comforting presence of the supervising mother. Finally, of course, the threat of actual bathing is softened to mere paddling. The paddling child is an emblem of the modesty and veiling required of women, and at the same time of the permissibility of looking voyeuristically at the female. This satisfactory (for the male viewer) combination is achieved at the price of the acknowledgement of the fact of exposure, on the margins of the picture: so that the denial in the centre is known to be disingenuous. This achievement is parallel to the satisfactory way that the picture achieves the obedient dropped eyes of the women it includes, by the enactment of disobedience and punishment in minor figures. The formulation of Ramsgate Sands can be seen to be considerably more complex than any characterisation of it as 'a mirror of the world', or even as a distorting ideological mirror, would suggest.

DEBARRING SOCIAL INFERIORS

The harrassment by the donkey owners, and the approach of the lower-class bathing attendant introduce the question of how Ramsgate Sands represents the relationship between the middle class visitors and others. The thematic veiling and blocking from sight of figures has other connotations than those already explored relating to bathing. The enclosed space below a parasol

or bonnet, or behind a novel or newspaper was, in a small way, private space that offered its inhabitant some protection from the possibility of dangerous or polluting contact with social inferiors. The allocation of exact class descriptions to the non-middle-class figures in Ramsgate Sands is problematic. The picture rarely allows the figures to be construed with more precision than to call them lower-class. Street or beach traders may have been members of families engaged in fishing, or employed at other times of the year in other occupations, either locally in the town, in the surrounding agricultural districts or in the metropolis. Hawkers and proprietors of bathing machines, or donkeys, may, technically speaking, have been petit bourgeois, but an overall understanding of their economic position might place them more accurately as members of the working class, or of the lumpen proletariat. The composition of Ramsgate Sands is extremely crowded, but it is a crowd where privacy is not violated. It is interesting to contrast it in this respect with the way crowding is presented in Omnibus Life In London. (68) This feature of the picture was noticed in one review in 1854, in the central group of young ladies watching the mice.

That family in the centre are remarkable for their exclusiveness; at Peckham, their garden wall is higher than that of anybody else; and here they turn their backs upon everybody, living as it were within a ring-fence. The papa wears his slippers and reads the Times. The mama, who is yet pretty, shades her complexion with what the boatmen call a "main top-gallant stu'n-sail" of blue silk to her bonnet. The young ladies read Bulwer and Disraeli, and keep worrying their matter of fact father for the newspaper to look over the list of marriages. (69)

This links turned backs and lowered bonnet hoods with high walls

(68) see below, Chapter Four.

(69) Art Journal, June 1854, p.161

and exclusive private dwellings in a way that resembles the link made above between aspects of the posture and presentation of the figures, and some of the architectural details in the picture. A Ramsgate local historian, writing in the 1880s, spoke of the disputes that arose over access and right of way when the cliff top terraces of Ramsgate were first erected. The example he gives is of Nelson Crescent (built 1798-1801) and Prospect Terrace, which were on the West Cliff, the other side of the harbour from the scene of Frith's painting, though the name of Nelson Crescent is mentioned in the Art Journal review. It says there

If we look up we can catch a glimpse of the crescents rejoicing in the names of Nelson and Wellington. (70)

The last few houses of Wellington Crescent can be seen in the top right hand corner of Frith's painting. The dispute between Nelson Crescent and Prospect Terrace was a lengthy one.

After the laying out of the two properties for building, jealousies and continued disputes upon the matter arose, insomuch that the Nelson Crescent people at one time built a brick wall 10 to 12 feet high in order to obstruct the view of those in Prospect Terrace, in resentment and retaliation for some trespass or annoyance the Nelson Crescent people were supposed to have sustained. After many attempts, in vain, to push it down or pull it down, a gale of wind suddenly laid it low, when a compromise was effected by which a wall or partition, breast high, was erected, surmounted by dwarf iron spikes, a way being left at each end, interrupted by posts, for the passage of pedestrians. At the end towards the cliff there were three posts, the centre one being fitted with a hinge for any emergency. (71)

This story is suggestive in many ways, and it makes a specific connection between maintaining status and blocking the gaze of outsiders. The anecdote may have had some currency in the 1850s,

(70) *ibid.*

(71) Richardson, 1885, quoted in R.S.Holmes, *op.cit.*, p.56-7.

but in any case, the physical remains of posts and partitions would have spoken of the exclusiveness of these cliff top properties. They were the areas in Ramsgate with the highest social tone in mid-century, according to Robin Holmes's study, based on census returns and rate books for Ramsgate from 1851-71. He looks at such factors as servant keeping, number of male household heads in social class I, and degree of owner occupancy, and demonstrates that the cliff top properties showed a concentration of Ramsgate's most affluent residents. In 1851 the West Cliff was rather more fashionable than the East Cliff, but by 1871 the East Cliff had caught up.(72) The cliff top properties shown in Frith's Ramsgate Sands are buildings from Ramsgate's most fashionable era, when the resort was patronised by the military and by aristocracy and royalty. Wellington Crescent, on the far right of the painting was built 1819-22, East Cliff House beside it in c.1823, and the house-end that can be seen above the central terrace is of a house in Albion Place, which was commenced in 1789.(73) 'Nelson' and 'Wellington' are not just names that evoke British military heroics, but also an era in Ramsgate's history. The social tone of Ramsgate was especially high during the Napoleonic Wars, when it was regularly used for troop embarkation, notably for the battle of Waterloo. There were barracks and officers quarters on the West Cliff until the troops were withdrawn in 1819. The high concentration of officers made the town socially attractive, and in 1802, for example, The Times reported the presence in Ramsgate of 41

(72) R.S.Holmes, op.cit., p.2267-322.

(73) N.Pevsner, Architectural Review, September 1956.

persons of note, and that a society dinner and ball, with eighty guests had included two Dukes, three Duchesses, a Marquis, two Earls and a Countess.(74) In the following year the Princess of Wales took a house at Ramsgate for six months in the summer. At this stage the Marquis Wellesley lived in Albion Place, and East Cliff was the permanent residence of Lady d'Ameland. These associations of the Wellington and Nelson Crescents fit rather oddly with the notion of the garden wall in Peckham, conjured up for the Art Journal reviewer by the family group in Ramsgate Sands. Mid-nineteenth century Peckham was not a centre of high fashion, but a comfortable middle class suburb of London. The gentility and exclusivity conveyed by the family group is on rather a reduced scale. They are conceived of as living in a row of houses, uniform except for the height of garden wall. Nonetheless the effect registered by the Art Journal is not one of bathos. There is a sense in which these bourgeois figures are recognised by the picture - and acknowledged by this review - as the proper successors to the aristocracy of the early century, and the national bearers of the tradition of Wellington and Nelson. A gently satirical attitude towards them is combined with complacence at their typical Britishness. This complacence can only be achieved because the picture exercises such careful control over elements and associations of the scene that might render these representatives of the nation socially unfit for their position.

(74) R.S.Holmes, op. cit., p.68-72.

THE CLASS MIX OF SEASIDE RESORTS

The reputation of Ramsgate as a select resort militated in favour of this control, and its royal associations were particularly important in this respect because they persisted beyond the Napoleonic War period. These two points, and the way in which the harbour establishment crystallised these aspects of the town are topics that I will return to. However just as much as the picture had an identity as 'Ramsgate', it had an identity as 'metropolitan seaside resort'. In fact the title of the picture in the Royal Academy catalogue in 1854 was Life at the Sea-Side, with the town unspecified. It shares with Frith's painting of 1858, Derby Day, the characteristic of being a scene, that while it is set outside the city, at some distance from London, nevertheless unmistakably portrays metropolitan leisure. The seaside was known as a popular destination for many classes of city dwellers, for lower-middle-class and working-class day trippers as well as for families that could afford to take apartments by the week or for the season. Brighton was a resort that had particularly good rail links with London. Huge numbers of trippers descended on the town in the holiday season. Over 73,000 passengers were reported to have travelled to Brighton in one week in May 1850, and 132,000 people on a single Easter Monday in 1862.(75) The influx of working-class, and lower-middle-class, trippers to other resorts was not quite so great, and the social profile of individual towns varied, but all the resorts around London experienced an expansion in the number of

(75) J.Walvin, op.cit., pp.39 and 156.

visitors in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The social life of the resorts no longer consisted entirely of assemblies, balls and concerts that were controlled by a master of ceremonies who would exclude social inferiors. The expanded social provision included such facilities as theatres, museums, Cosmoramas, band performances on piers and promenades, firework displays, balloon ascents, bazaars selling fancy goods, and outdoor dancing. An article on Brighton in 1857 differentiated between visitors of different ranks. It listed 'peers, judges, bishops, blase ladies of fashion and overworked barristers' and Jewish stockbrokers, comfortable tradesmen and their families, 'smart young men from the banking houses and city commercial firms', and further down in the social scale 'milliners out for a holiday', authors, out of work actors, and finally 'honest toilers and workers'.(76) It was acknowledged that the social spectrum at the seaside could be complete. The respectable classes could be separated from 'low' day-trippers by forms of zoning within the resort. In Brighton for instance the upper classes kept to the promenade, while the lower classes spread out picnics on the beach. In Scarborough the two bays attracted two distinct kinds of clientele. But among such large numbers of visitors and across such a wide spectrum of class positions it was still possible that there might be some dilution or infiltration of the genteel holiday makers by individuals who belonged lower down the social scale, and who lacked either the money or the manners or breeding considered proper to the social sphere they had invaded. In heterogeneous company anxieties

(76) Illustrated Times, 8 August 1857, p.103.

arose as to the suitability of social contacts that might be made. Since the seaside was an area for middle class family leisure, there was special concern over the possibility of young marriageable daughters forming unsuitable romantic attachments. This is alluded to in an article that compares 'refined' Broadstairs with Ramsgate.

There is Ramsgate again; a most delightful town, full of gaiety and life, with excellent bathing and moderate lodgings; but the giggling and flirting that daily take place on those terrible sands, are enough to frighten a mamma into a nervous fever. Those sands are one mile in length, picturesquely interspersed with jutting rocks, behind which a young lady might remain talking for hours with the most imprudent of matches, whilst an anxious parent was vainly sweeping the view with her pocket telescope, or fluttering over the ground, with the agony of a disturbed partridge seeking for its chick. Men dressed in checks, who can give none on their bankers; youths who carry all their gold in their watch-chains; bachelors who are ready to borrow half-crowns abound on that yellow shore. The Goodwins, seen in the distance, are not more fatal to the Pollys of Newcastle or the Marys of Liverpool, than are the Ramsgate sands to the Annettas of Eaton Place or the Lucilles of Russell Square, who when once "struck" on this dangerous coast, soon find their prospects in life wrecked, and become completely lost to the world of fashion and ton.(77)

RAMSGATE SANDS: FROM THE BANAL TO THE FANTASTIC

Commentary on the painting, Ramsgate Sands, showed some anxiety about the social identity of the seaside group in the painting, about which Londoners were portrayed. The way this anxiety surfaces and is subdued can be examined in the class labels attached to the figures by the critics, and by their choice of the term 'cockney', and their transformation of it into 'Cockaigne'. 'Cockney' is a word that appears in reviews of

(77) Illustrated Times, 29 August 1857, p.154.

Ramsgate Sands in Punch in 1854, where it is called 'a cockney dolce far niente (78), and in both the Art Journal and the Athenaeum in 1859, the year that the engraving after the picture, by C.W. Sharpe was published. (79) The Art Journal said that Ramsgate Sands was

a marvellous exhibition of the bright and happy side of Cockneydom.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'cockney' as a description of Londoners is 'always more or less contemptuous or bantering', and many nineteenth century examples are given, including such formulations as 'cockney chatter' and 'cockney conceit'. (80) Such descriptions imply a lack of education and dignity and give a class specificity to the term that it carries in a more exaggerated form today. The review of the engraving in the Athenaeum returns to the word 'cockney' on several occasions.

The picture, with all its defects, its shallow, unfeeling view of life, its restricted cockney atmosphere and disagreeable foot-light peculiarities, was, in spite of the point of view, a clever and full picture, - it is interesting from the fact of its being the first of a series of pictures evidently planned by Mr. Frith as modified photographs of the social aspect of our present century in its wisdom and in its folly. He began with Ramsgate, - the cockney's Paradise, - and went on to Epsom - the rascal's heaven.

The picture is said to be full of 'acute but unloving views of cockney human nature' and the review concludes that it shows

the idle citizens trying to believe they are happy but burning to get back to the smoky den and the ponderous red-bound ledgers.

The description of these Londoners as citizens encourages the

(78) Punch, vol. XXVI, Jan-Jun 1854, p.222.

(79) Art Journal, March 1859, p.95, Athenaeum, 5 March 1859, p.325-6.

(80) O.E.D., Clarendon, Oxford, 1970, vol. II, pp.575-6.

reader to place them as members of households substantial enough to include voters, and the men are envisaged as being involved in commerce of some sort, though it is not spelt out whether high finance and merchanting, or small scale shop-keeping, is meant. While their social standing, though generally recognised as middle class, beyond that is left vague, the connotations of the term cockney tend to drag their status down. The dreariness of commerce is invoked, and as a consequence, the lack of visual appeal of the modern urban bourgeoisie is an issue that is raised. Other accounts of the picture follow the same pattern in the way they describe the social position of the visitors. The Art Journal review of 1854 that identified one group as coming from respectable Peckham, later suggested that the seaside visitors came generally from the area between the two extremes of Whitechapel in the east and Paddington in the west, and from families sufficiently genteel to own a one horse carriage, but sufficiently insecure to be preoccupied with the fact. These moderately prosperous members of the bourgeoisie are not thought of as dangerously low, but their cockney associations stop them from being anything but banal and unromantic. Nonetheless, at the same time, these figures are taken as species of the ideal. All the examples where the term 'cockney' is introduced link the term with an opposite. Cockney characteristics are paradoxically counterposed to the bright, sweet, or paradisal. The paradox is built into the Punch expression 'a cockney dolce far niente', which creates an oxymoron with its unlikely placing of the Italian expression. The word 'Cockaigne' is selected as one that unites the cockney with the fairy tale. Its primary sense is of an imaginary world of luxury and idleness, but in a secondary

sense it was used as a name for the land of cocknoys.(81) By punning between these two senses both the Athenaeum and the Art Journal were able to suggest that in Frith's painting a magical transformation from the banal to the picturesque had been achieved.

From a commonplace subject he has given us a scene as full of character, contrast, and colour as a carnival; full of beautiful faces, graceful attitudes, and delicate humour true to the age, the costume and the place, - and yet, though all three promise little, amusing, artistic, and picturesque. An Italian boy is exhibiting his white mice to some pretty damsels of Cockaigne - a Jew is offering a fussy old lady a Mandarin not unlike herself for sale - a blue ogre of a bathing woman is on one side seizing on a child to its great horror and disgust, and on the other a pretty mother and nurse are tempting a startled little girl into the water. (82)

Pretty damsels, Mandarin, ogre and little girl all belong to a fairy tale world. It is a world that holds delight and excitement for children, and both the Illustrated London News and the Art Journal reviews made the point that it was a picture with which children in particular would identify.(83) The transformation has a bearing on the perceived class identity of the figures in the picture. From being instances of a class acknowledged to be dull to look at, and incapable of arousing any romantic or heroic associations, the figures have been made larger than life, and have become exempla.

We are in the midst of an essence - the best blood of Cockayne, and hence the consummation of a thousand epitomes.(84)

The class structure of the bourgeois world has been mapped onto

(81) O.E.D. cites examples from 1824, 1842 and 1881.

(82) Athenaeum, 6 May 1854, p.560.

(83) Illustrated London News, 13 May 1854, p.438, 'Ladies run to the miniatures, boys and girls to Mr. Frith's 'Life at the Seaside.'

(84) Art Journal, June 1854.

the class structure of a fairy tale world. As a result the daughters of bankers or shopkeepers can appear as princesses or noble ladies. Most importantly, a vast and infinitely subdivided set, the bourgeoisie, has been reduced to a limited set, the personae of fairy tales, and to a set which has clear demarcations between its individual terms.

The venture into modern life entailed a series of risks for the artist. There was the risk of encountering drab costumes, and scenes which were dull to look at. Also there was the risk of portraying a class that may have been socially and politically accepted at its upper levels in the ruling class, but which shaded imperceptibly into lower, 'vulgar', social groupings. Finally there was the (linked) risk attached to abandoning a conventional recognised set of pictorial elements. The danger was that there would cease to be any limit to the range or extent of the items depicted. This would induce what Barthes describes as 'the vertigo of notation', where a description is unable to stop multiplying details.(85) The critical response to Ramsgate Sands indicates an awareness that these risks have been taken, and a relief that they have been safely negotiated. Cockaigne offered pretty costumes, feudal society with a distinct aristocracy, and a limited set of constituent elements, in much the same way that a scene from 'The Rape of the Lock' or Don Quixote appeared to do. The Art Journal summed up its notice of the picture in 1854, by saying that it was very successful considering the 'unpropitious materials' chosen, but that Frith

(85) 'The Reality Effect', (1968), in R.Barthes, The Rustle of Language, trans. R.Howard, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p.145.

had exhausted every-day life 'at one draught'.

We have seen how he paints from our standard literature; and we see how he depicts every-day life. The latter he exhausts at one draught; he has left himself "no effects;" he cannot afford variety in the same line without descending to caricature. Our literature is exhaustless in melodramatic subject-matter. (86)

Every-day life could only be exhausted in this way if it were summed up, and transported from the actual to the typical. This is what the mid-nineteenth century critics felt - with some relief - that Frith had done. To do so was to tame the potential visual anarchy of the modern life scene, and to place it safely as one specialised area of genre within the wider category of literary genre scenes which were familiar and predictable. The Saturday Review in 1859 claimed that Frith's great merit was his ability to locate the typical.

In Mr.Frith's paintings there was, in addition to the highly elaborated execution, some point and meaning in the subject. Life at the sea-side and life on a race-course is marked by peculiar and well-defined characteristics. (87)

These remarks depend on the idea that unless the modern subject undergoes some such processing, it necessarily degenerates into meaninglessness. The modern life scene that did not portray the typical would sink to the level of Dutch genre within the hierarchy of genre that was utilised by critics in the 1850s. (This hierarchy is discussed at greater length in my opening chapter.) It could be dismissed as a kind of art that mimicked the trappings of bourgeois or peasant life, and failed to develop any spiritual content. By offering what seemed to be the epitome of modern life Frith had refined and raised his subject matter.

(86) Art Journal, June 1854, p.161.

(87) Saturday Review, 4 June 1859, p.683.

Though it appears as a criticism when the Art Journal says that in approaching the modern subject in Ramsgate Sands Frith had drunk it dry, it is in fact praise of the satisfactory way in which he limits and sums up his problematic subject matter.

AN ARRAY OF TYPES

Ramsgate Sands is accepted as archetypal because it brings together a series of immediately recognisable stock types, which were associated with the seaside. The man with his telescope, the bathing attendant and reluctant child, the black-face minstrels, the bothersome hawkers, the young ladies reading novels, the self-conscious young man dressed in quasi-naval fashion, and the enervated lounging dandy were all standard elements of accounts of seaside life. They were familiar to viewers from other contexts, for example from serious magazine articles about the seaside, such as the Chambers's Edinburgh Journal article of 1853, 'The Seaside Resorts of the Londoners', from fictional accounts such as the visit of the Tuggs family to Ramsgate in Dickens's Sketches By Boz, and from the seasonally recurring seaside jokes or comic accounts that appeared in Punch. The languid young man, for example, whom we can see on the right of the painting, lolling on his seat with outstretched legs, and his arm negligently draped over the chair back, approximates to a character who regularly appeared in the columns of Punch. He is characterised in the Frith painting by the elaboration of his dress. He has an exquisite pair of glossy patent boots. His hat is a fashionable wide-awake, and he is cultivating a new moustache. He is adorned with a red flower in his button hole and displays a gold watch chain across his waistcoat. The

character is one who is represented by Punch as an overgrown boy who affects a fashionably languid air, smokes endlessly and wears an outrageously loud costume at the seaside. In one manifestation he sports a jacket patterned with zebra stripes.(88) On other occasions his trousers bear a chequerboard design (fig.22), or he sticks out his feet to show off his elegant boots.(fig.23) An article in 1853 gave a list of 'SEA-SIDE AIRS (As shown by Young Gentlemen at a Watering-place)', which compounded details that could be applied to the languid young man in brown or to the young man affecting a naval style, further back and to the left, in Frith's painting. The idiocy of that figure is signalled by the way a pair of donkey's ears appear over his straw boater.

Wearing hats and coats they would never think of wearing in London.

Sporting their elegant feet in buff-coloured slippers, or bottines, or pearl-buttoned boots or shoes of the most dazzling colours, such as would draw all the little boys after them in town.

Affecting a nautical appearance altogether, carrying a long telescope under their arm, which every now and then they pose against the parapet to take a sight at some invisible object "in the offing".

...Hanging about the sands under pretence of reading a book, and always occupying three chairs when they sit down - one for their body, one for their legs, and another for their feet - with another one for their telescope. (89)

These young men are referred to in the Illustrated Times as 'young swells, who go to the sea-side to be seen rather than to see'.

...dandiacal bodies, elaborately got up, regardless of expense - in the morning in the nautical style, in the evening in Belgravian walking costume - parading along this magnificent promenade, or attitudinising on a bench in front of the Marine. (90)

(88) Punch, vol. XXXV, 14 Aug 1858, p.72.

(89) Punch, vol. XXIII, Jul-Dec 1853, p.121.

Ramsgate Sands offered its viewers a number of such recognisable types. The nautical youth and the lounging swell are picked up in the Art Journal which mentions 'the old and young yachtsmen' and 'the young man with an apologetic moustache', and in the Athenaeum in its mention of the 'sham yachtsman' and the 'idle citizens'.(91) The Illustrated Times commented on the nautically dressed young man when they published an engraving from the picture.

We knew too, in those days, just such a dashing, tip-top young gentleman as the one shown in our engraving - the boating-looking youth with the fat telescope ...He was a bore, that brother; nobody liked him, and everybody hated his telescope. He dressed like a boating man, but the only time he ever ventured on the "briny" was on the occasion of a trip to Goodwin Sands, and then he had to be laid at the bottom of the boat. (92)

All the reviews read partly as a catalogue of these familiar types.

The Art Journal comments that the painting is like a kaleidoscope:

this composition, which at each turn of the kaleidoscope presents a new picture. (93)

The kaleidoscope, apparently suggested by the child's telescope in the picture, indicates the distribution of patches of bright colour, and a manner of viewing that pauses at one pattern, then shifts to a completely new configuration as the viewer's eye travels across the canvas. The metaphor alerts us to the way that the picture creates a montage of disparate elements,

(90) Illustrated Times, 24 October 1857, p.276.

(91) Art Journal, June 1854, p.161, and Athenaeum, 5 March 1859, p.325.

(92) Illustrated Times, 12 February 1859, p.103.

(93) Art Journal, *ibid.*

allowing them to keep their separate identity. This relates to the picture's insistence on the privacy and seclusion of the various members of the crowd assembled on the beach. Indeed, when the picture was engraved the composition was said to cause special problems for the engraver.

From the peculiarity of the composition, the large number of figures it contains, and the infinite variety of colour and tone apparent in the dresses, Mr. Sharpe's task - as we know well from having frequently seen him working on the plate - was one of no ordinary difficulty. The composition divides itself into two parts; a line drawn through the centre will at once determine this: of these two parts respectively, light is the keystone of the one, and dark of the other: it was utterly impossible to bring these into harmony, when in truth they are two distinct pictures, both in composition and treatment, and the eye cannot embrace the whole at the same time. (94)

The costumes of the primary figures on the left are dark in colour, and those on the right are light, and it is this that splits the picture in two when reduced to monochrome. The criticism of the picture by the artist Mulready also referred to its failure to cohere in terms of light and shade. Frith recorded his comments in his diary.

the light and shade not sufficiently massed, too much cut up into small pieces of sharp dark and light - all my old faults. (95)

Beyond this, the disintegrative tendency of the subject lies partly in the way it is an amalgamation of a number of discrete incidents. The problem for the engraver was to 'bring the subject together' but the appeal of the picture for its public was that its component parts did not impinge on one another. In view of this it is significant that the Illustrated Times broke with its normal policy of reproducing in their entirety paintings

(94) Art Journal, March 1859, p.95.

(95) W.P.Frith, op. cit., p.253.

from the London exhibitions, and chose to serialise Ramsgate Sands. When the Art Union issued Sharpe's engraving the Illustrated Times produced a series of extracts from the picture. Each section was accompanied by a commentary on the 'characters' shown. In its final instalment it reproduced the bottom right hand corner of the picture, showing the widow and the bored looking swell, and the group of men with the bathing woman and the mother and child. By removing these figures from the overall composition it was able to exaggerate the space and seclusion enjoyed by the figures.

This week our Engraving represents the retired, highly-respectable quartier of the sands. Gentlemen who wear excessively good clothes, even on weekdays - ladies who are very extravagant in delicate-tinted gloves, and change their dresses three times a day - prefer taking their chairs away from the ordinary mob, and this is the spot they fix upon. You can imagine how secluded the locality must be by the fact that the sprawling, dangling, dawdling youth in the wide-awake has fixed upon it for carrying on his flirtation with the sweet widow, whose pretty nose makes you wish you could see her eyes. (96)

The picture was welcomed because it was patently mythological. It presented a compendium of types, each of which could be enjoyed or consumed in turn. The figures in themselves were not necessarily comforting self-images for the bourgeois audience to contemplate. The over-dressed young men were absurd, the oglers could be considered brutal, the flustered couple besieged by donkey-men lacked dignity, and perhaps betrayed lower-middle class origins. These last wore exactly the same costumes as serene and elegant figures in the foreground, but the man is red-faced and too stout for his suit, and the woman is ugly and

(96) Illustrated Times, 3 September 1859, p.152-3.

bespectacled. The picture does not entirely deny the possibility of London's seaside resorts attracting a socially diverse public, but through the way it is constructed it gives the impression that the danger of undesirable contact between different elements of that public is minimal.

THE SOCIAL TONE OF RAMSGATE

Up to this point, this chapter has dealt with Ramsgate Sands' management of the problematic social identity of the crowd at seaside resorts in general. In the next sections the specific social status of Ramsgate will be investigated. We will examine the particular inflection given to a seaside scene by the choice of Ramsgate as a setting. Ramsgate Sands makes use of elements that summon up not just the seaside, but a particular kind of seaside resort. Moreover the recognisable features of Ramsgate, such as the terraces, the harbour and the obelisk are identified, not just as geographically explicit features, but as terms in a process of development of the resort. That process involved protracted and sometimes violent conflict between classes and class fractions. The observations made earlier about the contrast between the grandeur of the town during the period of the Napoleonic Wars, and the moderate gentility of the mid-nineteenth century will be reexamined in the light of these struggles.

The choice of Ramsgate as a setting was an important element in allaying fears of crumbling class barriers. Reviews of the painting identified it readily as Ramsgate, even when it had a general title. The Athenaeum and Punch both referred to it in

1854 as Ramsgate Sands. The print of 1859 was issued with a subtitle as Life at the Seaside, Ramsagte, 1854. The Illustrated Times extracts in 1859 were all labelled 'Ramsgate Sands'. From the point of view of its degree of gentility, Ramsgate fell between Margate which had the reputation of having low visitors, and Herne Bay or Broadstairs which were comparatively exclusive. Not only are contemporary accounts unanimous on this, but they are universally concerned to point out the differences in the social tone of resorts. From fiction, where Dickens portrays a discussion of the relative merits of resorts before the Tuggs family decides to go to Ramsgate (97), to sociological writing, where Dr. Spencer Thompson, in a work of 1860, draws up a similar league table of resorts, the same routine is found. It is a format that is followed in periodicals' presentation of articles on seaside towns, such as the long series 'By the Sea-Side', in the Illustrated Times of 1856-7. The painting declares itself to be a picture of Ramsgate, rather than of any other resort, or of an imaginary place, by the careful, topographically correct, detailing of the background. (Frith may have worked from photographs here as he did for the background details of Derby Day. He says in his autobiography that he wished to make the background 'locally accurate' and that photographs were tried but proved to be of little use.(98)) The inclusion of the clock-tower and the obelisk draw special attention to the fact that Ramsgate is the setting, as they were well-known landmarks. In examining

(97) C. Dickens, Sketches By Boz, 1836-7.

(98) W.P. Frith, op. cit., p.246.

how 'Ramsgate' in particular meshes with 'the seaside' in general we can begin to see how Frith's realism moves between the universal and the particular. It is a key question for representation, and the 1850s saw an unsettling readjustment of the criteria by which the 'truth' of a representation was judged, and the balance demanded between universal and local truth. Local truth, or the exact statement of detail, as a guarantee, or monitor, of the representation's authority was increasingly demanded. In history, as much as in genre painting, elaborately finished and painstakingly researched detail was expected. Conflict arose because there was no accompanying critical reevaluation of the notion of the general truths to be imparted by the greatest art. I would suggest that, among other ramifications of this shift, there occurred a particular crisis for the production of ideologically satisfactory imagery. An image such as Frith's picture of seaside life had to reconcile its ideological claim to universal validity for a class viewpoint, with an insistence on the local truth of the representation. The experience of bourgeois empiricism has made us familiar with the successful management of this paradox, but we should not underestimate the fresh difficulties it may have posed for artists and critics at this juncture. An ingenious solution is produced in Ramsgate Sands. He works between the general term 'seaside' and the particular term 'Ramsgate'. As I have argued the generalisation of the scene allows for the normative middle class family groups to be surrounded by comic types, but to remain distinct and untainted by them. The particular identity of the scene as Ramsgate, rather than counteracting this reading, reinforces the normative status of

the family group. It is important that Ramsgate's reputation fell half-way in the range of gentility of resorts. By a process of averaging out it could be claimed as the town that had special title to stand as representative of middle class seaside society. Lower resorts could be conceived of as places where workers or shopkeepers aped their betters. In the more elite resorts it was possible to accuse the middle classes of affecting the habits of the aristocracy. In the middle-range town of Ramsgate the bourgeois visitors could be represented as incontrovertibly belonging to the resort. If the picture is located in the common discourse about shades of social difference, and the reputations of the various resorts, its middle class figures take on a title to occupy the space of the picture, despite the fact that it is historically an aristocratic space, and one where nation has been linked with the heroics of an aristocratically led army and navy. The great problem of bourgeois culture is how to adjust to the coming to power of a new ruling class. Ramsgate Sands is a picture that asserts the title of its bourgeois figures to stand as national representatives in direct succession to Nelson and Wellington.

CONTESTS OVER THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESORT

The status of a resort depended on a number of factors, including transport links to London, the type and range of facilities available for visitors, the type and cost of accommodation, and the standard of the town's roads, pavements, lighting and sewers. Where sewage was piped straight into the sea, close to the shore, both sea bathing and sea breezes sought by visitors were obviously affected, and the town's reputation

diminished. Tactical decisions had to be taken by local authorities as to the advantages of investing in town improvements, and the type of developments they would undertake, or permit. These decisions were the occasion of fierce political struggle in different localities. The type of visitor coming to the town was not a matter of accident, but in some degree one of strategy. As in housing, higher returns could be gained from a higher class of visitor, and so the construction of grand hotels, or high-class terraces with large suites of rooms and controlled environs, and high expenditure on promenades, piers and parks was desirable, as were the imposition of fees for entrances to promenades, and the policing of the streets and sea shore, and the suppression of itinerant traders and of small scale catering or vending concerns. Such an overall strategy could best be achieved in resorts where the wealth of the town was great, permitting the high capital expenditure involved, and where landholding was concentrated in a few hands, for example in the estate of a local aristocrat. Leaseholds emanating from such estates could be qualified with restraints, with a view to raising the value of the property at the expiry of the lease. For example a minimum value of individual building plots could be set, or clauses could be introduced limiting the use to which any building could be put.(99) In the case of Ramsgate, the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century developments did emerge from the estate of a local aristocratic family, the Townleys; they were largely responsible for the Albion Place scheme, among others, but later more modest building projects

(99) J.K.Walton, op.cit., p.126.

were undertaken by small-scale speculators on freehold properties. The row of houses in the middle of Frith's painting of Ramsgate, on beach level, is Kent Terrace. This property originally came from the Townley estate, but it was bought outright by a firm of solicitors, and sold again to developers, who put up the terrace, purpose built for seasonal hire, in 1833-37.(100) Ramsgate's building pattern from the late 1820s was characterised by small developments, catering for the less opulent middle class visitors, which were made possible by a mainly freehold local property market. This is in contrast to the highly controlled, large-scale developments of more elite resorts such as Eastbourne. There were some large landlords in the Ramsgate property market, one landlord owned 40 properties, and the top five owners owned nine per cent of properties in 1851, but over half the properties were owned by small landlords with five properties or less.(101)

The wealth of Ramsgate's resident population made possible the high rates and the capital expenditure necessary to encourage and maintain a high social tone in the resort. R.S.Holmes's thesis of 1977 contradicts the view of some historians that by 1870 Ramsgate had become 'roaringly plebeian'. He demonstrates that the social tone was high in 1851, and that there was only a marginal decline by 1871. In 1851 25.4% of households had servants, and this can be compared with 21% in York, and 10% in Preston.(102) The wealth of the town depended on the presence of

(100) R.S.Holmes, op. cit., p.76-80.

(101) R.S.Holmes, op.cit., pp.177-179, 182, 228.

(102) *ibid.*, pp.107, 121.

the harbour. Fishing, shipbuilding, rope and sail making, warehousing, dockwork, navigation and coastguard and naval employment accounted for over a quarter, and nearly a third of the occupations of all Ramsgate's male household heads.(103) There was a great boost to the fishing trade in the mid-nineteenth century, as changes in fishing methods encouraged a shift from Channel fishing to North Sea trawling, and fishermen migrated from the west country to Ramsgate. The harbour's primary purpose was to offer a harbour of refuge to Channel shipping in stormy weather, but it also operated as a coal importing depot, and as a point of departure for some cross-Channel passenger services.

Direct links existed between the level of investment in the resort, and the harbour functions of the town. Costly improvements were made to the harbour, and the town benefited from these. The harbour was dredged out to make it possible for large ships to enter, and the harbour walls and piers were strengthened and underpinned in a large scheme of repair work that continued throughout the 1850s. (The slabs of building stone in Ramsgate Sands are the only indication in the picture of this work). The work was financed by interest from a reserve fund of 56,000 l., and by revenue from harbour, slipway and dry dock dues, and from property in Ramsgate. Finances were under Parliamentary and Admiralty scrutiny. The pier was expensively coped and paved, and formed an important feature of the resort. In 1853 it was said

(103) *ibid.*, p.132.

The pier in Ramsgate is the all in all in the way of promenade, and a very noble promenade it makes - massive and stately and nearly (the east pier) two thirds of a mile in length. (104)

Other harbour-financed fixtures installed earlier in the century also served as amenities and attractions for tourists. The 1851 Report on the harbour ran through some of these, commenting on their expense.

The meeting room at Ramsgate, on the contrary appears unnecessarily large and expensive for any harbour purpose, and entails the cost (though not heavy) of a housekeeper; it has been built 50 years. A handsome flight of granite steps from the west end of the harbour up the cliff, erected in 1824-5 is ornamental and unnecessarily expensive. The clock-house and warehouse partake in some measure of the same character, but these also have been built many years and cannot be charged to the same trustees. (105)

The harbour trust, after some wrangling, paid most of the cost of diverting a town sewer that emptied straight into the harbour. Of a total cost of 1,752 l. the town only paid 300 l. The finances of town and harbour were also interconnected on a day to day basis. The Ramsgate Improvement Bill of 1838 made permanent an arrangement, whereby tax was levied on coals imported into Ramsgate, and the proceeds were used for 'lighting, paving and cleansing the town and rendering it more attractive to visitors'.(106) The political struggles around this clause in the Bill illustrate the issues involved in regulating the social tone of a resort. The clause was opposed by the shipping interest, nationally, and by the coal producing interest. It was also opposed by a large body of opinion in Ramsgate, on the grounds

(104) Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, 12 November 1853, p.307.

(105) Report of James Walker to the Secretary to the Admiralty, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1851 (678.) LII, p.450.

(106) Sir E.Knutchbull M.P. for Ramsgate, reported in The Times, 19 January 1838.

that it would permanently increase the price of coal in Ramsgate by 2s 6d a ton. This was felt to be an intolerable burden on the poorer classes, and doubt was expressed as to whether provision for discretionary remission of tax for the poor would prove effective. The issue hinged on who would benefit from the improvement of Ramsgate as a resort. Within the middle classes of Ramsgate the wealthier elements had most to gain from elevating the social tone. Grander concerns would benefit more than cheap boarding houses or down-at-heel shops. The passing of the improvement Bill was an important victory for one section within Ramsgate's middle class.(107) Other clauses of the Bill attempted to regulate the activities of street hawkers and itinerant vendors. The interests of rate-paying shopkeepers were united against the members of poorer classes who provided stalls selling refreshments on the beach, or hawked goods or offered donkey rides, entertainment or accommodation to visitors. Services offered may even have included prostitution; certainly in Brighton there was a large annual ingress of prostitutes.(108) These traders were in competition with shops, and beyond that, their regulation would improve the social tone of the resort, by protecting middle class visitors from the seeing and being harrassed by hawkers who might be dirty, impoverished or offensive in some other way. They might actually be desperate for custom, or they might fabricate heart rending stories of distress to force customers to buy. One magazine spoke of 'distressed maidens with crochet work' who 'wend their way among

(107) For the Parliamentary debate on the Bill, see The Times, 19 January 1838.

(108) J.K.Walton, op. cit., p.20.

the chairs' trying to sell their goods on Ramsgate Sands.(109)

Another account describes a range of vendors, including a young woman whose distress-story the writer refuses to believe.

The sands are a capital place of business for itinerant vendors and fancy salesmen. No sooner had we entered, than we heard the din and uproar of several fine ready-money making businesses. "Buy a collar," said the crisp scartching (sic) voice of the lady with the blue marked embroidery patterns, ranged out on a toilet-table. "Berries, penny a pint, foine berries!" growled a big fellow, with a truck piled up with red gooseberries that reminded us of sore eyes. We had not proceeded far towards the water's edge, when a rather pretty girl with a japanned skin, began to bother us to buy a pair of garters. We assured her that we wore socks, but she wouldn't go, and actually had the effrontery to tell us she had not tasted food for two days, though she was plump as a pet greyhound. (110)

As suggested earlier in this chapter, some of these wandering traders would have been Londoners who operated seasonally at the seaside. Others would be fishermen, or other lower-class Ramsgate residents. Despite the fact that the Bill was passed, the struggle to exclude these traders was not over. The first prosecutions in 1839 under the Act led to a riot in Ramsgate, and a combined force of coastguards, revenue-cutter men, and troops called in from Canterbury, had to be used to quell the disturbance. Resistance to the regulations was so effective that no further prosecutions were brought.(111)

In Ramsgate Sands we do not just see the status quo achieved as a result of these struggles. The indications in the picture of Ramsgate's harbour: ship masts, the harbour wall, building stone, the clock-tower and the large and imposing buildings on

(109) Illustrated Times, 5 February 1859, p.90.

(110) ibid., 23 August 1856, p.139.

(111) Richardson 1885, quoted in R.S.Holmes, op. cit., p.253.

the left, the Harbour Master's House and Custom's House, and the crenelated Pier Castle with the cells of the harbour police, are all signs of the wealth and authority attached to the harbour, and as such are arguments in support of Ramsgate's gentility. A comment in the 1851 report on the harbour's finances mentioned, somewhat defensively, the general impression conveyed by the harbour's personnel.

There is in the dress, and bearing, and description of the officers and boatmen, the appearance of Ramsgate being a Royal harbour, which, although it costs very little and [has] its uses, is apt to impress the inhabitants and visitors with the notion of extravagance. (112)

We see here that, to some extent, the Royal associations of the town are built in to the connotations of the harbour. The harbour references in the picture, and the Royal associations it calls up, must be seen as participating in what is at one level a discussion of Ramsgate's reputation, but at another level is a political struggle over resources, in which classes and sections of classes were pitted against each other. The Royal associations of the town were not confined to the visits of Charlotte, Princess of Wales, in 1803 and 1804, (see above p.33), nor to the departure of George IV from Ramsgate, commemorated by the obelisk of 1821-2.(113) There had been a series of visits by the Duchess of Kent with the Princess Victoria, the first in 1822, when the future Queen was only three years old, two more in 1827 and 1829, and a fourth in 1835.(114) After this there was a rumour that Queen Victoria was going to build a Royal Palace on

(112) 'Report of James Walker to the Secretary to the Admiralty', Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1851 (678.) LII, p.450.

(113) John Newman, Buildings of England: North East and East Kent (3rd ed.) Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1983, p.412.

(114) R.S.Holmes, op.cit., p.72.

the West Cliff at Ramsgate (115), and although the Queen did not select Ramsgate as a place for summer visits, preferring the more remote Isle of Wight, Victoria and Albert did make a day trip to the town in 1842. It could be argued that the continuity of the royal associations of the town meant that the painting, Ramsgate Sands, referred not to a monarchy distanced by time and involved in dissipation and madness, but to a more accessible sober and domesticated modern monarchy, in whose public image the respectable family was paramount. These associations would have been redoubled by the fact that Queen Victoria purchased Ramsgate Sands. The picture was bought by Messrs. Lloyd as a print speculation. When Queen Victoria expressed an interest in the picture they ceded it to her at the price they had paid, reserving ownership of the copyright. They kept the picture until the plate was completed, then sold the plate to the London Art Union for £4,000. (116) The 15,000 prints of Ramsgate Sands purchased through the London Art Union in 1859 (117) were acquired in the knowledge that the image came from a picture in the Royal Collection. The very image came to signify 'high class', as is suggested by the Illustrated Times, though the comments it makes are somewhat barbed.

In a few months' time Mr. Sharpe's engraving will be adding to the magnificence of the British sitting-rooms; the landladies of Guildford and Duke Streets will be deliberating whether they should not ask an extra five shillings weekly for their parlours and first floors, so mightily will "Life at the Sea-side" brighten up their faded walls and improve

(115) The Times, 24 August 1838.

(116) P. Ferriday, 'The Victorian Art Market: The New Collectors', Country Life, 9 June 1966, p.1458. W.P. Frith, op.cit., p.258, mentions a sum of £3,000.

(117) A. King, 'George Godwin and the Art Union', Victorian Studies, vol.8, Dec 1964, pp.101-130.

the look of their dingy rooms. (118)

It is acknowledged that the engraving has class, (the article suggests that it could easily have been sold for 6 guineas, instead of being issued with the one guinea Art Union subscription), but, nonetheless, it would be so widely distributed that it would end up in settings which were less than elegant.

BEACH TRADERS: THE DISAVOWAL OF CLASS FEARS

The many figures of hawkers and beach entertainers in the picture are also constituent parts of the statement that it makes about Ramsgate. The statement contributes to the contest over the question of how exclusive Ramsgate was. The background details of the painting stressed the gentility of the town, the hawkers' presence loads the picture in rather a different way. The middle class visitors could have been depicted in exclusive occupation of the beach or of the pier, or some other place of resort. Other fine art depictions of seaside society can be found which present the subject in that way. One example is a picture by Jane Maria Bowkett of the promenade at Brighton where all the figures are middle class (fig.24). By contrast, in Ramsgate Sands the middle class figures are hemmed in by black-face minstrels, sailors selling parrots, exhibitors of performing animals, bathing attendants and donkey owners. As we have seen with the picture's treatment of the problems surrounding sea bathing, it characteristically operates by evoking and controlling fearful topics, rather than by completely avoiding

(118) Illustrated Times, 5 February 1859, p.90.

them. It is a manoeuvre of disavowal rather than of denial. The device of pushing the more worrying incidents to the edges of the picture is used. Of all the traders, those nearest the centre are the least threatening.

The man with an Italian hat, exhibiting white mice, and the man selling painted figures to the old lady, are both kneeling deferentially. The Italian hatted man is dressed poorly, but well within the parameters of the pleasingly picturesque. His velveteen jacket is worn and discoloured at the elbows, and we see the rough hobnail soles of his boots, but neither he nor the other kneeling vendor is filthy or ragged. They have their backs turned, as do the other two hawkers further back, but still in the centre of the picture. These are the old man with a tray of cakes or confectionery, and the top-hatted man selling ballads. All these figures are mixing freely on the beach with the middle class visitors, but the viewer of the painting is not confronted with them, nor given the impress of individual personality that a front view would have provided. The pattern is quite different on the circumference of the picture. One simple indication of the difference is that there is a switch from back views to front views. In the line of blacked-up minstrels we can almost see this being enacted. A singer has turned round in the line and is looking roguishly towards the main group of visitors. The other performers are occupied with instruments, and, apart from their heads, they are mainly hidden from us, but this man has no instrument, he is just dancing, and in doing so he waves his arms and turns his body in a manner that might be considered comic or offensive. The sailor with a parrot on the left of the picture,

the donkey man in the right background, the young man behind the ogling gentlemen on the right, and the female bathing attendant in front of them, are all approaching their customers from behind. This makes them more threatening because they approach like thieves or assailants. In some cases they make actual physical contact with the customer. The sailor is speaking to the woman while her husband is occupied in looking through the telescope, and so she has, in a sense been left unprotected. The upsetting effect of the clamorous donkey proprietors has already been mentioned, and so has the terror provoked by the bathing woman. The lad on the far right is a disturbing figure because his activity is not explained. He could even be interpreted as a pickpocket, taking advantage of the oglers' distraction, although this idea did not emerge in any of the 1850s criticism of the picture.

At the centre of the picture are three more vendor figures facing towards the viewer. There is the man with the top hat and cloak, another who is the keeper of the "happy family" display of animals, and holds a tambourine for the hare to beat, and the man in a green jacket, who is probably his assistant, collecting money. All face towards the viewer. Frith, in his autobiography, identifies the green coated man as a drummer for the "happy family".

a hare was made to play upon a tambourine, and during the finale, the proprietor's friend and assistant on the drum made the usual collection. The drummer wore a wonderful green coat; he was very ugly but an excellent type of his class. (119)

The stance of these three figures is half way between the reassuring central foreground figures and the more worrying figures at the sides. They are face-on to their customers, but equally they are standing up and are face-on to the viewer of the picture. The green coated man in particular is positioned in a potentially aggressive way, not just because he is demanding money rather than performing or displaying goods, but because he is placed close to the woman with a child in front of him, who forms part of the audience, and the bright complementary colours of his clothing, and the detailed depiction of his face make him appear to come forward, and so he is brought even closer to this woman. His stern features, apparently remarked upon by Frith as ugly, add to the effect of a slightly frightening confrontation.

It must be recognised that some of these figures are tiny (the whole painting is 30 x 60 1/4 ") and can only be picked out from the bunched composition by careful scrutiny. Nonetheless it is clear that there is a system to the way these traders and entertainers have been introduced. In the context of the strategies and struggles involved in the development of seaside resorts their very presence is problematic. The picture plays with some of the terrors attached to their presence among the polite crowd, and moreover among a crowd that includes ladies, but where the central foreground groups are left serene and unmolested, and the overtowering buildings and monuments stand as guarantees of the gentility specific to Ramsgate, and of the authority and coercive force belonging to the harbour and customs establishment, then the array of somewhat threatening lower class types around the edges of the crowd can be contemplated as a

danger fended off, and it is safe to regard the incidents as amusing.

THE JEWISH ASSOCIATIONS OF RAMSGATE

The picture deals with one final aspect of seaside society, and particularly of Ramsgate, and that is the presence of Jewish families among the visitors. The presence of Jewish people was noted at Brighton, amongst other classes of visitor.

The wealthy children of Israel delight in it (Brighton), and the gorgeously attired, gazelle-eyed, hooked-nosed daughters of the ten tribes, make its thoroughfares radiant with the eclat of their costume and the oriental brownness of their charms. (120)

Their presence was, it was suggested, a defiant challenge to the aristocratic snobbery of Brighton.

And here, too, come the cloudy complexioned, bright-eyed, hook-nosed, jewelled sons and daughters of Israel in the greatest force; nor is there perhaps a more refreshing sight throughout the British dominions than a Brighton one-horse open fly entirely filled by Mr. Lazarus of Petticoat Lane, smoking a Whitechapel cheroot in the very faces of those aristocrats who pretend to sneer at and despise him! (121)

But Ramsgate, even more than Brighton, was the resort with Jewish associations. One of the most eminent figures in Victorian Britain, Sir Moses Montefiore, had his seat at East Cliff Lodge, in Ramsgate. He was one of the twelve Jewish brokers allowed on the London Stock Exchange, and retired at the age of forty in 1824, having founded the Alliance Insurance Company and various other ventures, and made his fortune in stockbroking. For the next forty five years he acted as something of an intercessor and ambassador for Jews all over the world, undertaking various

(120) Illustrated Times, 8 August 1857, p.103.

(121) ibid., 26 February 1859, p.135.

missions to Palestine, Damascus, Egypt, Constantinople, Russia, Syria, Rome and Morocco, pleading for the release of Jewish prisoners, and defending Jewish rights.(122) In Ramsgate he filled the position of local landed aristocrat. As the Illustrated London News put it

Having subsequently (to his knighthood in 1837) discharged with equal credit, all the duties of a resident country gentleman and magistrate in the county of Kent, of which he has also been High Sheriff, Sir Moses Montefiore has entered the ranks of our landed aristocracy, and now wears the rank of baronetcy conferred upon him in 1846. (123)

Montefiore built a synagogue at Ramsgate in 1833, and this and his national and international reputation as a Jewish spokesperson, was supposed to have attracted many Jews to Ramsgate. Punch repeatedly mentioned the Jewish visitors there.

There is an undue proportion of Jews and Jewesses at this their favourite Harbour of Refuge. The sands of a morning resemble a Mosaic pavement. SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE has a great deal to answer in focussing so many all on one spot. The fault is laid entirely at the door of his synagogue. ...The daughters of ABRAHAM (beautiful young Jessicas!) throw flowers and scented notes into the little window of his bathing machine. "on weekdays the only attractive young gentleman in the place" (124)

In another report on Ramsgate the name of Disraeli keeps cropping up, as politician and as author. The sands are described as 'as crowded as the Commons on a grand DISRAELI night'.

...considering the undue proportion of Jews and Jewesses, you might call them so many living Coningsbys, full to repletion as they are of Asiatic Mysteries, by the side of which that greatest of Asiatic mysteries the Indian Rebellion, would seem to be the easiest of riddles. (125)

Another item in Punch, primarily offering a satire on the

- (122) Dictionary of National Biography, Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1894, vol. 38. See also Anne and Roger Cowan, Victorian Jews Through British Eyes, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986.
(123) Illustrated London News, vol. 46, 18 February 1865, p.153.
(124) Punch, vol. XXXV, 28 August 1858, p.90.

fashionable visitors to Ramsgate, who have only left London to avoid unpaid bills, envisages the mysterious letters L.S.D. being engraved on the sand.

DOCTOR CUMMING, in an antiquarian opening, gives the origin of the three letters, showing them to be synonymous with Hebrew roots (and therefore still much cultivated by the ROTHSCHILDS and others of the Jewish preference), although subsequently adopted by the Romans, and brought from Rome by ST. AUGUSTINE, who planted them at Canterbury. (126)

The humour is involved and obscure, but a reference to the Jewishness of the locality is tied in with the local tradition that St. Augustine landed at Pegwell Bay.

RACIST COMMENTARIES: ORIENTAL SEXUALITY

The humour of Punch, and to a lesser extent of the Illustrated Times, is based on racism rather than religious bigotry. It is interesting that references to Ramsgate's Roman Catholic associations do not appear. The references to St. Augustine are used for a hit on Anglican bishops rather than as a slur on Catholics. Ramsgate was the home of A.W.N.Pugin, the architect, until his death in 1852, and he built a Catholic church opposite his home on the West Cliff, at his own cost. The church was started in 1845, and finished in 1850, complete with sacristy, cloister and school. The church was taken over by the Benedictine order in 1852, and a monastery erected opposite in 1860-61.(127) There was therefore ample scope for anti-Catholic remarks in the commentary on Ramsgate, but we only find a series of references to the presence of Jews. The racism of the comments on Jews is organised around a stereotype of Jews in

(126) *ibid.*, vol. XXXI, 16 August 1856, p.67.

(127) John Newman, *op. cit.*, pp.406-409.

trade and finance who are said to make a lot of money and to move in social circles for which they are not fitted. The Jews become a focus for general anxieties about class distinctions and the position of nouveaux riches groups. The Mr. Lazarus of Petticoat Lane exemplifies this notion of what Jews stand for. The article dissimulates when it claims to celebrate his stance, because the very presentation of a Jew in this way reveals collusion in the fear and hatred that produce that stereotype. Alongside this are anxieties about sexuality and miscegenation. Jewish women in particular are described as attractively exotic and oriental in appearance. The association of oriental women with the luxurious sexuality promised by the harem was a cultural commonplace in nineteenth century Europe. J.F. Lewis's popular watercolour scenes of the interior of harems provide a reference point for this in British fine art production of the 1840s and 1850s. It was possible to represent oriental women as sexually active and passionate without labelling them as deviant. The Punch notion of the beautiful young Jessicas besieging one "English" gentleman is completely in accord with this manner of representation. White women described in this way would immediately be categorised as depraved, and probably diseased. Oriental women are already conceived of as alien. Edward Said perhaps overstresses the parallels that can be made, by grouping 'Orientals' with other elements, including women, considered alien in Western society.

Along with other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilised and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien. (128)

While all these groups were regarded as alien and represented 'the other' for the white, responsible, sane, male, propertied member of the bourgeoisie, still there was a specificity to the racism displayed towards 'Orientals'. The fearful notion that women and the poor were prone to deviation, that they were biologically predisposed to become immoral, criminal or deviant in their behaviour differs from the racist attitude to Jews and Arab people that they were already alien; automatically and immutably endowed with a characteristic sensuality, passivity and irrationality. The difference is one that has ramifications in the particular context of Ramsgate Sands. It is interesting to see Punch's claim that the presence of Jews on the beach created more of an aura of mystery than the Indian rebellion. In line with the sexualising explanations generally adopted for Oriental rebellions (129), the most reported feature of the Indian Mutiny was the rape and murder of white women and children. The press presented brutal British repression in 1857 in terms of righteous revenge for the atrocities. The presence of 'oriental' Jews beside white families on the beach calls up this image of the violation of white women.

Even before the Indian Mutiny the representation of different races mingling in a public situation, where women were present, was fraught with difficulties. The painting Train Up A Child by Mulready (exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1841) showed two white women encouraging the young boy with them to give alms to

(128) E.W.Said, Orientalism, (1978), Peregrine, Harmondsworth, 1985, p.207.

(129) Ibid, p.315.

three Indian beggars. In this picture part of the unease of the subject seems to spring from a sexual threat to the white women from the black figures in the painting. Heleniak, in an extended discussion of this picture quotes from the Oriental Annual of 1838 to demonstrate the salaciousness attributed to Hindu holy men and beggars. She outlines the history of the representation of black people in British painting of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, and maps this against increasing racism, surfacing in ethnological and anthropological studies in the the 1830s and 1840s, manifested in the imagery and arguments of the considerable pro-slavery movement, and exacerbated by the crises that arose in governing the colonies, especially the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and the disturbances in Jamaica in 1865.(130)

JEWISH FIGURES IN RAMSGATE SANDS

In Ramsgate Sands there are only two figures who seem to be clearly indicated as Jewish.(131) These are the two men, sitting with their backs to the viewer whom we see just in front of the green jacketed assistant, towards the centre and at the back of the main figure group. They have their heads turned so we see them in profile, and they are both given pronounced hook noses. The older man wears a skull cap, the younger man has a large blue cravat tied in an elaborate bow. None of the reviews of the painting remarks on these two men. It seems that the figures

(130) K.M.Heleniak, William Mulready, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1980, p.100-108. See also C.Bolt, Victorian Attitudes to Race, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1971.

(131) One review suggested that the toyseller in the foreground was Jewish, Athenaeum, 6 May 1854, p.560.

were too small and inobtrusive to attract the attention of the reviewers. It is interesting that Frith introduces Jewish male figures but no Jewish female figures into the painting, and we can speculate as to the reason for this decision. Possibly the presence of supposedly sensual 'oriental' females among the women visitors on the beach would have upset the carefully contrived sense of embattled female virtue and propriety that the picture achieves. They would have offered an alternative, overtly sexual, focus for the male viewer's gaze which would, arguably, have interfered with the covert scrutiny allowed, by the picture, of the young ladies on the beach. As we have seen, the impeccable bearing and exaggerated gentility of young ladies is what guarantees and safeguards the risky business of male voyeurism. Their propriety is maintained in the presence of all sorts of factors which could upset it. The middle class women are hemmed in by disturbing elements. The two Jewish men take their place among the slightly threatening figures of the picture's margins. They are figures that offer a class threat in accordance with the caricatured notion of Mr. Lazarus of Petticoat Lane, and they offer a sexual threat. It is one that is considerably alleviated by the way they are turned in on one another, engrossed in their own conversation, and turned away from the main figure group.

CONCLUSION

Information about the social and economic specifics of the scene, and the activities, depicted by Frith gives us access to the picture's constituent elements. An analysis can be developed which makes sense of the picture by breaking it down into meaningful units and seeing how those units are deployed.

Insertion of the picture into the discourses and contests around the seaside in mid-nineteenth century Britain enables us to recognise the socially significant senses out of which the picture is built. We see that it is an image that conducts rigidly controlled explorations of questions of sex, class and race. The first sections of this chapter explored the sexual politics of looking. We saw how the formal organisation of Ramsgate Sands sets up controls over the viewer's scopical drive. The desire to look is acknowledged and exploited by the picture, but certain permissible limits to looking are insisted upon. An access of pleasure is guaranteed to the viewer, but never at the risk of completely lifting repression. We saw that this functioning of the picture-text is dependent on the picture's recognition and reinforcement of differential codes of behaviour for men and for women - adherence to which contributes to maintaining the oppression of women. The second half of the chapter addressed Ramsgate Sands' management of class identity and relations between classes in a problematic public space. It investigated the interface between the aristocratic historical associations of the locale, and the middle class subjects of the painting, and charted the production of meanings for the middle class from this interface. The middle class is also given definition, in the picture, in opposition to other elements. The modern urban crowd is shown to include 'vulgar' lower- middle-class types, and figures from the fringes of the working class, but any threat that these groups may constitute is fended off by the manner in which they are incorporated in the composition. The presence among the visitors of members of a racially distinct minority also presents the potential for disruption, but it is a threat

that is similarly contained. These readings of the picture emerge from a structuralist approach, in that units of meaning are identified, and their articulation in networks across the text of the picture is examined. At the same time this presentation attempts to avoid the distinctly ahistorical basis of much structuralist analysis. The picture under discussion is located at a particular juncture in the establishment of a new ruling class, at a turning point in the development of the family and the institutionalisation of bourgeois leisure. Its appeal to a wide public, from the monarch to the petit bourgeois landlady, pinning up an Art Union print, or to the purchaser of a 3d copy of the Illustrated Times, attests to its success in formulating a viable representation of the middle class at this historical moment.

CHAPTER THREE: THE AWAKENING CONSCIENCE

This chapter examines the critical reception of the painting The Awakening Conscience by William Holman Hunt, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1854, the same year that Ramsgate Sands was exhibited (fig.25) In common with Ramsgate Sands its subject is a scene from modern life, but its concern is not the bearing of the bourgeoisie and their conduct in public, but the morality of the private sphere. The setting is a wealthy modern interior, elaborately furnished, and the picture shows two figures. The first is a young man, leaning back in his chair at the piano, stretching out his right arm, and looking up towards the other figure. This second figure is a woman who has been sitting on his knee or on the arm of the chair. She is just standing up and has her hands clasped in front of her, and stares out of the picture. When the painting appeared at the Royal Academy the critical reaction was mixed, and this chapter charts the critical positions set out in various commentaries.

RUSKIN'S LETTER TO THE TIMES

The best known critical notice of the picture is that written by John Ruskin. His account appeared in a letter he sent to The Times. Ruskin's letter fixes on the woman as the key figure in the picture. It identifies her as a fallen woman and places the

scene as one stage in a career that it takes to be an inevitable result of the woman's guilty lapse from virtue. It welcomes the depiction of the fallen woman as morally beneficial: the image of sin confirms and bolsters the moral category of female virtue. Sin is about to meet the punishment it deserves. Ruskin's account also goes further, and suggests a way in which the attitude of the viewer can be developed beyond an initial impulse of punishing condemnation to one of pity. On the one hand the punishing impulse is carried forward by the fate he imagines to await the woman, while, on the other, the exercise of compassion ensures that the viewing of the picture is, doubly, a morally uplifting experience.

Ruskin's letter to The Times was the second of a pair of letters dealing with Hunt's paintings. The first letter addressed itself to Hunt's principal picture at the Royal Academy Exhibition, The Light of the World. Three weeks later the letter on The Awakening Conscience was published.(132) This letter occupied several column inches in the paper but it is necessary to reproduce it in full in order to examine the view of the picture that it invites.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "TIMES"
SIR ,

Your kind insertion of my notes on Mr. Hunt's principal picture encourages me to hope that you may yet allow me room in your columns for a few words respecting his second work in the Royal Academy, 'The Awakening Conscience.' Not that this picture is obscure, or its story feebly told. I am at a loss to know how its meaning could be rendered more distinctly, but assuredly it is not understood. People gaze at it in blank wonder, and leave it hopelessly; so that, though it is almost an insult to the painter to explain his

(132) The Times, 4 May 1854 and 25 May 1854.

thoughts in this instance, I cannot persuade myself to leave it thus misunderstood. The poor girl has been sitting singing with her seducer; some chance words of the song, 'Oft in the stilly night,' have struck upon the numbed places of her heart; she has started up in agony; he, not seeing her face, goes on singing, striking the keys carelessly with his gloved hand. I suppose that no one possessing the slightest knowledge of expression could remain untouched by the countenance of the lost girl, rent from its beauty into sudden horror; the lips half open, indistinct in their purple quivering, the teeth set hard, the eyes filled with the fearful light of futurity, and with tears of ancient days. But I can easily understand that, to many persons, the careful rendering of the inferior details in this picture cannot but be, at first, offensive, as calling their attention away from the principal subject. It is true that detail of this kind has long been so carelessly rendered, that the perfect finishing of it becomes matter of curiosity, and, therefore, an interruption to serious thought. But, without entering into the question of the general propriety of such treatment, I would only observe that, at least in this instance, it is based on a truer principle of the pathetic than any of the common artistical expedients of the schools.

Nothing is more notable than the way in which even the most trivial objects force themselves upon the attention of a mind which has been fevered by violent and distressful excitement. They thrust themselves forward with a ghastly and unendurable distinctness, as if they would compel the sufferer to count, or measure, or learn them by heart.

Even to the mere spectator a strange interest exalts the accessories of a scene in which he bears witness to human sorrow. There is not a single object in all that room, common, modern, vulgar (in the vulgar sense, as it may be), but it becomes tragical if rightly read. That furniture, so carefully painted, even to the last vein of the rosewood, - is there nothing to be learned from that terrible lustre of it, from its fatal newness; nothing there that has the old thoughts of home upon it, or that is ever to become a part of home? Those embossed books, vain and useless -- they also new -- marked with no happy wearing of beloved leaves; the torn and dying bird upon the floor; the gilded tapestry, with the fowls of the air feeding on the ripened corn; the picture above the fireplace, with its single drooping figure - the woman taken in adultery; nay, the very hem of the poor girl's dress, - at which the painter has laboured so closely, thread by thread, - has story in it if we think how soon its pure whiteness may be soiled with dust and rain; her outcast feet falling in the street; and the fair garden flowers, seen in the reflected sunshine of the mirror -- these also have their language -

Hope not to find delight in us, they say, For we are spotless, Jessy - we are pure.

I surely need not go on. Examine the whole range of the walls of the Academy; nay, examine those of all our public and private galleries, and, while pictures will be met with by the thousand which literally tempt to evil, by the thousand which are devoted to the meanest trivialities of incident or emotion, by the thousand to the delicate fancies of inactive religion, there will not be found one powerful as this to meet full in the front the moral evil of the age in which it is painted, to awaken into mercy the cruel thoughtlessness of youth, and subdue the severities of judgment into the sanctity of compassion.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your obedient Servant,
THE AUTHOR OF 'MODERN PAINTERS'.

The standard art historical version of events is that the press received The Awakening Conscience badly, with bewilderment and disapproval, that Ruskin went to its defence in this letter, and that the letter gives a correct account of the subject, the treatment and the moral implications of the picture. Accordingly Ruskin's account has by and large been allowed to stand as the definitive gloss. Hunt, in his autobiography, reprinted Ruskin's letter, and this has been taken as sufficient validation, despite the fact that the book was not written until fifty years later.(133) In fact the 'bewilderment' of the critics bears

(133) W.H. Hunt, Pre Raphaelitism and the Pre Raphaelite Brotherhood, (2 vols.), Macmillan, London, 1905. For art historical accounts see: i. William Holman Hunt, Exhibition Catalogue by Mary Bennett, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1969, pp.35-37 (mainly drawn from Hunt's autobiography, and quotes Ruskin's letter at length). ii. The Pre Raphaelites, Exhibition Catalogue, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1972, entry 24 (relies on Ruskin for details discussed and heightened perception of details by the woman, but uses notions alien to Ruskin). iii. Walpole Society, vol. XLIV, 1972-74, 'Letters from William Holman Hunt', p.76. (cites Millais's statement that Ruskin had misunderstood the picture, but comments 'Millais does not give his own interpretation of the story and Ruskin's is the generally accepted one'). IV. The Pre Raphaelites, Exhibition Catalogue Tate Gallery, London, 1984, entry pp.120-121 by Judith Bronkhurst, (goes beyond Ruskin in the range of details discussed, but uses some elements from Ruskin, and still sets up

further investigation, as this chapter will go on to show. The rightness of Ruskin's reading should not be uncritically assumed. Its rightness or wrongness could conceivably be debated, but a more fundamental question is what the letter reveals about one particular way in which The Awakening Conscience could be understood and appropriated within mid-nineteenth century debates, both about sin and sexual deviancy, and about representation.

In Ruskin's account of the painting, an attitude of pity is taken towards the girl. It is pity that is exercised from a safe moral distance. Ruskin's text does not treat the woman in the picture as a psychological subject to be empathised with, like the heroine of a novel. Her state of mind is, it is true, summoned up by Ruskin, where he links it to the detailed representation of the room and its trappings, but the very next sentence of his account moves on to the parallel, but separate, heightened interest an outside observer feels. Ruskin pleads for that interest to be channelled into pity rather than disgust. The emphasis in many modern accounts is on the positive elements in the picture pointing to redemption - the leaves and flowers reflected in the mirror, the star on the frame, the ray of sunlight and, from the pairing with The Light of the World, the presence of Christ knocking at the woman's heart.(134). This

a true interpretation versus the bewilderment and misunderstanding of the critics).

(134) Andrea Rose, The Pre Raphaelites, Phaidon Oxford, 1977, no. 15. ('the kept woman... is struck with remorse and jumps up to throw off her guilty life and to follow henceforth in the paths of virtue'.)

Chris Brooks, Signs for the Times : Symbolic Realism in the Mid Victorian World, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1984. (He sees

slides easily into a notion that the girl has the freedom to choose to turn away from her captivity to the purity of nature outside, and to a happy virtuous life - possibly a twentieth-century confusion between salvation and earthly redemption.(135) For Ruskin, the emphasis was very definitely on the inexorable fate awaiting the woman in this world. His 'right reading' of the details of the picture consisted partly in imagining their past and future. He does not hesitate in reading off a sequence of events in looking at the hem of the woman's dress.

...nay the very hem of the poor girl's dress - at which the painter has laboured so closely, thread by thread - has story in it, if we think how soon its pure whiteness may be soiled with dust and rain; her outcast feet falling in the street.

He refers to a fictional sequence of events which was commonly associated with the fallen woman. She starts as innocent; she is seduced and loses her virtue; she tears herself away from the

a potential for order in the formal organisation of the top of the picture, and the positive decision of the woman to rise up and distance herself from the world where she is an object for sale.)

James Thompson, 'Ruskin and Hunt's Awakening Conscience, Victorians Institute Journal, 1979, vol. 8, pp 19-22.

(Stresses the left to right reading, and corresponding movement of the girl, towards the patch of sunshine. Also stressed is the pairing with The Light of the World: Christ is outside the picture on the right, as he is omitted from the print on the wall. The girl 'appears to be on the verge of release').

(135) L. Nochlin, 'Lost and Found : Once More the Fallen Woman', Art Bulletin, 60, March, 1978, pp 139-53. Reprinted in N. Broude et. al., Feminism and Art History, Harper and Row, New York, 1982. (This cites a number of cases where the repentant fallen woman is represented as returning to a country family. The only English example she gives however is an eighteenth-century one, though the French 1830s and 1840s images may have had circulation in England.) L. Nead 'The Magdalen in Modern Times: the Mythology of the Fallen Woman in Pre-Raphaelite Printing', Oxford Art Journal, 1984, vol. 7 no. 1. (This article makes a clear distinction between the possibility of the soul's salvation and the impossibility of a release from the fallen woman's grim earthly fate.)

false protection of the man who is keeping her, or he casts her off; she has no home or means of support except prostitution; she walks the streets and finally commits suicide by drowning herself.(136) It is a horrifying future and in the expression on the woman's face he sees 'the fearful light of futurity'. As Ruskin describes the original expression on the girl's face (before the repainting) it could almost be a death's head: lips drawn back showing clenched teeth, staring eyes and a look of horror. For Ruskin she is a 'lost girl'. The natural elements, 'fair garden flowers', he sees reflected in the mirror are, in his account, unable to call the girl towards them. She is cut off from anything pure by her fall. She may escape the man but, like the bird in the picture, she is 'torn and dying'. It escapes the cat but is irreparably damaged.

One aspect of Ruskin's letter is that of footnote to his previous letter on The Light of the World. That painting was the real subject of controversy in May 1854. As Hunt's principal picture, it was mentioned in The Times's Royal Academy review, whereas The Awakening Conscience was not. It was the picture that drew the (scornful) attention of the prestigious German art critic, Dr. Waagen. Ruskin's laudatory letter offered an explanation of the symbolism in The Light of the World and commented on the handling of colour, detail and recession in the picture. He maintained that the degree of detail was not microscopic as in spurious imitations of Pre-Raphaelite painting, but that things were represented as they would appear

(136) see L.Nead, as note 33.

to the eye at their true distance from the viewer. He mentioned the example of the ivy on the door where individual leaves were not distinguished with sharp outlines.

...all is the most exquisite mystery of colour; becoming reality at its due distance.

Having taken this position, he laid himself open to the response that, in that case, he ought to denounce The Awakening Conscience, with its microscopic detail, as just such a spurious imitation of Pre-Raphaelitism. It was perhaps to answer or forestall this response that he published the second letter in The Times. Here, as we have seen, he found an ingenious way of justifying the exact delineation of every detail by referring it to the topic of the picture. Ruskin's letter on The Awakening Conscience can therefore be seen as much as an elaboration on his first letter as a response to a hostile critical reception of the picture.

These comments should discourage us from misinterpreting the purpose of Ruskin's letter or mistaking its status. It would be wrong to invest his remarks with any special authority or any claim to a superior critical understanding. As this chapter will explain, his letter was not the last word on the picture, either chronologically or logically. Nonetheless his letter does offer a one coherent way of understanding the picture. His account was favourable. It found the picture to be moral and admonitory. Although the situation it depicted was an immoral one, the representation of a woman on the first step of a downwards path could be interpreted as functioning almost prophylactically. The evil was warded off by the image of her punishment.

THE PATRON'S READING OF THE PICTURE

Ruskin's letter mobilised certain myths and proposed a meaning for The Awakening Conscience, but the ideological application of his morality remains, to some extent, undefined. Before examining some conflicting interpretations of the picture this chapter will attempt to (re)construct a concurrent reading on the part of the picture's purchaser, Thomas Fairbairn. The procedure is unorthodox, and the reading we can attribute to Thomas Fairbairn is never more than hypothetical. There is no surviving evidence of the way he understood the painting: no description by him of Hunt's painting in a diary or letter. Nonetheless this exercise is fruitful in many ways. It extends the notion of a picture's reception beyond a roll-call of the standard range of published reviews. Moreover, partly for want of direct evidence of the patron's attitude to the picture, it attends to the material circumstances of Fairbairn's position when the picture was commissioned, and explores the political dimension of statements he made at the time. Through the specifics of this individual's contact with the picture we can establish one way in which the art work could function ideologically.

Thomas Fairbairn, the nephew of Peter Fairbairn of Leeds, was involved in the Manchester engineering firm founded by his father, William Fairbairn. Thomas Fairbairn as eldest son was made a partner in 1841, and became senior partner in 1853 when his father retired, leaving his two sons to run the business. By 1859 he was the sole proprietor, when his brother withdrew from the business. In his early years with the firm he was based in London and had responsibility for the ship building yard at

Millwall.(137) This branch of the firm proved unprofitable and when it was wound up he moved back to Manchester. So in the year 1853, when Thomas Fairbairn saw and admired William Holman Hunt's paintings at the Royal Academy, he was in a position of rising power and status. The losses at Millwall were estimated at over £100,000, but the fault was not Thomas Fairbairn's. His father had taken the decision in 1835 to set up the works there and it rapidly became clear that it was a mistaken decision and that Liverpool might have been a better venue. The crisis was partly one of credit and again it was William Fairbairn's credit that was shaken rather than just his son's. Thomas Fairbairn had to forego a university education to take over at the Millwall works but he was given the opportunity of ten months to travel in Italy in 1841-42, and the eight years spent in the metropolis must have been of considerable social advantage to him. He married his wife Allison in an Anglican church in Greenwich in 1848, at the end of his period in London.(138) When he moved back to Manchester he was therefore a married man, and a full partner of the business and had experience of managing a large-scale works, which had undertaken prestigious Admiralty jobs such as the building of the 600 horse power ship, *Megaera*, and had carried out experimental testing on pioneering tubular iron structures for bridge building. Moreover, he was returning to a provincial northern city with all the manners, habits, and social contacts

(137) William Pole, ed., The Life of Sir William Fairbairn, (1877), David and Charles Reprints, Newton Abbot, Devon 1970.

(138) Entry in Fairbairn family Bible, cited in: Judith Bronkhurst, 'Fruits of A Connoisseur's Friendship: Sir Thomas Fairbairn and William Holman Hunt', Burlington Magazine, vol.CXXV Oct 1983, no.967, p. 587, n.9.

acquired during his eight years in London. The difference between London and provincial society was considerable, and particularly evident in terms of social life and etiquette. In such matters as the time of dining and the manner of serving dinner the provinces could be twenty years behind the fashion of London.(139) Of course there was no hermetic division between the two. Thomas Fairbairn's visit to the Royal Academy in 1853 was by no means unusual for a member of the northern bourgeoisie. Business or politics might take a Leeds or Manchester manufacturer to London fairly regularly, especially with the advent of railways, and the trip would give the opportunity for sampling the social and cultural events offered by the metropolis.

FAIRBAIRN AND THE 1852 LOCK-OUT

The key feature of Thomas Fairbairn's position in 1853 was his triumphant leadership of the combination of Manchester engineering employers in the 1852 lock out. Strike action by the engineers seemed imminent as the powerful union, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, sought to consolidate its position within the industry. Wages and conditions were negotiated separately in each individual workplace. The union had sought to exclude unskilled non-union labour from working on boring, planing, shaping and slotting machines in certain Manchester workshops. This step towards a closed shop system was reinforced by a general policy to limit the number of apprentices per skilled

(139) see Leonore Davidoff, The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season, Croom Helm, London 1973.

engineer who could be taken on. The union also sought to achieve minimum wage rates for engineers, to refuse to work on piece-work wages, and, in an effort to achieve maximum employment for their members, to refuse to work systematic overtime.(140) The employers, outraged at the conditions achieved by the union and the threat of strike action where these conditions were flouted, decided to take the initiative and organise a lock-out. A four-month struggle ensued from January 1852 and Thomas Fairbairn was a leading figure on the employers' side.

Not all the engineering employers in Manchester and district took part in the lock-out. The Times noted that in Manchester thirty four establishments stayed open while only thirteen took the step of closing the works entirely, suspending production and locking out union members and other workers alike. However, those thirteen firms were the largest factories, employing an average of 323 men, while the smaller firms employed on average only 64 men.(141) The larger employers were better able to bear the short-term loss. The benefits they stood to gain in the long term were considerable. They were operating on a large enough scale to enable them to install new machinery and benefit from employing unskilled labour at lower wage rates. The smaller companies did not have the resources to participate in the struggle or the capital to invest in the future if the union was smashed. The example of a mill fitter in Leeds was cited in The Times to demonstrate the advantages of beating the union. Thomas

(140) J.B. Jefferys, The Story of the Engineers 1800-1945, (1945), Johnson Reprint Company, London, 1970, pp 32-48.
(141) The Times, 15 January 1852.

Fairbairn's uncle, Peter Fairbairn of Leeds, is not specifically named, but he fits the description of the large mill fitter who has achieved entirely non-union labour, with a high proportion of apprentices, four to one journeyman (the ASE were demanding one apprentice to four journeymen), and many unskilled machine tenders. His wage rates, averaging 14 shillings, are contrasted with the prevailing average rate of 24 shillings in Manchester.(142) Peter Fairbairn's struggle with the union had taken place in his early days at Leeds when the 1833 strikes at the Wellington Foundry, and his employment of scab labour led to attacks on his house and gunshots into his dining room, narrowly missing his young son and daughter.(143) One may reasonably speculate that Thomas Fairbairn had support and advice from this branch of the family. There was some co-ordination between the lock-out organised in Manchester and parallel action in London, and Thomas Fairbairn's London contacts may have been useful here.

The press was used in the campaign against the engineers' union. Fairbairn wrote a series of letters to The Times under the name of AMICUS. At first he seemed simply the friend of the employers, stating the facts of the lock-out and explaining their motives. Later however he tried to justify himself as a true friend to the workers, professing to expose the lies of the union organisers, and their communist or Blanquist leanings, and advising the workers as to their best interests. When the factory gates reopened it was only to admit workers who would

(142) The Times, 14 January 1852.

(143) Fortunes Made in Business, various writers (unspecified), 2 vols, London, Sampson, Low etc., 1884.

sign a non-union agreement. As Amicus, Fairbairn had been spokesman for the immediate local group of large engineering firms and, in a sense, for his class. One of his letters put the struggle in a wide perspective.

On the high ground of public duty, we will try to check a movement which, if allowed to proceed, would hurry on the most terrible social revolution which either this or any country ever witnessed.(144)

He exaggerated the situation. The engineering lock-out occurred at a low point of working class activity. Chartism collapsed after 1848, and it would be a mistake to see the engineers' struggle as a mass working class movement. The union was highly sectional; indeed the very demands that precipitated the conflict were sectional demands for limitation of apprenticeships and exclusion of unskilled labour. It was not generalised working-class support that enabled the union to stay out for so long, but financial contributions from other skilled unions, and, mainly, levies from their own members who were still working, amounting to £12,000.(145) The conflict rapidly moved to a defensive struggle. From the early days of the lock-out, the union was prepared to abandon its demands concerning unskilled labour, and gradually to make concessions over piece-work and overtime. By the beginning of April it was offering to abandon all demands if the employers would withdraw the compulsory signing of the non-union declaration. This was hardly a revolutionary situation. However Fairbairn was not alone in exaggerating the importance of

(144) The Times, 5 January 1852.

(145) J.B. Jefferys, op cit. p. 39,
A.E.. Musson, British Trade Unions 1800-1875, Macmillan, London, 1972, pp 50-58. I am indebted to Duncan Hallas for discussing this question with me.

the struggle. A letter from Lord Shaftesbury to his father congratulated him on his 'bold, manly and righteous course of resistance to the Louis Blanc conspiracy of the mechanics and engineers'.(146) The role of the letters in The Times was perceived as crucial, both by the union leader Newton, and by the employers' lawyer Sidney Smith.(147) The employers' victory in 1852 must have added to Thomas Fairbairn's personal power and prestige in Manchester and to some extent nationally.

THE COMMISSION FOR THE AWAKENING CONSCIENCE

It was in the following year that Fairbairn contacted William Holman Hunt, and offered him

an unlimited commission for some work to be undertaken at my convenience.(148)

This open-ended commission eventually became the commission for Hunt to complete The Awakening Conscience which he had started in 1853. It was not a straightforward commission. Despite the initial offer from Fairbairn, it was not an open commission, like Peter Fairbairn's to Haydon in 1840, nor was it the case of a patron ordering nudes or ships wholesale to suit his taste. At many stages it seemed unlikely that the purchase would go ahead. Both Hunt and Fairbairn had moments of doubt and hesitation. Several times the painter Augustus Egg interceded to help Hunt to sell the picture. At first Hunt did not imagine that the subject of The Awakening Conscience might suit Fairbairn. When he did decide to offer it to Fairbairn, Fairbairn needed to be persuaded

(146) W. Pole, op cit., p.325.

(147) J.B. Jefferys, op cit., p. 41.

(148) W.H. Hunt to Thomas Combe, 30 April 1853, quoted J. Bronkhurst,op. cit. p. 588.

by Egg to adopt the picture. When it was completed, he needed to be persuaded to accept the price of 350 guineas that Hunt set. In the months between its completion, in January 1854, and its exhibition, in May of that year, the picture was at the house of Augustus Egg, since Hunt had left for the Middle East. Hunt was hesitant about sending the picture into the Royal Academy that year, in his absence:

...it might perhaps be better not to risk a mistake and therefore well to keep it back from exhibition until my return when I know there would be no danger.(149)

His presence in the country would make possible an appearance at the private view and give him opportunities to speak to critics and avert or soften the hostility that the picture seemed likely to provoke. The reaction of those who went to see the picture at Egg's house gave some indication of the reception that could be expected. Egg wrote

All sorts of abuse have been heaped upon it by many, I may say by the majority to whom I have shown it, in a most unfeeling and uncharitable manner. (150)

In the event Hunt decided to exhibit the picture, and the deal was settled with Fairbairn. Even at this stage however, when the Royal Academy Exhibition was open, Hunt was afraid that Fairbairn might withdraw because of the adverse criticism that the picture attracted. Fairbairn did pay his money in July 1854, and was initially pleased with the picture, but later he requested Hunt to repaint the expression on the girl's face.

(149) W.H. Hunt to T.Combe, 21 February 1854, quoted R. Parkinson, 'The Awakening Conscience and the Still Small Voice', The Tate Gallery 1976-8: Illustrated Biennial Report and Catalogue of Acquisitions, The Tate Gallery, London, 1978.

(150) A.Egg to T.Combe, 20 March 1854, quoted R.Parkinson, *ibid.*

THE SACRED TIES OF HOME

If we look at the commission from Fairbairn's point of view and ask why he should have agreed to take the picture, we can make various suggestions. One of the Hunt paintings he saw and admired at the 1853 Royal Academy was Claudio and Isabella (completed in 1853)(fig.26). He would not have been able to buy this because it had been painted for Egg to fulfill a commission given by the older artist some years before, when Hunt had been badly in need of money and encouragement. Hunt insisted that Egg take the picture, although Egg urged him to sell it for a higher price, which he was, by then, able to command.(151) In fact, Fairbairn, may have been one of the people making offers for this picture, offers which Hunt refused. If this picture is the first in a series of Hunt's pictures associated with Fairbairn then The Awakening Conscience (1854) is the second, and Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus (1851) (fig.27) is the third. This third picture was bought by Fairbairn in 1855. A fourth picture by Hunt can be added to the series. Commissioned by Fairbairn in 1864 and completed in 1865, it was a group portrait of Fairbairn's wife Allison and their younger children, called The Children's Holiday (1865) (fig.28). It was not until the 1870s that Fairbairn commissioned a portrait of himself from Hunt (commissioned in 1873, completed in 1874, Fairbairn family collection) and purchased the Hunt painting The Scapegoat (painted 1854-5, purchased by Fairbairn 1878).

(151) W.H. Hunt, 'Notes on the Life of Augustus Egg', The Reader, 1863, II, p.5.

The theme of Claudio and Isabella is taken from Measure for Measure and that of Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Two Gentlemen of Verona, and so two Shakespearean subjects flank a modern life picture at the beginning of this series. However all three have in common themes of illicit sexual union. In the subject taken from Measure for Measure Claudio is languishing in prison for fornication. His sister Isabella has it in her power to avert his death sentence if she agrees to sleep with the Duke's deputy Angelo. Her brother's life is in balance against her chastity. In The Awakening Conscience, the girl is a kept mistress who starts up from her lover's lap, realising her sin. Her chastity has been lost for ever and she feels the pain of regret and repentance. In the picture based on Two Gentlemen of Verona, Valentine has just rescued Silvia from attempted rape by Proteus. Her chastity is defended from his lust. Julia, in disguise, toys with the ring Proteus had given her as a pledge of his love. Their union has been threatened by his attempt on Silvia. What interest can Amicus have had in these subjects? His letters to The Times about the engineering lock-out describe a situation where the union agitators are pitted against the sacred ties of home. He urges the workers not to attend meetings and listen to 'the turbulent and dangerous knot of demagogues', but instead to stay at home.

Let them discuss quietly at home with their wives, parents and friends their prospects and what ought to be their conduct. (152)

He accuses the union journal, The Operative, of blasphemy in its reference to Christ's not owning property.

(152) The Times, 10 January 1852.

...page after page of such miserable perversion as this disgraces the recognised organ of the Amalgamated Society ...such are the efforts made to excite discontent, hatred and envy, and destroy the affectionate reverence with which the moral beauties of our religion ought to be regarded. (153)

He recommends the workers to abandon the union and think of the misery and hardship a protracted struggle will bring on their wives and children,

...those whom they are bound by the ties of nature and the obligations of religion to nourish and protect. (154)

What he saw as his struggle against communist tendencies threatening the social fabric rested upon the double basis of home and religion, the sacrament of marriage, the sacred hearth. In the passages quoted from his letters to The Times, he is appealing to these sanctities. They are part of his ammunition in denouncing the activities of the union. He uses them as moral certainties to prove that he is right and to reinforce the recommendations he is making. He was, as we have seen, involved in a campaign to cut wages, deskill the workforce and improve the profitability of his firm. The notion of the sacred ties of home is one part of the ideological framework of that campaign. Simultaneously the campaign was to establish his position as a leading figure in the manufacturing community, and no doubt to strengthen his credit. Fairbairn could have interpreted the three Hunt pictures as moral pictures dramatising the dangers besetting sexual virtue and the need to defend it and value it. This was one element in a more extensive ideological construction of the pure woman as the dispenser of a benign moral influence

(153) The Times, 20 January 1852.
(154) The Times, 27 December 1851.

within the unsullied sphere of the home. Her children received not just physical care and nourishment from her but spiritual benefits too. The industrialist husband could come home from the morally ambivalent influences of the business world, the factory and the city or town, to the restorative virtue of the woman at home. Equally, in this construct (and we have seen Fairbairn using it) the worker could be cleansed in his home from the evil influence of union meetings at the factory gate. We can begin to see an ideological position from which the three pictures would make coherent sense. They all deal with illicit sexual union, or the threat of it. The importance of marriage and the home was a key element of Fairbairn's presentation of the employers' case. The three Hunt pictures make an issue of the threat to marriage. Fairbairn needed not only a sense of the ideal but the disturbing image of its destruction to galvanise his moralising. Similarly, he needed not only the vision of employers' freedom to dictate conditions of employment, but also its polar opposite, a threat of communism, which was, at that date, an imaginary threat. These were the demands of his rhetoric, but also the axes of his world-view. One extreme took its definition from its opposite.

WIFE VERSUS HARLOT

This way of seeing the three pictures is supported by a consideration of the fourth Hunt picture to concern Fairbairn: The Children's Holiday. A direct comparison between this painting of 1865 and The Awakening Conscience of 1854 can be used to demonstrate the framework of Fairbairn's attitudes to the function of women in society. Retrospectively, we can perceive a symmetrical opposition in these two pictures from Fairbairn's

collection, though such a comparison would have been unthinkable at the time. It would have been an insult to Fairbairn's wife to consider her portrait in conjunction with a picture of a kept woman. In fact they were two different kinds of picture. Over ten years separated their acquisition. The family portrait was a very large picture, probably hung in the staircase of the country seat Fairbairn had bought in 1861.(155) The Awakening Conscience was relatively small, designed to be hung at eye level and viewed at close quarters. It may have been moved to the country seat or may have been kept in a town residence, but at any rate it would not have been shown in the same area of the house as The Children's Holiday. The pictures belonged to different genres and a viewer would approach a portrait in a different way from that in which he or she would approach a subject picture.

Despite these cautions, we are able to do the unthinkable and point out the similarities between the two pictures. Harlot and wife both stand surrounded by their domestic trappings. Parted hair, earrings, lace at the collar, pink bow at the neck of their dresses, and richly patterned shawls over grey striped garments appear in both. The tea table takes the place of the piano but an oriental carpet and red upholstered mahogany chair remain in the same place. Adding to the echo is the slightly bent posture: an effect produced by the rising motion of the woman in The Awakening Conscience, and in the later picture by the large bustle of Mrs. Fairbairn's dress and her action in reaching over to take the teapot. There is a further slight similarity in the

(155) Burton Park in Sussex. J.Bronkhurst, op cit. p. 593.

position of the arms, both hands clasped in front in The Awakening Conscience, one hand reaching across to hold the shawl in place in the portrait group. The second image is of course reversed as a mirror image would be, and that sums up the relationship between the two, the same but opposite. In every pair of parallel details the opposites are seen. The hair loose and dishevelled in the kept woman is neatly drawn back and arranged in braids in the virtuous wife. The glittering gold or gilt earrings are matched and opposed by coral earrings set in gold that do not primarily connote ostentatious wealth, as diamonds or precious material, but rather stand for the value of artistic workmanship. The earrings and brooch have been identified as a prizewinning set shown in 1862 at the International Exhibition (156), and their public recognition as exemplary pieces of applied art identify them with the absent husband, since Fairbairn was well known for his activities in connection with art and applied art.(157) The large and lopsided floppy pink bow on the dress in The Awakening Conscience is opposed to the discreet points of pink ribbon that emerge from beneath the brooch and the rows of fine lace in The Children's Holiday. The shawl of the mistress is casually tied round her waist in a thick knot in place of an outer skirt over her white

(156) J.Bronkhurst, op cit., p. 594.

(157) Fairbairn was Chairman of the organising committee of the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857. He was responsible for the management of the Fine Art Department in the 1862 International Exhibition. He was commissioner for the International Exhibition of 1851 (elected as commissioner in May 1861), 1862, 1867, and 1871. He had purchased the Soulages Collection of decorative art in 1857 and it was bought from him for the nation 1859-65. Judith Bronkhurst, op cit., pp 588, 592-4.

petticoat. It functions as an item of undress like a dressing gown. The shawl of the wife is symmetrically arranged over her shoulders and gathered in neatly at the waist, completing her dress suitably for an outdoor summer setting. The coarse and dull grey stripes of a shapeless upper garment, suggesting an uncorseted body, contrast with Mrs. Fairbairn's fine striped shining silk dress which marks the tight waistline, the high buttoned neckline, and the narrow cuffs with emphasis of black applique and buttons. It is a dress of expensive materials but not showy since, its colours are so quiet, and it is modest in its slightly severe lines. The parallel position of their hands displays the array of rings on the hand of the kept mistress, where every finger has a ring except the ring finger, while the wife limits herself to one ring, her wedding ring.

Apart from the dress and the stance of the major figure in each picture there are a number of other aspects of the pictures that play on the parallel, but diametrically opposed, situations of the women. The room in The Awakening Conscience is a home that is not a home. It has all the fittings and furnishings of a comfortable parlour but it is not home. The man does not live there but comes visiting, as his hat and gloves show. It is not really home for her either: she has no past connection or future stake in the setting. It is a temporary arrangement. The comfort is not a result of her homemaking. The items are newly purchased and installed as she is. Her lack of housewifely skills is evident in the neglected tapestry, wools scattered over the floor, and in his dropped glove which is not tidily put away. The incongruity between her undress, which might be natural in a bedroom, and the elaborate furnishings and decorations of the

room which mark it as a formal room emphasises that she does not belong there. In The Children's Holiday the paradox of a home that is not a home is repeated but inverted. Insofar as it has an outside setting it does not show a home but all the signs of home, absent in The Awakening Conscience are there. The woman is tending to her family, dispensing tea and cakes. The children are pledges of the future, the old oaks of the estate in the background signs of a past, and rootedness. The husband is not included in the picture, but he belongs there more than the present lover in The Awakening Conscience. The jewellery is a sign of him as are the other applied art objects, the silver tea pot and urn and the china, their classical motifs in tune with the jewellery. These may also have been wedding presents which would further include him in the picture, as do of course the wedding ring, and the children. The group of mother, son and spaniel shows a series of relationships. The spaniel positioned at right angles to the eldest boy signifies fidelity, a quality associated with dogs, but also submission, specifically associated with spaniels. The boy, in turn at right angles to his mother, looks at her, evincing the same qualities, her faithful supporter, but under her guidance and control. She looks out of the picture, surely gazing at her husband with the same steady submissive look. So in this way too the husband is included in the picture.

This suggests some ways in which the pictures could have made sense to Fairbairn, reading them against each other in the context of his personal Hunt collection. That is not to say that these are personal meanings. The double image of woman as either

pure wife and mother or debased whore, and the idea that she took on her rightful function in a private domestic sphere, were so widespread as to be common sense. But it only became common sense by constant formulation and reformulation in various sites, one of which was painting. Another site was that of political journalism, and the letters of Amicus show him mobilising these assumptions in a situation where he clearly had a personal stake. For Fairbairn, The Awakening Conscience was a picture that showed the converse of virtuous womanhood. It showed the fallen woman as the antithesis of home, virtue and stability. Her guilty relationship with the man was seen to threaten the institution of marriage and the home. This was perceived the more readily as the scene in the picture was not far removed from a happy domestic interior. It was not a scene of a prostitute in a gutter, nor of a kept mistress in a public place, but was almost a parody of a virtuous menage. We can conjecture that Fairbairn read the picture in this way. Such a reading would be consistent with the ideas articulated by Amicus. Moreover it is logically consistent with the attitude articulated by Ruskin's letter on the painting. The pattern of guilt, punishment and pity set up in Ruskin's letter is founded on an unambivalent identification of the woman's behaviour as sinful, and a vision of the stark contrast between her current state of immorality and her virtuous origins. The letter posits an implicit contrast in the picture between the interior we see and a true home.

MULTIPLE MEANINGS

Despite the plausibility of the account we have developed of Fairbairn's access to the subject of The Awakening Conscience and

its consistency with the account of the picture given by Ruskin, the doubts and hesitations involved in the picture's commission suggest that it did not slot easily into a clear ideological position. Fairbairn did not refuse or repudiate the commission in the end, but he did seem in danger of doing so. His decision to have the women's face repainted is evidence of his uneasiness with some aspect of the picture. The subject of the picture, the fallen woman, was a problematic one in the mid nineteenth century. Prostitution and the associated problems of female sexuality and gender identity were the subject of discussion in medical and legal literature and in social commentary and social reportage, as well as in literature and art.(158) It is possible that The Awakening Conscience could present contradictory meanings. By pairing the painting with The Children's Holiday, a way of reading the picture has been suggested that was consonant with, and supportive of, Fairbairn's economic and political position. Other readings can be posited. This is not to suggest that Fairbairn was duped and that the reading we can attribute to Amicus is wrong. If that interpretation were not allowed by the picture then it is unlikely that Fairbairn would have gone ahead with the purchase. Rather the Amicus reading is one viable approach to the picture among others. In this case the inadequacy of reducing the ideological work of a picture to the class position of its patron becomes evident. Studies of

(158) Jeffrey Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800, London, Longman, 1981. M. Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 1 : an introduction, trans. R. Hurley, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979. L. Nead, 'Seduction, Prostitution, Suicide : On the Brink by Alfred Elmore', Art History, Vol. 5 No. 3, Sept. 1982, pp 310-322.

patronage and ideology such as Hadjinicolaou's *Art History and Class Struggle* have attempted to establish a one-to-one equivalent between the class position of the patron and the ideological content of the painting.(159) Whatever the degree of precision with which the patron's class position is defined, it is too limiting to read a picture exclusively in terms of its owner's assumptions, views and interests. One result of this method of analysis is to see pictures as invariably confirmatory. It does not allow for any differentiation in the role of the picture. There are shifting relationships between patron and painting when, in one case, a painting is simply aligned with the patron's viewpoint, in another, it actively confirms the position of the patron, or, in a third case, it reformulates a position. But the problem with Hadjinicolaou's method is more fundamental than this. It allows neither for a multiple meaning in the picture nor for a varying context for the reception and understanding of the picture.

To posit a unitary meaning which the picture, or any text, has, is to impose from outside a coherence which takes no account of different strands, breaks and contradictions which the work may encompass. It can lead to a position which ascribes a notional 'real' meaning to the work, which is given more credence and attention than the actual material of the text.(160) If, instead, the art work is seen as an assemblage of signs which derive their meaning not just from the particular combination in

(159) N.Hadjinicolaou, Art History and Class Struggle, trans. Louise Asmal, Pluto Press, London, 1979.

(160) Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1978.

which they are found, but from a variety of sign systems which extend beyond the limits of the work, then it is possible to see the work as offering many readings, as being polyvalent. The conditions of reception also play a part in extending the range of meanings borne by the picture. A picture was not just seen by the individual who purchased it but by many people in a variety of contexts. Its ideological import could vary according to the viewer and the situation in which the picture was viewed. In the space of twelve months a picture could be moved from an artist's studio, to an academy exhibition, to a dealer's showroom, to a private house and then back to an exhibition hall as part of a loan exhibition. Within a private house it could be hung in a gallery specially for paintings, or in a public reception room or in a private apartment. It could be kept in a male preserve within the house or in an area primarily for women's use. Any change in location could affect the way in which the picture was viewed. The passing of time too could fundamentally alter the way in which a picture was understood. This chapter attempts to identify some of the available meanings of a picture rather than to demonstrate the congruence of the world-views of picture and patron.

PRESS REACTION: HOSTILE AND NEUTRAL

In the particular context of the picture's exhibition at the 1854 Royal Academy, and at Birmingham in the following year, a number of critical accounts emerged that were consonant neither with Ruskin's reading of the picture, nor with the reading we have attributed to Amicus. Interest in and hostility to the painting seem to have been stimulated by Ruskin's letter.

Despite the 'abuse' emanating from those who saw the picture at Augustus Egg's house before the Royal Academy Exhibition, and despite Hunt's absence and consequent inability to engage in the diplomacy of the art world, the initial press notices of the picture were not exaggeratedly hostile. They either ignored the painting or expressed relatively mild disapproval. The Times did not mention the picture. The Sun bracketed The Awakened Conscience (sic) with The Light of the World and summed them up as 'each in its way astonishingly clever, but both wonderfully extravagant'. (161) The critics' charges of bad taste, vulgarity, ugliness and incompetence were really developed after the publication, at the end of May, of Ruskin's letter. The most sustained attack came in the September issue of the Art Journal. This is one reason for taking issue with a version of events which sees critical outrage and incomprehension followed by Ruskin's revelatory defence.

A second reason is that the alleged incomprehension of the critics needs examining more closely. Incomprehension was an element of the earliest reactions to the picture. J.E. Millais had written to Hunt

I hear flocks of people are going to see your modern subject at Egg's who are mystified by the subject. (162)

Egg was anxious about this and favoured the title which was ultimately adopted, when it was suggested.

I think the title 'The Awakening Conscience' is a very admirable one, and very much assists the telling of the story. (163)

(161) Sun, 1 May 1854.

(162) Letter quoted by Diana Holman Hunt. Quoted by R. Parkinson, op. cit.

When the published criticism appeared, the critics spoke of the painting being misunderstood, but most often it was to claim that ordinary viewers failed to grasp its meaning, rather than that they themselves were baffled. This is an important distinction, because there is a big difference between actually failing to grasp the meaning of the scenario and incident portrayed, and the use of the concept of incomprehensibility to criticise the picture for dealing with the scenario in a particular way. The Athenaeum said

Innocent and unenlightened spectators suppose it to represent a quarrel between a brother and a sister.(164)

The Illustrated London News mentions the picture in the context of comments on the general low standard of appreciation and understanding of pictures at the Royal Academy.

If we call to mind overheard opinions expressed in the Exhibition itself they will be found of a very mixed character . . . Mr. Hunt's cold allegory of our Saviour is viewed with a devotional feeling by some, by others with a gaze of ill stifled wonderment, and by too many as a piece of Mediaeval barbarity. Nor does his smaller picture fare much better, though the attempt to discover its actual meaning has too often proved abortive, for the Awakening Conscience of this clever painter is now familiarly known as 'the loose lodging.(165)

These remarks probably rely on Ruskin's first letter to locate the 'actual meaning' of The Light of the World in its allegorical aspect. The tag 'loose lodging' would seem to be an accurate description of the scene in he Awakening Conscience but the review here implies that it is not, as if its real meaning lies elsewhere, and as if it would be as absurd to see the picture as

(163) Letter A. Egg to T. Combe, 27 March 1954, quoted by R. Parkinson, op. cit.

(164) Athenaeum, 6 May 1854, p.561.

(165) Illustrated London News, 13 May 1854, p. 438.

representing a wicked menage as to see The Light of the World as representing a man with a lamp and a door with ivy growing on it. The theme of incomprehensibility occurs too in the Art Journal review. According to the critic in this journal, the subject of the painting would be unintelligible were it not for the title, but, he claims, confusion is restored by the Biblical quotations that accompanied the title.(166) This is a way of describing the meaning as being obscure, then establishing that the reviewer knows what the meaning is, and finally reestablishing its status as obscure. The review published in the Morning Chronicle refers to the unintelligibility of the painting.

This is an absolutely disagreeable picture, and it fails to express its own meaning, either in its general composition or through the agency of its details. The complicated compound shadow in the mirror is also a mere piece of intricacy without any good or valuable effort.(167)

In the reviews of The Awakening Conscience in all these newspapers and journals, from the Athenaeum to the Morning Chronicle, there is a common vacillation. The approach to the picture varies, as does the degree of disapproval, but they have in common a vacillation between saying that they know what the picture means and saying that it is, through some structural defect, illegible. There is a tantalising suggestion in the Athenaeum reference to 'innocent spectators' that the viewer who admits to being able to read the picture is not innocent, but is implicated in the sin of the scene. This diametrical opposite of Ruskin's morally aloof, compassionate spectatorship is a position

(166) Art Journal, 1854.

(167) Morning Chronicle, 29 April 1854.

that can be further explored in the interpretations of the picture offered by Punch, and F.G. Stephens, in a pamphlet on Hunt, which will be discussed later.

The basis of the Morning Chronicle review is the failure of the picture in compositional and formal terms. The full-scale attack on the picture in the September issue of the Art Journal was on the same theme.(168) The article takes on the reading of details, or, as it puts it, 'the narrative of the properties and incidents', and says that Ruskin's praise of these was absurd, since the use of accessories in the picture to tell the story was nothing new or exceptional. It was standard practice, and the job of the critic was to gauge the degree of vulgarity with which the accessories were used. The vulgarity, in the case of The Awakening Conscience, extended to the subject chosen. The article admits that such a subject could be treated in a way that avoided vulgarity, but here it did not.

The subject has been dictated by the very worst taste; in similar cases we sometimes see the point made out without vulgarity of sentiment.

The substantive fault-finding is reserved then not for the failure of the picture to tell its story through its details, nor even for the substance of the story itself, but for another kind of illegibility: a formal incompetence. Defective drawing, clumsy contours, mistakes in the lighting and shadows, and inconsistencies in the size of the figures and their reflections are cited. Grouped with these criticisms is the exaggerated expression and agonised stance of the woman. This too is

(168) Art Journal, September 1854.

perceived as a formal error since

when the profound emotions of the soul are painted, the body is passive.

Hunt, the article concludes, does not have the technical ability to paint the subject he has attempted.

FAILURE TO SUBORDINATE DETAILS

We have posited a meaning that The Awakening Conscience may have held, if not for the individual Fairbairn, for the member of a particular class fraction, Amicus. The meaning suggested by Ruskin's letter on the painting is not identical with that which can be drawn from a pairing with The Children's Holiday, that of whore versus wife, of claustrophobic interior non-home versus airy exterior home, of degradation and sin versus wifely virtues. But Ruskin's reading is not in conflict with what we might call the Amicus reading. It develops the past circumstances and future consequences of the girl's fall, and constructs a position for the viewer of moralising condemnation, tempered with pity for her doom. It too gives the picture a place in the range of statements and representations that were in currency and were jointly establishing a consensus on the limitations of power and the appropriate role of women. But the other newspaper reviews of the picture that we have looked at opposed Ruskin, not simply, as modern commentators have thought, by registering incomprehension where he offered explanation. They raised objections to the technique of the picture (Morning Chronicle, Art Journal), and to the 'mystical, irrelevant', confusing, Biblical quotations (Athenaeum, Art Journal). They noticed the 'studious exactitude' with which details were made out (Art

Journal) or even praised them as 'wonderfully true' (Athenaeum), but considered the work put in to achieve this closely worked, detailed surface - wasted (Art Journal, Morning Chronicle). These apparently incoherent objections do have a unifying theme in that they all relate to features of the picture that prevent the viewer from taking the kind of superior, detached moral position that Ruskin devised.

The Biblical quotations which accompanied the picture did not lend themselves to the secure and superior position taken by Ruskin. One was inscribed on the frame.

As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart.

Two accompanied the title in the Royal Academy Catalogue.

'As of the green leaves on a thick tree, some fall and some grow; so is the generation of flesh and blood.

Ecclesiastes, xiv, 18

'strengthen ye the feeble hands, and confirm ye the tottering knees; say ye to the faint hearted: Be ye strong; fear ye not; behold your God.'

- Isaiah - Bishop Lowth's

Translation

They were not quotations referring to penance, expiation or punishment. There was no intimation in them of the fearful earthly doom Ruskin took to await the woman, but instead, in the Isaiah passage, exhortation to fearlessness, an identification of the woman as weak and tottering rather than lost and culpable. The notion of falling in the Ecclesiastes passage is not of guilty falling but of random survival or failure in nature.

When critics objected to the faulty technique in The Awakening Conscience - to the intricacy of the complicated compound shadows and the wasted effort on details - they were pointing to features in the picture which offended against accepted rules of

painting. The objections that were raised cannot be fully understood unless they are put in the context of critical categories that were available and current in the 1840s and 1850s. Many paintings throughout this period were criticised for departing from a compositional norm that centred the viewer's attention on the main incident in the picture. As explained in Chapter One of this thesis, critics followed criteria derived from Reynolds. It was thought that the subordinate parts of the picture should be kept from competing with the main incident by being made less distinct. The disposition of areas of light and shade, the emphasis gained from colour contrasts, and the compositional grouping were all expected to articulate the picture surface so that it was legible. We can see that The Awakening Conscience deviated from these rules of painting and this helps us to understand the response of many critics to the painting. When reviews referred to the unintelligibility of the picture, they were often indicating that the picture surface was not made legible in the way they expected. We can see that The Awakening Conscience does not have distinct patches of light and shade but even, indirect lighting all over the picture, except for a small pool of sunshine in the bottom right corner. The room is crowded with objects claiming our attention. Even the flat surfaces of carpet, wall and piano are richly coloured and patterned. The mirror especially tires the eye because what we see in it are not merely the reflections of objects in front of it in the picture - the side of the man's head and shoulder, the back of the girl, but of things beyond the picture space - the opened French windows and the garden setting beyond them, and the reflection of a mirrored wall beside the French window, parallel

to the mirror behind the couple, which reflects in turn the wall which would be to the left of the couple and the fireplace on that wall surmounted by yet another gold-framed mirror or picture. There is so much information contained in the mirror that our ability to interpret it is exhausted and all our eye is able to do is move restlessly from one apparent perspective to another.

A comparison of two reviews from the 1840s illustrates clearly the prevailing critical attitude as to the correct and incorrect portrayal of detail in narrative painting. J.C. Horsley's Winning Gloves was considered to have obeyed the rules of painting in its use of light and shade, but to have transgressed in its over-elaboration of detail.

A lady sleeping in a chair, and a cavalier about to 'win gloves' by kissing her. In this picture there is much that is beautiful: but brilliancy in the lights and depth in the shadows are counteracted by a finish of parts which breaks the unity of these qualities. A care even zu Hollandisch has been lavished on unimportant matters in the composition, while some of the same would have advantaged the female figure who sits uneasily. (169)

The failure of a picture to differentiate between details and to guide the viewer's eye was particularly disturbing to mid-nineteenth century critics because it meant not just that a picture failed artistically but that it was demoted in the notional hierarchy that ranged from spiritually uplifting high art to the degraded physical stimulation of low art. At this date, and throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Dutch painting was considered to be very low in its meticulous attention to fine detail. Excess detail could block the

narrative and lead to misinterpretation or render the picture unintelligible. A review of Richard Redgrave's Going to Service, exhibited in 1843, judged it a highly successful picture. It was said to balance a proliferation of detail, or, within the narrative context, of allusions, with a proper structure to the picture.

Great ingenuity has been exerted to render the story perfect; every part of the canvas contains some allusion to the main incident, thrown in so judiciously as to appear in the proper place. A girl is about to leave her home in the country...Effective narrative and delineative truth have been the artist's principal view here, and his purpose is perfectly answered. Each of the figures sustains perfectly the part allotted to it, without the slightest impertinence to interrupt the smooth currency of the history. (170)

The picture was thought successful because there was no competition for attention between the main figures and the surroundings.

THE MORAL CONSEQUENCES OF COMPOSITIONAL DISRUPTION

Using categories current in the mid-nineteenth century, The Awakening Conscience can be seen as a picture that fails to balance the composition, and one where the viewer is reduced to a mere eye, a sensory organ without discrimination. Such a viewer does not have a secure narrative entry into the picture. He or she can no longer be as certain as Ruskin about the past and future of the woman in the painting. This viewer is not a judge who can choose to summon up compassion, but merely an observer. Moreover the stimulation of the eye was not, at that period, considered to be a neutral experience but had associations of guilt and excitement. Gratification of the visual sense was

(170) Art Union, 1843.

certainly considered low. It was associated, through the picturesque, with low subjects despite pleas that the picturesque should not be limited to showing indigence.

The low and the mean, the decayed and poverty-stricken[sic] are often thought to be the only picturesque, as if picture must indulge vile associations. Let not art take habitat in 'rotten rows', nor vainly imagine that the eye should seek delight where the foot would not willingly tread - the purlieus of misery and vice. (171)

The delight of the eye, when unconnected with spiritual or intellectual considerations, was in the illusion that what was painted was real. Handsome faces and perfect buildings were thought to offer uniform lines and general truths. They evoked not just pleasure in looking but admiration and abstract reflection. In the picturesque the viewer was shown things, not told about them. With its ragged jumble of items it insisted on the specificity and actuality of every element. With every separate element, whether it were broken earthenware pitcher, uneven roof or grimy urchin face, the specificity was insisted on and the pleasure of the illusion renewed. The picture was not a unitary experience but a series of shocks of recognition. The excitement associated with the purely visual was the excitement of these ever-recurring frissons. Since the experience was not such that it allowed the viewer to draw any conclusions, the effect was to generate demand for more and more doses of the scopic. The parallel with a sexual appetite is one that strikes a modern commentator, but it is not simply a reading back of modern concerns. We saw in Chapter One of this thesis that visual excitation was frequently described in terms of sexual

(171) Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, September 1841.

excitement. The language of art criticism was pervaded by metaphors of titillation and prostitution. Ruskin deplored the effects of facile imitation of the actual in art, and his remarks indicate the sexual connotations of the descent from spiritual contemplation to purely visual excitement.

All high or noble emotion or thought is thus rendered physically impossible, while the mind exults in what is very like a strictly sensual pleasure. (172)

In this account, purely visual delight is conceived of as a physical thrill akin to sexual excitation.

In the case of The Awakening Conscience, there is another kind of excitement involved, again one that is linked to the extremely distinct rendering of detail. Ruskin's letter to The Times identified a feverish excitement of the girl's state of mind and the viewer's consequent interest, both of which, he claims, warrant the clarity of the details. This idea that the mind becomes more aware of trivial objects when in a state of excitement or distress was not original. It is cited as a common literary device used by Dickens and Scott, and as a justification for the detail of Lauder's The Trial of Effie Deans, shown at the Royal Academy of 1841.

[It] may possibly meet with censure from many who think historic art ought to have no such aim - that it should not descend to such particular and strongly defined representation of detail - that there is too much actual truth ... Whoever has been present at such harrowing scenes as the Trial of Effie Deans, has borne away with him, fixed upon his memory, and connected with the event in no other way than accidentally, some visual object or objects which he can never after separate. There is an effort in the mind, under the most trying circumstances, to find relief from the external senses - and the organs of the eye do

(172) Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol.I, Library Edition, vol.III, George Allen, London, 1903, p.102.

their part with wonderful fidelity. (173)

A psychological mechanism is being described whereby the visual sense is exaggerated to provide relief from stress.

Pictorial characteristics of The Awakening Conscience can, then, be identified which, using critical categories available in the 1850s, would have implicated the viewer in a state of visual excitement, analogous to sexual excitement, and would have made the viewer undergo a visual experience associated with terror or distress. The art critics who objected to the painting were objecting to being put through this experience. Above all, they did not want to be thrown into a pleasurable but terrifying state of excited looking by a scene of unmistakable impropriety, a scene with no distancing mythological overlay, but one which was, on the contrary, startlingly modern. The subject matter of The Awakening Conscience, a private interior, and a couple, one half-undressed and intimately seated on the other's knee, put the viewer into the position of voyeur, as if he or she were peeping through a keyhole.

VOYEURISM AND THE PRIMAL SCENE

In psychoanalytic writing the pleasure taken in looking is described as scopophilia. In Freud's description of the different instincts that operate in the sadistic-anal phase of the development of the libido, scopophilia is described as a component instinct, along with epistemophilia: the instinct for gaining knowledge. (174) He does not suggest that this instinct

(173) Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, September 1841.

(174) S. Freud, Pelican Freud Library, Ed. A. Richards, Penguin,

disappears completely as the libido moves on to later stages of development. In his analysis of the dream of a woman, about buying theatre tickets, he talks of

a sexual desire to look [scopophilia], directed towards sexual happenings and especially on to the girl's parents.

later he amplifies this:

The desire to look ... curiosity to discover at long last what really happens when one is married. This curiosity is, as we know, regularly directed by children towards their parents' sexual life; it is an infantile curiosity, and, so far as it still persists later, an instinctual impulse with roots reaching back into infancy. (175)

If we were to describe the effect of The Awakening Conscience in psychoanalytic terms, it would be to say, precisely, that it appeals to a sexual desire to look, and offers what has the appearance of a sexual happening for the viewer. But the psychoanalytic gloss can be taken further and can incorporate the effect of terror or distress that we have associated with the painting. Freud discusses children's observation of sexual intercourse by their parents, either in reality or in phantasy. This is what he calls the primal scene, and the child, led to stare fascinatedly at the scene by his or her scopophilic urge and curiosity, experiences sexual excitation. But at the same time the child commonly experiences terror, first because the scene is misconstrued as a violent struggle (176) and secondly because it gives him or her the opportunity to see that the mother has no penis, and so confirms the existence of castration. It was in the case history known as that of the Wolf Man that

Harmondsworth, 1973-, vol. I. Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, p. 370

(175) S. Freud, *ibid*, p. 258, 263.

(176) S. Freud, *ibid*, vol. 7, On Sexuality, p. 198.

Freud went most carefully into the implications of the primal scene. The primal scene, actually observed, developed as a phantasy, or recalled in a dream, has different effects on the boy at different stages in his psychological development. At the age of four he has a dream of wolves sitting in a tree, which recalls the viewing of the primal scene at the age of one and a half, and it is in the dream, that the terrifying aspect of the scene, the danger of castration, becomes apparent to him. In the primal scene recalled by the dream the rear-entry position adopted by his parents in sexual intercourse gives him the opportunity to see that his mother has no penis.

...a scene which was able to show him what sexual satisfaction from his father was like; and the result was terror ... a conviction of the reality of the existence of castration. (177)

The primal scene can, in a case like this, allow the exercise of scopophilic pleasure in looking and simultaneously overlay it with the terror produced by the fear of castration. I would suggest that The Awakening Conscience produced in its mid-nineteenth-century viewers a comparable combination of sensual pleasure in looking and distressful anxiety, while casting the viewer in the role of voyeur by presenting such a private and intimate scene. In following through an analysis of the picture in these terms I will refer to the viewer as 'he', not because all viewers were men but because the picture can be thought of as constructing a masculine position for its viewer.

We can identify parallel primal scene elements in a range of other paintings of this period, both by Hunt and by other

(177) S. Freud, *ibid*, vol. 9, Case Histories II, p.267.

artists. The Awakening Conscience was not alone in making the viewer witness a fearful secret event. In Hunt's early work, two paintings deal with such themes. The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro during the Drunkenness Attending the Revelry (1848) shows two lovers escaping secretly. A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids (1850) (fig.29) similarly presents a secret activity conducted in an atmosphere of fear. In each case the viewer is shown something that is hidden from others in the picture. The revellers in the hall cannot see the lovers escaping, and the mob chasing the Christian outside the hut cannot see the missionary being sheltered. Such paintings as The Proscribed Royalist, 1651 (1853) (fig.30) by J. E. Millais and Broken Vows (1856) (fig.31) by P.H. Calderon show us lovers meeting in secret. In the latter we are given the woman in the foreground to identify with. Her unfaithful lover is with another woman behind the fence. The distressful fascination characteristic of the primal scene is built up in this picture through the woman's grief at being betrayed. She leans back with closed eyes, trying to shut out what she has seen through the chink in the fence but we, as viewers of the picture, are allowed to go on looking. The theme of R. Redgrave's The Fortune Hunter (1843) has a comparable theme (fig.32). The woman behind the screen witnesses the lovemaking of the couple entering the room. She is neglected because she is not rich and finely dressed like the other woman. The same theme runs through many of J. C. Horsley's humorous subjects. In Showing a Preference (1860) (fig.33) the man walks out with two young women but one is ignored. Her humiliation and embarrassment are the comic equivalent of the anguish in Broken

Vows. The fearful looking is acted out in his later Pay For Peeping (1872) (fig.34) where a boy who spies through a hole in the curtain on a young couple courting in the bay window is about to be punished by an older woman, who approaches him, her hand raised to slap him. In the same year that The Awakening Conscience was exhibited, Abraham Solomon's modern life scenes First Class - The Meeting and Second Class - The Parting (1854) were shown at the Royal Academy. The first of these (fig.35) is yet another voyeuristic scene, where the young couple, making eyes at each other in the railway carriage, do so stealthily while the old gentleman is asleep. A certain amount of disquiet was expressed at the impropriety of this subject, and the criticisms echo the criticisms of The Awakening Conscience.

As a picture it is executed with great knowledge and power, but it is we think to be regretted that so much facility should be lavished on so bald - or vulgar - a subject.
(178)

In a second version of the picture (fig.36) Solomon removed the objectionable frisson by showing the old gentleman awake. These samples indicate the wider artistic context in which the themes we have identified in The Awakening Conscience were being explored.

FETISHISTIC STRATEGIES: PUNISHMENT AND BEAUTY

In their hostile reaction to The Awakening Conscience the critics we have examined registered and rejected the voyeuristic thrill and the scopophilic appeal of the painting. It offered them pleasure in looking, but only pleasure mingled with

unpleasure in the castration anxiety associated with the primal scene of which they were made voyeurs. The fear could be made bearable in a strategy like Ruskin's. His reading of the picture denied the aimless decentred act of looking by constructing a firm narrative. It further fended off the threat of castration with the controlling, punishing attitude it took towards the woman. The condition of his power to recommend pity and forgiveness was his power to condemn and punish. Ruskin's reading converts the dangerous scopophilia offered by the picture into a safe sadistic voyeurism. Another way in which the anxiety could be allayed is through an iconic strategy in which the beauty of the object represented is asserted, and the gaze fixes on this beautified image. In psychoanalytic terms, this is the strategy of fetishism where the contemplation of an apparently castrated woman is replaced by the contemplation of an object, or a part or aspect of the woman that is rendered or considered phallic. By means of this substitution, the woman can once again be imagined as complete. Castration anxiety is subdued and the pleasurable component of scopophilia is allowed to predominate.(179) Notions of beauty as plenitude that were current in the mid-nineteenth century suggest how this fetishisation of the female figure operated. A clear example is given by some remarks made by William Holman Hunt on some female figures in the Elgin room of the British Museum. He described female beauty as swelling.

(179) see L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Screen, vol.16, no.3, 1975, for a theorisation of the pleasure derived from viewing cinema, the threat of castration this pleasure seems to entail for the masculine viewer, and the narrative and iconic defence mechanisms adopted.

look ... how it has pushed forward the brow, enlarged the nose extended the nostrils, pouted the lips, protruded the full chin, made heavy the rich hair, swollen the erect throat, and rounded the massive limbs. (180)

In the vision he presents, the female figure is very much like a penis erecting. Later on in the same article, with the prospect of an imperfect or asymmetrically swollen figure there is the suggestion of a failing erection, as the beam of justice's balance drops.

Beauty is justice in form. Justice is not poor in acts - beauty is rich in matter. Raphael's outlines are proud and ample - the equipoise not of empty scales, but of paired weighty fulness and variety, that single and unmatched would turn the beam to a very unequal angle.

The problem with The Awakening Conscience was that it failed to offer female beauty for the viewer to fix on, and so blocked off this strategy of fetishistic scopophilia. Critics repeatedly complained about the ugliness of the woman in the picture. Fairbairn eventually requested Hunt to repaint the woman's expression. A review from 1856, when the picture was shown at the Birmingham Society of Artists, typifies the complaints about her ugliness.

Conscience does not always attest its workings by a grin, and there was no need to have made his example of its force so preternaturally ugly ... an ugly woman in the incipient stage of a hysterical attack. (181)

This review then moves on to the hideous deformity of Hunt's 'syren': Pre-Raphaelitism.

fast bound to the Pre Raphaelite syren [Mr.Hunt] remained her votary, to find some day or other the lady's mask will fall off, and disclose to him a very deformed face.

The ugliness of the woman represented in the picture has been

(180) W.H. Hunt, 'Notes on the Life of Augustus Egg', The Reader, vol.II, 1863, pp.42-43.

(181) Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 6 October 1856.

transferred to a notional figure, Pre-Raphaelitism, and in dubbing this figure a siren the review conveys the shock and fear experienced when the beguiling and reassuring beauty is no longer there. All that is left is a threat of death, since sirens lured sailors to their death.(182) Through a siren-prostitute-fallen woman association these remarks can be taken as an indication of the castration fear aroused by the picture. In this framework the viewer is being seduced by the syren-prostitute, just as he is being seduced by the pleasure in looking at the picture surface. The metaphor chosen by the critic suggests the unconscious fear and threat of castration experienced by the viewer. An unnerving involvement at this level militated against a calm and disengaged critical discourse.

IMPLICATING THE VIEWER

The mirror in the picture adds to the elements of The Awakening Conscience which put the viewer into this uncomfortable position. Logically, since the mirror reflects the space outside the room, it ought to reflect the viewer peeping at the intimate scene. It threatens to expose the voyeur. The complication of the reflection in the mirror with its frames within frames, and mirrors within mirrors, opens the possibility that the frame round the picture as a whole is yet another mirror frame. In that case, it is as if the mirror on the back wall had moved

(182) The identification of the woman in the picture with the siren is further confirmed by the common use of the metaphor of the siren for a prostitute in the nineteenth century. Prostitutes were thought to lure young men into sin as sirens lured their victims. See L. Nead, 'Woman as Temptress: The Siren and the Mermaid in Victorian Painting', Leeds Arts Calendar, no. 91, 1982, pp 5-20.

forward to take the whole picture space. The guilty voyeur then finds that he is indeed exposed in the picture. He is present in the picture as the young man, the lover of the kept woman. By this process, the viewer is not just included in the sexual event as voyeur, but in a psychoanalytically distinct, but simultaneous role, as an actor. The modernity of the dress and accessories in the picture was unusual in the context of the Academy Exhibition at this date, except in portraiture, where the subject was a named individual. This modernity, combined with the unusual accuracy with which every detail in the picture was represented, combined to confirm the impression that the picture as a whole was a mirror. The viewer, already experiencing the fearful pleasure of looking, was invited to identify that fearful pleasure with the guilty pleasure of sinful behaviour.

There are very few reviews of the picture where critics pay any attention to the male figure in the painting. One instance is the pamphlet of 1860 on William Holman Hunt by F.G. Stephens. He gives as much space to the man as to the woman. The man is described as

a showy handsome tiger of the human species, heartless and indifferent as death ...insolent shamelessness ... false, pitiless and cruel. (183)

The woman is described as 'the victim of his passions'. Despite this, there is still no identification of the writer with the man. F.G. Stephens speaks for the bourgeois (male) viewer and reader of his pamphlet, and provides him with a way to avoid identifying with the man in the picture, by describing that man

(183) F.G. Stephens, William Holman Hunt and his Works, 1860.

at one point as 'patrician', suggesting that he is an aristocrat, and at another point as 'the double distilled essence of vulgarity . . . the true specimen of 'the gent'. In either case he does not qualify as a member of the bourgeoisie proper, and so the viewer/reader is allowed to keep at a comfortable distance from him. Only Punch offers us a review where these defensive tactics are dropped. The elements in The Awakening Conscience that tend to include the viewer in the painting and implicate him in the illicit situation are acknowledged in some measure.

I see a courageous determination to face one of the rifest evils of our time, and to read all of us youth a terrible lesson . . . the painter preaching us a sermon . . . knocking at our hearts and awakening our consciences. Knock on Henry Holman Hunt [sic] for all that Tell us more home truths. Set us face to face with our great sins again and on Henry Hunt [sic] again. Still paint our Magdalenes, scared by the still small voice amid their bitter splendours, mocked in their misery by the careless smiles and gay voices of their undoers. (184)

This review is very far from Ruskin in its reading of the picture. According to Ruskin, the picture encourages the viewer to exercise a judge's compassion. According to the Punch critic, the picture encourages the viewer to acknowledge his own guilt.

The Awakening Conscience was evidently a problematic image in the 1850s. On one hand it lent itself to the standard narrative attached to it by Ruskin, and to a compatible position we can construct for Amicus. On the other hand, features of the picture were felt - by a large number of critics - to obstruct a secure narrative extrapolation. The tendency of the scene to position the viewer as voyeur, coupled with its refusal to provide a beautified image, made it hard to accept as a pleasing visual

experience where narrative was minimised. The picture seemed to offer a threat to a secure narrative therefore, or else a threat to the pleasure of the viewer. The reaction of the Punch critic seems to move beyond an insistent assertion of, or demand for, one or the other. By acknowledging the possibility of the viewer/male seducer's guilt, the review suggests a radical revision of the commonly repeated narrative construct that was associated with the fallen woman. The guilt of the man in the picture raises the possibility of the innocence of, or at least a modification of the guilt attributed to, the woman. The sequence of the woman's guilty action, her inevitable earthly degradation and the distant possibility of divine forgiveness is upset at the outset. Consequently, it seems conceivable that the path Ruskin lays out for the woman in the picture might not be the one that she will follow. Some parallel examples of a questioning of the consensus myth of the fallen woman can be found in literary explorations of the theme in the late 1840s and early 1850s.(185)

CONCLUSION

Neither Ruskin's reading nor a reading we can attribute to Amicus exhausts the meaning of the The Awakening Conscience. It is impossible to ascribe a single unified ideological function to the picture. The vicissitudes of the commission, and Fairbairn's ultimate dissatisfaction with the expression of the woman in the painting, give some indication of the painting's failure to match

(185) For examples of this emerging discussion see C. Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, 1847, (novel). D.G. Rossetti, *Jenny*, 1847-48 (poem) E.Gaskell, *Ruth*, 1853 (novel) and W.R. Greg, 'False Morality of Lady Novelists', 1859 (review article).

exactly the requirements and expectations of its patron. We can begin to understand the reason for this when we look at the reviews of the picture that were published in the 1850s. The complications and contradictions in the picture made it very difficult for the critics to deal with. The critical positions that were developed were, as we have seen, widely divergent. The scopical experience of viewing the picture was disturbing to critics, especially when combined with the subject matter which concerned immoral behaviour. This chapter has examined the ways in which that feeling of unease was registered, and the strategies adopted to mitigate it.

CHAPTER FOUR: WILLIAM MAW EGLEY'S OMNIBUS LIFE IN LONDON

In Wilkie Collins's novel of 1852 Basil there is a key episode, where the hero Basil boards an omnibus on impulse. He has literary ambitions and feels that bus travel gives a particularly good opportunity for the study of human character.

I had often before ridden in omnibuses to amuse myself by observing the passengers. An omnibus has always appeared to me, to be a perambulatory exhibition-room of the eccentricities of human nature. I know not any other sphere in which persons of all classes and all temperaments are so oddly collected together, and so immediately contrasted and confronted with each other.(186)

He uses class in the general sense of different types, but there is an overtone of the specific sense of social rank, and, as the story develops, the class difference between the aristocratic Basil and the woman he first sees on the bus plays a major part in the tragedy. Margaret is a linen-draper's daughter, and Basil is afraid to confess to his father that he has fallen in love with a woman of that class. The class difference between them is urged by Margaret's father as a reason for Basil to accept the condition of an immediate marriage, but delayed consummation. He claims that a broken engagement to a high-born suitor would ruin his daughter's reputation. As a result Basil quarrels with his father and allows himself to be deceived by his wife. The bus

(186) W. Wilkie Collins, Basil, (1852), reprint of 1862 edition, Dover, New York, 1980, p.27.

then, in Basil, is the site of dangerous contact between classes. Charles Knight the publisher, in his autobiography, also mentions the social stigma attached to riding in omnibuses when they first appeared in the 1830's.

The omnibus appeared not in our streets till 1831, and when it came, the genteel remained faithful to the foul and stinking hackney coach, mounting its exclusive iron steps with the true English satisfaction at not being in mixed company. (187)

Riding on top of a bus, particularly, was felt to be most ungenteel. Two cartoons from Punch in the late 1850's play on this feeling. 'DESOLATE STATE OF LONDON IN AUGUST, SCENE, Picadilly', is the title of one, where a 'swell' gives as his excuse for riding on top of a bus, that it is August, outside the social season for London, so nobody of any consequence will see him in this degrading position. (fig.37) The other shows a footman giving notice because

Master were seen last week on top of a homnibus. (fig.38)

In each case the cartoon is ridiculing the self importance and over-fastidious stance of the speaker, but nonetheless the omnibus was felt to be a place where these shades of social distinction were likely to become an issue. There are references elsewhere to washerwomen and butchers being obliged to ride on top. (188) This chapter considers a painting, Omnibus Life In London, by William Maw Egley, which shows a bus load of passengers (fig.39). It examines the ways in which that image engages with issues and problems of public social interaction.

(187) Charles Knight, Passages of a Working Life (3 vols. 1864-5), Irish University Press, Shannon, Ireland, 1971, vol. 2, p.10.

(188) Punch, vol.XII, Jan-Jun 1847, p.31

GENRE PAINTING AND MODERN LIFE

Egley has been grouped together, in one history of Victorian painting, with artists who are known for a single work, or for a handful of works (189), despite the fact that Graves lists him as exhibiting 108 pictures in various London exhibitions between 1843 and 1893 (190), and the painstakingly compiled catalogue of his own works that he produced at the end of his life describes over 1,000 paintings (191). Omnibus Life In London is the only work that has found its way into a major art gallery and has been regularly reproduced. Egley produced miniatures, portraits and genre pictures, occasionally with modern settings, but more often with subjects taken from history or literature. On a number of occasions his works were purchased by Art Unions and Art Union prizewinners. A picture based on The Taming of the Shrew, and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1851, for instance, was sold for £150 to a prizewinner from the Art Union of London. In 1856, the Dublin Art Union purchased his Queen Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn for £50, and in 1857 a subject from Tennyson, The Talking Oak, in which the single figure wears modern dress, was sold to the Art Union of Glasgow for £35. This subject was also published in the National Magazine as an engraving in 1857. By 1859 Egley had an established reputation for producing skilful, highly detailed, small-scale genre paintings, and Omnibus Life in London, which was exhibited at the British Institution in 1859,

 (189) J.Maas, Victorian Painters, Barrie & Rockliff, London, 1969, p.239.

(190) A.Graves, A Dictionary of Artists who have Exhibited Works in the Principal Exhibitions 1760-1893, (1901).

(191) W.M.Egley, ms Catalogue of Pictures, Drawings and Designs by W.Maw Egley, B`orn" 1826 Oct 2, 4 vols.

should be considered in this context. The painting was less than 18 inches square and was sold for £52.10.0 to W.Jennings of 13, Victoria Street, London, who saw the picture at the exhibition and was struck by the resemblance of one of the figures to an acquaintance of his.(192)

In the opening chapter of this thesis we saw the denunciation - in the pages of the Athenaeum and elsewhere - of middle-class taste, epitomised by the subscribers to art unions. These patrons were said to be satisfied with small-scale genre works which did little more than reflect the image of their small-minded patrons. Superficially, the painting of Egley would seem to fit this description almost exactly, and to support the notion, which persists in modern art history, that modern life subjects appealed to middle-class patrons because it gave them pleasure to see their own selves depicted.(193) However, just as we discovered in the case of Ramsgate Sands, we will find that in Omnibus Life In London the depiction of the middle class is fraught with difficulties. Egley's choice of a modern subject exposes with particular clarity the problems of representation in an area of painting that has no pretensions to grandeur of emotions or great spiritual significance.

This chapter will look at a range of material relating to the scene on an omnibus in Egley's picture. The material ranges from critics' readings of the picture, to comic descriptions of bus travel, and cartoons and engravings in popular magazines, 'serious' press comment, legislative developments, physical shape

(193) See the opening of Chapter Two.

and dimensions of buses, fare structures, physical organisation of transport routes, accounts of bus journeys from travel literature and from fiction. Each source operates within a different area of discourse, and each, in some way constitutes or offers a different narrative. The narrative content of Omnibus Life In London is not sealed off from these other available narratives. This chapter attempts to locate the picture within the range of texts/narratives on which its meaning depended. A degree of leverage can be exerted on the picture by moving between discourses.

BUS TRAVEL AND THE MIDDLE CLASS

The omnibus-using public was identified as socially mixed, and therefore unsuitable for the upper classes, in the incident I have described in Basil, and in Charles Knight's reminiscences. This perception is borne out by the selective arrangement of bus routes into central London. Even as late as the 1870's there were no omnibus routes between Church Lane, Kensington (later Church Street), and Regent Street. There were none up Palace Road. These West End residential areas were inhabited by a carriage-owning class, who did not need to use public transport. After private carriages the other alternative to buses was the hiring of hackney or hansom cabs, one horse vehicles, holding two passengers and open at the front, or of closed broughams, holding two or four passengers. Until the Stage Carriage Act, of 1832, the passenger traffic of central London was exclusively served by hackneys - they had a monopoly dating from at least the seventeenth century, which meant that even stage-coaches coming in from outside London were forbidden to set down, or pick up,

passengers, except at the stage-coach terminus. With the abolition of this monopoly, buses were able to set up on routes in London. The original 20 inside passenger buses, with three horses, were replaced by more compact two-horse, 12 or 14 inside passenger buses. These smaller buses were easier to manoeuvre in traffic. The factor of manoeuvrability was crucial in the congested, and often narrow streets of the city, particularly in situations where rival bus proprietors were competing for passengers.

The only public transport alternative to buses in the 1850's were trains, and steamboats on the river. Trams did not start to appear until the 1860's, and the first stretch of the London Underground was not opened until 1863. The main line railways made very little impact on short distance traffic, largely because the trains terminated too far short of the City. The City of London, the district around Bank, was the main commercial centre of the city, and so in terms of conveying people to work, and to conduct business, the buses, which went right into the heart of the city had a big advantage over trains terminating at Kings Cross, or other main line stations in the north, or terminating south of the river, with the congested bridge routes still to negotiate. The report of the Royal Commission on Metropolitan Termini had specifically recommended that railway stations be kept at a distance from the built up centre of London. An estimate made of the transport modes of daily commuters in 1854 divided them in this way:

omnibus.....	20,000
steamboat.....	15,000
railways.....	6,000 (194)

These commuters, however, would not have been members of the working classes, because both the late starting times, and the high fares would have put public transport out of the workers' reach. Mass patronage of excursion routes, on Saturdays and holidays, was developed in the 1840's and 1850's. In 1844, on Easter Monday, the first excursion train to Brighton was laid on, and there were also numerous cheaper routes to Greenwich, Blackwall etc.

The social mix within an omnibus was therefore by and large a mix within the middle class, but it could extend to the limits of that class. A lower-middle-class clerk would have sufficient income, and work hours that made the bus convenient, any upper-middle-class banker or businessman could board the bus, unless he had pretensions to aristocratic status, which would necessitate a private carriage at all times. The nature of public transport was such that there was no guarantee that these 'normal' middle-class limits would be consistently maintained. After all, in Collins's novel, the aristocratic Basil rode on the bus on impulse. The distinction between roof passengers and inside passengers might break down in rainy weather when everyone would seek to ride inside. The fare structure acted as a mechanism to exclude casual use of buses by workers, if the timetables excluded them on a regular basis. Because of this, the periods of fierce competition between buses, and of drastic fare-cutting, were the times at which there was greatest danger of the class composition of the bus-using public being extended to include

(194) T.C.Barker and R.M.Robbins, A History of London Transport (2 vols.), London, Allen & Unwin, 1963-74, p.50.

non-middle-class elements. Fares were generally set at 6d, or, post 1848, at 6d, with a 3d fare for a journey of half the route or less. There were two main phases, in the period from the advent of buses in the 1830's to the emergence of rival trams and underground in the 1860's, when there was a serious challenge to this level of fares. At these times of extreme competition fares were forced down to 4d, 3d, or even 1d. Fares at a penny would not have been high enough to have excluded workers. The first fare-cutting phase was in 1846-1847. The ferociousness of the competition caused great instability in the business, forcing some proprietors to the wall. Stability was reestablished by the adoption of cooperative route-sharing between surviving proprietors, and an agreement to keep to standard fares. This stability was upset by the moves, in the years from 1856, to effect a takeover of large numbers of omnibuses, by a company based in, and largely financed from, France: the Compagnie Generale des Omnibus de Londres "CGOL" This company was modelled on the Parisian bus company, but, unlike its Parisian counterpart, it never had a monopoly on bus transport. It succeeded in buying 600 out of just over 800 omnibuses in London, and was able to make considerable economies by centralising horse-feed supplies, and setting up a horse-feed depot, where processing of straw and grain was carried out on the spot by steam-power. Horse-feed was a major item of expenditure for bus companies, representing nearly 50% of running costs for this company. (195) It nevertheless faced competition, partly

(195) The Times, 6 May 1857, total annual expenses £399,863, cost of horse-feed £171,840.

politically motivated competition from an operation called the Metropolitan Saloon Omnibus Company, which opposed the CGOL on the grounds that it was foreign, but also from small proprietors who refused to be bought out, or those that continued to enter on the business. This led to a new round of drastic fare-cutting on some routes, and an attempt to make the company less unpopular by anglicising its name to the London General Omnibus Company Ltd. in 1859 "LGOC".(196) What I am suggesting is that the effect of the formation of this company on public perception of buses was that it aroused a renewed anxiety about the social position of bus users, and an associated set of fears attached to the notion of a French monopoly. It was in this climate that William Maw Egley's painting was produced and exhibited.

The opposition of the Metropolitan Saloon Omnibus Company was particularly important in this context: far more important than the tiny number of buses they managed to run, which only numbered 15 in 1859. They took their struggle against the French company onto a propagandist level. The issue of shares for the company was something of a propaganda exercise in the first place. Shares were issued at the unusually low price of L1 each, encouraging patriotic Londoners of small means to back the company. They also took the French company to court, accusing them of a variety of unfair practices, designed to drive the Metropolitan Saloon Company out of business. The long running litigation was also a propaganda weapon, since the court case was reported verbatim in the columns of The Times. Lengthy reports

(196) Barker and Robbins, op. cit., ch.3.

appeared from the beginning of November 1858, and so the nationalistic rhetoric of the prosecution was given wide exposure. The tenor of the case can be seen from this accusation:

...a foreign company had thought to possess themselves exclusively of English thoroughfares and, finding themselves opposed, had resorted to the practices of which he now complained to enjoy undisturbed possession of the road.(197)

The notion of possession of the road is interesting in the light of the highwayman associations of Egley's picture, that I will discuss later.

ANTI-FRENCH FEELING IN OMNIBUS LIFE IN LONDON

The picture, Omnibus Life In London, draws upon the anti-French feeling that was current in 1859. In the picture the passengers are tightly packed, and two more people, at the door, hope to squeeze in to the already crowded space. The feeling of claustrophobia it projects can be related to the fear at being trapped that was said to result from omnibus 'nursing' - one of the unfair practices of which the French company was accused in the court case of 1858. The ^CLGOC^L was accused of surrounding rival buses with up to five of their own buses, making it impossible for the enclosed bus to pick up passengers. In this practice two buses were driven so close to the back of the bus that it was impossible for existing passengers to get out, and, according to the prosecution, this terrified passengers in the bus.(198) However, the bus in Egley's painting The bus in the painting is apparently not a rival British bus besieged by French

(197) The Times, 8 Nov 1858.

(198) The Times, 8 Nov 1858.

aggressors, but one of the LGOC buses. The coconut matting on the floor and the placard giving the address of the Advertising Office in the Strand indicate this. The LGOC offices were located in the Strand, and one of the British managers of the company also ran an advertising business, and gained the bus advertising franchise. The situation, then, is of British passengers in a hostile environment, with the conductor as the representative of the French company. The French company is taking money from English travellers, and seeking to take control of the highway by force. The solemn and watchful expressions of the passengers can be construed as the national defensiveness necessary in the face of a threat from a foreign power.

The boy on his mother's knee is dressed in red, white and blue, and carries a toy trumpet and military drum, with the royal coronet and Queen Victoria's initials on it. The trumpet and drumsticks are not lying idle in his lap, but are gripped and held up in his two hands. This surely must be taken as a metaphor of British resistance. The French company had been described in terms of a foreign military presence in Britain. It was the metaphor chosen by The Times to emphasise the vast scale of the bus company operation.

...the vehicles are worked by 6,225 horses, more than the whole of the British cavalry engaged at Waterloo.... The provender for these troops of horses is somewhat startling in its aggregate, and the quantities received will serve to convey an idea of the exertions necessary to be made for a commissariat department for the movement of an army in a foreign country.(199)

It is significant that the comparator chosen is Waterloo, which

(199) The Times, 10 November 1857.

evokes a situation where Britain was at war with France. The article does not end on a chauvinist note however, but concludes by pointing out that the LGOC contributes a large amount in duty tolls and license fees to the British exchequer. The military metaphor was one that had been used in a Punch cartoon of the previous year. There the French bus company was characterised as organising its drivers on military lines. The buses are shown drawn up in a military formation, and the text explains the new military commands that are to replace the bus conductor's normal cries (fig.40). 'Full inside' is to be replaced with 'loaded', and 'All on 'em out' with 'Discharged'. This violent, gun-shot terminology associates the bus conductors of the French company with active warfare. The war referred to here is the Crimea, where France and Britain were allies from March 1854 to the Congress of Paris in March 1856. Consequently any anti-French connotations of the image are subdued.

By 1858 and 1859 foreign affairs had taken a different turn, and France was no longer regarded unequivocally as an ally. Anti-French feeling caused one constitutional crisis in 1858, when Palmerston was forced to resign as Prime Minister over the Conspiracy To Murder Bill. This was a measure aimed at foreign refugees on British soil, who might be plotting against their home governments. Palmerston's support of the Bill was opposed by the Radicals, as an abdication of British independence at the behest of the French ruler Napoleon III. The Tories joined forces with the Radicals in opposing the Bill, and Palmerston's government fell as a result. In the later months of 1858 anti-French feeling was exacerbated by the building of a harbour at

Cherbourg, for steam-powered warships. This was considered to be dangerously close to the British coast. In the early months of 1859 the situation in Italy caused a polarisation of the pro- and anti-French camps within British politics. The Tories had been resolutely anti-French, and when France sided with Sardinia's efforts to wrest areas of Italy out of Austrian control, the Conservative Party and Queen Victoria were unequivocally pro-Austrian, and therefore anti-French. Early in 1859 Austria declared war on Cavour in Italy, and in return France declared war on Austria. French troops went in to Lombardy in April 1859. There was a division in public feeling however, because the growing anti-French feeling was now countered by a pro-Italian feeling in Britain, and France, as Italy's protector became less unpopular. This became the key issue in the General Election of April 1859, when Derby and the Tories stood for support of Austria, and Palmerston with an array of Peelites, Whigs, Liberals, and Radicals lined up in support of Italy, and of France as their ally. The identification of Palmerston as pro-French lent cohesiveness to this grouping, and the Tories lost the election. By July 1859 Austria and France had negotiated a peace, and the anti-French feeling became more general in Britain. Palmerston was able to maintain support for Italy and to take up a position which was critical of the terms of the peace, and of French incursions into Italian territory in Savoy. This provided the basis for increased expenditure on arms, and on a series of fortifications along the south coast that he had been seeking.(200)

(200) Information on the twists and turns of foreign policy, and

The months in which Omnibus Life In London was being exhibited, reviewed, and circulated as an engraving (in the Illustrated London News) were between February and June 1859. These were the months when anti-French feeling was a vital element in British party politics. In late 1858, or late 1859 the latent nationalism of the image could have been generally received. It is possible to maintain however that in the first half of 1859, when the picture was most prominent, it had a party specific resonance and must have been read as a Tory image. There is little evidence for this, that I have been able to find in the published critical notices of the picture. The Art Journal review of the painting quibbles with the title on the grounds that it might imply to a foreigner that Londoners live in buses. It specifies 'Frenchman' for a non-English speaker, in what might be considered a slightly hostile way. It seems to assume that such a painting should demonstrate to the world the virtues of how Londoners do live. Such scraps would, on their own, be very inconclusive, but take on an increased significance in the light of the preceding discussion.

SEGREGATION OF CLASSES

Modern urban geographers, such as M.J.Daunton, have pointed to a tendency for planners of, and commentators on, the nineteenth century city, to prescribe a format which can be described as encapsulated, rather than cellular. This can be seen in the policies on working-class housing, where the old cellular city of

the effects on party politics from J.Ridley Lord Palmerston, (1970), Granada, London, 1972

communal courts, entered by intricate alleys, was replaced by street layouts where each family unit was encapsulated in a separate dwelling, with access via a public street, which was easily kept under surveillance. The preference was for clearly defined, uncrowded public spaces, with regular layout, where policing was easily achieved. Developments in the spaces set aside for recreation, the buildings developed for markets, and the new production sites, the factories, are all cited.(201) Work on representations of the early nineteenth century city is compatible with this analysis.(202) Residential segregation of classes was encouraged, and was perceived as an increasing tendency, though there is considerable debate on the degree to which it was achieved.(203) The city centre street, however, was bound to remain a site of class interaction and contact. The ideological notion of the family as the haven from this dangerous public world, was developed, with other segregating mechanisms, notably the debarring, or eviction, of middle-class women from certain public spaces and activities. The ideology and rhetoric generated around these issues is frequently contradictory. There was one line of middle-class thought that recommended the association of workers with the middle classes, on the grounds that the association would be morally beneficial for the former. This was in contradiction to the drive to segregation. Similarly

(201) M.J.Daunton, 'Public Place and Private Space, the Victorian City and the Working Class Household', in eds. Fraser and Sutcliffe, The Pursuit of Urban History, Arnold, London, 1983.

(202) G.Pollock and C.Arcscott, 'The Partial View...' in J.Wolff and J.Seed (eds.), The Culture of Capital, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1987.

(203) R.Dennis, English Industrial Cities of the Nineteenth Century, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984.

there was a contradiction between the notion that woman's place was the private sphere of the home, and yet her femininity was supposedly expressed and enhanced by going to shops in the town centre to view and purchase the latest fashions or furnishings, or to attend bazaars or charity fairs in public buildings in town.

The drive to encapsulation in the Victorian city is illustrated by the social dimension of the efforts made to provide separate water supplies for each block of housing, or even for every residence. The Morning Chronicle account of the textile districts mentions the policy of a millowner at Hyde, near Manchester.

Mr Ashton is for a compulsory supply of water, to be introduced into every tenement however humble. The system of taps or public pumps he describes as being fraught with all sorts of danger to morals.(204)

Charles Knight includes a woodcut of people gathered round a standpipe in his London of 1841-44.(205) The reason he gives for including this scene is that it is a quaint reminder of bygone habits, which are revived only in the emergency of a frost. He is quick to explain the nuisance that this communal water supply constituted when it was the norm. He refers to the gossiping among women, fights breaking out between them, the gathering of crowds, and the consequent impediment to the flow of traffic. Impropriety and disruption are linked to group assemblies within the working class. One of the prevalent fears expressed was of the corrupting effect of association between respectable elements

(204) J.Ginswick

(205) Plug in a Frost, C.Knight, London (6 vols.) Knight, London, 1841-44, vol.I, p.236.

of the working class and its fringe elements: those who were drunkards, beggars, prostitutes or thieves. An 'investigative' article of 1841 on 'The Dwellings of the Poor In London' vividly describes the dangers of a household where thieves live in the basement, a labourer and family on the ground floor, a homemaker and family on the first, and prostitutes on the second floor. The corrupting effects of this arrangement are spelt out. One of the respectable girls comes into contact with one of the prostitutes, and soon becomes vitiated, or

Perhaps it is one of the sons who makes the fatal acquaintance, and the consequences are, if anything worse. (206)

Sexual corruption is allowed to stand as the metaphor for other evils such as contact with thieves handling stolen property. This collapsing of the criminal into the sexual is a feature that we can observe in the commentary on corruption by contact in Omnibus Life In London. The fears aroused by the idea of promiscuous contact between different elements within the working class were even greater when there was a prospect of that contact being extended to the ranks of the middle class.

CLASS IDENTITY IN OMNIBUS LIFE IN LONDON: CRITICS' ACCOUNTS

The painting Omnibus Life In London only elicited a brief comment in the Art Journal review of the 1859 British Institution exhibition. The review simply stated that the picture was 'painfully true' and that 'the perspective crowds these poor people cruelly close'. (207) The figures are generally referred

(206) 'The Dwellings of the Poor In London', Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, vol.X, 1841, p.352.

(207) Art Journal, 7 May 1859, p.7

to, as 'people'. In other more lengthy reviews the people in the bus were identified more exactly, sometimes as occupying specific social positions. We can take an initial survey of the critical reception of the picture by picking out the class attributions made by reviewers. The National Magazine notices a delicate young lady, an exaggeratedly dressed youth, a youngish widow, an elderly woman, a little girl, a maternal looking woman of some thirty years, a sturdy boy her son, a young woman about to enter and the conductor.(208) (Egley's catalogue stated that this review was by Frederick George Stephens) Its terms are fairly neutral, though perhaps the recognition of the exaggerated dress of the youth identifies him as the flashy lower-middle-class type familiar from other contexts, 'the gent'.(209) Shades of distinction between the 'young lady' sitting by the door, and the 'young woman' entering also suggest the perception of class mix. The Daily Telegraph specifies the young dandy, the querulous old gentleman, the babies, the children, the young lady and the widow.(210) The Dublin University Review identifies a seventeen year old 'apparition', 'dressed in the neatest and most modest of fashions', a youth who is 'a young swell of the bank clerk order', a widow, a 'farmer looking man', a 'tradesman not quite so overcome as his companion', a 'corpulent woman...the underservant out of place'. Here the types are more specific, though it becomes harder to place the individuals mentioned, especially the farmer and the tradesman.(211) The Illustrated

(208) National Magazine, March 1859.

(209) G.Crossick (ed.), The lower middle class in Britain, 1870-1914, London, Croom Helm, 1977.

(210) Daily Telegraph, 7 February 1859.

(211) Dublin University Review, transcribed in W.M.Egley,

London News, when it published the woodcut of the picture, accompanied it with an imaginary scenario, where the characters have names.(212) The gentleman leaning forward on the left is Sir John Grubbery, an unscrupulous financier, and the woman nearest to us on the left is Mrs Brisket, the widow of the proprietor of a ham and beef establishment. Presumably next to her, and shrinking back, is Algernon Bosanquet, seventh cousin of a Nova Scotia Baronet, who, out of snobbery tries to hide himself from observation, despite the fact that his aristocratic connections are so tenuous, and that he is too poor to afford a cab. There is also a Mrs Fitz-Cholmondley, who may be the figure to the left of Sir John, who was presented at court about thirty years ago, and who therefore is now about fifty. She is said to shrink within her pride:

always gathers it about her to avoid contact with the plebeians amongst whom fate has thrown her.

The little story mentions characters who usually travel on top of the bus. Jack Spangle, a clerk in an Assurance-Office, is one of these. He habitually kisses his hand to women in first floor windows. Another character from the top is Gus Chaucey - a 'sucking stockbroker', well versed in the sporting paper the Racing Calendar. There is an ambitious Mr Jones, and a one-eyed widower called Mr Brown, who is trying, unsuccessfully, to find a widow to marry. We are told that on this occasion Jack Spangle is inside the bus, sitting opposite the pretty widow. In this case he is not the splendidly dressed young man by the door, but is out of sight, except for the edge of his low crowned, wide

Catalogue.

(212) Illustrated London News, 11 June 1859, p.571

brimmed, 'wide awake' hat which the story mentions. Again these characters are socially diverse, and there is an element of confusion as to which is which. Perhaps we are to presume that Gus Chaucery, 'sucking stockbroker' is the young man by the door, by virtue of a punning reference to the way this character sucks his cane top.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF STOCK TYPES

Some of the figures picked out in the reviews are stock types who appear in contemporary cartoons. We can find some of them in the pages of Punch. The choleric old gentleman appears twice in an omnibus context. In the first case he is giving an extremely inoffensive conductor a hard time.(fig.41) The joke of this, of course, is that their behaviour is simply reversed, and the rough, lower-class conductor would never wear a boater, nor speak politely. In the second case the old gentleman is on the way to the Bank bus terminus in the City, and the cad interprets him literally, and perhaps accurately, as being on the way to the bank to draw his dividends. Here the cad retains his normal lower-class identity; he speaks ungrammatically, is impertinently familiar, is quite unconcerned by his passenger's complaint, and, fetching beer for himself and the driver, he is, or may soon be, drunk.(fig.42) The gent appears in cartoons too. We find him sitting on top of a bus and chatting away to the conductor.(fig.43) This in itself is evidence of his lack of class. His question

OH AH! - AND WHAT DO YOU FEED THE HORSES ON ?

is not on a very elevated topic, and is rather a stupid question too, as the horses are so thin that they obviously hardly get fed

at all. He is so completely empty-headed that it is possible he may believe the sarcastic reply of the driver:

BUTTER TUBS - DON'T YER SEE THE 'OOPS ?

The gent appears again in full regalia outside his outfitters, complete with price tags on all his flashy, off the peg, mass produced fashion items.(fig.44) The sign behind him announces Sydenham trousers at 17/6, and these are the very trousers advertised on a placard in the bus in Egley's picture. In one other cartoon we see into the bus, and on the right is the gent again, abstractedly holding his cane up to his mouth, very much like the young man by the window in Egley's picture, and staring mesmerised at the young woman opposite.(fig.45) This cartoon dates from 1848, over ten years before Omnibus Life In London, but the situation is remarkably similar to that in the painting. The woman turns her head away, not with the demure and preoccupied look of the woman with the veil in the Egley picture, but with a weary look of disgust. Despite this, and despite the fact that the dog has bitten him, the gent is supposed to pursue his unwelcome attentions through the small ads. columns.

THE YOUNG LADY with the Spaniel, (a real KING CHARLES) in pink riband, who bit a GENTLEMAN in the Brixton 'bus, is IMPLORED to return her initials and address. As a proof of the advertisers heart felt devotion, he gives an installment of his name. THEODORE -----

What we find in these cartoons, and in the commentaries on the painting, are not just stock types, they are stock narratives. A semi-serious set of instructions printed by The Times in 1836, when buses were very new, includes two points which relate to these figures.

OMNIBUS LAW

7. Behave respectfully to females and put not an unprotected lass to the blush because she cannot escape your

brutality.....

12. Refrain from affectation and conceited airs. Remember that you are riding a distance for sixpence which, if made in a hackney coach, would cost you as many shillings; and that should your pride elevate you above plebeian accommodation your purse should enable you to command aristocratic indulgences.(213)

The Egley painting is a narrative picture, but the narrative does not reside entirely within the logic of the painting. It refers to a pool of current narratives associated with the situation, and with the figures in the picture.

CONFLICTING IDENTIFICATIONS

One thing that emerges from a resume of the figures identified in reviews of the picture is that the identifications made were not always the same. There is a great deal of difference between identifying the woman in the left foreground as an underservant out of place, as the Dublin University Review does, and identifying her as a wealthy widow, as the Illustrated London News does. An underservant was not even a figure with the status, authority and respectability of a housekeeper. In a house that kept more servants than simply a maid of all work, or a cook and a housemaid, the hierarchy of servants would be strictly observed. The heaviest, dirtiest work would be reserved for the underservant, the boot cleaning, slops emptying and scrubbing, documented, for example, in the journal written by the servant Hannah Cullwick. The physical effort required in a transition from underservant to middle-class woman is documented there too, as her association with a middle-class man, Munby, put

(213) The Times, 30 January 1836, quoted in Barker and Robbins, op. cit., p.36.

her through the trials of that transition.(214) The widow of a proprietor of a ham and beef establishment would be a member of the middle classes, albeit of the lower middle, shopkeeping or innkeeping class. The Mrs Brisket of the Illustrated London News story is not represented as being ladylike however. It is suggested that she regularly takes a nip of brandy, under the euphemism of eau de cologne.

Whether identified as servant or as shopkeeper's widow, this figure in the picture is associated with unease. In one case, as a servant, she is embarrassed and put out by having to move her packages.

A corpulent woman...[with] bundles, the removal of which to accommodate the newcomer seems rather to annoy her[;] her fingers peering through her gloves, and shabby attire import the underservant out of place, as does a somewhat coarse and good-hearted face.

In the other case, as a wealthy widow, she is aware of the annoyance aroused by her luggage, but doesn't acknowledge that she is at fault, putting the blame on the snobbery of her immediate neighbour.

...the omnibus would be well enough if particular parties who should ride in their own carriages did not object to the pile of small parcels with which she generally contrives to bother herself and them.

In this version the major source of distress is her sudden fear that her pocket has been picked. According to the story elaborated in the Illustrated London News, she is travelling home after collecting her bank dividends, and the hurried exit from the bus of the man sitting next to her makes her think he might

(214) The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick, Victorian Maidservant, ed. Liz Stanley, Virago, London, 1984.

have robbed her. It turns out that she was mistaken, and that his hurry was caused by his feeling that it is humiliating for a man of his social standing to be seen on a bus. She also suffers from an array of other anxieties, all turning on a fear of being robbed or swindled. In her own mind there is some confusion between the fear of being robbed and the fear, or hope, of being propositioned by a man.

[she fears that she is being] watched to and fro by an Irish gentleman whose whiskers are worthy of a place in the Guards, but whether his intentions are wicked or charitable, whether he means to pick her pocket or offer her marriage she has never been able to determine.

Whichever class position is ascribed to the figure by the commentators, there is a feeling of disturbance and disruption attached to her which turns on questions of the actual or imagined presence of class elements that should not be there. In the Illustrated London News story Mrs Brisket is momentarily confused as to whether the man leaning back is snob or criminal. Neither identity is suitable for a middle-class conveyance and the fact that there can be an equivocation over class identity is disturbing in itself. It seems that the bus, that might normally be expected to be exclusively occupied by middle-class passengers, has turned into a far more dangerous place of chance encounter.

AMBIGUITIES IN THE COMPOSITION

Egley's own description of the painting gives us no clue as to the class position of the woman with the bundles. He describes her simply as a

stout elderly woman with basket, [and] handbox.

The detail picked up on, of the worn gloves, draws our attention

to a doubtful area in this part of the picture. It is not entirely clear whether this hand belongs to the elderly woman, or to her neighbour. The most logical reading, and one that fits in with what Egley says, is that it is her ungloved hand on top of the basket, so that her bundles include a pot plant under her arm, and a wicker basket on her knee. The exposure of an ungloved hand would have been considered a breach of decorum for a lady in a public place. In this case the worn-gloved hand, clutching a few coins, is that of the man beside her. This is compatible with the impoverished snob, with the distant aristocratic connections, Algernon Bosanquet, from the Illustrated London News story. The hand on top of the basket displays a blue cuff, which we do not see on the woman's right hand, because her shawl covers the cuff, but if carefully searched for, another patch of blue can be seen on her dress lower down.

In terms of the class composition of the group, an unproblematic middle-class group is perceived as being upset by the presence of several of the figures. The old woman is read as coarse, the man next to her as indigent, and possibly criminal, the woman next to the widow as an impoverished snob, the young man on the other side of the widow as a lower-middle-class youth with aspirations to being a gentleman swell, and in danger of ungentlemanly behaviour towards the woman he is staring at. The other figure who cannot be assimilated as a safe middle-class element is of course the conductor who is staring in from the top of the doorway. When class identity is once questioned, then there is the added danger that apparently identifiable figures

may prove to be other than they seem.

CRIMINALS AND CROWDS

The narrative of the old woman thinking that her pocket had been picked is related to middle class anxiety about the presence of criminal elements in public places. The pickpocket theme also appears in an illustrated story by George Augustus Sala which was published in the London Journal, in the early 1860's. (215) The view inside a bus used there is almost identical to the Egley painting. Egley remarked on this and included the cutting in his catalogue. It is a wet day and the writer speculates on what can induce ladies to travel on a wet day, when social calls, or visits to parks or shops must be so inconvenient.

What can they find to do in the City?

A very pretty young woman enters, and we are almost convinced that women travel just for the display of their beauty and finery. She looks as if she were worth ten thousand a year.

The young lady trips to the seat made for her, displaying a remarkably neat pair of balmorals [boots]...naughty child what calls can she have from home?

When she gets off the bus the other passengers find their pockets have been picked and the suspicion falls on the young woman.

The association of pocket picking and the Egley picture derives in part from a repeated use of this device in other elaborate crowd scene paintings. B.R.Haydon's Punch or May Day of 1829 shows a pocket being picked amid the confusion. Frith's Derby Day, 1858 includes a pickpocket, and the policeman in

(215) London Journal, cutting in W.M.Egley ms. Catalogue.

Hicks's The General Post Office. One Minute to Six, started in 1859 and exhibited at the R.A. in 1860, seems to be forestalling a pickpocket. Policemen arrest a swindler in Frith's Railway Station of 1862, and a pickpocket is arrested in Hunt's painting, London Bridge on the Night of the Marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales, of 1863. If Egley's painting was being received in a context where this sort of incidental detail was so common, it is not surprising that the pickpocket associations were inferred by critics even when there is no pickpocketing shown.

COMPOSITIONAL FORMAT

The compositional scheme of the painting, Omnibus Life In London, is striking, with its perspectival scheme violently emphasised by the near-symmetrical ranging of characters on either side of the bus, and the open door framing the head of the woman about to enter. One review readily recognised that this is placed at the vanishing point.(216) The question arises whether this is not the only way of representing a bus interior, or, indeed, a railway carriage, where passengers are similarly brought together. Other examples show that an alternative view, of a longitudinal range of figures, was quite possible. That is the format of Abraham Solomon's First Class - the meeting: 'And at first meeting loved', 1854, and of Charles Rossiter's R.A. picture of 1859, To Brighton and Back 3/6 (fig.46). When we do see the sharp recession and a framing doorway, the scene is repeatedly one of terror, where theft, and/or assault are

(216) National Magazine, vol.V, 1859, p.285.

threatened.

W.P.Frith's picture A Stagecoach Adventure - Bagshot Heath, 1848 (fig.47), and the sketch for a later version of this painting (fig.48), use this format. The highwayman occupies the window, his head occupying a lower position in the earlier picture, so that it is staring in, in an equivalent way to that of the omnibus cad in Egley's painting. The vanishing point is here not a woman's head, but the barrel of a pistol. Robbery with the threat of violence is compounded with a sexual threat, as the décolleté young woman faints away, and slumps onto the military man beside her. This intimate swooning, and exposed flesh is taken even further in the later picture. Her face is no longer shielded by her bonnet, and the high bow on her dress front is now much lower. In either case the evident alarm of the officer may be attributable to the sudden impropriety caused by the young woman's faint as well as to fear of the highwayman. The painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1848, but it is interesting to note that it was also exhibited in London in 1859, in the same year that Omnibus Life In London was exhibited. It was one of the pictures in an exhibition of the collection of the dealer Mr Flatou, on show at the New City Gallery, Change Alley, Cornhill. Its inclusion in the exhibition was referred to by the National Magazine in these terms:

Mr W.P.Frith ARA has his well known Mail-coach Adventure.
(217)

The popularity and circulation of this image, for a long period, is indicated by the fact that Frith was preparing another version

(217) National Magazine, vol.V, 1859, p.72.

in 1876, and by the existence of an anonymous copy of the 1848 version (fig.49).

A series of cartoons in Punch provide other examples of frightening situations, presented in a similar format, to set beside the stagecoach scene. An old lady is scared out of her wits by the sudden appearance of a paper-boy at the bus door (fig.50):

Youth (suddenly). "'Orrid murder - on'y Penny!"

Another cartoon shows 'Three Gentlemen Smoking [against regulations] in a Railway Carriage (fig.51). The guard puts in his head and says

There are two things not allowed on this Line Gentlemen; Smoking, and the Servants of the Company receiving Money.

while holding out his hand to receive a bribe. A third Punch cartoon shows the bus conductor looking into the bus window, and shocking the old woman on the right by saying (fig.52)

Now, then! If any Lady wishes to 'Correspond,' I'm quite ready, they've on'y got to say so.

She thinks he is making an improper advance. He is in fact referring to the system of changing buses while retaining the same ticket that was introduced by the London General Omnibus Company after taking over the London buses.

The pictorial format seems to key the Egley painting into this range of situations, and the anxiety that emerges in the reviews about class identity, and the danger of criminals, as well as the fear of respectable women being assaulted, or treated improperly, relates visually to the composition.(218) The sharp recession in

(218) The comparison with Frith's painting raises the point that

Omnibus Life In London means that the appearance of crowding is increased, to the point where we can only distinguish hands and limbs with great difficulty. The puzzle aspect caused by the composition, and the fine detailing, makes the picture a very intense visual experience. This in itself was associated with terror or intense emotion. (219)

SOURCES OF THREAT IN OMNIBUS LIFE IN LONDON

In the Frith painting there was a two-fold threat to the passengers of the stage coach. The highwayman was the major threat, with a subsidiary threat coming from the fainting woman. It is interesting to compare the dual focus of threat in Omnibus Life In London. It could be said that both the conductor and the woman entering present a menace to the passengers. They both occupy the open doorway, in the way that the frightening highwayman of Frith's picture does. It might be said that the fear of contact with an alarming, rough, lower-class, bus employee, is accompanied by some sort of sexual threat posed by the woman. The common sense problem that her entry poses is one of space. The other problem is one connected with the stock narratives involving a pretty girl on a bus, which revolve around romance and impropriety. These crop up in the critical accounts of Omnibus Life In London and in associated narratives, but also

Egley states in his manuscript catalogue that he worked with Frith on several of his paintings. Frith conveniently forgets to mention this in his self-aggrandising autobiography, mentioning Egley only once in passing, as an old friend. W.P.Frith, My Autobiography and Reminiscences, (2 vols.), Bentley London, 1887. It is even remotely possible that Egley may have worked on A Stagecoach Adventure.

(219) see above Chapter Three.

in the more general pool of bus anecdotes and jokes in currency. The physical anxiety about being packed more closely into an already crowded, enclosed space is concatenated with the anxiety aroused by the fact that this is a woman entering, and the squash will involve more intimate contact between the sexes than may be proper. The formal parallel I have drawn with the Frith picture of the highwayman suggests that this may be as much a fear of the woman, from a male point of view, as a fear for the woman. The resonances of the narratives involving the pretty woman in a romantic situation contribute a sexual charge to the situation. Of all the female figures in the picture the woman in the doorway, alone, is staring at the spectator., This is a significant point in relation to the nature of the threat associated with this figure. In the discussion, in an earlier chapter, of the disposition of female glances in Ramsgate Sands, we found that the comfort of the (male) viewer depended on the dropped or averted eyes of the female figures. The beach was a worrying public space because it was a space of bodily display, and Ramsgate Sands developed elaborate palliative devices to avoid the distressful psychic consequences of viewing the female form. The omnibus was equally a space of the body. Physical contact between passengers, who could be of either sex, was inevitable, and the arrangement of seats meant that every passenger was under the surveillance of passengers opposite. In this situation, as on the beach, the prospect of viewing women involved a mingling of anticipation and fear. It was possible for a representation of this situation to put the viewer of the picture (constructed as male) into the position of a voyeuristic passenger, and subject him to the anxieties attendant on that

position. The same cluster of fears and excitements was elicited by the image of the fallen woman in The Awakening Conscience, but in that case the picture apparently failed to produce devices to ward off the threat of castration that was the concomitant of pleasure in viewing the scene. One group of critics complained of an expunging of narrative content in that picture. The picture, they complained, was reduced to objectionable visual intricacy. Other critics, notably Ruskin, supplied a narrative that minimised this problem. In Omnibus Life In London there is a comparable density in the amount of visual information supplied by the picture. The superimposition of figures causes interpretative problems comparable to those caused by the mirrors in The Awakening Conscience. There is a very closely worked picture surface, and one that is, apart from the tiny area of street seen through the door and windows, completely even. We are given as much information about the inside surface of the lady's parasol at the back of the picture as we are about the cabbage leaf wrapped around the bunch of flowers in the foreground. The problems for the viewer were not, however, as extreme as in the case of [The Awakening Conscience]. When the Daily Telegraph described the picture as being 'utterly deficient in humour', and the Dublin University Magazine complained of its 'metallic look', 'hardness' and 'want of atmosphere and relief', the critiques were directed at the way the picture offers no respite to the act of looking. The Daily Telegraph did not elaborate a narrative from the figures. If it had done so it would have been able to credit it with conveying some sort of humorous anecdote or anecdotes. Those papers that did interpret it in story terms, can perhaps be said to be compensating for a

lack in the picture, or defending themselves against it, as much as describing any narrative actually offered by the painting itself. Faced with an insistently scopic experience, the reaction of such critics is to provide a narrative that protects them from the consequences of being reduced to a pure spectator. The narrative readings that were produced were not entirely consistent, but it was usually possible to produce a story by relating the picture to the stock figures and situations associated with bus travel. The visual intensity of the picture, and the focus on a staring and, consequently, potentially castrating female was, arguably, mitigated by the prettiness of this and other female figures in the picture. It could also be suggested that the woman is rendered less threatening by the parasol she carries, if this is interpreted as a phallic attribute, because it acts as a fetish object and so allows the viewer to disavow the knowledge of castration that the sight of the woman seems to offer. The status of the representation is ambiguous. It provides some of the reassuring features that we saw in Ramsgate Sands, but any reassurance is partial, whereas reassuring features were systematically inscribed in the seaside view. This chapter will go on to show that Egley's picture alludes to other disturbing factors in the situation depicted. His choice of an omnibus for the scene, where lady passengers mix with men, and where non middle-class elements could intrude, set up a situation that was already delicate. There is a thematic concern in the picture with clothing, particularly women's clothing, and the hiding or visibility of legs, which multiplies the anxieties attached to the presence of middle-class women in public places.

THE IDEAL OF SEXUALLY SEGREGATED BUS TRAVEL

This chapter has already touched on the contradiction that existed in the strictures on middle class women's behaviour, that both assigned them to a place in the home, and required them to frequent the town centre for such activities as shopping. A comparison is made, in a diary, between Liverpool buses and London buses in 1853, and the writer suggests that unaccompanied ladies would not travel on London buses.

These vehicles are much superior to those in London, or indeed anywhere else, that I have seen; they are so broad that the conductor can walk between people's knees without inconveniencing the passengers....Altogether they are a very comfortable and conveniently arranged vehicle, and as a consequence they are used by the upper ranks of society and by ladies unaccompanied by male attendants - a practice quite unknown in London. (220)

The presence of a male attendant could not lessen the discomfort of a crowded bus: its only purpose could be to protect the woman from any infringement of her modesty. The comment in the diary should not be taken as evidence that middle class women did not travel, unaccompanied by men, in London. There is an ambiguity in the syntax which allows us to suppose that while ladies from the highest ranks may not have done, others of less exalted station, though still ladies, may have done. There is a prevarication in the Sala article too, where his playful conjecture as to the purpose of ladies' journeys rests upon the idea that there are legitimate and illegitimate purposes for such journeys. The legitimate purposes are shopping, paying visits, and going to parks. The illegitimate ones hover, in an

(220) R.B.Dockray, diary, 1853, quoted in J.Hibbs, The History of British Bus Services, David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1968, p.29

unresolved way, between sexual display and criminal activity. The link between bus transport and ladies' shopping was made in a cheerful announcement in The Times that some of the larger drapery stores in London were going to use bus tickets as small change.

Several large drapery firms have declared an intention of availing themselves of these tickets as the pleasantest small-change for their lady customers. (221)

The sales ploy of the drapery firm, and The Times's unconcerned announcement of it demonstrate that the use by ladies of the public vehicles, with their miscellaneous passengers: of mixed sex, and possibly from many classes, was not considered problematic, so long as it was firmly tied to such a feminine activity as buying dress fabric.

There was some safeguard against lady travellers mingling with male commuters, in the timing of their journeys. Between nine and eleven in the morning would be the peak commuting time for men, and it was only after that that ladies might travel into town for shopping. This gender-specific timetabling is stressed in an article pitched at a lightly humorous level. It is preoccupied with respectability and the class-identity of passengers, as so many of the commentaries on bus travel are, but it manages to sidestep the issues of promiscuous crowding and illegitimate reasons for ladies to travel.

The Brown omnibuses pass my door every quarter of an hour. From nine o'clock till eleven, these celebrated vehicles are crowded with government officials, West-end banking-clerks, wealthy tradesmen, and all those varieties of the human race comprised under the head of men of business.... All these early commercial birds look as if they had picked up the

(221) The Times, 3 January 1857.

golden worm, and they all bear the mint-mark of respectability. The old gentlemen who ride inside, and sit staring at each other in grim silence, are unquestionably respectable; so are the severe fathers of families who discuss the state of the money market on the front-seats; and so indeed are those pale-faced boys in long coats and tight collars, who smoke huge meerschaums and fat cigars on the roof. Nevertheless, I would rather not ride in such good company. I would rather wait till noon, when the mothers and daughters of our suburb begin to besiege the Brown busses, when the driver is being continually requested to pull up for another lady, and when the conductor hears nothing but a rustle of silk dresses and a clanking of iron hoops. The fair ones are bent on shopping, and will return in a few hours loaded with ducks of bonnets and divine mantles. Of course they ride inside, and I seldom have anybody to dispute with me my right to the box-seat. (222)

The writer professes his enjoyment of travelling when the ladies do, but any suggestion of impropriety is kept at bay by his saying that he rides at a safe distance from them, on the roof. His observation of them is not the rude and discomfiting staring of the 'gent' in the Punch cartoon. His attitude is safely and gallantly flirtatious.

INCREASING CROWDING OF BUSES

The timing of journeys may have diminished the contact between the sexes on omnibuses, but it could not eliminate the possibility of it, any more than timetabling could completely exclude the working class. Men and women could often travel together inside buses, and the crowding could cause embarrassment. The economics of bus transport made the full loading of buses essential for the continuing profitability of the bus companies. If larger vehicles had been practicable in city traffic then full loading would not have been such a crucial

(222) Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, vol.X, 14 August 1858, p.97.

issue. The costs per vehicle of wages for driver and cad, and for maintaining the two horses, and the relief horses, did not vary, however many passengers were accommodated. There was little scope for increasing fares above the standard 6d, and so the degree of loading became the major factor in how much profit was made. In phases of intense competition and fare-cutting the cramming in of passengers became even more essential. Punch referred to the era of 2d fares in 1847 as a situation of civil war between rival companies, and describes an old lady being seized round the waist by a bus conductor, and thrust into a bus.

In another minute she is seated on the lap of an old gentleman who is carrying a pound of grapes. (223)

The same sort of indignity was complained of in a legal case in 1858, reported in The Times, where a daily commuter took the bus conductor to court for crowding his bus above the legally licensed limit of ten inside.

He remonstrated with the defendant for overcrowding his vehicle, and told him he should summon him. When the last two passengers got in the defendant actually pushed them, shut the door, and allowed them to fall into a seat somewhere, or into the other persons laps. The conductors of these omnibuses were in the constant habit of overcrowding their vehicles to the annoyance of the public. (224)

The court fined the conductor 5s with costs.

Efforts were made by the French company to improve the design of buses in the wake of their takeover of the majority of London buses. They ran a competition, in 1856, for improved bus design, within the constraints of a ten or twelve inside passenger bus. The winning design which was used for new buses, mainly on the

(223) Punch, vol. XIII, July-December 1847, p.217.

(224) The Times, 1 June 1858.

out of town routes, included a higher roof inside, a rail on the outside to assist passengers climbing onto the roof, brass rods on the bench seats inside, demarcating each passenger's share of the bench, and matting on the floor. Some of these features were incorporated into existing vehicles on the city centre routes too. The competition itself, and the publicising of improvements made, indicate an awareness on the part of the bus company of public discontent at the level of comfort offered by London buses, and particularly at the amount of space per passenger. One article specifically refers to the new buses.

It is true that there are a number of newly constructed vehicles on the road, and some of them began by the ostentatious display of improvements which were soon suffered to fall into disuse; but there are few roads where the ill-ventilated, foul-strawed, close and narrow boxes, contrived to carry eight and made to carry twelve are not still an institution with all the vitality of a recognised nuisance. (225)

The efforts of the LGOC were evidently perceived as empty propaganda and failed to prevent the flow of complaints about bus travel.

CRINOLINE DRESSES

The presence of ladies in a crowded omnibus in the late 1850's caused a special problem, that was covertly referred to in the article about Brown's buses, in the reference to 'the rustle of silk dresses and...the clanking of iron hoops'. This was the problem of accommodating their bulky crinoline dresses. The crinoline cage was a device invented in late 1856, which provided a frame over which the skirt of the dress was draped. Prior to

(225) Illustrated Times, 12 December 1863, p.378.

its invention, the mid-century middle class woman's skirt was padded out with many layers of petticoats and stiffened material, to achieve its bell-shaped outline, and a hem of 12-15 feet in length. The crinoline cage made all this padding unnecessary, and, as a result, made the process of dressing much quicker and simpler, and probably made it easier for women to move around, as the skirt, previously weighing up to a stone, was now much lighter. Angela Kingston has pointed out the stream of derision that was directed, in the press, at the bloomerist challenge to restrictive women's clothing, in 1851. (226) The development of the crinoline cage too, was a subject of ridicule. It simplified women's lives and made them more mobile, but the new crinolines were ridiculed as being absurdly impractical, and as causing all sorts of difficulties in normal life. The criticism was, on the surface, delivered from a standpoint that advocated sense and practicality in apparel. Underlying it was a reaction to the possibility that the new fashion would remove some of the physical restraints which accompanied the ideological prescriptions for middle class women, just as the bloomerist advocacy of trousers for women had done. The adoption of the cage did make possible a wider hem, and so there may have been an exaggeration of outline in consequence. The ribs, or hoops, of the cage were necessarily stiff, and often made of steel, which may have rendered the skirt more stubbornly resilient than a padded one, and so less flexible in a crush, unless the expedient were taken of hoisting the skirt. These were the aspects that

(226) A. Kingston, unpublished M.A. thesis, Bloomerism, Department of Fine Art, University of Leeds, 1984.

the satirical publications such as Punch made much of.

Throughout the period from the introduction of the crinoline cage until 1859, when Egley's Omnibus Life In London was exhibited, the pages of Punch were packed with allusions to the new fashion. A lady wearing a crinoline would, it was asserted occupy several seats in the theatre, or in the park (fig.53). A gentleman would not be able to get close enough to her to kiss her under the mistletoe, or to take her arm while walking. Most interesting in the context of the crowded bus is the series jokes based around the impossibility of cramming a crinolined lady into a small enclosed space. As early as July 1856 there is a cartoon showing the delight of a street urchin at the prospect of a lady entering a small brougham coach (fig.54):

Impudent Boy. "I SAY BILL! COME AND SEE THE CONJURING -
HERE'S THIS GAL A GOIN' TO SQUEEGE HERSELF INTO THAT THERE
BROOM.

In another cartoon five women are attempting to enter a small hut, where a bachelor cousin has laid on lunch for them. The young women are chaperoned by the mother of two of them, but nonetheless the joke partly consists in the fact that if they do manage to squeeze into the hut, there is the delightful, or embarrassing, prospect of the unmarried ladies being squashed up against the gentleman (fig.55). In another case the small space is specified as an omnibus. A lady is about to enter the bus, and we can see the face of a man sitting inside. She holds up her skirts, ready to mount the step at the back of the bus, and shows part of the crinoline cage, and the lace edged petticoat she is wearing. The conductor stops her and says:

Werry sorry'm, but yer'l 'av to leave yer Krinerline
outside.

We see that the bus is absurdly hung about with crinoline cages, attached to the rail on the roof (fig.56). The cage itself is made an object of embarrassment here, as the apparently practical regulation would involve undressing, and the public display of an undergarment. The potential for embarrassment is the theme of a cartoon where a little brother dances in to the drawing room, wearing a crinoline cage round his neck, and humiliates the young lady of the house, in front of her moustachioed singing master, saying:

LOOK HERE, CLARA, THERE'S A YOUNG WOMAN DOWN-STAIRS HAS BROUGHT THIS FOR YOU, AND WANTS TO KNOW IF IT WILL DO.
(fig.57)

One of the incidents shown in the large crowd scene by William Holman Hunt, where a pickpocket is being arrested in the foreground, is a boy jokingly holding up a crinoline cage, further along the bridge, as his contribution to the festivities.

EXPOSURE OF THE BODY

Objections to the crinoline cage often contain an element which refers to the removal of the crinoline, and to the display of the cage, or to the display of the woman's body beneath the cage. A Punch cartoon of 1856 seems to be a key image in this respect. The title is DRESS AND THE LADY, and it shows a woman from behind (fig.58). Her left half is fully dressed and outdoors in a wooded avenue. Her right half is undressed, as far as the crinoline cage, and standing before the dressing room mirror. We see through the hoops and straps of the cage to her slight unpadded petticoat, and we see her bare, or stockinged, lower calf, above her ankle boots. The shock of the image is that just below the surface of the apparently bulky outdoor

figure is an undressed, bare-legged woman. The impermeable, modest screen provided by tens of layers of stiffened petticoats is no longer there. Other cartoons illustrate situations when the calves might be immodestly revealed. In A SKETCH DURING THE RECENT GALE, a crinoline is supposed to have blown inside out as an umbrella does (fig.59). The woman is wearing a fairly voluminous long petticoat, but nonetheless, this single, unstiffened, layer moulds itself to the back of her calves, revealing the outline of her legs. The preoccupation is clearly with this part of the leg, rather than the thighs or bottom. In another cartoon the device developed by women for drawing their skirts up, by pulling up the hoops of the cage, by means of draw-strings at the waist, is ridiculed. The purpose of the device was to avoid dragging the hem in the mud, and ending up with a drenched and heavy skirt, and to make it easier to climb steps. It seems from the cartoon that the device was new in 1858. The point is made by imagining a gentleman adopting a similar device, for what were considered the equally ridiculous 'peg top' trousers (fig.60). The man in the foreground has drawn his trousers up nearly as far as the knee, and reveals his bare calves above his socks, the bulging muscles carefully outlined. The lady behind him is doing the same with her crinoline, and we see her rather short petticoat and her lower leg. She is about to move forward to the edge of the pavement, where her legs will be as brightly lit, and as distinct, as those of the gentleman. The viewing of legs is similarly the topic of the cartoon where two fashionably dressed ladies are hoisting their crinolines as they walk in front of a haberdashery shop (fig.61). Two little boys follow, and one says:

MY EYE, TOMMY, IF I CAN'T SEE THE OLD GAL'S LEGS THROUGH THE PEEP HOLES!

He is referring to the holes in the broderie anglaise edging to her petticoat. The idea is that the petticoat may not be immodestly short, but it can still be revealing if edged in this fashion. In the shop window behind are displayed a pair of striped stockings as far as the knee, and a number of crinoline frames to reinforce the point. The stout middle aged lady is also thought to have no reason for displaying her unattractive legs in this way, whereas her slender young companion might have some justification for adopting this provocative costume.

OMNIBUS LIFE IN LONDON: DISPLAY OF LEGS

The foreground of Egley's Omnibus Life In London has two examples of broderie anglaise edging on underclothing. The young girl on the right is wearing pantaloons under her striped dress, and her little brother on their mother's lap is also wearing similar pantaloons under his short blue frock. Hers are much longer and reach right down to the ankle. The boy's legs can hardly be considered to be the object of sexual excitation, but, in the context, his revealed calves suggest the possibility that she, or one of the ladies, might reveal hers. It is interesting to note that Egley originally intended the little girl to have white stockings and sandals, which would have displayed her legs and ankles. He describes her in these terms in his catalogue:

a fashionably dressed little girl of ten or twelve wearing a straw hat with feathers and ribbons, the hair in long, dark ringlets, a grey jacket, and light, striped silk dress, with a short skirt displaying her long white trousers trimmed with needlework, and the black kid boots with brilliant patent leather toes and high heels. This figure was painted from Miss Susannah (Blanche) Rix. In the sketch for the picture she is represented wearing white stockings and

patent leather sandalled shoes. (227)

His description of her dress does not quite fit the picture. It is not a short dress, but, as can be seen where it extends behind the band-box with flowers on it, is a full-length dress, which has been folded up where she has sat down, and so shows her pantaloons. The concertina effect of the dress on the seat, and the way it juts out in front, beyond her legs, may indicate that she is wearing a crinoline cage. If so then she is a child example of grown ladies fashion. Egley's own susceptibility to elegant ladies' ankles and feet is shown by the diary entry he made when he had bought his wife a some new boots.

Jan 31 1856 Thur. ...In the Eveng. I bought for my darling pet a pr. of elegant blk. boots with the most brilliant enamelled toes. They fit tight to her feet & make them look deliciously small and beautiful. (228)

His personal response was in line with current social attitudes towards female form and fashion.

There seems to be a parallel between the expression of the little girl in the picture and that of the lady with a veil at the other end of the bus. Both have lowered eyelids, heads turned slightly to the left, and a preoccupied look, as if conscious of being surveyed. The girl's lips turn up slightly, whereas the woman's lips turn down as if she is faintly disturbed, or made grave by the attention she attracts. The Dublin University Magazine review describess the woman as wearing the neatest and most modest of fashions...she sits quite abashed by the evident admiration given to her.

In this way it picks up on the issues of modesty and immodesty in

(227) Egley ms. Catalogue.

(228) W.M.Egley, ms. diary 1856.

dress, and of women as spectacle that we have seen as themes in the Punch commentary on crinolines.

THE SCOPIC REGIME OF OMNIBUS LIFE IN LONDON

The picture seems to be very much concerned with looking, and, as a subtheme, with the visibility of legs. There are fifteen figures in the painting, and the two figures of the little girl and the veiled woman are the focus of the gaze of all the other figures. Of the six foreground figures, all faces are turned towards the little girl; and the middle aged woman and the older gentleman are looking directly at her. Of the nine background figures, all those whose faces we can see are looking towards the veiled woman. This orchestration of glances produces a feeling of fixity of action. The picture is not a compendium of incident that the eye can move across and between. The viewer is bound to stare with the figures at the girl and the veiled woman. There is no communication between the figures in the picture. Nobody speaks or moves. All the mouths are hidden, or set in an emotionless expression, apart from the hint of pleasure and displeasure on the faces of the two objects of attention. The woman entering the bus is seen as she hesitates, while the conductor surveys the seats to see if he can find her a seat. The man behind her peers over her parasol, and he too is caught in motionless watching, unable to move until there is a decision as to whether she can enter. The lack of movement and interaction reduces the viewer of the picture too, to motionless staring.

The placards on the bus walls contribute to the working of

this theme. On the left is an advertisement for a pair of 17/6 trousers, which consists of the name of the trousers, a picture of a pair of disembodied legs wearing the trousers and sitting down, and the name and address of the suppliers. On the right is a placard giving details of the Omnibus Company Advertising Office in the Strand. Passengers looking at the trousers advertisement are staring at a pair of legs, not female legs admittedly, but their disembodiment might seem to enact the castration that is obliquely suggested by the entire scene. There was some discussion in the press of the undesirability of advertising in buses, when advertisements were first introduced into them in 1847. One article took as its theme the offence to women's delicacy of feeling that might be caused if advertisements mentioned parts of the body.

It seems that there is such an extraordinary run for them [advertisements] that omnibuses are to be lined and stuffed with nothing else. How will you like sitting for an hour opposite to a pleasant list of the wonderful cures by some Professor's Ointment? or how will ladies like being stared in the face, all the way from Brentford to the Bank, with an elaborate detail of all the diseases which Old Methusaleh's Pill professes to be a specific for? The testimonials of these gifted gentlemen are as little noted for their delicacy as for their truth, and do not form the kind of reading we should exactly prescribe to the fairer portion of the public which patronise omnibuses. (229)

The idea is that the passenger trapped in the bus has no choice but to view the offensive display - much as the infant voyeur is caught by his or her own fascination and curiosity and is compelled to watch the distressful activity of the primal scene.

Omnibuses were associated with the objectionable display of legs occasioned by passengers climbing up onto the roof. A

(229) Punch, vol.XII, Jan-Jun 1847, p.31.

letter to The Times complained of the inadequate facilities for reaching the roof.

[passengers need to] displace the conductor and scramble up at considerable personal risk by aid of an iron step, generally placed at the edge of the window, to the inconvenience of the the inside passengers. (230)

The inconvenience referred to could only have been the embarrassing sight of legs passing up past the window. The inside passengers were uncomfortably close to the legs of those who were installed on the roof. This is the point made by the Illustrated Times, in an article that also refers to the crush caused by crinolines.

It is pretty obvious that one great reason for all the failures is the practice of carrying too many passengers. In this way the roof ventilation is impeded by the legs of those who ride the knife-board, and impart a flavour of corduroy and damp blucher to the internal atmosphere. The space devoted to each person is (to say nothing of crinoline) absurdly insufficient, and it is always difficult to choose, when any choice is left you, between the seat next the door, where you are swept down from head to foot by the muddy and iron bound skirts of female passengers, who struggle helplessly forward with general assistance; or submit to be stifled in the remoter corner near the horses, where you shrink from opening the sliding-trap and so exposing the driver's legs to a through draught.

The horror of being packed in such a confined space, exposed to all the inflictions of dirty straw, impracticable ventilators and windows, an attempt to open which would be destruction alike to glass and finger nails, deters hundreds of people from riding in London omnibuses except under pressing necessity. (231)

Legs appear in three guises here, with regard to roof passengers' boots and trousers, ladies' crinolines inside the bus, and thirdly in the mention of the driver's legs. The exposure of the driver's legs to a draught would also involve the exposure of his legs to the view of the inside passengers. This raises the

(230) The Times, 28 February 1851, quoted in Barker and Robbins, op. cit., p.60.

(231) Illustrated Times 12 December 1863, p.378.

question of what there was at the far end of the bus in the position occupied by the viewer. In the London buses referred to by the Illustrated Times, a sliding ventilation door was the norm. In some cases the end of the bus was mirrored which brings up another interesting parallel with the Awakening Conscience. It became conceivable through the logic of multiple reflections in that painting to imagine the frame of the picture as coincident with a further mirror frame, and for the viewer to be included in the picture. If the back of the bus were mirrored then the viewer of Omnibus Life In London would be included in the picture too, as one of the three faces in the doorway. This would do no more than to involve the viewer in their hiatus of activity. He or she would be similarly frozen and staring. A middle class male viewer, unable to identify with the female figure, or with the working class cad, could only identify with the pair of eyes, which are all we can see of the male passenger about to enter.

The anxiety and claustrophobia of Omnibus Life In London is the more obvious when it is compared with a picture where a similar situation is represented, but in a far more relaxed way. Charles Rossiter's To Brighton and Back for 3/6 was painted in the same year, and we have already noticed that it adopts the opposite compositional format from Omnibus Life In London, and arranges the figures horizontally across the picture frame. The picture appears to avoid the anxieties about class evinced in Omnibus Life In London. There is not the sense that it is a middle class environment, invaded by individuals who do not qualify for inclusion. The bare wood of the carriage interior

shows that this is a second or third class carriage and so it is a view of the working class or the lower middle class that is being given. The title indicates that it is an excursion trip for the day, and, as discussed above, there was a mass public taking advantage of rail excursion trips out of London, who would not have made regular use of public transport inside London. The first excursion train to Brighton was on Easter Monday of 1844. The train consisted of fifty seven carriages drawn by six engines. By 1855 the price of a day trip to Brighton had settled at 3/6.(232) There were twelve or fourteen trains a day from London, and a day excursion to Brighton was a familiar institution, widely advertised. A Chambers's Journal article speaks of

the advertisement so familiar to all eyes "Eight hours at the sea-side". It goes to the root of the matter at once. (233)

The root of the matter, according to this account, was that the trains were so frequent, fast, and reasonably priced, that access to the sea-side was feasible even for the lower classes. They might not be able to go to the sea-side for the season, like the middle classes, but they could share the benefits of fresh air by taking advantage of these day excursions.

Thus the benefit applies in the end, to all classes but the extreme poor - and they must be poor indeed who, in these cheap days, cannot afford an occasional inhaling of fresh air.

The child leaning over the back of the seat in To Brighton and

(232) Barker and Robbins, op. cit., p.56.

(233) Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, vol.X, 14 August 1858, p.97.

Back for 3/6 is holding out a bun with a cross marked on the top of it. If it is a hot cross bun then the outing takes place on an Easter holiday. The main figures revolve in a circle around this bun, and they follow the various stages of family life. On the right is a young couple, courting or newly married, sheltered by the parasol the man is holding, and their knees under one rug. The young man gazes fervently at the woman, and his lips are open as if he has just spoken. She is listening to him with her eyes lowered and her face turned modestly to one side, but her blushing pink cheeks and the way she toys with her ring finger suggest that she is thinking of their approaching marriage, or of their recent wedding. The fact that they share their rug and that she has on her lap a copy of the Family Herald suggests that they are already a family unit.

Behind them, and at the top of the circle of figures is a young mother with a baby in her arms. She represents the next step in family life, the happy consequence of the scene in the foreground. The baby has become a lively toddler in the third group, which consists of the little girl with a fur tippet holding out her half eaten bun, and her mother carefully watching what she does. Below them, and in the left foreground is the final group, which is a family of four. There are two children, a little girl in red, and a boy holding the basket which perhaps contains their picnic. The mother is older than the other women, and is well wrapped up in several layers of brightly coloured shawls. Her husband is sitting beside her, leaning towards her shoulder and dozing contentedly with a lace handkerchief draped over his hat.

The circle is one of virtue and happiness. The way it revolves around the cross is perhaps symbolic and conveys the idea that these families are founded on Christian values. The activity of the little girl, generously offering to share her bun, could be emblematic of Christian charity, and an indication that these families are fulfilling their role of providing a moral training for the children, but the universal smart clothes in the picture preclude the theme of help for the needy. Certainly the mother with her baby at the top of the picture recalls a virgin and child. Their white bonnets stand out against the darker background like haloes, and the blue ribbons on the mother's bonnet would be appropriate for a figure of the virgin. This pair are separated from the other figures, and are emphasised because the woman is the only person standing. She seems to preside over the entire composition in the manner of a Raphael madonna. The Family Herald was a middle class publication directed at the respectable working class, and specifically intended to inculcate Christian family values, and to draw the newly literate sections of the working populace away from immoral and corrupting fiction.(234)

If Omnibus Life In London is a picture that is concerned with the act of looking, then To Brighton and Back for 3/6 is one that tempers the purely visual with the theme of listening. The young woman on the right is listening to the words of her beloved. The little girl with the bun has spoken to the girl in red, and the figures around her react with shyness, surprise or amusement, but

(234) Louis James, Fiction for the Working Man, (1963), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1974.

not with displeasure. Others, not involved in this interplay, are self absorbed and contemplative, as is the mother with her baby, or the man facing out towards the passing scenery on the right, or even the father asleep.

The only figure in To Brighton and Back for 3/6 who does not fit into the pattern of self absorption or humorous interaction is the odd figure of a man in the centre of the picture, behind the two young mothers. He is staring straight at us, from the vanishing point of the picture. His mouth is hidden by his cane top, and so all we see of him, apart from his hat, is one eye staring. This is the one point in the picture that recalls the chilling atmosphere, and the emphasis on the scopic of Omnibus Life In London. Otherwise it is a picture where the activity of the ear could be said to preponderate over the activity of the eye. Because of this it does not acknowledge what were perceived as the particular perils of modern urban existence. It is a painting whose ideology consists in the presentation of what it takes to be a wholly positive vision of the lower classes, in an ideal segregated situation, rather than a vision which, in a no less ideological way, fearfully rehearses the dangers which may follow on a breakdown of dependable barriers between classes. It does not represent an atomised and threatening crowd, but a harmonious group where all come from one comfortable and respectable class position, and where the separate groups are articulated together thematically and compositionally. It did not succeed in attracting favourable reviews, and was rejected by the critic of the Saturday Review as being a meaningless assemblage of shawls and flounces and oddities of expression.

Mr. Frith this year sends only a portrait of Mr. Dickens, and has nothing in the style of the "Derby Day." His success has, however, brought this kind of subject a good deal into vogue, and there are a number of paintings by different artists which seem to be inspired by his pencil. None of them, however, come quite up to his standard; and as it is a kind of art which is worthless and vulgar unless thoroughly well executed, it may be hoped that the infection will not spread. In Mr. Frith's paintings there was, in addition to the highly-elaborated execution, some point and meaning in the subject. Life at the sea-side and life on a race-course is marked by peculiar and well-defined characteristics. In such a scene as "Brighton and Back - 3s. 6d." (378), by C. Rossiter, there is nothing of this kind. A railway-carriage is simply an excuse for coupling together odd faces and dresses. "Dividend Day at the Bank" (519), by G.E. Hicks, is a step in advance; but it also is, both in subject and treatment, decidedly inferior to Mr. Frith's productions. The kind of talent which is employed upon such painting as this would be much better occupied in domestic scenes like those which Mr. Faed paints. Art in which shawls, flounces, and oddities of expression are the most conspicuous points, is of a poor kind. (235)

Evidently for this reviewer the narrative elements of Rossiter's picture were not apparent, and it fell too much into the camp of unnarrativised visual cleverness. Nevertheless we can identify a narrative cohesion in the picture which Omnibus Life In London seems to lack.

CONCLUSION

We can now summarise the effect that the picture Omnibus Life In London has on the viewer. The picture posits the presence of a male viewer who is caught in frozen, and helpless voyeurism. He is looking in on the scene, as the three figures in the open door are looking in. The scene is one where people of both sexes are enclosed in a small space, and are in close physical contact with one another. He is given a very intense and detailed view of the situation, which is hard to interpret exactly, due to the

crowding of the figures and the lack of incident, but which seems to offer the prospect, or danger, of women allowing their legs to be looked at. This situation is compounded with a sense of threat associated with the woman about to enter, and a general fear of being robbed of something that belongs to him. If the woman about to enter is wearing one of the new fashionable crinoline dresses, then the problem of fitting all the passengers in will be all the more acute. There is also a danger that she will show her legs as she lifts her skirts to climb the step into the bus, and as she sits down. Her petticoat might be too short, or it might have a revealing open-work border. The threat of her approach translates to the threat of viewing a woman's body, and being forced to recognise the fact of sexual difference. The anxiety about robbery translates to a castration fear. It also connects to the nationalistic hostility to a foreign power. The absence of any indication of speech or communication between the figures in the painting makes the activity of the eye the more prominent, and hinders the viewer's attempt to temper the picture's insistently scopic quality by inferring a narrative.

Modern city life has been described by Walter Benjamin as characterised by a series of disconnected shocks equivalent to the rapid repetitive actions of industrial machinery, taking place in an atmosphere of deafening noise. He quotes Georg Simmel's observation that in the modern city the eye is more crucial than the ear.

Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear. The main reason for this is the public means of transportation. Before the development of buses, railroads, and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in a position of having to look at one

another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another.(236)

Benjamin incorporates this idea into his account of the new sensory awareness required of the inhabitant of a big city. First he talks of the production line movements: the pressing of buttons, and lifting of levers, and then he goes on:

Tactile experiences of this kind were joined by optic ones, such as are supplied by the advertising pages of a newspaper or the traffic of a big city. Moving through this traffic involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions..... Whereas Poe's passers-by cast glances in all directions which still appeared to be aimless, today's pedestrians are obliged to do so in order to keep abreast of traffic signals. Thus technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training.(237)

This notion, and the relating of the heightening of the visual to modern urban experience can be applied to the distinctly visual emphasis of Omnibus Life In London. This chapter has investigated the scopic regime of that painting and the effect of denarrativisation that emerges from it.

(236) Georg Simmel, quoted in W.Benjamin, 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', in Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, trans. H.Zohn, (NLB 1973), Verso, London, 1983, p.38.

(237) W.Benjamin, 'Some Motifs In Baudelaire', op. cit., p.132.

CHAPTER FIVE: NARRATIVE THEORY AND NARRATIVE PICTURES

This thesis deals with a local shift within the signifying regime of mid-nineteenth century realist painting. It depends on an understanding of the way in which narrative was offered and controlled in British genre painting, which derives, in turn, from the account(s) of classic literary realism I have mentioned. Literary narrative theory, and particularly Barthes's observations in 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', can be used to illuminate the mechanisms of narrative painting.(238) I will identify a degree of disintegration of narrative in mid-century painting, perceived, at the time, as a failure to refer. This is not to claim genre paintings of the late 1850s as protomodernist works, and to call for a redefinition of the grand sweep of modernism. Such reversals and revisions are quite familiar, and too easily summoned up to be very satisfying. Barthes shows that by shifting comparators it is quite possible to read a Balzac story one minute as a classic realist text, and the next as pure writing in anticipation of modernism.(238) In the field of visual art Jackson Pollock might

(238) R.Barthes, 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative' (1966), trans. L.Duisit, New Literary History, 1975, vol.VI, pt.2, pp.237-77.

(238) R.Barthes, S/Z, (1970), trans. R.Miller, Jonathan Cape, London, 1975.

be claimed as the heroic representative of modernism; as an artist who succeeded in rendering his canvases non-referential. And yet, from a different stand-point, his work could be denounced as failing in modernist rigour. The chaotic web of a painting such as Number One of 1949 does not prioritise the activity of any one section of the canvas. The motif has apparently exploded, or has been distributed. And yet developments within the modernist regime, under the tutelage of such a critic as Clement Greenberg, further refined the criteria for attaining a non-referential art, so that, from the vantage point of colour-field painting of ten years later, Pollock's work seemed hopelessly caught up in the renaissance illusion of three-dimensionality, in the expressive drama of gestural brush-work, and in a motif-inspired concession to the edges of the canvas. This example demonstrates that the effect of repeated waves of assault upon narrative has been rather to interrogate it than to annihilate it.

NARRATIVE PAINTING - NARRATIVE AS DEFECT

A simplistic identification of narrative with moralism led to a wholesale rejection of Victorian narrative painting by a British critical establishment addicted to formalist aesthetics in the first half of this century. Literary content was considered to be intrinsically opposed to the properly artistic. And the epithet 'narrative' is still perceived as a stigma, despite the growing attention to Victorian painting, and its rising market value. Sachervell Sitwell was unusual in considering Victorian narrative painting worthy of attention in 1936. His book, Narrative Pictures, nonetheless censures the

narrative painting of the mid-nineteenth century on the grounds that it is imbued with sentimentality. His definition of narrative painting is simple. It is

the painting of anecdote. It is the chosen moment in some related incident, and looking more closely into its details we must see hints or suggestions of the before and after of the story. (239)

The incident can be of literary derivation or from life. For Sitwell the genre is one that depends, for success, on a combination of moral seriousness, painstaking, and poetry. His assessments of various practitioners depend on the degree to which they fulfill these various requirements. Seriousness and painstaking, for instance, are both absent in Morland's work. His painting is sentimental rather than serious, and too easy and fluent to be painstaking, and so he does not consider it, properly speaking, to be narrative painting. Ford Madox Brown's painting is also flawed by its sentiment.

The appearance of this nervous weakness, coming in the middle years of the Victorian epoch, is a sign that the last days of this kind of painting are at hand. (240)

Sitwell's assessment of William Holman Hunt's picture, The Hireling Shepherd, is that it is one where the seriousness and painstaking have become so exaggerated as to constitute a kind of sentiment that, while it is essentially narrative, undermines the value of the narrative.

As a morality picture The Hireling Shepherd is, of course, jejune and absurd. Holman Hunt was serious-minded to the point of being ridiculous. No humour whatever seems to have entered into his character. But The Hireling Shepherd, all the same is remarkable by the very excess of its faults. And they are the errors of narrative taste or sentiment.

(239) S. Sitwell, Narrative Pictures, (1936), Batsford, London, 1969, p. 1.

(240) op.cit., p. 4.

The painting, throughout, is admirable and accomplished in a sense in which this is true of but few English paintings....excessive realism....almost every object in this picture is made to tell a story. (241)

His argument is paradoxical. Rather than being criticised for being non-narrative, as Morland was, Drown and Hunt are in effect accused of being too narrative. What praise he has for Victorian painting is reserved for the documentary function he attributes to some pictures. He calls Omnibus Life In London a perfect human document, and claims

This interior of a Bus gives us the real aspect of the age, as no film and no work of fiction can ever restore it to us. The same thing may be said of two drawings....representative of many more by Eugene Lami. (242)

In what is, in a sense, its ultimate manifestation then, narrative overreaches itself, and becomes so intent on telling a story that it ceases to have any aesthetic value.

Narrative is one of the aspects of British art that Pevsner deliberates on in The Englishness of English Art (1956). The concepts of the book are arranged as binary oppositions, and narrative qualities take their place opposite aesthetic qualities. He perceives narrative qualities in the English use of apparently arbitrarily chosen styles for the facades of buildings.

in England there existed as we have seen a disposition in favour of narrative, and the thatched Old English cottages as against the Italianate villas tell a story by their very costumes. The effect is evocative, not strictly aesthetic. (243)

Similarly he cites the preponderance of heraldic emblems over

(241) op.cit., p.77.

(242) op.cit., p.82.

(243) N.Pevsner, The Englishness of English Art, (1956), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1964, p.48.

figure sculpture in churches as evidence for a tendency of the English to lean to the informative rather than to the imaginative. (244) Careful observation of detail is allied to a narrative style, and is praised in Hogarth and Constable, but Pevsner allows that it can be a weakness in English art.

The narrative strain...can represent concern with human life and the search for truth, or on the other hand the preference for the extra-aesthetic aspects of a story over the aesthetic aspects of painting. (245)

He conceives of a battle between two sides of Englishness, the one side described as rational, moderate, reasonable, conservative, observant and narrative, and the other as imaginative, irrational, fantastic and quirky or fanatical. He sees the period 1840-60 as marking the ascendancy of the former over the latter, to the loss of vigour in English art, particularly in English painting. The Pre-Raphaelites are identified as belonging to both these categories. While they had elements of the imaginative side,

their hankerings after truth to nature and after the edifying story links them, as has been shown to the rational narrative side. (246)

His book is more temperate than Roger Fry's work of 1934 Reflections On British Painting, which damned the Philistinism and debasement of mid-nineteenth century British art - the damnation being expressed in metaphors of Avernus (describing the results of Wilkie's slide into the anecdotal) and even of Sodom and Gomorrah (for Frith's Paddington Station). (247) Pevsner's

(244) op. cit., p.92.

(245) op. cit., p.196.

(246) op.cit., p.199.

(247) R.Fry, Reflections On British Painting, (1934), Books for Libraries Press, New York, 1969, p.96 and p.109.

account does not dismiss as worthless the prosaic element of Englishness, particularly in its manifestation in architecture. For him the Perpendicular style is as worthy as the Decorated, and as important to document and describe. The book is partly an attack on the stubbornly European viewpoint of Fry, who only saw value in British art insofar as it conformed to European standards and developments. It is an attempt to rescue an aspect of English use of line and flatness or etheriality from blanket condemnation as non-plastic and un-European. Pevsner achieves this without resorting to the nationalism of such a war-time effort as Aspects of British Art. Nonetheless he does not challenge Fry's notion that the illustrative, literary or narrative mode is inherently anti-aesthetic. The concomitant, clearly stated in Fry, is that this mode appeals primarily to those devoid of aesthetic understanding, and in effect to the lower classes.(248)

This cluster of ideas, formulated in the 1930s, is one that has carried through into modern accounts of Victorian painting. In a recent book E.D.H.Johnson makes a remark that can be traced back to Pevsner and to Fry:

The art criticism appearing in British periodicals was at a low ebb throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century. The fact that most notices of the pictures in the Art Journal were devoted to detailed descriptions of their narrative or anecdotal content speaks volumes with regard to how they were supposed to be viewed. (249)

The implication is that there is some other superior critical mode which the Victorians failed to employ, which goes beyond

(248) Fry, op.cit., p.35.

(249) E.D.H.Johnson, Paintings of the British Social Scene, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1986, p.278.

narrative. The remark is directed at criticism, or the reception of pictures, rather than at the paintings themselves, but the book also posits a determining effect on artistic production of the picture consuming public, who were also subject to these critical limitations. At two points in the chronological account of the book, 'From Hogarth to Sickert', the picture buying public is brought in to account for a decline in taste. The first is the latter part of the eighteenth century. The second is the mid-nineteenth century.

Johnson operates with a rudimentary notion of ideology as the conceptual apparatus of the dominant class. He refers to the middle class of the eighteenth century as, by mid century, having gained political and economic 'ascendancy' and as consciously exercising cultural hegemony, ('an increasingly confident sense of their instrumental role in setting the cultural tone of national life').(250) The growth of the print trade with the establishment of Boydell in the 1740s and other print producers by the 1860s meant that genre painters produced with an eye to this trade and to a large middle class audience.

As might be expected, these pictures, like their seventeenth century counterparts in Dutch genre painting, were small in size and mirrored the domestic concerns of the middle classes whose homes they were designed to adorn. In accordance with the inclinations of a novel-reading audience, they customarily depicted situations fraught with narrative or anecdotal interest; and before all else, they were imbued with the strongly moralistic presuppositions of the social order whose mores they flattered. (251)

The distinction he is making is between the great satirical productions of Hogarth and the ideologically confirmatory

(250) op.cit., p.84.

(251) op. cit., p.83.

narrative painting of the later part of the eighteenth century. The underlying assumption is that when a picture is simply narrative it is most purely ideological. Ideology is set up as an opposite principle to artistic worth. If, on the contrary, you make the assumption that all paintings have a narrative aspect, then the accompanying assumption is that all paintings are ideological, and so are available for ideological analysis. The critic or art historian is released from the role of judge and instead has to specify how the narratives operate, and for whom. The denomination 'narrative' is no longer perjorative, nor is it a sufficient description.

Roger Fry's 'less sophisticated public' who preferred literary qualities to plastic values (252) reappears in Johnson's account of the mid-nineteenth century decline in taste. He speaks of captains of industry, whose fortunes were founded in the mills and factories of the midlands and north, and who collected modern British works because they

portrayed the kind of familiar scenes at which their owners liked to look. (253)

The 'taste for pictures of familiar subject matter' (254) was spread beyond these industrialists to a wider, predominantly middle class public (255) by the expanding print trade, and Johnson notes a decline after 1850 into feeble productions

addressed to the tastes of an indiscriminating public for whom art, at best provided momentary distraction from the tedium of daily existence. (256)

(252) op.cit., p.35.

(253) op.cit., p.186.

(254) ibid., p.188.

(255) ibid., p.189.

We can ask what constitutes familiar subject matter. Johnson uses it as a code word for domestic genre and modern life scenes. Why the nineteenth century middle class should have wanted to look at these subjects rather than any others is not thought out, if indeed it is true. If most images in circulation represent scriptural subjects, for example, then an image of children at a cottage door, or of a modern street scene, would seem most unfamiliar. The term depends partly on the notion of the documentary truth of such pictures. We have seen how Sitwell found some compensatory value in the truth of modern scenes. Johnson too, on several occasions falls into the trap of reading the pictures as literal transcripts of life. Ritchie and Levin are cited as examples that capture the look and spirit of mid-nineteenth century London, and 'there is no mistaking the authenticity of Mulready's pictures of life in the city streets'.(257) O'Neill and Hall's representation of a viewing public are taken as evidence for what the composition of the viewing public actually was.(258) Redgrave's governess is an authentic document, by reference to another set of texts, also taken as literally true

The situation shown here was all too common in Victorian society, as anyone familiar with the life of Charlotte Bronte and her novels Jane Eyre and Villette well knows. (259)

This level of analysis perpetuates the logical fallacy of Sitwell. It is a line of thought that continually reappears in accounts of Victorian painting, and other examples could be

(256) *ibid.*, p.192.

(257) *ibid.*, p.207 and p.227.

(258) *ibid.*, p.187.

(259) *ibid.*, p.229.

cited, notably from Christopher Wood's Victorian Panorama.(260)

AN ALTERNATIVE STRAND OF MODERNISM

Fry, Sitwell and Pevsner stand in a tradition of modernist criticism that effectively excludes any possibility of an analytic understanding of Victorian realist painting. Narrative pictures are dismissed by this school of thought that considers the concerns of narrative art to be alien to painting 'proper'. There is however another strand of modernism which opens up the space for a critical engagement with realism, and that is the politically engaged modernist position which emerges from the debates of Brecht and Lukacs in the 1930s. Lukacs published a series of articles opposing the use of modernist techniques in novels and theatre, as well as expressionism in literature and painting. Instead he advocated realism in art, basing his definition of realism on his readings of Balzac and Tolstoy. Brecht's practice in theatre was directly and indirectly attacked by these articles, and he wrote replies for the Moscow based Das Wort, which were not, however, published at the time. Brecht framed his defence of modernist practice in terms of a redefinition of realism: demanding an extension of the scope of the term beyond the model of nineteenth century realist novelists, such as Balzac and Tolstoy. Within the debate 'realist' became a code-word for popular and politically progressive art. Brecht defended modernist techniques, such as

(260) C.Wood, Victorian Panorama, Faber & Faber, London, 1976, for example p.247: 'modern-life paintings ...wonderfully attractive and informative pictures, which conjure up for us, with an immediacy and directness that no other medium can, the mid-Victorian world.'

James Joyce's use of interior monologue and Dos Passos's use of montage, against Lukacs's claim that they were inaccessible to workers and simply formalist. He turned the accusation of formalism against Lukacs himself, for his exclusive advocacy of certain archaic, nineteenth century forms, applied in a fossilised form in the quite different historical circumstances of the twentieth century.(261) In the debate Lukacs stands in the pro-realist, and Brecht in the pro-modernist position, but the value of the debate for modern criticism has been the way that both authors map the historical development of artistic forms and articulate the fundamental departures of modernism - making possible an anatomy of nineteenth century realism.

The modernist criticism of the British art establishment has been ahistorical, and essentially idealist in its promotion of non-representational art. By contrast the European Marxist theorists of the 1930s understood modern art as both agent and product of crucial social and political tensions. Formal developments in art were bound up with questions of social relations, class consciousness and ideology. Form was not considered in a vacuum, rather it was perceived, in Adorno's phrase, as 'a sedimentation of content'.(262) In this way the experiments of modernism - the disruption of forms, the shifting of viewpoint, and the denial of anticipated resolution - were

(261) See F. Jameson, ed. and afterword by, Aesthetics and Politics, New Left Books, London, 1977, for documents and discussion of this debate.

(262) 'The campaign against formalism overlooks the fact that form ...is itself a sedimentation of content', T.W. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory (1970), Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1984, p.209.

advocated, or rejected, on political grounds. The description of, and contest over, modern developments sharpened critical perception of the underlying characteristics of nineteenth century artistic forms, and their specific social, and political basis and functioning. A critical approach derived from this area of thought no longer needs to approach the nineteenth century wearing modernism as blinkers, and attempting to read realist painting, for example, exclusively in terms of abstract colour values.

Much structuralist and post-structuralist criticism emerges from this politically engaged discussion of modernism. Twentieth century innovation in art and literature have been analysed in terms of new principles of textual organisation, and, as a point of comparison, the workings of nineteenth century texts have been scrutinised. The terms and parameters of the analysis have shifted since the 1930s, and the whole debate has been reworked - in various political directions - in the light of modern psychoanalytic theory, sexual politics and theories of ideology. In Britain the work of Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe on literature, and the debates in Screen in the 1970s, on film and literature, have drawn on a Lacanian notion of the formation of the subject through his or her acquisition of language, and Althusser's theory of ideology, particularly the idea of the interpellation of the individual in ideology. The features of the classic realist literary text have been described by these writers, and the ways in which the text positions its reader have been explored. They have pointed out the ideological affirmation enforced by a unitary authorial point of view, and by the

guarantee of narrative closure. They identify the idealism and psychological repression at work in the text's denial of the materiality of its signifiers, which are systematically bound in, one to one, with signifieds, creating an effect of transparency; of the text as window on the world. At the same time the realist text denies the reader the scope to create his or her own readings within the work. No single work is said to conform exactly to the model; the classic realist text is an abstraction which serves as an analytic tool. I would suggest that this model of the realist text, and the strand of critical modernism from which it springs, offer a useful point of access to nineteenth century British realist painting. They make it possible to engage with the narrative aspects of nineteenth century painting, and to undertake ideological analysis of works where a standard art historical approach can make no headway.

FORMS AND DEGREES OF NARRATIVITY - FROM ALLEGORY TO PORTRAITURE

Individual chapters of this thesis have argued that certain modern life pictures show, to some extent, a retreat from a centred, articulated composition to various degrees of disintegration. As genre pictures, modern life scenes occupy a position somewhere between history painting and still life, or to select different, but analogous, reference points, between allegory and portraiture. The position they occupy is an uneasy one because it lies between two modes, one of which operates within a semiotic system where the sign claims no resemblance to what it stands for, while the other offers signs which are analogic and claim to resemble the objects or individuals referred to. In allegory the distance between signified and

signifier is stressed, in portraiture the sign is naturalised, and the signified appears fused with the signifier.(263)

If we compare E.J.Armitage's allegorical painting of 1858, Retribution (fig.62), with the portrait of Queen Victoria by T.J.Barker of 1861, Queen Victoria Presenting a Bible in the Audience Chamber at Windsor (fig.63), we can see the distance between the avowedly allegorical representation of Britain and India, portrayed respectively as a mighty figure of Britannia and a cringing tiger, and the literal representation of the British monarch and a kneeling African chief. The Armitage painting declares itself to be allegory by a number of features. The action takes place before a generalised backdrop, there is little indication of a three dimensional space. It is a backdrop consisting of clearly notional jungly vegetation, oriental towers and a streaky sky; the setting does not need to indicate anything more specific than 'somewhere in India'. The huge size of the picture (it is 269.2 x 289.5 cm.) and the giant, larger than life, stature of the principal figure contribute to its insistence on its own unreality or 'beyond-reality'. The flat areas of pale colour, the classicism of the drapery, the defeminising of the female figure, indicating that it stands for an abstract attribute rather than a woman (264), and the fixing on a single dramatic gesture, all add to the effect. By these means the viewer is alerted to the fact that the meaning does not lie in the immediate referent. By contrast, the portrait of

(263) J.Culler, Structuralist Poetics, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1975, p.229-230.

(264) see M.Warner, Monuments and Maidens, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1985, ch.4.

Queen Victoria, though large in size as befits a state portrait (167.6 x 213.8 cm) has all the features of a realistic portrayal. The queen wears a modern crinoline, and the drapery is closely detailed, rich and varied in texture. The central incident of the painting is a subdued moment so that the focus is on the presence and attitude of the protagonists rather than on any thrilling feat. The minor figures in the picture are identifiable (though the identity of the African chief has been lost to, or by, an imperialist history) and the setting is a particular state apartment rather than a generalised locale. The striking thing about this pair of images is that despite their opposite mode of presentation they are very close in the meanings they mobilise. The juxtaposition makes very obvious the animal imagery employed in the depiction of the African chief. His stance, his leopard-skin cape and similarly spotted sash make him look like an animal, and the feathers in his turban do too, especially where one is tucked in at the side like a pointed ear. The way he is crouching translates the neutral pose of Victoria presenting the Bible into a gesture of domination, especially as her height is extended by the figure of Albert immediately behind her, and he is wearing military dress. Victoria, although she is not rendered animal-like is associated with the lion that is Britain by the carving of a lion on the arm-rest of her throne. What differentiates the images is not the presence of symbolic meanings in the allegory, and their absence in the portrait group, but the declared relation of image to referent.

We can consider a third image which falls between these two extremes, and this is Dominion by Edwin Landseer, which shows the

interior of an animal cage where the trainer leans back among the lions, tigers and leopards, protecting a lamb which nestles up against him (fig.64). Through the bars of the cage we can see members of the public viewing the display, and a flag fluttering in the breeze. In this scene, just as in the allegory or in the portrait there is a symbolic dimension. The 'dominion' of the title is exercised by the trainer over his beasts, and by the male lion over the other beasts. The extended and folded paws of the lion are echoed by the position of the trainer's arms. He combines the subduing action of his right arm stretched out over the tiger, with the protective gesture of his left arm bent round the lamb. We are encouraged to read the lion (and the trainer) as the lion of Britain, particularly as outside the cage there is a soldier, apparently standing at attention, beneath a national flag showing a lion rampant. Consequently we can read the lamb as a symbol of Christian people, and the other beasts as dangerous heathens; the tiger as India and the leopard as Africa. Britain is therefore shown as having the power to tame and subdue the subject peoples of the Empire. The lion also has dominion over the lioness which crouches on the left of the picture. The symbolism of the inhabitants of the cage then carries over to the members of the crowd outside. The British soldier is there to exercise control over a group that would otherwise be worryingly heterogeneous: a little child clings to its mother in fear of the caged animals, but in a sense the crowd is fearful too. A black man is present, and women mix with men without being clearly chaperoned, or attached to distinct family clusters.

The presentation does not fall into either an allegorical or a

portrait mode. Were it not for the presence of the bars of the cage and the spectators outside, it might be possible to claim the picture as allegory, a version of the peacable kingdom envisaged in the passage in the Bible, 'and the lion shall lie down with the lamb ...', and taking on the allegorical nature of that prediction where the kingdom envisaged stands for the kingdom of God. There is obviously a reference to this passage in the picture, but the setting is obstinately anti-allegorical; the scene is indicated as an actual scene in a modern-day zoo or menagerie. Equally the presence of the crowd stops the picture from signalling itself as being simply a portrait of a, possibly well-known, animal trainer and his beasts. The spectators are not named individuals, but stand as both 'real' and indeterminate. They figure as generalised representatives of the phenomenon 'the public' and of the types that make it up. This peculiar status of the representation is characteristic of genre painting. To take another example the small grubby children of a rustic genre scene are intended to be read as representatives of the general category 'urchin' rather than as specific portraits on one hand, or as emblematic embodiments of an impersonal concept such as poverty on the other.

ACCESSORY DETAIL - THE EROSION OF PORTRAITURE

The argument thus stated is considerably complicated by the shifting nature of both portraiture and genre painting in the mid-nineteenth century. There was no question as to the right of the person and the acts of Queen Victoria to be commemorated in a grand oil painting. The appropriate features of the setting and the costume details were annexed to the status of the sitter.

But if the sitter's claim was not acknowledged then the highly specific details lost their pertinence. Frith was able to substitute an arbitrary assortment of books, papers, and writing desk for the more conventional pillar and drapery in his portrait of Dickens in 1859.

I thought it best to discard the common curtain and column arrangement, and substitute for these well worn properties the study in which the writer worked, with whatever accident of surrounding that might present itself. (265)

The fireplace and mantelpiece on the left do in fact act as the column that Frith claims to have abandoned, so the portrait is not as informal as his description suggests (fig.65). However the disorder of the papers on the desk, and, above all, the inclusion of a waste paper basket in a prominent foreground position are potentially disruptive elements in the picture. Dickens's reputation as a great man ensured that the ephemeral litter of his surroundings would take on significance, and Frith was able to point out the manuscript pages of A Tale Of Two Cities on the desk. Similarly when C.R.Leslie's painting of a state ceremony was reviewed, notice was taken of the arbitrary features of the scene, necessarily resulting from the adoption of a portrait mode, where the picture claimed to be a literal transcript of the occasion. Despite these features the total effect was judged to be one of significance and elevation.

'The Queen Receiving the Sacrament (the concluding part of the Ceremony of her Majesty's Coronation), on the 28th June, 1838', C.R.LESLIE, R.A. The merits of this picture place it among the highest of its class; the artist has succeeded in wrapping the scene in a holy interest, powerfully supported by the deep and anxious attention settled upon the faces of all present. An appropriate effect is produced by a beam of light which descends towards the altar. The figures are

remarkable for their ease and grace, and the likenesses are strikingly identical. It must be remembered that in the treatment of such subjects there are many difficulties to be surmounted. The whole arrangement is arbitrary; the business of the artist is to paint the actual fact, unheightened by imagination or pictorial artifice. Parts of this picture, assuredly, required no embellishment; the figures of the young Queen and her maids of honour are as graceful, ideal, and beautiful as the most poetic fancy could desire; we cannot say so much for some of the great dignities and strait-laced officials who figure in the ceremony, but they are equally essential to the occasion, and they are well discriminated. (266)

According to the review, the officials and dignitaries lacked the presence required to achieve the difficult balancing act between the constraints of the actual and the desideratum of the significant. The beauty of the maids of honour gave them sufficient importance. Dickens's special status as a famous author apparently provided sufficient justification for the inclusion, in his portrait, of the paraphernalia surrounding him. However, by and large, it is the social class of the sitter that emerges as the key factor in assessments of whether the detailed accessories of a portrait had sufficient support. It is clearly the major factor in the Art Union's assessment of a portrait by Chalon in 1845.

'Portrait of Mrs. Thwaytes.' A.E. CHALON, R.A. This portrait is a very humiliating, but a very powerful, illustration of our national character; the might of money in England is a proverb; the lady here painted - whose humble name has been transformed from Thwaites into Thwaytes, we hope by order of the artist only - is the widow of that respectable grocer who bequeathed a sugar-plum to the wife he had married when he was vending figs by the pennyworth -

"A plain good man"

She has, it appears, exhausted one of her money-bags in the purchase of diamonds, which she has permitted the artist to look at; and they are "all over" her - money's worth from head to foot! ...Mrs. Thwaytes has been done all over in jewels -

"Rich and rare are the gems she wears;"

and there could be no possible objection to her commissioning Mr. A.E.Chalon to paint her ten thousand pounds'worth of diamonds and her face (for 500 l.); but to exhibit the homely daw in the peacock's feathers - not borrowed but bought - in the place of honour in the British Royal Academy is giving her "a glory" of which her honest grocer-husband never could have dreamt. (267)

The writer makes no apology for the outright snobbery of this review. His major point is that the grocer's wife is not socially fitted for the subject of a formal Royal Academy portrait. As a result the relation of figure to setting within the portrait is disrupted. Her jewellery, instead of remaining a fitting accessory for a noble sitter, beautiful in itself, but subordinate to the main subject, becomes a glaring feature that usurps the place of the sitter. Rather than a portrait of a sitter with jewels, the review describes a portrait of so many thousand pounds' worth of diamonds, with a face. The jewellery itself ceases to connote the elegance and taste of the sitter, and the diamonds just stand for money value. It is a signifying regime where the hierarchy has broken down. Just as an exchange can take place where the diamonds can be converted into cash, so separate elements of the portrait can be switched around. It is indicative of this that the 'i' of Mrs.Thwaites can be exchanged for the 'y' of Mrs.Thwaytes. The interchangeable units refer ultimately to the series in which they are found. To draw attention to the change from 'i' to 'y' is to foreground the alphabet. Where due subordination has been removed and the pictorial elements jostle one another uncomfortably they are reduced to being pure signifiers that can be exchanged at will. Earlier in this chapter I described portraiture as a genre where

(267) Art Union, 1845.

there is apparently an analogic relation of image to referent. In the cases discussed here, from the 1840s and 1850s, there appears to be a situation within portraiture where the signifier threatens to float free from the signified, precisely at the moment when it had seemed most firmly fixed within the constraints of a realist mode. The disruption threatened by the wastepaper-basket in the portrait of Dickens, and apparently achieved by the diamonds in the portrait of Mrs. Thwaytes occurs when the accessories are at their most solid. The problem is not that the objects are no longer recognisable, but that the choice of objects appears arbitrary, and the importance they have in the composition becomes unclear. Once the rationale for inclusion has been eroded then any odd assemblage of objects could be offered as a picture.

LOWER CLASS PORTRAITS - THE INVASION OF GENRE

Within a changing art market, with a rising proportion of middle class patrons, the high status of the sitter could no longer be relied upon as a guarantee of order and intelligibility within the portrait. In 1842 Punch could delight in the absurdity and bathos of representing the disreputable fringes of the working class in portrait form. The series 'Punch's Dossay Portraits' was a parody of the D'Orsay portrait series where engravings of eminent and noble individuals were published with biographical details. The figures chosen by Punch for its spoof series were a vendor of peat and hearthstones, a charity boy turned beadle, a street guitar player, a street-sweeper, a barber and an omnibus cad. Each was given a name and a fictional biography with details of family line and achievements. The

omnibus cad, for example was introduced in this way:

The family of the Jarvises, to which the subject of our present sketch belongs, has always been identified with the public conveyances of the metropolis; and an intermarriage with a cad walloper (a female of Welsh extraction who used to frequent the same public-house as the cads, some of whom she occasionally walloped) united the escutcheons of the jarvies and the cads in the person of the youthful Jarvis. (268)

The bus conductor's portrait heads the article (fig.66). Their achievements were always disreputable, and often criminal. There is a marked contrast in the presentation of the London cabman in the British Workman of 1857. The article is part of a campaign to stop cab-drivers and omnibus cads working on Sundays, and it is illustrated with an engraving of 'Joseph Powell, a well-known six-day London Cabman' (fig.67). He is presented as an example of a cabman who has obtained a six-day instead of a seven-day licence, and has given up working on Sundays. We are told that, far from causing financial hardship, this arrangement has led to increased prosperity, and that he now owns sixteen cabs and twenty-nine horses. What is surprising about this image is that the workman is shown in an individualised portrait, without any hint of the bathos aroused by the notion of a portrait of Jarvis in Punch. He is not shown in bourgeois dress in his role of manager and proprietor of a small business, but is shown in his working man's outfit of low-crowned hat, weatherproof cape, cravat and identifying number tag. The grand portrait convention is invoked in the low viewpoint selected, and the fixed gaze of the sitter directed out from the picture to one side. The portrait bears comparison with Frith's portrait of Dickens, and

(268) Punch, vol. II, Jan-Jun 1842, p.208.

the cab-horse and the corner of the cab itself stand as the framing devices of the picture. I am suggesting that the conceivable bounds of portraiture were shifting in the period 1840-60, and that the distance between the parodic presentation of a fictional figure, Jarvis, in Punch and the dignified portrait of a real individual, Powell, in the British Workman is some measure of that shift. Of course the contexts of these two images are quite different; while the very serious, sermonising British Workman was aimed at a working class audience, Punch was a comic paper directed at the middle class. Nonetheless the very existence of the British Workman, and the range of images it carried, would have been impossible in 1842. Image and context were both symptomatic of new subject matter entering certain areas of representation.

The text in the British Workman adopts the format of an official enquiry, where testimonies of individuals are assembled. The interview with Jarvis and his portrait are just the culminating example of what purports to be a broad survey. The format of enquiries derives, in turn, from the procedure in court cases where a series of witnesses are called. The pattern of courtroom depositions would have been most familiar to newspaper readers, as the nineteenth century press constantly supplied its readers with verbatim accounts of court cases. The personal interview with someone who was not a figure of authority was therefore nothing new in the 1850s, but it might be claimed that it came to be a more frequently used mode in journalism. S.M. Smith has pointed to a contrast between the the direct quotation of working class evidence in the reports on Children's

Employment (the most publicised of which was the Children's Employment Commission report of 1842 on employment in the mining industry), and reports such as Chadwick's Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain of 1842, which confined their evidence to quotations from figures of authority such as doctors, factory inspectors and poor law guardians. (269) Lord Ashley defended his decision to include direct evidence from women working in the mines, and vouched for its authenticity.

I will quote the evidence of one woman who deposes to her own sufferings; and let me here observe, that the evidence of the workpeople themselves is worth more than all the rest; for they know what they suffer and what the consequences are. I can say for them that I have ever found their statements more accurate, and that I have never met with attempts to mislead in the evidence given by working men of their own condition. (270)

The approach adopted by the Children's Employment Commissioners became the dominant one, and it is this direct presentation of working class figures that distinguishes the journalistic efforts at social reportage of the late 1840s and 1850s, notably the Morning Chronicle series of reports on conditions in London and in other regions of the country. G.Himmelfarb argues, in a recent book, that Mayhew's contributions to the series were neither unique nor original in their presentation of verbatim life histories, and suggests that Mayhew may have been influenced by the passages purporting to be life histories inserted by G.W.M.Reynolds in his Mysteries of London. (271) Certainly it

(269) S.M.Smith, The Other Nation, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980, p.136.

(270) quoted in S.M.Smith, loc. cit.

(271) G.Himmelfarb, The Idea of Poverty, Faber, London and Boston, 1985, p.321.

seems important to locate Mayhew's method within a broader context of changing patterns of representation.

The Morning Chronicle reports followed the publication of Henry Mayhew's letter 'A Visit to the Cholera Districts of Bermondsey' on 24 September 1849. The series began on 10 October 1849 and ran until 12 December 1850.(272) Selections from Henry Mayhew's contributions on the metropolis were later issued in part-work form, the first number appearing on 14 December 1850. These were collected in a three volume edition in 1851-2, and reissued as a four volume collection in 1861-4.(273) The part-work achieved a circulation of 13,000; three times the circulation of the Morning Chronicle for the run of the series.(274) Mayhew intersperses interviews, reported in direct speech, with workers and street-folk, with statistics and general observations. The work contains a vast number of strikingly diverse, individual case histories, which are, in effect, portraits. Moreover the illustrations in his part-work and collected volumes are of some of the individuals whose interviews can be found in the text, and, by reading the letter press, we can usually discover their names or nick-names and detailed

(272) The letters to the Morning Chronicle have been reprinted: Mayhew's letters on the metropolitan districts in a six volume edition by Caliban Books, Firle, Sussex, 1980-82 and the letters on the manufacturing, mining and rural districts edited by J.Ginswick, in a three volume edition by Cass, London, 1983.

(273) There is some confusion as to the dates and number of volumes of the 1851-2 edition, since the separate volumes did not have separate title pages. G.Himmelfarb refers to a two-volume edition in Cambridge University Library (op.cit., p.586). The Brotherton Library at Leeds University has two copies of this edition, which are catalogued as being three volumes bound in one. One of the volumes includes the wrappers from the original parts, bound in at the end.

(274) G.Himmelfarb, op.cit., p.355.

accounts of their lives. The illustrations are, therefore, not the generic pictures of street-sellers which are familiar from an eighteenth century genre tradition, nor the generalised factory children we see in an early nineteenth century anthropological work such as George Walker's The Costume of Yorkshire (fig.68). The usual caption to the illustrations in Mayhew's London Life is 'from a daguerreotype by Beard'. This is an invocation of what appeared to be the uniquely documentary quality of the novel photographic method of recording likenesses. These captions and the interaction with the interviews in the text combine to convey to the viewer the conviction that these engravings are particularised portraits.

The inclusion of engravings from daguerreotypes formed an important promotional feature of Mayhew's part-work. The four-page prospectus for the series had, on the front page, an engraving by E. Whimper after a drawing by H.G. Hine, based on a daguerreotype of '"OLD SAREY," the well known Hurdy-gurdy Player'. This showed the blind street-performer, and her guide holding her arm, and extending a plate for contributions. The back of the prospectus consisted of an extract from the first number, describing this individual, and recording her own account of her life. We learn that the guide's name is Liza. The extract also describes Sarey's reactions when she is taken to the photographer's studio. 'When conveyed to Mr. BEARD'S establishment to have her daguerreotype taken, she for the first time in her life rode in a cab.' She is fearful at first, but later exhilarated by the sensation of the cab-drive. She is not tired by the stairs up to the studio. She wants to touch the

photograph when it has been made. All these details dramatise the formal process of taking a studio portrait of a particular individual. In the inner pages of the prospectus there are further references to Beard's daguerreotypes, and it concludes:

Each Number of the Work will contain an Illustration of Real Life, taken by Mr. BEARD'S improved method of Daguerrotype, rendered to the wood, and engraved by the best artists; so that when the series shall be completed, it may present

A LIFE-LIKE PICTURE GALLERY

of

London Labour and the London Poor. (275)

The rules and boundaries of portraiture were necessarily affected by these new currents of representation. We have seen that by the 1850s it was possible include serious, engraved portraits of working people in a publication such as the British Workman. The ramifications of this change were felt beyond the confines of illustrated periodicals. A portrait of a news vendor, painted by the Sheffield artist Godfrey Sykes in 1859, suggests that there was a parallel alteration, within oil painting, in the limits conceivable for portraiture (fig.69). This picture is large enough (29 x 25"), and sufficiently individuated, to indicate that while, on one level, it is a genre painting, on another it is a form of portrait. We are not given the name of

(275) As the series developed, this emphasis on the pictorial picture gallery diminished slightly. Engravings based on Beard were supplemented by engravings based on sketches, sometimes stated to have been taken on the spot. References to visits to the photographer's studio were not included in the descriptions of other characters, and a reader might imagine, from the backgrounds sketched in behind the street-folk that the figures had been photographed outdoors in the course of their work. Nonetheless, except in the more elaborate scenes with several figures, there was still an identification between the characters in the engravings and the individuals who recounted their histories and habits to Mayhew.

the sitter, but his specific identity is established by the title's naming of the street in Sheffield where he operates. The picture has none of the earnest campaigning framework that characterised the engraving of the cab-driver in the British Workman, and, without it, it is a singularly blank image. The blankness is summed up by the way that the cab-driver's handful of sabbatarian tracts has been replaced by the newsvendor's handful of newspapers. The figure distributes apparently neutral public information and not, as far as we can see, avowedly partisan literature, and in a parallel manner the picture itself offers blank information to the viewer. We are given a narrow area of bare brick wall as background, on the left, and a view of undistinguished small houses on the right. The image refers obliquely to renaissance portraiture, mainly by the way the hair bushes out from the tightly fitting cap, and by a suggestion of a padded doublet in the depiction of the thick cloth of the striped jacket. The sitter's identity is so far from the renaissance nobleman thus invoked, that the reference simply accentuates the picture's failure to offer a point of access for the viewer, particularly as there is no cue for a comic response. The image is uncompromising in its refusal to offer any heroism of action, morality of subject matter, or nobility or beauty of either person or setting to focus the image and facilitate interpretation.

It is clear that in the case of Sykes's newsvendor the status of the sitter could not be counted on to effect due subordination of the accessory parts of the picture. The production of this picture in 1859 can be seen as an extreme example of the

disruption that was taking place within portraiture. Chalon's portrait of Mrs. Thwaytes and the critical indignation it aroused in 1845 was not an isolated case, but one example in a trend which caused increasing critical disquiet. The Athenaeum had complained about the portraits in the 1843 Royal Academy: 'overdressed women dandling overdressed children and men standing bolt upright, trying to look dignified, or seated in armchairs trying to look easy'. (276) Here too the critic conveys the impression of sitters who are insufficiently genteel (true gentlemen would not have to try to look dignified) and who, as a consequence are struggling for priority of attention with the objects; the clothes and the furniture, that surround them. By 1859 the complaints were still more vehement. In a general discussion of the portraits at the Royal Academy Exhibition of that year two tendencies were picked out by the Athenaeum: a feeble sketchiness, on one hand, and on the other a smug overconfidence. Both were taken as evidence of the commercialisation of portrait painting. A (mythical) past was invoked where the choice of subject was dictated, not by mere wealth, but by heroism nobility or beauty in the sitter.

They seem to cry to us as loud as ever "We were painted for hire; we were hurried over by clever men, who turned us off as soon as they could, because they did not care for us... Few of them are painted with a sense of enjoyment or love of Art for its own sake. There is no solemn building up of wise senatorial heads as in Titian, of the typical gentleman as in Vandyke, or the perfection of grace as in Reynolds, but in their stead, glib, low-toned clevernesses, or obtrusive simpering self-satisfaction brimful of wealth: they are persons of redundant property, whose portraits have been subscribed for by complacent tenants and obsequious corporations, ready to worship wealth, however ugly the form it assumes. (277)

(276) Athenaeum, 1843, p.570.

According to this critic, where anything more than a hurried, rubbed-in sketch has been produced, the 'redundancy of property' expresses itself, in pictorial terms, as the redundancy of accessory parts. For example, in the one-line notice of a portrait by Pickersgill of Thomas Smith Esq., late Sheriff of Hampshire, the picture is dismissed in these terms: 'a dull picture of a frightened looking man in an ugly court suit'.(278) The reviewer indicates that the costume is uncomfortably prominent, indeed that it has more presence than the sitter. The problem for the reviewer is that portraiture has apparently been encroached upon by new middle class elements. The social and political transformation that enabled Smith to hold county office was seen to have an effect on the regime of representation.

The purpose of this discussion of some of the issues surrounding developments in mid-nineteenth century portraiture has been to shed light on the status of genre painting. Insofar as genre painting was defined and located on a continuum from portraiture to allegory it must have been affected, in turn, by the apparent collapse of the internal structuring devices of portraiture. One way to formulate what what was happening to portraiture is to say that it was being invaded by genre. The increasing informality of settings for portraits, and the possibility of any insignificant person being taken as a subject, meant that the primacy of the figure threatened to give way to an interest in accidental or picturesque details of the surroundings. Concomitantly the borders of genre were being

(277) Athenaeum, 1859, 1, p.651.
(278) ibid., p.562.

shifted. The illustrations to Mayhew's London Life and the London Poor or Sykes's newsvendor could be taken, not as portraits, but as new individualised versions of genre. The peculiar general status of genre figures that I have already mentioned: actual, but not individual, general, but not avowedly allegorical, was disturbed in turn.

ACCESSORIES AND REALITY

All areas of subject painting were affected by this development not just modern life painting and domestic genre, but literary genre painting, and even that hybrid, historicised genre. A new literalness was observed in the pictorial rendering of scenes. Imaginative reconstruction of situations appeared to give way to literal transcription of the figures and properties assembled. In modern life and domestic genre, figures who had been confidently ascribed to certain typical character positions increasingly seemed to be specific portraits. Critics liked nothing better in a genre painting than to be able to list off a range of character types from the picture. The enthusiastic reviews of Thomas Webster's paintings of children in the 1840s usually dwelt on the variety of figures and expression, and allocated each to a certain physical or character type. A review of his Sickness and Health (fig.70), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1843, illustrates this way of reading the picture.

No.128. 'Sickness and Health,' T.WEBSTER, A.R.A. Before a cottage door two children are dancing to the music of a hand-organ, played by an Italian itinerant; this is the illustration of health; that if sickness is a girl seated by the door, and supported by pillows, - on her sad features plays a gleam of temporary pleasure at the performance of her sisters. The invalid child is touchingly painted; it is apparent that the general object is her amusement, and also that there is some anxiety to prevent her feeling this; a

temporary glow suffuses her cheek, but her feeble and languid condition seems to pronounce her mortally stricken. The children are most successfully pictured, and the organ-boy is a perfect specimen of his class. Altogether, it is one of the most effective and interesting pictures in the collection, fully sustaining, if indeed it do not increase, the high reputation of this excellent artist. (279)

The differentiation of characters; the sick girl, the lively, but delicately tactful, dancing children, the foreign organ-boy, is the key to the past and future of the narrative. From the demeanour of the dancing children the viewer can ascertain that their intentions in starting to dance were kind, rather than callous. From the appearance of the girl her future death can be predicted. The organ-boy's typicality is commented on with satisfaction, almost as if his conformity to the stereotype is the guarantee of the critic's interpretation.

By contrast, where a genre figure was too individualised, the critics found the meaning of the picture obscure. The introduction of portrait elements seemed to undermine the narrative. There are a number of examples of this sort of objection in the Art Union in the 1840s. In 1845 a picture at the Royal Academy exhibition was described.

No.540. 'The United Service,' A.MORTON. This is a large composition, and represents, we understand from the catalogue, the visit of Chelsea pensioners to their friends at Greenwich, and contains portraits of distinguished veterans well known in both Royal Hospitals. But a meagre subject after all, and certainly unworthy of the consideration at which the artist has rated it. There is portraiture without expression; composition without a story. We see, it is true, in the cordage of the cheeks of these veterans, many a sea-chart, - that is a record of some kind; but for this the canvas would be but very ill set forth. There are many figures, and we doubt not that they are like the "braves" themselves. (280)

(279) Art Union, 1843.

The phrase 'portraiture without expression, character without a story' is an interesting summary of the effect registered. The introduction of actual portraits evacuates the narrative. The old men may be truly portrayed, but they are not rendered typical, and so the picture does not offer the readily identifiable elements of a story. The picture slips from a modern life genre subject over into portraiture, and is consequently denarrativised.

At the same time that this sort of complaint was being made, a seemingly contradictory call was heard from the critics for a return from the artificial to the real and authentic in subject painting. As far as objects and costumes were concerned, critical opinion was unanimous that the old familiar set of accessories was unbearably hackneyed. Sometimes this led to a call to abandon tired subjects from Shakespeare or Goldsmith and to present modern subjects. - This was an alternative hinted at by Punch in 1852.

Our artists, in fact, have ceased to be workmen, if you will, but it is by becoming upholsterers - ticklers of the eyes of the rich, ministers to the vanity of the vulgar, contributors to the gratification of the ostentatious. They elbow one another for room on the walls of the Exhibition; and, like impudent ladies in other places, strive to attract attention by the thickness of their rouge, and the brilliancy of their colours - Non musa sed meretrix.

In this sad struggle for the poor function of pleasing JOHN BULL'S eye, no wonder that painting has almost forgotten to ask itself whether it might not yet, perchance, speak to his imagination, and stir his mind. In the upholsterer's work the painter has acquired the upholsterer's taste for fine fabrics and gay colours. He has looked at life with a decorator's eye, till he has got to value nothing but what he calls picturesque. The men and women around him are unfit for his purposes, except as the

originals of portraits - for portraits pay. But, for all else, he asks, helplessly, what is to be done with our present unpicturesque costume? And, thereupon, finding that the tailoring of the times is unfriendly, he turns away in disgust from the time altogether, and plunges wildly into the reign of CHARLES THE SECOND, and LOUIS THE FOURTEENTH, and WILLIAM and MARY, where he can disport himself delightedly among brocades and velvets, and gold lace, and peach-blossom coats, and blush-coloured stockings. (281)

According to this description the accessories have taken on greater importance than the subject in these pictures, and their disconnected gorgeousness has reduced the pictures to mere occasions for visual titillation. It is significant that the metaphor selected is of over-made-up 'impudent ladies', perhaps the reference is to prostitutes, and certainly there is an association of sexual impropriety. The sensual pleasure of looking became tainted with overtones of illicit sexual gratification. This is a progression of ideas that we have already encountered in earlier chapters of this thesis.

To sum up, the preceding sections of this chapter have drawn attention to a series of comments on pictorial disintegration in portraits, where it was claimed that accessories were taking over. A comparable process was also apparent in subject painting. An unfamiliar incident or character-set elicited the reaction that the picture was illegible, or void of narrative. In this case the details might seem arbitrary, and their proliferation uncontrollable. The over-familiar subject, equally, loosed the accessory elements of the picture from any firm anchorage. Where the incident was feeble or hackneyed, the exact delineation of drapery and properties was felt to result in

(281) Punch, vol. XXIII, Jul-Dec 1852, p.17.

painful over-emphasis, and to eclipse the narrative. Where a picture's narrative failed, its moral status became questionable. It could be said to descend to mere sensual gratification. Moreover the visual disruption entailed in the decentering of a composition produced an effect of busyness, even frenzy. Such images were far removed from the calm and repose that were thought to emanate from noble art works, and to encourage a mood of intellectual and spiritual reflection in the viewer.

It is important to understand that this crisis of signification was general, insofar as delineation of detail became problematic in portraiture and in subject painting, in literary, historical and modern life subjects. I have stressed in this discussion the point that a changing access to the narrative situation of pictures was at issue. It would be a distortion and reduction of the issues to describe the situation entirely in terms of a mid-century stylistic change, where an increased elaboration of detail became the norm. Such a change has been noted, and is usually ascribed to the influence and eventual acceptance of the Pre Raphaelite painters. The examples I have selected make it quite clear that minute detailing was already perceived as problematic in the 1840s, prior to the formation of the Pre Raphaelite Brotherhood. Rather than offer a neutral description of a stylistic shift, I have attempted to elucidate the way in which elements were combined, and to demonstrate the emergence of new possibilities in pictorial formulation. The critical reaction to these changes suggests some of their social ramifications, and indeed some of the difficulties and hazards that emerged for artists.

NARRATIVE DISINTEGRATION - PSYCHOANALYTIC READINGS

Dickens wrote an article for Household Words in 1858 in which he bemoaned the stereotyping of properties and costumes in Royal Academy painting. Facetiously he suggested the confiscation of all the fancy costumes available for hire in London, particularly from Messrs. Nathan in Titchbourne Street, Haymarket, and Messrs. Pratt in Bond Street, and the stock of curiosities and plate held by antique shops and jewellers in Wardour Street and New Bond Street:

...all wrought, decorated cups and covers ...all steel caps and armour of whatsoever description, all large spurs and spur-leathers, all bossy tankards, all knobbly drinking glasses, all ancient bottles and jugs, all high-backed chairs, all twisted-legged tables, all carpets, covers and hangings, all remarkable swords and daggers, all strangely bound old books, and all spinning wheels. (282)

He went further and suggested that the very models were tired and boring.

I cannot disguise from myself the fact that I know all the models ...I am tired to death of that young man with the large chest, and I would thankfully accept a less symmetrical young man with a smaller chest, or even with a chest in which the stethoscope might detect a weakness.

In the case of the models the solution he suggested was that they should be arrested and imprisoned, and even mutilated. It is deliberate hyperbole, to make the point that the props are predictable and limited. His gambit of listing them out, naming sources and demanding their removal stresses the tedious repetition and rearrangement of a closed set of properties. The article starts from the contrast between the variety and movement

(282) C. Dickens, 'An Idea of Mine', Household Words, 13 March 1858, reprinted in Miscellaneous Papers, reprinted with an introduction by P.J.M. Scott, Kraus Reprint, Millwood N.Y., 1983, pp. 161-166.

of the street outside the Royal Academy and the artificiality and stasis within. Modern life is set up in opposition to literary and historical genre. The violence of his proposals, in particular the idea of amputating the limbs of the model with the 'immaculate legs', forms a parallel to the pictorial violence that the viewer is subjected to. The physical sectioning of the body is parallel to the division of a single, articulated, pictorial composition into unrelated, competing parts. Dickens's conceit works as a metaphor for the experience of viewing the art work. In a composition without due subordination the legs, the tankards and the pieces of furniture vie for the viewer's attention. The separate items transfix the viewer uncomfortably.

Were a pair of eyes in question they must smirk at me; were a pair of spurs in question they must glint at me; were a pair of boots in question they must stretch themselves out on forms and benches to captivate me. (283)

The viewer is forced into a position of unpleasurable, compulsive staring at a scene that cannot be understood. The motif of amputation suggests that the source of distress, in psychoanalytic terms, might be a fear of castration. In the discussion of The Awakening Conscience in a previous chapter, an interpretation of the fearful, fascinated staring precipitated by the picture was offered, that described a conflict between scopophilic pleasure and castration anxiety.

Some useful analytic terms have been developed in narrative theory to describe the way in which narrativity can be dismantled. Barthes, in his 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative' distinguishes between distributional

(283) C. Dickens, *ibid.*

units, which, following Propp, he calls functions, and integral units, which he calls indices or indicators.(284) These units are small sections of a literary text. Functions are arranged sequentially, and refer in a chronological or logical way to other equivalent functions before or after them on the same level. By contrast, indices refer to a signified on a different level. They can be indicators of character or atmosphere for example. Barthes suggests that the relation between functions is a metonymic one, and that between indices and their signifieds a metaphoric one. In different types of narratives either functions or indices can predominate. Popular tales, with minimal character development and a simple chronological sequence, are primarily functional. The psychological novel, at the other extreme, is predominantly indicial. Within the organisation of functions key units act as hinges of the narrative. These nuclei are moments of initiation or resolution of an uncertainty. Between the nuclei other narrative units act just as chronological fillers. These units Barthes calls catalyses. In a suspense story the suspense is created by multiplying the catalyses after a nucleus. The effect of this is to hold off the resolution, and raise the threat of an uncompleted sequence. The narrative structure itself is being both risked and dramatised. Elsewhere Barthes has described narrative suspense as the gradual unveiling of 'corporeal striptease', promising an Oedipal pleasure.(285) Attention to,

(284) R.Barthes, 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', (1966), trans. L.Duisit, New Literary History, 1975, vol.VI, pt.2, pp.237-77.

(285) R.Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, (1973), trans. R.Miller, Hill & Wang, New York, 1975, p.10.

and pleasure in, the materiality of the modernist text involves a suspension of this properly narrative pleasure. But he also describes examples of nineteenth century texts where this gradual unveiling becomes so extended, by the insertion of apparently irrelevant detail, that the suspense is lost, and the reader moves over to a position of taking pleasure in the text itself. The example he uses is the description of washing on a line in Bouvard and Pecuchet.

In the signifying system of mid-nineteenth century genre painting we have seen a shift towards a portrait mode. The distance between sign and signifier, at its greatest in allegory and minimal in portraiture, has been closed. At the same time a failure in narrative is perceived. The rapprochement of sign and signifier should guarantee the production of meaning. In the analytic terms proposed by Jacques Lacan the fixing of the signifier to the signified is the condition for the production of meaning. There can be a metonymic succession of substitute signifiers in the unconscious which is endless. The nature of metaphoric substitution is quite different. The replacement signifier, in metaphor, crosses over the line into the position of the signified. This is the moment of the generation of meaning and the cessation of the endless metonymic movement of desire, which, by definition, can never be assuaged. The terms and categories apply equally to language and to the human psyche, since Lacan argues that the unconscious is structured in the same way as language. He asserts that this fixing of meaning is what characterises the symptom.

The double-triggered mechanism of metaphor is in fact the very mechanism by which the symptom, in the analytic sense,

is determined. Between the enigmatic signifier of a sexual trauma and its substitute term in a present signifying chain there passes the spark which fixes in a symptom the meaning inaccessible to the conscious subject in which is its resolution - a symptom which is in effect a metaphor in which flesh or function are taken as signifying elements.

And the enigmas which desire seems to pose for a "natural philosophy" - its frenzy mocking the abyss of the infinite, the secret collusion by which it obscures the pleasure of knowing and of joyful domination, these amount to nothing more than that derangement of instincts that comes from being caught on the rails - eternally stretching forth towards the desire for something else - of metonymy. Wherefore its "perverse" fixation at the very suspension-point of the signifying chain where the memory-screen freezes and the fascinating image of the fetish petrifies.
(286)

Desire's "perverse" fixation on the fetish is the moment when its infinite exchanges are interrupted, and it comes to a halt - emerging as a symptom, or, in other words, crossing over from metonymy to metaphor. It can be seen that this halt is what certain critics of The Awakening Conscience were calling for when they looked for a fetishistic focus for the experience of viewing the painting. In one sense the interchangeability of items in the picture appealed to the scopic drive, and set up a metonymic play of signifiers which keyed in to structures of desire. However that desire, in a psychoanalytic account, is conditional on the infant's recognition of loss, whether of the mother's presence, or the loss involved in the possibility of castration, since desire depends on the admission of a lack in the mother. The distressful consequences of this recognition can be neutralised by the adoption of a fetish. A fetish does not wipe out the recognition of castration entirely, and so through

(286) Jacques Lacan, 'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious', (1957), in The Structuralists, ed. R. and F. De George, Anchor, New York, 1972, pp.312-3.

fetishism a minimal access to desire is maintained, but it does disavow castration by setting up an object as substitute. The moment of petrification into a fetish is the switch-point from metonymy to metaphor.

As we have seen, the dissolution or disruption of meaning did not occur at the level of individual items in modern life scenes. There was no ambiguity in the presentation of material objects, such as items of clothing or furniture, or physical space, in any of the paintings we have examined. Where problems of interpretation did arise they hinged on the identity of characters in the pictures and were ultimately narrative problems.(287) We might recall the female figure in the foreground of Omnibus Life In London. Was she a servant woman or a wealthy widow? The attractive , but distressful, play of signifiers must be located on a narrative level, and Barthes's terminology helps us to identify the units, and their axes of combination. If narrative functions relate in a metonymic, horizontal way and indices relate in a metaphoric, vertical way, then the dangerous, runaway chain of desire is stopped and controlled by the totalising, retroactive references of the indicial elements. On the other hand, the horizontal axis is emphasised, and as it were, stretched towards infinity by the multiplication of those irrelevant filler functions: the nuclei, which hold off the resolution of narrative uncertainty.

(287) In Propp's account, the actants of a narrative are as much essential units as the functions of the story's development. See V. Propp, The Morphology of the Folk Tale, trans. L. Scott, The University of Texas Press, Austin and London, 1979.

Those instances we have identified where images offended or troubled critics because they appeared meaningless are perhaps susceptible to an analogy with texts in which the metaphorical axis is deemphasised in favour of the metonymic axis, and especially to suspense texts, where the resolution is withheld. The detailed studies of individual paintings in earlier chapters have shown some of the problems attached to identifying the narratives contained in, or referred to, by static visual images. Any analogy with literary texts is partial. It would be impossible physically to locate the narrative units of a picture. Words, sentences or groups of sentences cannot be isolated - but then attempts to demarcate units definitively are doomed even in a literary text, as the baroque involutions of Barthes's S/Z suggest.

A text with a predominantly metonymic structure depends on the acknowledgement of difference and loss, and allows competing voices and moral contradictions to persist. A text which asserts metaphoric control sets up a metalinguistic voice, insists on constant identities, disavows loss and denies desire. These different structures have been asserted as characteristic of the modernist and the classic realist text respectively.(288) The increasing realism that can be discerned in mid-nineteenth century British painting, however - the suppression of painterly marks, the fidelity to minute detail, and an accompanying effect of subdual of lively gesture and dramatic or comic expressiveness

(288) Colin MacCabe discusses James Joyce's modernism in these terms. C. MacCabe, James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word, Macmillan, London, 1978.

- do not bring these works closer to the structure of the realist novel. I am not talking of occasional anti-realist moments within the realist art work, the possibility of which MacCabe concedes when he says

classic realism can never be absolute; the materiality of language ensures there will always be fissures which will disturb the even surface of the text. (289)

I am, rather, pointing to a change in the narrative organisation of genre painting which brings it closer to the structures of sensation fiction than to those of the classic psychological novels of the nineteenth century.

SENSATION NOVELS

The general characteristics of sensation fiction have been described in W.Hughes's book, The Maniac in the Cellar.(290) Works by Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins, Mary Braddon and others which set fast-moving stories of crime, treachery, madness and bigamy in the purlieus of the modern middle class household were dubbed sensation novels. Hughes describes the roots of the sensation novel of the 1860s as lying both in the gothic novels of the early part of the century by "Monk" Lewis, Byron and Scott: novels which were set in an aristocratic environment and a remote locale, and in the crime novels by Bulwer Lytton, Ainsworth and Dickens, which were known collectively in the 1840s as Newgate novels. In the latter the setting was an underworld which was equally remote for the bourgeois readership. The novelty of sensation novels was that they brought the thrills of

(289) Ibid., p.27.

(290) W.Hughes, The Maniac in the Cellar,

these genres into a bourgeois domestic setting. Dickens said of Wilkie Collins's The Moonstone that it was 'wild, yet domestic', and an article on the genre in the Quarterly in 1863 said

The sensation novel, be it mere trash or something worse, is usually a tale of our own times. Proximity is, indeed, one of the great elements of sensation. It is necessary to be near a mine to be blown up by its explosion; and a tale which aims at electrifying the nerves of the reader is never thoroughly effective unless the scene be laid in our own days and among the people we are in the habit of meeting.
(291)

There is a parallel to be drawn from the additional risks and problems attendant on the choice of modern life settings for paintings, and the shock value generated by transposing the thrilling exotic novel to settings which were both modern and banal. Certainly the sensation novel attracted quite as much censorious criticism as 'low' and illegible modern life subjects in painting. But beyond this there are structural parallels between the two narrative forms.

Sensation fiction was characterised by an emphasis on plot rather than character or authorial comment. Suspense built up throughout the story, and the narrative often contained a series of minor climaxes. Where the novels were being written for serial production each climax would mark the end of an episode. The theme of doubling was frequently found, whether in terms of doppelganger incidents, where someone meets their double, or occurrences of bigamy, or the reappearance of a character who was thought to be dead. Plots were marked by frequent coincidences. The mixture of the familiar and the extraordinary in these novels is secured by an insistence on the reality of the familiar: by

(291) W.Hughes, quoted in The Maniac In the Cellar pp.16 and 18.

exact descriptions of settings and objects, and particular insistence on the mechanics of the plot, to insist that it was indeed logistically possible for the sensational events to occur. Readers are given details of railway timetables, of the shops visited to purchase various items needed for a disguise, or of the exact locale where a murder weapon was buried. An article of 1862 on sensation novels by the novelist Mrs. Oliphant, published in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, noted the fact that the settings and actions are rendered credible, and that supernatural effects are eschewed.

His [Collins's] effects are produced by common human acts, performed by recognisable human agents, whose motives are never inscrutable, and whose line of conduct is always more or less consistent... The more we perceive the perfectly legitimate nature of the means used to produce the sensation, the more striking does that sensation become.
(292)

It was a fiercely debated point as to whether the truth to life of sensational elements warranted their depiction in literature. Mrs. Oliphant vehemently disagreed with the notion that it did. In her opinion things that may be matters of fact, and therefore true, could still be inherently false because 'unlawful, unnatural, and unfit for the use of the true artist'.(293) Similarly, Mrs. Craik, in an essay, argued that

...vivid descriptions of hangings, of prison whippings, of tortures inflicted on sane persons in lunatic asylums, are not fit subjects for art. The answer to this objection is, that such things are; therefore why not write about them? So must medical and surgical books be written; so must the most loathsome details of crime and misery be investigated

(292) Mrs. Oliphant, 'Sensation Novels', Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, vol.91, Jan-Jun 1862, pp.564-584.

(293) Mrs. Oliphant, 'Novels', Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, vol.94 Jul-Dec 1863, p.173.

by statesmen and political economists. But all these are professional studies which, however painful, require to be gone through. No one would ever enter into them as a matter of mere amusement. (294)

We can pick out a reference here to Charles Reade's sensation novel, It's Never Too Late To Mend (1856). The gruesome prison sequences in that novel were sensational but actual, as they were drawn from parliamentary reports on prison conditions. It is interesting that Mrs. Craik invokes the rules of painting to explain the mistakes of novel writing. Not only should the parts be made subordinate to the whole, and minute finish of individual incidents or characters avoided in the interest of overall effect, but the characters should not be transferred wholesale from life into the pages of a novel.

...any artist knows that to paint exactly from life is so difficult as to be almost impossible. Study from life he must - copying suitable heads, arms or legs, and appropriating bits of character, personal or mental idiosyncracies, making use of the real to perfect the ideal. But the ideal should be behind it all. The nature to which he holds up the mirror should be abstract not individual; he is a creator not an imitator: and must be a poor creator who can only make his book read by gibbeting therein real people, like kites and owls on a barn door, for the amusement and warning of society. (295)

In these comments there are echoes of the objections raised by art critics to the rendering of figures as portraits in a sphere of art where more general and abstracted figures were expected.

The characters in sensation fiction were not, as Hughes points out, the static, two-dimensional figures of melodrama, nor did they resemble the coherent three-dimensional figures of realist novels. They existed in two-dimensions but their identities were

(294) Mrs. Craik, 'On Novels and Novel Makers', Plain Speaking, Tauchnitz reprint, Leipzig, 1882, p.199.
(295) Ibid., p.188.

unstable. They were subject to sudden moral reverses or complete character changes. They might experience occasional fits of madness, or undergo sudden transformations as a result of anger or jealousy. Illness could produce astonishing reforms in villains, or reduce heroes to querulous invalidism or complete idiocy. The novels were characterised by a blurring of both moral and class distinctions. Most shocking of all, to many readers, was the emergence in these novels of female villains and the display of female sexuality.

By 1883, when Trollope's autobiography was published, he could point to a basic distinction that was generally drawn among modern English novels between 'sensational' and 'anti-sensational' or 'realistic' works.

I am realistic. My friend Wilkie Collins is generally supposed to be sensational. The readers who prefer the one are supposed to take delight in the elucidation of character, they who hold by the other are charmed by the construction and gradual development of a plot. (296)

In fact Trollope maintains that a good novelist should develop both plot and character to the highest degree. He condemns novels which offer no more than 'a string of horrible incidents affecting personages without character, wooden blocks'. (297) We can take this description - despite Trollope's protestation that such novels are not truly sensational - to stand as a resume of the brief account we have given of sensation fiction. The narrative structure described is undoubtedly one where there is greater emphasis on the metonymic relations between units than on

(296) A. Trollope, An Autobiography, (1883), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980, p.226.

(297) Ibid., p.227.

metaphoric relations. The image of stringing together incidents expresses the linear combination of narrative functions. The string is one in which causal relations are stressed - the story's logical, consequential character is emphasised - and so the mechanical structure of the plot is able to stand as justification for any shocking elements it encompasses. Once embarked on the narrative, the reader is committed by its linearity to an inevitable succession of shocks and disclosures and is put in a position of suspense which is both fearful and anticipatory. Barthes's notion of filler catalyses explains very well the way that the sheer texture of this metonymic structure can heighten the suspense and carry the reader from one revelation to the next. It must be said that the doubling characteristic of sensation fiction might be seen as the inscription of certain fetishistic elements of disavowal into a system that otherwise allows the acknowledgement of loss and difference.(298) Particularly when the sensation novel takes the form of a detective story the drive to acquire knowledge and the parallel desire to look are mobilised or exercised by this rapid motion from function to function. The Moonstone (1868) by Wilkie Collins has been claimed as the first English detective novel, but in fact, from the mid-1850s, detective figures and detective

(298) In the accounts Freud gives of the methods adopted by the psyche to ward off the fear of castration, the reduplication of penis symbols is allied to the fetish. This reduplication of symbols plays the same part in dreams as the fetish does in waking life. S.Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, Penguin Freud Library. vol.IV, p.539, 'The absurd detail of the strip of wood not simply breaking but splitting lengthwise was explained thus: the dreamer recalled that this combination of doubling and destroying was an allusion to castration. Dreams very often represent castration by the presence of two penis symbols as the defiant expression of an antithetical wish.' See also p.474.

novel elements appeared in a number of novels.(299) Mrs. Oliphant said, in 1863, that the distinguishing feature of modern British fiction was its 'police court aspect', its 'preference of crime to vice', and that the faults of popular fiction lay in 'its tendency to detectivism, to criminalism - its imperfect and confused morality'.(300) She remarked on a common pattern of events where crime was followed by wrong suspicion and then by detection.

THE DETECTIVE STORY

The detective story positions the reader as detective. Alongside the investigator, the reader scrutinises evidence and searches for clues. This gives the reader a special relation to the 'reality' of the world of the novel. Situations are not perceived and interpreted in their entirety, but are broken down into the smallest possible elements, any of which may emerge as a clue. The reader starts by distrusting the common sense, aggregate view, or the obviously significant elements, and instead attends to the minutiae and the neglected, apparently

(299) Dickens includes a detective in the figure of Inspector Bucket in Bleak House (1852). Many of the early novels and stories of Wilkie Collins include characters who act as detectives. One example is the narrator of The Stolen Letter (1858) who spies on the villain, searches his room while he is out and finds the letter which was being used in an attempt at blackmail. Robert Audley is scornfully described as acting like 'a detective police officer' in M.E.Braddon's Lady Audley's Secret (1862). For other suggestions for models and antecedents for the detective plot of The Moonstone, see S.Lonoff, Wilkie Collins and his Victorian Readers, AMS Press, New York, 1982, p.174.

(300) Mrs. Oliphant, 'Novels', Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, vol. 94, Jul-Dec 1863.

insignificant features of the situation. A discarded train ticket, mud on the soles of shoes, or a slip of the tongue in an otherwise coherent statement can provide the detective with the necessary lead. In the sensation novel Lady Audley's Secret the detective figure, Robert Audley, asks Lady Audley whether she has ever heard of circumstantial evidence.

...that invisible rope which is woven out of straws collected at every point of the compass and which is yet strong enough to hang a man. Upon what infinitesimal trifles may sometimes hang the whole secret of some wicked mystery, inexplicable heretofore to the wisest of mankind! A scrap of paper; a shred of some torn garment; the button off a coat; a word dropped incautiously from the over-cautious lips of guilt; the fragment of a letter; the shutting or opening of a door; a shadow on a window blind; the accuracy of a moment; a thousand circumstances so slight as to be forgotten by the criminal, but links of steel in the wonderful chain forged by the science of the detective officer... (301)

This sort of attention precludes a totalising, metaphoric reading of the narrative. Moral judgements of characters have to be suspended. It flattens out into monotonous linearity action that might be sculptural and reflexive. But the reader is not bored because the metonymic movement of the text gives a yield of pleasure. The impulse to find out counterbalances any fear of the consequences of the knowledge. This Oedipal curiosity is the narrative motor. In Oedipus Rex the hero first gains acclaim for his puzzle-solving as he defeats the Sphinx. Then his investigative fervour takes over, and he insists on following through the puzzle of the murder of Laius despite his own growing foreboding and warnings from others. The detective/reader is driven like Oedipus to follow through the investigation. During the period of the Oedipus complex the infant shows great

(301) M.E.Braddon, Lady Audley's Secret, (1862) p.104.

curiosity and the scopic and investigative drives become dominant. In the simplest and most schematic account of the positive Oedipus complex for a boy, the child becomes aware of the existence of the father as a threatening third term that interrupts his dual relationship with his mother. He perceives the father as a hated rival, and develops murderous feelings towards him. He also recognises that his mother does not have a penis and deduces that she has been castrated by the father. This provokes intense anxiety as the boy fears that he may be castrated in turn. The sight of his parents copulating, or a recollection or phantasy of the scene, can be the focus of these fears and revelations. His curiosity makes him seek to view and interpret the mysterious and frightening act of parental copulation. The child can only overcome the anxiety of this situation by dissolving the Oedipus complex. To do so he has to abandon his sexual ambition to possess his mother, and intensify his identification with his father, erecting an internalised paternal authority in the super-ego.(302) In the Oedipus complex, therefore, knowledge is sought, but its acquisition seems to threaten the child.

The detective story is oedipal in two senses - first because it sets the reader on a trail of investigation comparable to that undertaken in Oedipus Rex, and secondly because its concerns with looking and interpreting, and the fear and compulsion involved in pursuing the enquiry, resemble the experience and concerns of the

(302) S.Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', Penguin Freud Library, vol.11, esp. pp.371-374, and 'The Wolf Man', Penguin Freud Library, vol.9.

child going through the Oedipus complex. Oedipal patterns in detective stories have been pointed out. Penderson-Krag suggested a general link in an article, 'Detective Stories and the Primal Scene', written in 1949.(303) The murder victim, according to this reading, stood for the parent towards whom the child had negative oedipal feelings. The original crime investigated by the detective represented the 'primal scene' of parental coitus. Subsequent developments of this approach have paid particular attention to the plot of Wilkie Collins's The Moonstone because, in that novel, the hero, and one of the investigators, Franklin, eventually discovers that it was he himself who stole the diamond.(304) This fits with the oedipal figure who is both detective and guilty of the crime, and with the mixture of curiosity and guilt felt by the infant viewing the primal scene. The child, when this scene coincides with the final phase of the Oedipus complex, is enthralled and sexually excited by the primal scene, but fearful at spying on a forbidden sight, frightened by the idea that his father might punish him for his rivalry for the mother, and frightened by the conviction that this punishment will be to castrate him as his mother apparently has been. Combining with the murderous feelings he has towards his father these fears take on an aspect of guilt. The sexual symbolism of The Moonstone further encourages a reading of its central crime in psychoanalytic terms as a primal scene. The diamond was stolen from the young heroine, Rachel's,

(303) G.Penderson-Krag, 'Detective Stories and the Primal Scene', Psychoanalytic Quarterly, XVIII, 1949, pp.207-214.

(304) C.Rycroft, 'A Detective Story: Psychoanalytic Observations', Psychoanalytic Quarterly, XXVI, 1957, pp.229-45 and A.D.Hutter, 'Detective Fiction', Victorian Studies, vol.19, 1975-6, no.2.

bedroom at the dead of night, and it is a fairly obvious step to see this as a symbol of a forbidden sexual act between Franklin and Rachel. The smear of paint on Franklin's nightshirt that inculpates him is equivalent to blood from the defloration of Rachel. The jewel stands for her virginity.

There are many other aspects and levels to the sexual symbolism in the novel, but most interesting for the purpose of our discussion of metonymic structures are the incidences of scenes that are equivalent to primal scenes, and the mingled dread and excitation that overcomes the detective/voyeur in these situations. Central to these is the episode where the crime is re-enacted. Franklin takes the same dose of opiates that he had been acting under on the night of the original theft. On the occasion of the re-enacted theft the reader is allowed to watch the scene unfold alongside the physician Jennings, the lawyer Bruff and the servant Betteredge. Jennings describes the situation.

Mr. Bruff himself was looking eagerly through a crevice left in the imperfectly drawn curtains of the bed. And Betteredge, oblivious of all respect for social distinctions, was peeping over Mr. Bruff's shoulder.

They both started back on finding that I was looking at them, like two boys caught out by their schoolmaster in a fault. (305)

Dread and guilt are mingled with excitement in other scenes in the novel. When Franklin searches for a buried clue in the Shivering Sand, and when Miss Clack spies on the villain Godfrey Ablewhite proposing to Rachel, the person looking or making the

(305) W.W.Collins, The Moonstone, (1868), Collins, London and Glasgow, n.d., p.576.

discovery is caught up in alternating burning heat and shivering cold. In the final denouement Godfrey Ablewhite is found murdered in a lodging house. The detective's aide is a small boy with pop-eyes called, significantly, Gooseberry. Franklin and Sergeant Cuff try to shelter him from the sight, but Gooseberry sneaks in anyway.

Gooseberry had followed us into the room. His loose eyes rolled frightfully - not in terror, but in exultation. He had made a detective discovery on his own account....

"Robbery!" whispered the boy, pointing, in high delight to the empty box.

"You were told to wait downstairs," I said. "Go away!"

"And Murder!" added Gooseberry, pointing with a keener relish still, to the man on the bed.

There was something so hideous in the boy's enjoyment of the horror of the scene, that I took him by the shoulders and put him out of the room. (306)

Throughout the novel the process of detection involves characters in such situations where horror vies with pleasure in looking.

The predominance of a functional, rather than an indicial structure in the sensation novel, and the flat presentation of the banal circumstances of its setting are organised in the detective novel (which forms a subcategory of sensation fiction) around the act of looking. It is this focus on the visual which makes the detective novel a particularly useful narrative form to compare with genre painting. Suspense, and the metonymic spinning out of detail is inherent to the form, but becomes most extreme when a scene takes on a form analogous to a primal scene. In an early Wilkie Collins story, The Dead Hand, the hero, Arthur, is lodged for the night in the same room as a dead body. He draws the curtains round the body and resolves not to look at

the corpse, but he has a growing desire to look at the man. He resists the urge by reading a card with many zig-zag riddles printed on it. There is an underlying suggestion that the body is a sort of riddle. Then the hand of the corpse appears between the curtains, and Arthur's eyes are riveted on the sight: 'He stood looking at it, unable to stir, unable to call out - feeling nothing, knowing nothing - every faculty he possessed gathered up and lost in the one seeing faculty.' (307) This moment of fear and fascination leads to the discovery that the man is alive, and to the conclusion that the man is in fact the illegitimate son of Arthur's father. Some elements of this situation are parallel to the moments we have designated primal scenes in The Moonstone: in particular the motif of the faculty of sight taking over, and the submerged theme of an illicit sexual act.

Collins's novel of 1857, The Dead Secret, dramatises the importance of the visual by making the young heroine's husband, Leonard, a blind man. When they go together to the mysterious Myrtle Room to find out the secret which concerns Rosamond's illegitimate birth, we are momentarily cast adrift from the narrative thread of the investigation. At the fascinating and dreadful moment when the door to the room is opened we are put into the position of Leonard. (308) The narration soon reverts to its normal identification with Rosamond, but she realises his distress at not being able to see at this tense moment, and she undertakes to describe everything minutely to her husband so that

(307) W.W.Collins, Tales of Terror and the Supernatural, Dover, New York, 1972, p.51.

(308) W.W.Collins, The Dead Secret, (1857), Dover, New York, 1979, p.258.

he has a chance to offer his interpretation. This deference on her part to her husband mirrors the deference of the detective novel to the problem-solving capacity of the reader. Instead of presenting a coherent metalinguistic account from a position of authority, the narrative presents what purports to be a transcript of reality for the reader who takes the position of another - blind - participant. The text gives the impression that reality is presented raw rather than ready-processed.

Collins's novels show an interest in the process of abstracting classificatory systems from data, producing maps and codes, and conversely attempting to fit maps and codes against reality. There is much play in The Dead Secret on the labelling and relabelling of keys. The existence of a classificatory system I-VII obscures a system based on names of rooms. In an attempt to find a book containing a room-plan among many jumbled volumes the books are first examined in the order in which they are piled on the floor. This classificatory system is abandoned and another is tried in which they are reorganised according to size. This proves fruitful although it is equally random with respect to subject matter.(309) In The Stolen Letter, (1858), Collins provides his detective with a code indicating the location of the hidden document. He readily guesses that the code describes a position within a grid, but the problem lies in applying this abstraction to the intractable reality of the room. Any number of grids could be discerned in the furniture and furnishings. The detective tries counting motifs on the

(309) Ibid., p.233.

wallpaper and tassels in the bedhangings before he happens to try the repeating pattern of bunches of leaves and roses in the carpet, which reveals the hiding place. The searcher in this case is involved in intense visual activity, and scrutiny of aspects of the environment that are meaningless in themselves. Despite the help of an interpretative code the discovery has an accidental quality. The carpet beneath his feet was the last aspect of the room that the searcher considered, it only occurred to him to try it as he was leaving. The detective's task involves universal attention, and a willingness to stare at the most banal items. He is required to relinquish normal patterns of significance and interpretation, in other words to dismantle metaphors and to follow metonymic connections.

CONCLUSION

There is a parallel to be drawn between the emphatic anti-exoticism of sensation fiction and the banal modern urban middle class locations and situations depicted in that area of genre painting described as 'modern life'. But the foregoing discussion of the narrative structure of sensation fiction, and particularly of detective fiction, suggests that a less superficial analogy can be drawn between the literary and the artistic forms. The accounts given of pictures by Frith, Hunt and Egley in earlier chapters of this thesis have identified a concern, in different ways in each case, with issues of voyeurism and scopophilia. In different ways Ramsgate Sands, The Awakening Conscience and Omnibus Life In London present voyeuristic pleasures to the viewer, and manage or delimit those pleasures. Frith's achievement in Ramsgate Sands was to balance the viewer

between the metonymic thrills of the actual and the metaphoric security of the typical. Insofar as the figures of the picture were perceived as types and could be attached confidently to self contained narrative situations, then the endless substitutions of a metonymic structure were foreclosed. The potentially threatening phenomenon of the urban crowd which was not socially or sexually segregated could be sampled, and in that sampling the requisite segregation could be enacted. The safe domestic circle was inscribed on the public crowd. Voyeurism was allowed to operate under elaborate regulation, in particular the prohibition of the female gaze and the fetishistic transformation of aberrant female figures. Applying Barthes's terminology we could say that the text is one where indicial or integral units play a major role, and the distributional units, or functions, are not allowed to predominate.

By contrast the pictures discussed by Hunt and Egley offer no such reassurance. In The Awakening Conscience there is an invasion of the domestic sanctuary in a form that is almost parodic. It was possible to attach the scene to a narrative that punished the immorality of the female figure and so reassured the viewer that sexual propriety and social distinctions were not seriously threatened. Nonetheless the picture invited a voyeurism that undercut this ideological reading. The attention to items meaningless in themselves, and the presentation of an intimate and improper scene combine to position the viewer as the reader of detective fiction is positioned. Transfixed by curiosity and (in line with the oedipal nature of the curiosity) threatened by the discoveries that sustained attention may yield,

the viewer is obliged to suspend moral categories. The thrilling act of moving the eye from the patterned carpet to the decorative mural is a progression through metonymically rather than metaphorically linked units of the picture-text. To some extent Omnibus Life In London shares these characteristics, and similarly, bears comparison with works of sensation fiction. A public space is depicted, but unlike Ramsgate Sands, it is not one where family groups of different social standing can maintain decorous privacy and avoid mingling with one another. The picture crowds its figures together promiscuously, and despite critics' attempts to read the figures as distinct and familiar comic types there continues to be some ambiguity as to their social and moral identities. With the dissolution of private space comes the danger of voyeuristic intrusion. Figures stare fixedly and the viewer too has to gaze at the puzzling and disturbing configuration. The minute finish of accessories in the picture ties the spectator in to a sustained visual examination of the scene. As the passengers' costumes and luggage are commonplace, and in the picture's treatment no single item is rendered more important or prominent than any other, the viewer is exposed to an endless relay between items. It appears to be a puzzle, but it is not clear how to decode, or to organize into preliminary categories, the constituent parts. The viewer is therefore cast into the role of investigator here too. Once embarked on the metonymic chain of viewing the picture's parts, the spectator is committed to observe anything strange or shocking that might lurk in the banal. As in the detective story, this is the condition of gratifying the scopophilic urge, and, as in the sensation novel, the juxtaposition of the ordinary

with the frightful intensifies the effect of horror. Omnibus Life In London does not expose the viewer to the forgery, bigamy or murder of a sensation novel, but there are suggestions in the picture of the fearful consequences of viewing a woman's body, and, as we saw, a certain overlaying of the theme of castration with the theme of robbery. The parallel that I am suggesting does not rest primarily on a similarity of subject matter. It is based upon characteristics of certain pictures' formal organisation and their manipulation of the viewer's pleasure and unpleasure through the dynamics set up by that form. Nonetheless the historical and ideological specificity of the working of those texts remains a central proposition of this analysis. By locating the emergence of certain formal possibilities in the widest possible context of the the use and circulation of representations the ideological neutrality of formal developments has been questioned from the outset. The status and format of genre painting has been shown to be a social and, indeed, a political issue. Gratification of the eye was firmly established in bourgeois critical theory as a demeaning, lower-class form of access to painting. Nonetheless, in the period 1840-60 we have seen that un-allegorised representations of an increasing range of social material was necessary for the bourgeoisie, and concomitantly regimes of high art representation were disturbed. No single line of causality can be established but the synchronisation is not accidental. As government reports were published and middle class journals embarked on ambitious schemes of social reportage, so the scope and function of portraiture was redefined. Genre painting in turn moved into a new mode of blank presentation of scenes. It is in this configuration that the

stream of modern life paintings of the 1850s must be examined. This thesis has looked in detail at three paintings which ventured to gratify the eye with scenes from modern bourgeois life. Frith was uniquely successful in escaping from the dangers of social and moral degradation that the experiment involved. Metonymy is that level of language that gives access to the unconscious. The arrangement of the pictorial elements of Ramsgate Sands is one that contains the metonymic movement and insists on the operation of repression. Within the ideological functioning of the picture that repression is set up in the interests of the ruling class, and bulwarks notions of male superiority, the powerful nation state, the inferiority of non-indigenous races and the servility of the working class. This thesis has attempted to show that a psychoanalytic approach does not hinder or conflict with historical analysis of art works. On the contrary it is a necessary tool for the understanding of the effectivity of artistic texts in specific historical circumstances.

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Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper

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II: CATALOGUES OF EXHIBITIONS AND COLLECTIONS.

Entries in this section are arranged in order of town of exhibition, exhibiting institution and date of exhibition. For touring exhibitions venues have been given in alphabetical order. N.B. Some exhibition catalogues are published in book form and are listed under the author's name in section III of the bibliography.

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