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VICTORIANS LIVE

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EFFIE GRAY, THE FILM; OR, THE AFTERLIFE OF JOHN RUSKIN

By Herbert Sussman

What has happened to John Ruskin in our time?

RUSKIN HAS APPEARED in two recent big-budget reanimations of the Victorian past – Mike Leigh's *Mr. Turner* (2014) and *Effie Gray* (2014) with a script by Emma Thompson. In these reconstructions of the lives of the Victorians, Ruskin is diminished and even demonized. In *Mr. Turner* he is marginalized and a fool; in *Effie Gray* central but psychotic, a puritan Bluebeard. This degradation of the great Victorian sage enshrined in the thirty-nine volumes of Cook and Wedderburn has much to say about our contemporary representation of Victorian social criticism and particularly of the Victorian art world.

For one, the triumph of neoliberal discourse in our time has left no discursive space for Ruskin as sage, as social visionary. His Blakean vision of the storm cloud of the nineteenth century is vital to nineteenth-century environmental criticism, but his prophetic critique of capitalism has become non-thinkable, or at least marginal. His envisioning of a world of the past to be reclaimed in the future in a society based not on cash payment, but on satisfying labor has no place in a system in which money equals value and commodity lust becomes virtue. As passed through William Morris, artisanal labor flourishes, but at the margins of late capitalism. All of which makes the harsh representation of Ruskin in the film of Mike

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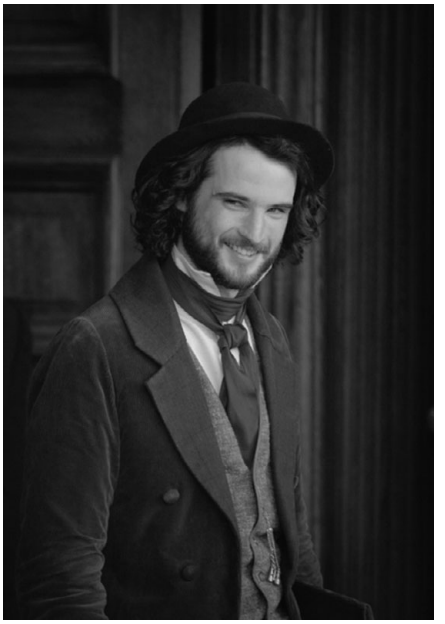


Figure 8. John Everett Millais (Tom Sturridge). Courtesy Sovereign Films.

Leigh, a filmmaker on the left, so puzzling. Perhaps Ruskin as obnoxious Asperger pedant represents for Leigh the coddled rich in contrast to the inarticulate genius of the working class artisan-painter. Artistic genius can inhabit the working class without the class-based English tradition of verbal flair, even if that genius is expressed only in the filmic Turner's grunts.

But as Ruskin has been marginalized as social critic by our now dominant neoliberal discourse, so too, as *Mr. Turner* and even more so *Effie Gray* indicate, his force as art critic and historian has been diminished by our new model of Victorian art. For we now valorize nineteenth-century British art within the avant-garde model as persuasively set out in the recent definitive exhibition, *Pre-Raphaelites: A Victorian Avant-Garde*. Within that context, rather than the champion of the artistic revolutionaries of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, as set out in *Effie Gray* Ruskin becomes an artistic fuddy-duddy, the stultifying, resentful representative of the old guard. And in the film, the artistic conflict is sexualized. Here Ruskin is the virginal traditionalist, John Everett Millais the radical revolutionary not only in his art, but even more so in his virility. The film transforms the respectable clean-shaven Millais of this early Pre-Raphaelite phase in Holman Hunt's *Portrait of John Everett Millais* (1853) into a handsome bearded young artist (played by Tom Sturridge), who would be more at home in Williamsburg Brooklyn than in Scotland (Figure 8).

And so with the erasure of Ruskin as radical social prophet and with the devaluing of his linguistic gift, of the preternatural attentiveness of his eye, and of his enormous influence in his world, interest shifts to his personality, to his psyche rather than his teaching. The occupation of popular culture, at least of film culture, with the Victorians is more psychological than ideological, more sexualized than aesthetic. Oh those crazy Victorians, and none more crazy than Ruskin as seen in *Effie Gray* with his child-loving, his impotence, his moralism, and

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Figure 9. John Ruskin (Greg Wise) and Effie Gray Ruskin (Dakota Fanning). Courtesy Sovereign Films.

his madness, not to speak of his part in one of the great sexual scandals of the time. Here his madness is mediated by the stock Freudian models through which popular culture still sees the Victorians. The historically-based severe Oedipal relation with his parents is highlighted; the film structured by the hegemonic model of nineteenth-century behavior, especially the Freudian notion that hysteria in men, as well as in women, is generated by sexual repression within the cocoon of domestic life. We have Ruskin as Bluebeard, but his cruelty to women is generated not by an over-charged, but by a suppressed libido.

But, as the title indicates, the film is centered not on Ruskin, but on Effie Gray, very well played by Dakota Fanning (Figure 9). Thompson has scripted a classic feminist liberation narrative as Effie moves from imprisonment to freedom, albeit freedom in a companionate marriage, transcends psychosomatic ailments by unlocking sexual desire, and achieves some autonomy in the world by having her marriage annulled. She is the madwoman in the castle, figured here by the bourgeois Denmark Hill. The dark sexual aristocrat becomes an unhinged pedophile dominated by his mother.

This Victorian gothic narrative is set in the sumptuous Merchant-Ivory / Masterpiece Theater mode, its accurate and evocative visual re-creation of Victorian life mediated through Pre-Raphaelite art. As satisfying as the referencing of British art may be to Victorianists, I wonder if the absence of such visual knowledge for non-Victorianists might account for the very short run of the film. The London interiors, and especially of Denmark Hill, the Ruskin family home where John took his bride to live, have the varnished sepia look of nineteenth-century painting. The Scottish hills where the Ruskins and Millais spent their fateful vacation are alive with the vivid greens and yellows of Pre-Raphaelite landscape painting. Particularly striking are the scenes at the rocky streamside site where Millais painted *en plein air* his magnificent portrait of a calm Ruskin, *Portrait of John Ruskin at Glenfinlas* (1853–54). Here the camera replicates the photographic minuteness without recession of the Pre-Raphaelite method.

At Brig o'Turk, as throughout, the film hews closely to the biography as it has come down to us in the visual record. The lengthy scene of Millais painting his flattering portrait of

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Ruskin brings out the repressed hostility of Millais to his mentor as well as Ruskin's sexual jealousy as expressed in his sharp critique of Millais's methods. The interior shots of the troubled three in the bleak Scottish cottage follow the sketches Millais made of their stay in Scotland to bring a vivid feel of historical and emotional accuracy. To the Victorianist, then, the contemporary film recreates the merger of art and life that characterizes the Pre-Raphaelites. In an almost post-modern way, the film becomes self-referential as Millais shows Effie the sketch on which the *mise-en-scène* is based.

At times the film moves beyond art as historical documentation to Pre-Raphaelite painting as representing the inner life of Effie who, caught in the innocence of a Victorian virgin, does not have the terms for her own sexuality available to her. Cleverly breaking with the realist genre, at moments the film cuts to Pre-Raphaelite paintings where Effie was not the model, but which register the emotions she cannot articulate. These interpolations are a clever way of setting her inner life on the screen. At one point we see a close-up of the face of Millais's Ophelia showing the innocence, passivity, and suicidal despair of a woman deprived of sex, rejected by a mad or seemingly mad male. But again, as satisfying as these interpolations may have been to me, I can only guess that they may have been simply baffling to the general audience.

In its plotting, Thompson's Bluebeard narrative represents Effie moving from innocent childhood to fully sexual, autonomous womanhood. The film opens with a rather cryptic scene of two very young girls speaking of a mysterious visitor; Ruskin had visited the Gray family when Effie was twelve. But this Ruskinian attraction to child-women is not fully represented, his sexual proclivities elided so as to foreground the effect on Effie of his aversion to adult heterosexuality. Nor do we see Effie as a feisty nineteen year-old, the habitué of county balls and even for a time engaged to an officer. The scene of the wedding from the Gray home, a rather gray dour affair, fits the traditional narrative of the naïve country girl captured by the aristocratic seducer.

The bridegroom here is not the pedant of *Mr. Turner*, but as played by Greg Wise (Emma Thompson's husband) is modeled with some irony on the Millais portrait where Ruskin's haughty physicality is signaled by his balance on the rocks. Ruskin's dignified reserve in the style of Colin Firth brings out the film world's model British gentlemen (Figure 9). In the rather subtle acting of the part, the gentlemanly reserve morphs into steely coldness that conceals pathological hatred of sexually adult women. I might add that as historically accurate as this portrayal of manly reticence may be, in contrast to a presentist emotional sensationalism, the reserve does generate a certain slowness of pace for the modern viewer.

Of course, for Victorianists of a prurient turn of mind, and who of us can claim innocence here, the chief question about the film is how it represents the wedding night. What is the take on what may be called the "pubic hair controversy"? Ruskin later said, of course, "But though her face was beautiful, her person was not formed to excite passion. On the contrary, there were certain circumstances in her person which completely checked it" (qtd. in Cooper 128). What these "certain circumstances in her person" were has vexed Victorianists and given rise to many delightful speculations. But on this matter, as throughout, the film nicely maintains Victorian discretion, rather than present-day prurience. On the wedding night, Effie drops her nightgown, but only to her bare shoulders. We do not see her bare body; no evidence for advocates of hairy armpits or signs of menstruation or pubic hair. A quick cut to Ruskin's face registers what Effie later described: "The reason he did not make me his Wife is that he was disgusted with my person the first evening." Ruskin then runs from the

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room. One aspect of Ruskin's very Victorian sexual problem is suggested later in the film. As the married couple lie in bed the camera focuses on Effie's mournful face, but as the bed shakes it cuts to Ruskin's blankets moving as he masturbates under the covers. This is a nice use of biographical fact, as it is known that he was addicted to what the Victorians saw as the major threat to manliness and, though not noted in the film, in the annulment proceedings he offered his success in onanism to disprove the charge of impotence.

Male hysteria and female hysteria, both created by sexual repression, become the twin poles of Victorian domestic life. We see Ruskin's intense Oedipal devotion and reciprocally the ferocious hostility of his parents to Effie, even to the extreme of their drugging her.

Within the Freudian vocabulary of the film, what Victorianists have valued as Ruskin's heroic effort to record the vanishing beauty of Gothic Venice is transformed into sexual pathology, a sublimation of libido from the genitals to the eye. In a striking scene, perched on a ladder Ruskin minutely examines a crumbling stone capital of St. Mark's, disfigured stone that analogizes his stony coldness and inner ruin. Effie joins him not to appreciate these stones of Venice, but to quarrel about his restrictions on her sexual dalliances. He remains marble. The detailed attentiveness of his eye becomes mere sexless pedantry in contrast with the virile Pre-Raphaelites and the sexy Italians.

In Scotland, the scenes of the *ménage à trois* in the bleak cottage at Brig o'Turk nicely radiate the tangle of repressed sexuality as Ruskin sleeps on the sofa and Millais and Effie each occupy a tiny cramped space. The spatial claustrophobia evokes the psychological claustrophobia of confined sexual attraction and constrained sexual jealousy. Pretending sleep, but with hidden open eyes, Ruskin listens with perverse pleasure to Effie and Millais talking and makes notes for a possible divorce proceeding grounded in what seems to him her madness and her sexual dalliance. It is a forceful cinematic evocation of a madman that would not be out of place in a Robert Browning poem. But again the biographical accuracy and narrative reserve may be appreciated by the readers of this journal, but must only puzzle a general audience, especially as to what exactly the filmic Ruskin may be writing.

Primarily, the film evolves as a narrative of awakening female sexuality and empowerment closing with Effie's escape from Ruskin's masculinist cruelty. In keeping with the Victorian frame, sexual desire is set out not in modern terms, but in the suggestive incidents and vocabulary of the nineteenth century. Drawing on the Victorian association of Venice with unrestrained sensuality, the script has Effie's libidinal longings break out in the Venice visits, shot on location in the same sumptuous color as the Scottish landscapes. The extended scenes of Effie unbound dancing with officers and even rowing a gondola mark her emergent sexual vitality; an attempted rape, a critique of a different form of male sexual violence than Ruskin's, all too conventionally causes an eruption of libido in Effie.

The growing sexual attraction between Effie and Millais in Scotland is also presented with historicist decorum. There is no swelling music, no steamy sex scenes. The closest we get is a quick scene where Effie accidentally topples on top of Millais on a walk in the Scottish countryside. For the obligatory nude scene, Effie admires Millais's naked body from afar, takes in her breath as he emerges in the distance from a swim in the cold Scottish lake. I admired the evocation of repressed libido for all its historical feeling, but the ponderousness again might account for the truncated run at the box office.

The Bluebeard plot then turns to escape. Trapped in a sexless marriage, Effie becomes overwhelmed with fatigue and begins to lose her hair, events that her physician cannot understand, but that to the modern audience are clearly hysterical manifestations. Enter Lady

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Figure 10. Lady Eastlake (Emma Thompson). Courtesy Sovereign Films.

Eastlake, played by Emma Thompson with her usual panache (Figure 10), as female enabler; the older experienced woman, who, ironically, is herself a prominent art critic and historian, helps the trapped woman to understand her sexuality and eventually to escape her husband through an annulment. Since a doctor must testify to Effie's being an intact virgin, we are given a rather nice scene showing the film's sympathy with rather than caustic criticism of Victorian mores. In this imagined gynecological exam, a fully clothed Effie leans back in a cushioned chair with her multiple skirts lifted only slightly as a bearded avuncular doctor bends over to certify that she is undamaged.

The pace finally picks up as Effie, on the ruse of visiting her family, flees her suburban incarceration for her family home in Scotland. In another nice Victorian reference that would be most likely lost to the film's audience, the narrative breaks for another resonant visual parallel, here to Millais's *Order Of Release, 1746*, painted in 1853, before the Scottish trip, and for which Effie proleptically modeled. In the painting, a courageous woman hands the prison guard the legal paper needed to free her abject husband. In the film, as Effie drives off from her captivity, her lawyer delivers a writ for the annulment to Ruskin and his parents. As in Millais's painting, power has passed from male to female. In the film, life imitates art.

Within the feminist narrative, the film ends with Effie's empowerment; the final shot is of Effie driving off. The reunion of the lovers is not shown. Nor do we see the afterlife of Effie and Everett. The reality of nineteenth-century bourgeois marriage with its difficulties would not be pleasant to watch. The Millais marriage would be a special downer, as the marriage includes the wife's own growing madness, the deaths of children, the tensions of a

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life devoted to the husband's upward striving as artist-businessman. This vision of Victorians as rebels in art and love is far more attractive.

The New School

WORKS CONSIDERED

Effie, Gray. Dir. Richard Laxton. Screenplay, Emma Thompson. Perf. Dakota Fanning, Greg Wise, Tom Sturridge, and Emma Thompson. Sovereign, 2014. Film.

Barringer, Tim, Jason Rosenfeld, and Alison Smith, eds. *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*. London: Tate Publishing, 2012.

Cooper, Suzanne Fagence. *Effie: The Passionate Lives of Effie Gray, John Ruskin and John Everett Millais*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2010.

TURNER REVEALED?

By Janice Carlisle

IN ONE OF THE MANY GORGEOUS SCENES in Mike Leigh's film *Mr. Turner* (2014), the artist and several of his friends take a boat ride on the Thames as the *Temeraire*, the ship that had heroically defended Nelson's during the Battle of Trafalgar, is being towed toward demolition. In recreating the genesis of the British public's best-loved painting, *The Fighting Temeraire* (RA 1839), the director blends documentary fidelity and imaginative license. As both he and Jacqueline Riding, research consultant on the film, explained in a recent "conversation," this scene could not have happened as either Turner or Leigh portrayed it. The artist could not have seen the view of the dying ship that he chose to paint because its relation to the setting sun was a physical impossibility and because the *Temeraire* by that time was already an ignominious hulk, stripped of its masts before it was hauled up the Thames. Turner's vision was a "complete construct," as Leigh and Riding pointed out, and Leigh's re-envisioning of this scene therefore wavers between construction and reconstruction. In one sense, it is true to the painting, if not to historical fact. Yet, thanks to the visual effects made possible by digital filming and by the efforts of Dick Pope, the cinematographer of *Mr. Turner*, its viewers see the contrasts among sky, clouds, and sunlit water as more intense than those in the painting (Figure 11). That fact could make *The Fighting Temeraire* that Turner is creating in the following scene, with the ghostly ship having almost completely disappeared, seem distinctly less impressive than it does on the walls of the National Gallery, London, where it now hangs.

Everyone who knows anything about *Mr. Turner*, which depicts the last twenty-five years of the life of J. M. W. Turner, knows about Timothy Spall's bravura performance as the artist, grunting and grimacing his way from one scene to the next. No one who has not seen the film can imagine how beautiful it is: the collaboration of director and cinematographer, working together on a digital full-length film for the first time, attests to the happy outcome of a decades-long process in which they both looked so intently at Turner's paintings that, as Leigh said in the interview that I have quoted, "they were in our blood." This comment

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Figure 11. Digital photo-collage. On the left: The *Temeraire* being towed on the Thames, from *Mr. Turner* (2014, Sony Classic Pictures). In the middle: Turner in his studio painting the *Temeraire*, from *Mr. Turner* (2014, Sony Classic Pictures). On the right: *The Fighting Temeraire, Tugged to Her Last Berth to Be Broken Up, 1838*, 90.7 x 121.6 cm, oil on canvas, Royal Academy 1839, National Gallery, London.

emerged from a conversation that took place at the 2015 International Festival of Arts and Ideas, with Tim Barringer, Paul Mellon Professor of the History of Art at Yale, acting as host and primary interlocutor. During this event, presented in partnership with the Yale Art Gallery and the Yale Center for British Art, Leigh insisted repeatedly that in making this film he had remained faithful to the historical record, claiming at one point, more-than-a-bit misleadingly, that the only act of invention in which he had indulged was his decision to define as sexual the relation between Turner and his London housekeeper, Hannah Danby (Dorothy Atkinson). Such comments, to my mind, offer an opportunity to think about *Mr. Turner*, paradoxically, both in relation to its director's stated intentions and without recourse to them. What, I want to ask, does the film become when it is judged against the relatively sketchy historical record, when it is seen as a version of a notoriously mysterious life, one that was famously protected from view by the man who lived it? What, alternatively, does the film become when judged as story that is not dependent for its meanings on the actuality of the life that it depicts, but as a work of visual wizardry portraying the trials of a fictional painter of the early- to mid-nineteenth century? Thinking about what *Mr. Turner* amounts to when divorced from its subject's historicity may seem a perverse approach, but it strikes me as one that goes to the heart of a compelling act of cinematic transformation.

As in the case of Turner himself, the power of the film inheres in its contradictions: it is, at turns, beautiful and ugly, as sweet and charming as it is aggressive and offputting. *Mr. Turner* oscillates between the romanticized cleansing of its locales and its open-eyed insistence on the more-than-occasional crudeness of Turner's behavior. During the recent conversation with its director, however, Jacqueline Riding pointed out that the film does have at least one single-minded feature, its emphasis on the centrality of Turner's relations

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with women. Although his insane mother receives only a brief, if memorable mention, *Mr. Turner* spends a good deal of time on his housekeeper Hannah Danby; less on Sophia Danby (Ruth Sheen), his mistress and the mother of his two daughters; and much more on Sophia Booth (Marion Bailey), with whom he lived incognito for much of the final two decades of his life. Biographies of Turner tend to give scant attention to these relationships because he himself left so little record of them; and the more speculative moves that Mike Leigh has made, including the scene in which Turner has his heartless way with Hannah Danby, seem, as the director said of that one, "correct." In this biopic Leigh examines both the artist's professional life and his domestic conditions in order to reveal the intersections between these two spheres. As Turner works furiously on one painting after another, grinding a white-laden brush into the canvas or spitting to achieve just the right effect, one or another of his adjuncts stands to the side, helping to make the magic happen. And such roles are not limited to those played by the women in Turner's life. He shows a touching affection for his father (William Turner, played with an engaging energy and glee by Paul Jesson), but their fully requited love for each other is set against the artist's use of his senior as his assistant; and the cost of that role for the older Turner is made clear as he pauses to catch his breath as he tries to mix a pigment, appropriately a stunning yellow, for his son's current painting. As Jacqueline Rider also remarked, the numerous scenes of Turner at work are unusual in films about artists; but as she also astutely noted, what scholars do not know about the materiality of artistic practices, how the paint actually reaches the canvas, outweighs what they do know.

Leigh's handling of this material, for a number of quite different reasons, is convincing. It is so, first, on the grounds of the historical accuracy that he was at such pains to emphasize in his recent interview. It mattered a great deal to him how much a lodging in Margate would have cost, how long it took to travel from that town to London by various modes of transport, and when it was appropriate for an early-Victorian artist to wear a hat or a coat. Riding and Leigh worked, literally for years, to be sure that all such details were represented accurately. Yet I doubt if most movie-goers would have guessed the lengths to which Leigh went so that he could achieve a sense of historical authenticity. The steam engine of a train, located in the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, was transported to the Welsh countryside so that it could represent a view that might have inspired *Rain, Steam, and Speed* (RA 1844). Timothy Spall, as he has noted in his own interviews about the film, took painting lessons for two years to prepare to play its title role; but Leigh went well beyond making sure that Spall learned to produce a passable imitation of a Turner canvas. When the central room of the Royal Academy was recreated in a Sheffield mansion for one of the very best scenes of *Mr. Turner*, the casting director was told to find actors in Sheffield who were also painters. As Mike Leigh explained, that stipulation made it easy to find men with long hair and beards so that hats clapped on their heads turned them instantaneously into artists exhibiting their work in London. (The problem, Leigh went on to say, much to the delight of his audience, was that there were quite a number of Sheffield actors who could paint, but not all of them could act.) The drive for authenticity makes the scenes in the Royal Academy on its varnishing days among the richest and most compelling in the film. Turner moves from friend to friend, commenting on one painting after another; he then pulls off his famous act of one-upmanship over his rival John Constable (James Fleet), first to the bemused consternation and then to the satisfied comprehension of his colleagues.

A number of the more implausible of the scenes in *Mr. Turner* also bear the imprimatur of history, and they are duly recorded in James Hamilton's biography *Turner*, his debt to

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which Mike Leigh has acknowledged. In one scene in an early-Victorian theatre, a satirical sketch turns a tray of broken jam tarts in a Turner painting that is framed and sold for one-thousand guineas to a bumptious collector. According to Hamilton and his sources, such a sketch was actually performed on the London stage in the early 1840s (351). Lines used to castigate Turner's late style – the idea that *Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (RA 1842) is made up, not just of "soapsuds and whitewash," but the "whole array of [Turner's] kitchen stuff" – are well-known complaints reproduced from Victorian lore or Victorian periodicals and quoted by Hamilton in his biography (358, 369). What seemed to me to be an unlikely event in *Mr. Turner* but perhaps one of its most "correct" is actually the penultimate anecdote with which Hamilton closes his book (380–81) and Mike Leigh closes his film: the heart-breaking journey made to Chelsea by the housekeeper Hannah Danby, hiding a face heavily discolored by skin disease, after she finds Turner's address there in one of his coat pockets, only to creep away unseen after she discovers that he has been living in Chelsea and is now dying there as the husband of another woman.

Yet such careful use of scholarly sources should not undercut one's appreciation of the liberties that Mike Leigh has rightfully taken in his depiction of the last years of Turner's life. An accurate chronology of the artist's works goes by the board in the interests of a coherent narrative. Turner's famous pronouncement "The sun is God" was, according to John Ruskin, said weeks before the artist died (Wilton 11); but poetic license makes them here Turner's last words. Leigh and his cinematographer may have looked at Turner paintings until they had them in their "blood"; but such study alone could not have produced the beautiful simplicity of the opening scene in *Mr. Turner* as the artist, sketchbook in hand, walks through the Dutch countryside to the sound of the chatter of two farm girls. Nor could such diligence have been the sole impulse for what was for me the most extraordinary moment of the film: Turner is putting his finishing touches on *Staffa, Fingal's Cave* (RA 1832), driving the paint into the canvas and blowing pigment onto it. In a final gesture, he draws his fingers up through the white paint on the left of the canvas; and just at the moment when his hand reaches the top of the cliffs, the scene changes, as if it were a dissolve in a magic-lantern show, transformed into a wall of rock with the artist walking beneath it.

This fade from canvas to rocky Scottish coast could be used as evidence of the central flaw of the film: it makes it seem as if Turner merely transcribed what there was out there in his world to be seen by everyone who was not Turner, including the audience of the film itself. Yet the same moment also makes it clear that *Mr. Turner* might have been called "Through Turner's Eyes." Such a perspective explains the dependence on the artist's "construct" in the filming of the scene in which the *Temeraire* appears. Moreover, the views of the boats in the Margate harbor that one sees out of the windows of Mrs. Booth's lodging house, as if they were already paintings framed and hanging on a drawing-room wall, depict what Turner saw as he created similar seascapes under the influence of Dutch marine painting. The caricatured portrayal of Sarah Danby also seems logical, even inevitable, if it is seen as the way in which Turner viewed this woman, more a Dickensian termagant whose presence must be escaped as quickly as possible or avoided altogether than a former mate rightfully concerned about his lack of interest in or support for their children. The contrast between the cruelty of that depiction and the lovely and loving sweetness of the portrayal of Mrs. Booth is the contrast between a woman who demanded Turner's time and attention and one who, as James Hamilton puts it, was willing to mother Turner after he had lost the father who was for years his primary caretaker (303).

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Even the utterly egregious portrait of the young John Ruskin (Joshua McGuire), a cruel caricature if there ever was one, would make sense if the film were titled "Through Turner's Eyes." If that depiction is taken to be the older artist's conception of the callow youth – a "prig," as Mike Leigh called him – then its exaggerations, including Ruskin's amazement at his "own powers of perception even at the age of four," might represent the animus of an artist who constantly felt and had good reason to feel that his contemporary critics misunderstood his work. Ruskin's pontificating on *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying* (RA1840), including the comment that its line of brightness is "precisely off center" (what can that mean?), is stupid enough to justify a dismissal of him. Those of us who have a passion for Turner's art because Ruskin's commentaries have given us the eyes with which to see it might simply have to accept that Turner could not appreciate the critic as we do – as a young man on the way to becoming the acknowledged and heroic champion of an artistic genius. The similarly negative portrayal of the tragically misguided Benjamin Robert Haydon (played but probably not overplayed by Martin Savage) depicts Turner's view of his fellow artist as a man who killed his professional mother, the Royal Academy of Art; and it makes psychological sense as a projection coming from the man who did virtually the same thing to his biological mother. Haydon might have been an ass, as Mike Leigh has a member of the RA declare, but he defended the ultimately futile cause of British history painting with what was an almost admirable, if literally short-sighted, devotion to it.

From that point of view, my question about the meaning of this film if it were not the record of an actual career becomes pertinent. If *Mr. Turner* were given yet another title, it might be labeled "Portrait of the Artist as an Aging Man." The story that it would tell about a fictional figure called J. M. W. Turner would be one of complete failure in the face of the mortality that he could neither accept nor fend off – the art would be as short as the life. In this version, a single-hearted compulsion to envision and to re-envision the look of the material world drives a man to his death; along the way, his trials are eased only by the blind love of his father, by the care of one loyal but ultimately uncomprehending woman, and by the acclaim of other misfits like Mary Somerville (played with great charm by Lesley Manville). This "Turner" is reviled by royalty, and his paintings are laughed at by gallery-goers. At the end of his life, his earlier good-hearted camaraderie with his fellow artists devolves into derisive, red-faced sneering as he looks at two paintings by John Everett Millais, both exhibited at the RA in 1851, that exemplify the work of a new generation of artists. The old man's lack of comprehension is made more painful still by its similarity to Haydon's contempt for the paintings that displaced his on the walls of the Royal Academy. *Mr. Turner* does not depict the horror of Haydon's botched but ultimately successful suicide, though its chronology would have justified the inclusion of that event. Instead, it focuses relentlessly on the sadness of Turner's end. Energy yields to senility, and the painter's efforts and ambitions come to nothing. After his death, all that is left are the two women whom he has used. His personal gallery has fallen to ruin, with vermin infesting it and water seeping in among its ignored and valueless paintings. Hannah Danby wanders around the once-grand house in Queen Anne Street, and the final evidence of Turner's life is the smile on Mrs. Booth's face as she cleans the windows of the Chelsea cottage that they have shared.

My retelling of the story of the film *Mr. Turner* as a fiction is, of course, wrong-headed: it ignores the dramatic irony that turns all the derision that Turner suffered into the last laugh that posterity has had on the uncomprehending views of his benighted contemporaries. We trust, if Victoria and Albert did not, that Turner's eyesight was not failing; we can be

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reasonably sure, as Victorian gallery-goers could not be, that he had not lost his mind. How close *Mr. Turner* brings us to the secret of his great gifts, his ability to see what no one else saw and to make his viewers accept, as Ruskin affirmed, the truth of that vision, remains an open question. Yet, as one answer to that question, I cannot but think of my favorite moment in the historical record, one that comes from John Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens*. It is 1844, and the young author is being treated to a grand dinner at Greenwich before he sets off for a long stay in Italy; and many of the prominent men of the time, among them "the great painter" Turner, have been invited to celebrate Dickens's departure. As Forster writes, "Turner . . . had enveloped his throat, that sultry summer day, in a huge red belcher-handkerchief, which nothing would induce him to remove. He was not otherwise demonstrative, but enjoyed himself in a quiet silent way, less perhaps at the speeches than at the changing lights on the river" (1: 313). This still image of Turner, rather than his grunting and groaning from frame to frame, portrays an enigmatic visionary, a man wrapped in a brightly colored muffler and quietly watching the effects of sunlight on water, silent while convivial chatter goes on around him. Such an image is perhaps as close as anyone can approach to the mysteries of his life and art.

Yale University

WORKS CONSIDERED

Mr. Turner. Dir. Mike Leigh. Cinematography, Dick Pope. Perf. Timothy Spall, Dorothy Atkinson, Marion Bailey, and Paul Jesson. Sony Classic Pictures, 2014. Film.

"A Conversation with Mike Leigh [and Jacqueline Riding]." Moderated by Tim Barringer. Andrew Carnduff Ritchie Lecture. New Haven, CT. 18 June 2015. Interview.

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THE MAN WHO NEVER LIVED AND WILL NEVER DIE

By Andrew King

AT THE BEGINNING OF "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" in the 1891 Christmas edition of the *Strand*, Holmes and Watson discuss a "disreputable hard felt hat" dropped at the corner of Goodge Street and Tottenham Court Road that commissionaire Peterson had brought to Holmes on Christmas morning (Figure 12). Watson asks Holmes what clue he could have as to the owner's identity. Holmes replies in his usual laconic fashion:

> "Only as much as we can deduce."
> "From his hat?"
> "Precisely."
> "But you are joking. What can we gather from this battered old hat?"
> "Here is my lens. You know my methods . . . ." (73)

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Figure 12. Sydney Paget. Illustration from "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle." *Strand Magazine* 3 (Jan. 1892): 73.

And then Holmes proceeds to help Watson read the identity of the owner from a combination of close observation of the traces of the man's life they find on the hat, and of the implications of where and how commissionaire Peterson found it in the street.

Like Sherlock Holmes teaching Watson to observe, *The Man Who Never Lived and Will Never Die* exhibition at the Museum of London was keen to teach the visitor how to read both Victorian London as a whole and the individual commodities that crowd the Sherlock Holmes stories. And again like Holmes, who does not simply tell Watson the solution but gets him to go through the research process himself, the exhibition offered visitors *learning experiences* rather than monologic narrations (as old-fashioned exhibitions used to do). And yet again like Holmes's training of Watson in deductive reasoning, these experiences were carefully organised stage by stage as a narrative – or what marketing these days calls a "customer journey." This is the journey I want to travel here. It's a path of peepholes and choices, light and dark, observation and investigation, and it's also a social, communal phenomenon. I went with a friend, and by the look of it, few visitors were alone. Curiously, though, even if the path had been obviously and carefully orchestrated, the many enthusiastic reviewers of the exhibition all seem to have ignored it. Some even appear to have visited different avatars, as a few of the items they wax lyrical on, we couldn't find, while we lighted on others. We guessed that the delicacy of some objects necessitated their rotation, though we don't remember seeing any notice about this in the exhibition itself.

The first learning experience we really noticed started before we even entered. The first to arrive in the morning, we were confronted with a fake wall of bookshelves. Is this it? What to do? Easy for us, confident members of the bourgeoisie trained in the tropes of sleuthing: find the hidden doorway (not at all difficult once you "observed" in a half-Holmesian way). What a delightfully simple way of reminding us of the textual nature of Holmes, and indeed of everything that follows! We are here!

Inside we are greeted with more fake volumes leading along a mysterious corridor where the books are soon ousted by newer technology. Screens loop clips of famous Holmes actors from television and cinema: Jeremy Brett, Benedict Cumberbatch, Jonny Lee Miller, Peter

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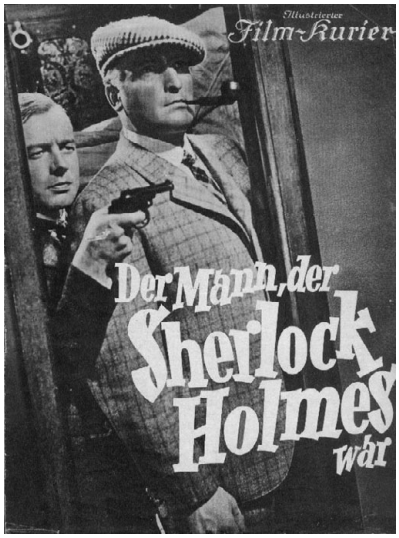


Figure 13. Cover of the Austrian film magazine *Illustrierter Film-Kurier* no. 2660 (1937), advertising *Der Mann, der Sherlock Holmes war*.

Cushing, Christopher Plummer, Robert Downey . . . . And as we turn along the twisted route, we enter more unfamiliar territory: for that is how the journey is organised. Like a teacher taking pupils from what they know to what they don't, so the visitor journey leads us from the known to the unknown. It's very reasonable and unshocking. We find the process both intriguing and comforting: as teachers, we know how the pedagogic story should go, and here it is in a material form that our bodies, not just our words, have to follow. Its conventionality aids understanding. So far at least, we don't have to work very hard.

Posters and more video screens are now showing the more unfamiliar Holmes of silent film and the late Victorian and Edwardian stage: William Gillette (who played Holmes in an 1899 play), Eille Norwood, John Barrymore. We're struck more, though, by the extent to which Holmes's early fame had spread beyond the English language. The first authorised Holmes film was *Les Aventures de Sherlock Holmes* released in 1911 and starring Henri Gouget, but it's a poster of the 1937 German comedy *Der Mann, der Sherlock Holmes war* [The Man who was Sherlock Holmes] that really demonstrates Holmes's international fame because it so effortlessly plays with the characters and the porosity of fiction and reality (Figure 13). Our heroes, mistaken for Holmes and Watson and taking on the roles for fun, uncover a mystery more or less by chance before getting arrested for impersonating the famous detectives. It turns out that "Conan Doyle" is at the trial and laughingly points out that Holmes and Watson are fictional: how can you impersonate what doesn't exist? Our heroes end up happily ever after with the daughters of the criminal they'd unmasked.

We are to be left in no doubt at this stage that Holmes was a fictional character. Yet the sound of Big Ben that had played early in the journey, like the German comedy, already suggests a more complex weaving of fiction and the real world. The man who never lived is a ghost that haunts the real city, as if he were an incarnation of the city's spirit that would

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otherwise remain as hidden as the entrance door. Perhaps we are to understand that he is the echoing resonance of the metropolis, perhaps the incarnation of decoding practices we use every day in the city. According to that logic it can be no surprise that Sherlock Holmes should meet Jack the Ripper in the 1965 thriller *A Study in Terror*. Reality and fiction are as inseparable as the boom from the bell, its ghosts from the building.

A detour, encouraged by peepholes in the passageway, allows us to pass backwards from film to Sydney Paget's illustrations. Their juxtaposition with photographs of Conan Doyle, Sydney Paget, and Joseph Bell (one of Conan Doyle's medical professors, and on whom Holmes was modelled) only encourages us to compare closely the illustrations with the photos, and Paget's pen and ink wash drawings with the printed images, as if we were seeking forensic clues to a lost reality. There is even a memorial plaster bust of Sherlock Holmes produced the year after he "died" at the Reichenbach Falls in December 1893. Are we sure Holmes didn't exist? If he's dead, as this tangible memorial suggests, he must have lived. The exhibition, having insisted at the outset that Holmes was fictional by presenting us with a dazzling and diverse array of filmic representations of him, is now leading us to focus more and more on the materiality of a world he seems to haunt and influence.

We move on to the crooked corridors of the central section of the exhibition, "The London of Sherlock Holmes." Now we understand what Holmes has been used for: he is a hook to get us to observe parts of the core collection of the Museum, lavishly bolstered by items on loan from elsewhere. That doesn't mean that Holmes disappears. The main focus is on London between around 1880 and 1915 – the period the Holmes stories are set in. One of the first maps we encounter has pinned out on it the routes across the city taken in "The Six Napoleons" and "The Bruce Partington Plans." An explanatory plaque informs us that, even though Conan Doyle had limited first-hand knowledge of London, the city acts as the third main character after Watson and Holmes in their adventures. By this time, we have been prompted to observe the city closely in the maps, paintings, and photographs. Of course there are the famous Charles Booth maps of poverty and wealth, but there are many others too: a huge one drawn for the 1884 Post Office Directory provokes a good deal of discussion between myself and my friend, and also with other visitors we hadn't previously met. We're all united by our varied knowledge of London and by the gaps in our knowledge that the exhibition reveals and partially fills. For like all exhibitions, this one comprises not only the experience of objects on display but also a *social* experience we visitors create and share with others. Ours is not a one-to-one contemplation of an aesthetic object, but a messy negotiation of meanings, stories, identities, where Victorian London's simultaneous presence and absence is an occasion for social bonding.

The modernisation of London between 1848 and 1898 is most powerfully communicated not by the relentless expansion of London the maps record, but by our comparison of several birds-eye views, including the famous ones in the *Illustrated London News* of 1848 and *Graphic* of 1884. We remark with something of a shock quite how industrial the South Bank was. It was a constant visual, and no doubt aural and odorous, reminder to Parliament across the river of the Empire's industrial might, which the pale-clad 1961 Shell Tower and the 1920s neo-classical County Hall have replaced with clean and silent administrative mirrors of Parliament wielding metropolitan and global-industrial power. The birds-eye views suggest a London very different from today, when industry accounts for only 11% of London's economy (Moore). "And look at the quantity of cheap accommodation!" I heard someone remark. "Pretty horrible, though – look at the Booth maps," I want to reply but

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Figure 14. George William Joy. *The Bayswater Omnibus*. Oil on canvas, 1895. 139 x 194 cm. Museum of London.

don't, yet all too conscious that the housing that has replaced the slums is affordable only by a tiny global élite.

The spread of the city required more and more public transport to get from one part to the next, obliging travellers to share cramped spaces with strangers. Sherlock Holmes walked, took hansom cabs and trains, but never an omnibus. That doesn't prevent the Museum of London including from their collection the wonderful 1895 canvas *Bayswater Omnibus* by George William Joy (Figure 14). An update of the more oppressive, corporeal, and crowded 1859 *Omnibus Life in London* by William Maw Egley, in this context the *Bayswater Omnibus* comes across as a cool late Victorian problem painting requiring the intense but distanced observation and discussion that Holmes and Watson brought to the battered hat: what can bodies, clothes, and other accoutrements tell us about the identities of the wearers? Anyone who travels by public transport will have felt this curiosity, though most of us seek to avoid it by burying ourselves in hand-held devices: books, tablets, phones. It's not polite to stare, to "observe." No doubt it was the same then, we say to each other, but here we can deduce as much as we want from the passengers' hats while they are still wearing them.

An omnibus is just one element of another remarkable painting from the Museum of London collection, John O'Connor's *From Pentonville Road Looking West, Evening, 1884* (Figure 15). Everyone in it is on the move, from a postman picking up the mail to a woman hailing a friend with her umbrella and who, unless she's careful, is about to be run over by

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Figure 15. John O'Connor. *From Pentonville Road Looking West, Evening, 1884*. Oil on canvas, 1884. 90.3 x 150.3 cm. Museum of London.

the omnibus Holmes never rode. Even the weather is changing, as the rain has clearly just stopped and the evening sun is emerging from behind the clouds even as it sinks down. The only moveable things motionless are cast-out packing cases and baskets, and they are the remnants of transport. Over the whole kaleidoscopic scene presides a giant fairy-tale castle, a visual and social anchor. But instead of the residence of a prince and emblem of aristocratic permanence and power, the Gothic towers are a monument to movement and commerce: the St. Pancras Hotel and Station. We city dwellers have all seen versions of this scene. We've all witnessed this changing light and been alive to the evanescence of the street with its multiple stories. Strangely, we comment to each other, it's the paintings and the atmospheric mezzotints and aquatints by Joseph Parnell that connect today and Victorian London more than the photographs. We are there in the scenes we recognise so well: details have changed but not the *observation*.

Passing along a bright linking corridor we are alerted to a shift from the wide establishing shot to the close up, from decoding an assemblage of things on a person or street to decoding individual items. Brightly illumined on a white wall are the deerstalker, magnifying glass, and calabash pipe made famous in the stage versions but which never appeared in Paget's illustrations. We can step into the spaces between them, hold them, suck them (if we dare), almost wear them, take a selfie, put ourselves on display disguised in an off-the-shelf Holmes, just like the hero of the German film. All we need are three small mass-produced commodities we can buy in many a tourist shop, and immediately we are someone whose deductive practices we had already been trained in even before we entered the exhibition. We've always secretly been Sherlock Holmes: we know him so well. The exhibition here

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lets us try on his insignia, do with our bodies what Conan Doyle's stories allow us to do in our imaginations.

Moving on into a wide, darker room now, we are confronted by a host of illuminated glass cases. We are invited to scrutinise individual objects inside them just as Holmes did the Blue Carbuncle hat (though *we* are helped by plaques). Items associated with the Holmes stories are arranged in the room, so we are told, according to the five key attributes of our hero: the analytical mind, forensic science, disguise, Bohemia, and ideal English manliness. Yet the categories, while not arbitrary – anyone knowing Holmes's adventures will recognise their salience - come across as less important than the individual things that the room's lighting makes us focus on. Overall, though, the room presents a Holmes wrapped up in a consumerist masculinity defined by technology and print. A portrait of the elegant Lord Tweedmouth on the cover of *The Sphere* from 1908 illustrates "the mandarins of Imperial Whitehall" in a case in the "ideal English manliness" section. In the "analytical mind" area, a case devoted to "News" displays pages from the *Times, Tit-Bits*, and, rather eccentrically, the obscure halfpenny weekly journal *Short Cuts to Knowledge and Fortune*. The description of Holmes as "the most perfect reasoning and observing machine" (again in "the analytical mind" section, of course) proves an excuse for the exhibition of Maskelyne's "Psycho" automaton, which delighted audiences at Piccadilly's Egyptian Hall in 1874 apparently by playing whist and performing conjuring tricks (rather before the Holmes stories were set – but it's a fun way to illustrate the idea of the man-machine with extraordinary powers of deduction). "Observation" in the "forensic science" segment is materialised as spectacles, pince-nez, and tiny signs on a pocket watch and carriage clock; "Bohemianism" by a cocaine syringe and the manuscript first page of *The Sign of the Four*. There is much, much more. We are so dazzled and exhausted by the quantity and diversity of technological modernity and eccentricity that we cannot register everything. There are even Holmes's stylish coat and dressing gown from the BBC series *Sherlock*. Everything, whether originally made in the nineteenth century or a modern recreation, becomes a prop; reality is mixed with fiction, and both found to be material when not sartorial. We are on the *Bayswater Omnibus* again or back with the Blue Carbuncle hat, recreating character and class and backstory from details. And the thought crosses us that the painter had created the identities of his subjects through the selection of detail, just as, given the resources, real passengers – and exhibition curators – can too. The room urges us to remember that Holmes's ideal Englishman was both a geeky early adopter and an acute reader of the defining tastes of consumer groups long before those terms were thought of: wasn't he able to place in society the owner of the "hard felt hat" pretty exactly? Holmes again is our contemporary. Only the props are different; the detective impulses are the same. It's all very curious, like the very physical memorial plaster bust commemorating the fictional death of a fictional character: "if he's dead he must have lived," wasn't that it? Isn't that what this room is telling us in extended form?

Towards the end of the road in this room, we come across a case no one else is interested in. It seems completely out of place not only here, but in the exhibition in general. It contains two manuscripts by Conan Doyle: "The Adventure of the Dying Detective" (1913) and "The Adventure of the Illustrious Client" (1924). Whether they were fine copies sent to the publisher isn't clear, but if they weren't there are no signs of editing of any kind: they are neater than anything we have ever written ourselves. We light on these manuscripts already overwhelmed by things and technology, from film and photography to typewriters, telegraphs, spectacles, and "Psycho." These hand-written pages by contrast seem old-fashioned; not

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charmingly retro but already left behind, fragile, reticent, modestly desirous of being ignored. As indeed they are by almost everyone. We dutifully examine them, but they are resolutely Not Us. Then with some relief we meet William Gillette again, this time on stage as Holmes in New York around 1900 – this is something we recognise from our world — and we exit hastily past a Turner painting of the Reichenbach Falls and the clatter of technology, walls filled with moving screens of cascading water. We are reborn into today and our own stories in the life of the city.

On the way out, passing the fake bookcase where we came in, we saw a custodian holding open the concealed door. Amused, we suggested to her that what she was doing rather defeated the point. Visitors just got confused, she said. They didn't know what to do so staff had to stand there, keep the door open, and tell visitors to go on through. We laughed conspiratorially with her – "Oh dear!" But we were also a bit embarrassed, for wasn't this an uncomfortable reminder that narratives, and experiences, are rather more class-bound than we good bourgeois intellectuals like to think? Not everyone has access to the expensive training we have had in codes and conventions, observation and deduction. What to us and those we chose to speak to inside was simple and delightful and flattering of who we are, doesn't open to everyone. But then we probably wouldn't speak to them: aren't we so thoroughly trained in social signs – in clothes, accoutrements, demeanours – that what seem like chance conversations with strangers are in fact our instantaneous, unconscious observations and deductions?

We exit the Museum via the gift shop. Deerstalkers in a new blue and gold tartan based on 1890s fabrics and expressly designed for the Exhibition; a bowler (like the hat in the "Blue Carbuncle," but more pertinently, like Watson's); stylish copies of Benedict Cumberbatch's silk dressing gown from *Sherlock*, whose original we'd just seen; Mrs. Hudson's tea service from the same series; Sherlock bears, Watson bears, board games, decorations, framed quotations, key rings, tea towels, chocolate . . . . Was this why we were bored by the manuscripts? We can't buy them, and physically isolated from the rest of the objects in the Room of Things, they hadn't been integrated into the exhibition's increasingly focussed narrative of history-as-purchasable-props. The nineteenth century the manuscripts offered was very alien to us. They were all too clear evidence that then writing wasn't so easily replicable or disseminated as now, neither auto-corrected nor word-processed, neither tweeted nor blogged. The manuscripts resisted us, repelled our vision of the nineteenth century as "just like now really but with different details." Their uniqueness and their neatness reminded us of the physical labour that writing Sherlock Holmes stories required. And then we realised with something of a shock that while the exhibition had at some points shown us industry, it hadn't shown us labour, just the fruits of labour – the things we had so delightedly decoded and whose meanings we had so pleasantly negotiated with like-minded people. Holmes's London was ultimately the London of today's pleasure and leisure and decoding for fun, a doll's theatre or magic toyshop for those who could afford the entrance fee. Booth's maps, with their thrilling juxtapositions of wealth and poverty, had been lip service to the moral worth of what was in the end a gift shop; their purpose, like the birds-eye views, was to remind us of the value of today.

I am not condemning the exhibition with these conclusions. Museums need to make money if they are to survive; with their neoliberal funding models, they are compelled to use whatever rhetorics of persuasion they can to attract visitors and garner good reviews, not only in order to get visitors to spend in the gift shop and on entrance fees, but to use footfall

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and reviews to extract income from funding bodies for future exhibitions. What I am doing with this review is only trying to explain the exhibition's narratives and our investigative journey, not lambast what offered to us a very rewarding learning experience that, in the end, brought us to unexpected conclusions.

Peter Simonson in *Refiguring Mass Communication* playfully traces the origins of "mass communication" to the notion of the communal meal around a table or "massa." *The Man Who Never Lived and Will Never Die* was ultimately an instance of such a meal, a Christmas feast such as commissionaire Peterson enjoyed with the goose he picked up along with the "disreputable hard felt hat" at the corner of Goodge Street and Tottenham Court Road. Whether this particular goose had a Blue Carbuncle inside it rather depends on the box-office and gift-shop takings. I hope for the Museum that it did.

University of Greenwich

WORKS CONSIDERED

The Man Who Never Lived and Will Never Die. Museum of London, 17 October 2014 – 12 April 2015. Curated by Pat Hardy.

Doyle, Arthur Conan. "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle." *Strand* 3 (Jan 1892): 73–85. 1891 Christmas number.

Moore, Rowan. "London: The City that Ate Itself." *Guardian* 28 June 2015. Web. 6 Aug. 2015.

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A WORLD TRANSFORMED BY THE TELEGRAPH

By Aaron Worth

IT IS A WIDELY ACCEPTED TRUISM that it has been the technological developments of our own time, more than any other factor, that have allowed or prodded us to look with fresh eyes at the age of the "Victorian Internet" (as Tom Standage dubbed the electric telegraph in 1998), a period of extraordinary innovation with respect to technologies of communication and perception. That said, old media have featured prominently in both Victorian studies and popular culture for some time now. Influential works of scholarship tracing the impact of nineteenth-century information technologies upon literary production include Laura Otis's *Networking* and Richard Menke's *Telegraphic Realism*; more recent studies have explored the impact of information technologies and systems on Victorian and post-Victorian conceptions of gender, sexuality, and colonialism (for instance Jill Galvan's *The Sympathetic Medium* and the present reviewer's *Imperial Media*). Moreover, such work as the ongoing research project "Scrambled Messages: The Telegraphic Imaginary 1857–1900" at University College London, the Courtauld Institute, and King's College London suggests that this rich vein of scholarship is far from exhausted. Meanwhile, on TV and in the cinema, it seems to be a rare nineteenth-century period piece that misses the opportunity to linger admiringly over the operation of one or more contemporaneous information technologies.

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To this point there has been, however, a relative paucity of museums exploring in any kind of depth or breadth the genealogy of our information age. Most often, perhaps, milestones in the history of communications technology have, until recently at least, been found occupying an isolated niche within general science-and-technology collections. But there are reasons to believe that the history of technology, including information technology, may be coming into its own in this latter domain as well. Certainly the emergence, in the past few decades, of such institutions as the National Media Museum in Yorkshire and the Computer History Museum in Silicon Valley, among others, has been a salutary development (though many if not most such venues have tended to focus on a single technology — the computer, radio, telephone, television, cinema, photography). Elsewhere, popular enthusiasm for Victorian technology has led to productive symbioses such as that between the Charles River Museum of Industry (in Waltham, Massachusetts) and a new steampunk festival.

A yet more promising development, which one can only hope will be a harbinger of things to come, is a permanent installation that opened at London's Science Museum in the fall of 2014. *Information Age: Six Networks that Changed our World* occupies, as the *Guardian* notes, "the UK's first permanent gallery dedicated to the history of information and communications technology" and represents the first step in a thoroughgoing overhaul of the museum (next up are galleries devoted to mathematics and medical history). *Information Age* is altogether more comprehensive in scope, and ambitious in aim, than any previous exhibition, certainly any permanent exhibition, on the subject of which I am aware. Visitors are invited to explore the history of telecommunications through the frame of six rubrics corresponding to iconic systems and/or technologies: "Cable" (telegraph), "Exchange" (telephone), "Broadcast" (television and radio), "Constellation" (satellite networks), "Web" (computer networks), and "Cell" (mobile phones). (According to the museum website, "Her Majesty the Queen opened our new Information Age gallery by sending her first tweet" — a pleasingly postmodern echo, it seems to me, of the Victorian age when epochal moments in the evolution of telecommunications frequently involved messages sent by royals or statesmen) (www.sciencemuseum.org.uk).

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, a well-curated, if less ambitious exhibit recently focused on the social and cultural impact of the electric telegraph in particular. *Wired: A World Transformed by the Telegraph*, on display in MIT's Maihaugen Gallery from September 2014 to June 2015, exhibited a selection of materials from the Peterson Telegraphy Collection, a gift of alumnus Thomas F. Peterson, Jr. MIT has long possessed a substantial collection of materials related to the history of telecommunications, in particular the Vail Collection, which comprises English inventor George Edward Dering's enormous scientific library, donated in 1912 by American Telephone & Telegraph president Theodore Vail (first cousin to Samuel Morse's partner Alfred Vail). The Peterson Collection adds a wealth of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century material on telegraphy to this archival base. It is, indeed, precisely this abundance, relative to the very modest size of the gallery — the impossibility, in other words, of displaying, if not infinite, certainly quite impressive, riches in a little room — which doubtless presents the most glaring challenge to the university's archivists.

In the case of the *Wired* exhibition, the organizers opted for an effective blend of the synchronic and the diachronic: while the gallery's floor and wall cases displayed a variety of materials grouped (roughly) by theme or media type rather than period, panels about the

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Figure 16. "Thanksgiving Greetings." Western Union advertising card. 20th century. Courtesy of the Maihaugen Gallery at MIT Libraries.

perimeter of the gallery offered a more connected, if necessarily much abridged, narrative of the technology's history, using both text and images. Two short (approximately three-minute) videos also accompanied the exhibit, viewable in one corner of the gallery (and still, as of this writing, available online). In the first of these, titled "The Whole Wired World," the collection's organizers, along with *Victorian Soundscapes* author (and MIT faculty member) John Picker, emphasize the transformative impact of telegraphy, focusing particularly on its emergence as a global network of submarine cables. The other video, "The Marconi Legacy," features the daughter of the wireless pioneer, sharing paternal anecdotes.

The gallery's half-dozen display cases contained a little over fifty items in total, an eclectic mix of photographs, telegrams, ephemera, and advertisements. A fascinating example of the latter was a small collection of Western Union advertising cards seeking to open up niche markets — a response to the increasingly crowded, and thus competitive, media ecologies of the early twentieth century. "Let us send that money for you," urged one card, "safely, quickly, easily"; on another, a surprisingly cheerful Pilgrim family offered a polite reminder that "for only 25¢ / You may telegraph THANKSGIVING GREETINGS anywhere" (Figure 16).

Of course, for all its vaunted immateriality (one thinks of Clifford Pyncheon's rhapsodic outburst in *The House of the Seven Gables*: "Is it a fact — or have I dreamt it — that, by means of electricity, the world of matter has become a great nerve?"), telegraphic communication was, as Picker notes in the above-mentioned video, a process with both origin and terminus in the material of paper. Here visitors could see what both ends of the process looked like — there were books of telegraph blanks and stamps, as well as a selection of telegrams ranging from a 1937 "Babygram" to messages sent to MIT from Winston Churchill and Dwight Eisenhower. Reproductions of photographs from the Peterson Collection focused particularly on the telegraph in military contexts: there were nineteenth-century portraits of soldiers in the U.S. Army Signal Corps, images of signalers during World War I, and a 1942 photograph of Tuskeegee cadets being trained in signaling.

Telegraphic fiction (a small but definite subgenre in the age of Morse) was represented by a pair of novels: Ella Cheever Thayer's *Wired Love: A Romance of Dots and Dashes* (1880) and Frank P. Sibley's *All by Wire: A Novel in Telegrams* (1905). As I noted above, the story of telegraphy's impact on literary production has been well explored in recent years by academic writers. But while the jaded Victorianist may no longer be able to call forth much

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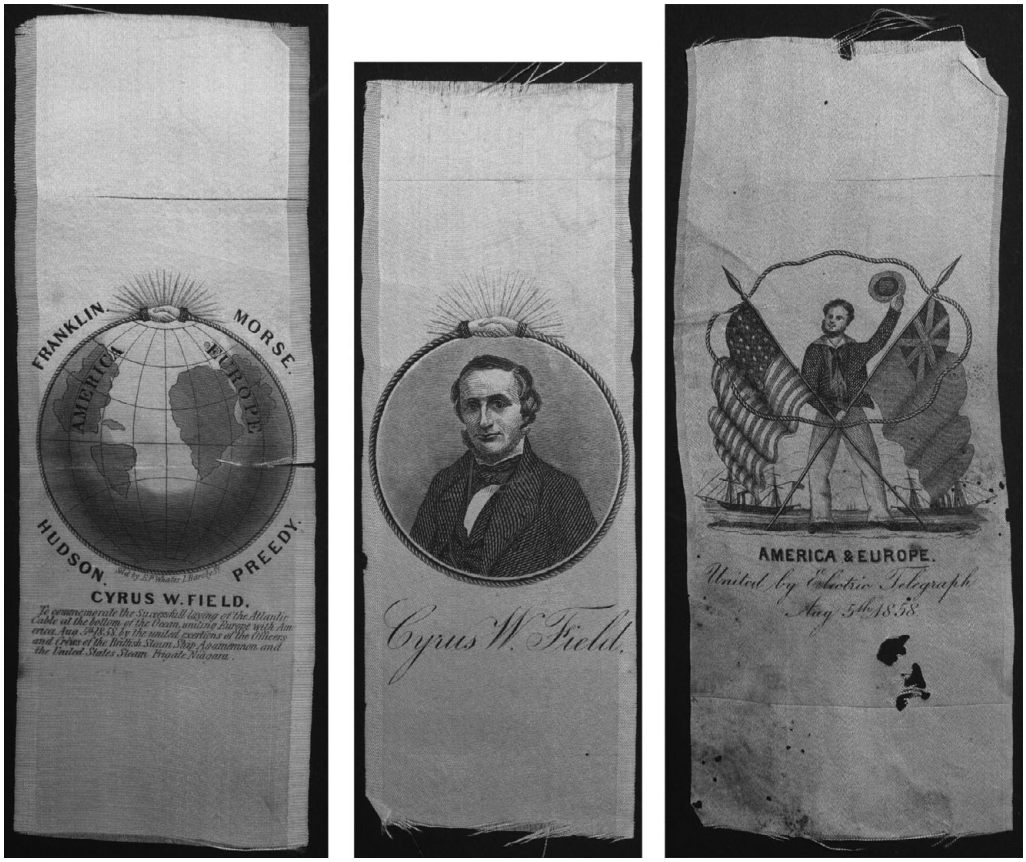
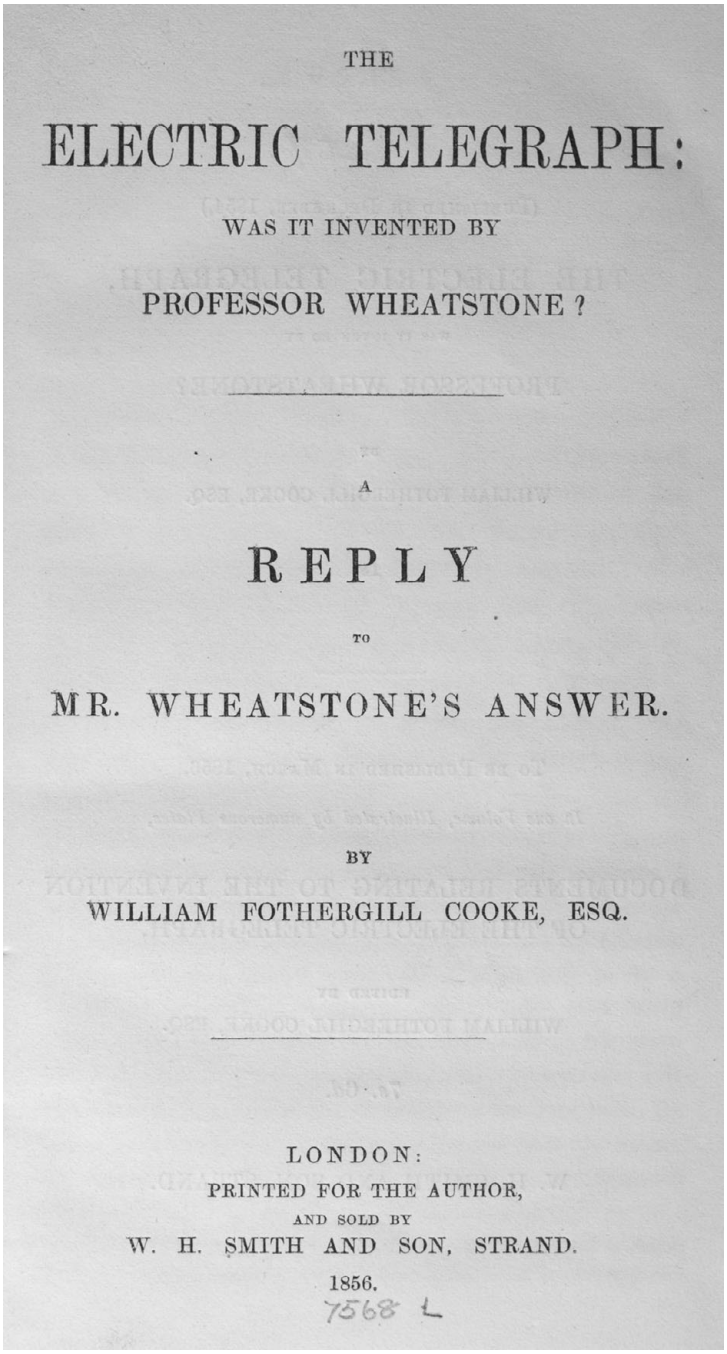


Figure 17. Three silk commemorative ribbons from the first transatlantic cable. Courtesy of the Maihaugen Gallery at MIT Libraries.

of a frisson of enjoyment from such uncannily proleptic-sounding titles as *Wired Love*, a student or casual visitor to the gallery, seeing those words gilt-embossed on the faded cloth cover of a 135-year-old book, may possibly be prodded into a moment's reflection that the information age did not spring into existence overnight.

Other materials illustrated how the expansion of telegraph networks in the later nineteenth century led to increased demand for operators: a four-volume set of textbooks, still in its wooden shipping crate (*A Treatise on Telegraphy, Prepared for Students of the International Correspondence Schools*); and a teaching model of a telegraph constructed for use by MIT students taking the "Methods in Telegraphy" class in the 1890s. Miscellaneous items of interest included a trio of illustrated silk ribbons commemorating the laying of the first, short-lived, transatlantic cable and an early twentieth-century Western Union delivery boy mask which demonstrated the iconic status of the figure in American culture at that time (Figure 17).

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THE

ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH:

WAS IT INVENTED BY

PROFESSOR WHEATSTONE?

A

REPLY

TO

MR. WHEATSTONE'S ANSWER.

BY

WILLIAM FOTHERGILL COOKE, ESQ.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,
AND SOLD BY
W. H. SMITH AND SON, STRAND.
1856.
7568 L

Figure 18. W. F. Cooke, *A Reply to Mr. Wheatstone's Answer*. London, 1856. Courtesy of the Maihaugen Gallery at MIT Libraries.

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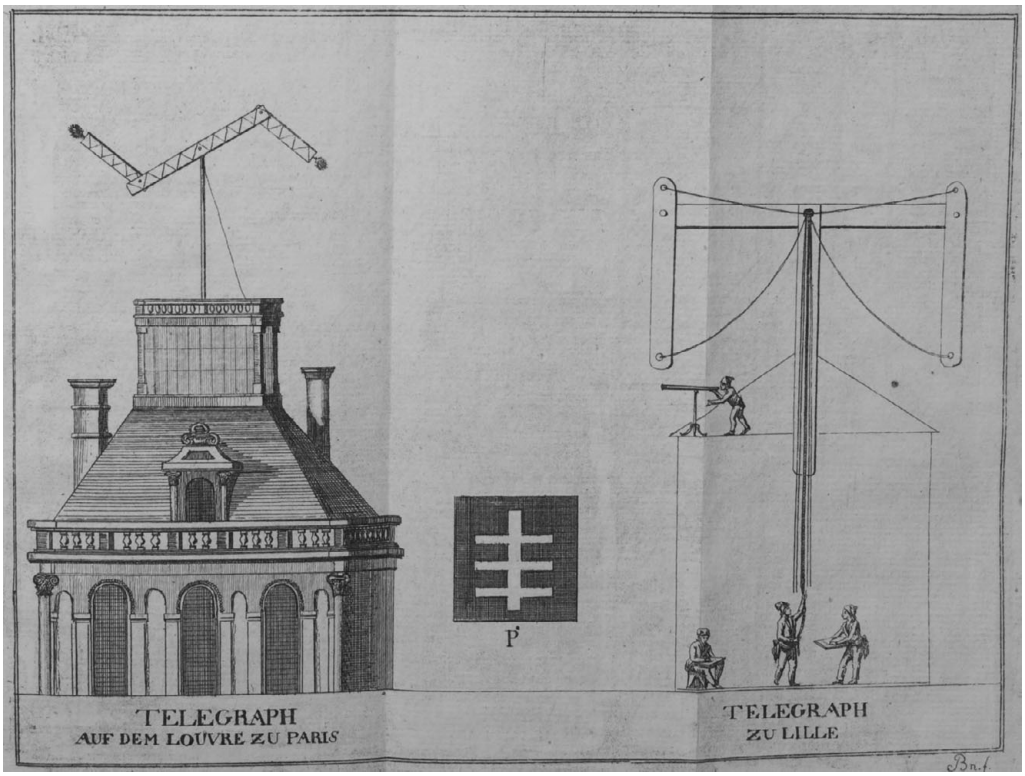


Figure 19. J. L. Böckmann, *Versuch ueber Telegraphic und Telegraphen*. Carlsruhe, 1794. Courtesy of the Maihaugen Gallery at MIT Libraries.

While the materials in *Wired* were primarily American, there were cosmopolitan aspects to the exhibit as well, as in a wall case containing printed materials: there texts by the American Alfred Vail (*The American Electro Magnetic Telegraph* [1845]) and the Englishman William Fothergill Cooke (*A Reply to Mr. Wheatstone's Answer* [1856]) shared space with forward-looking works by a pair of Germans from the age of Claude Chappe (Johann Lorenz Böckmann and Johann Andreas Benignus Bergsträsser) (Figures 18 and 19).

The exhibition's American orientation, reflecting both the particular strengths of the collection and, no doubt, a sense of audience, is certainly understandable — though visitors with Anglocentric biases of their own will likely have noted some of the omissions which a chiefly US-centered perspective risks engendering: the way, for instance, that allusions to submarine telegraphy can largely ignore the technology's vital role in imperial expansion and administration — a relationship which the historian of technology Daniel Headrick explored a generation ago (*The Tools of Empire*). For Britons, indeed, media technologies such as the telegraph were crucial to their very conceptualization of imperial systems — as the fiction of such writers as Kipling, Haggard, and H. G. Wells demonstrates (*Imperial Media*). Accordingly, visitors interested in this symbiosis might naturally have wished to see

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more of the Peterson and Vail collections' holdings relating to empire represented here. Some materials not on display include: a postcard depicting the construction of the Cape to Cairo telegraph, a Telegrapher's Service Book from Calcutta, and a Home Office announcement to a Postal Service employee about to receive an Imperial Service Medal (I am grateful to Program Manager for Rare Books Stephen Skuce for his help in locating these items).

Given the high degree of technological-historical illiteracy (if that is the right way to put it) one sees today — the iPhone, from the perspective of my students at any rate, seems to have been dropped from the heavens — even modest interventions can be valuable. The *Wired* exhibit sought to introduce visitors to the crucial precursor technology of our media-saturated age and to give some sense of its powerfully transformative effects on culture. This its well-chosen, attractively organized, and effectively glossed collection of period artifacts did very well.

The telegraph is, of course, only one of a number of communications technologies (the telephone is another famous example) whose origins are tinged with controversy, with multiple inventors trading warring claims of priority. In the case of the telegraph, the best-known figures involved were Samuel Morse and, across the pond, Charles Wheatstone and William Fothergill Cooke. The elegance and efficiency of Morse's system ensured that the development of the information age's ur-technology would be forever associated with an American. When it comes to contemporary exhibitions of the revolution wrought by that technology, however, the British would seem to have taken an early lead. It is to be hoped that in the near future we will see the establishment of an American counterpart to *Information Age*: a permanent exhibition, or even museum, devoted to the communications revolution launched during the Victorian age in all its multifariousness. I can think of few institutions better equipped to take on such a challenge than MIT. *Wired* provided visitors with a valuable introduction to the cultural impact of the electric telegraph. It also led this reviewer to imagine what the future might bring.

Boston University

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DEATH BECOMES HER: A CENTURY OF MOURNING ATTIRE

By Deborah Lutz

SOME FOLKLORISTS TRACE THE USE of black cloth in mourning to a belief that malignant spirits, released when death was present, needed repelling with non-reflective surfaces (Richardson 27). Glimmering materials such as mirrors and satin could be inhabited, whereas matte fields sent the spirit on its way, out an open window. In the rule-bound world of nineteenth-century mourning attire, the duller the fabric the more serious the mourning expressed, a fact immediately apparent in the dresses displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Death Becomes Her: A Century of Mourning Attire*. Essential to mourning wear was cloth made to lack any shine or gleam. Crape, a crimped, lusterless silk gauze, and bombazine or parramatta (a type of cheap bombazine), woven with a silk warp and a worsted weft, were the most common materials for first-stage mourning (Figure 20). The curators of the exhibition — Harold Koda, Curator in Charge of The Costume Institute, and Jessica Regan, Assistant Curator — explain the more widely accepted reason for the use of these unflattering effects. The grieving woman — especially if she were mourning for her husband — was meant to dress in nun-like simplicity, in deliberately unattractive "widow's weeds." But the hint of the fairy or folktale appears again in the length of the first stage of mourning for widows, which traditionally lasted a year and a day — also the time period for some spells.

As soon as the visitor entered the Anna Wintour Costume Center — where funereal music played and the lights were low (probably to protect the fabrics, but it felt atmospherically somber) — she was reminded that the outward show of mourning in the nineteenth century was largely women's work. Men changed their dress only in minor ways when someone close to them died and, not surprisingly, the show featured only a few men's mourning costumes (distinguished primarily by armbands and hatbands of ribbon made from silk grosgrain — a lusterless, corded fabric). The exhibition represented the full range of types of women's mourning dress, including a brown glazed cotton plain weave gown that a lower middle-class woman might have worn (although there were no examples of working-class mourning, presumably because few would have survived). Deep mourning crape, bombazine, and heavy veils — generally worn for the first year and a half by widows — were stiffened, resulting in a coarse and scratchy textile against the skin. Standing near these dresses, the viewer could feel how uncomfortable and hot such clothing would be to don — what a punishing experience the first stage of mourning must have been for women, almost a kind of self-flagellation. Early mourning for middle and upper-class women also involved isolation from the social world outside of the home. In contrast, the half-mourning gowns, worn by widows during the last half of the second year after a husband's death and usually made of softer silks or other fabrics, in black-and-white, gray, violet, mauve, pansy, or lilac and sometimes with glittering beads or sequins, would be almost joyful to wear. Yet, the stringent guidelines for mourning must be understood in the context of actual practice. Pat Jalland explores the

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Figure 20. American mourning dress of crape, 1870–72. Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

fact that individuals treated mourning strictures as flexible, able to be shifted according to particular needs and situations, a historical specificity not fully explored in the exhibition (303–04).

Through the study of nineteenth-century mourning dress, one can follow the histories of textile and fashion. The black dye on veils had poisonous qualities, according to one of many quotes projected on the walls of the exhibition, and led to respiratory and skin ailments for the frequent wearer. The fade of the dye worked as a marker of class: higher quality fabric and dye meant a dress kept its dark tint and didn't wash out to blue or rusty brown. The wall texts discussed at length the weave structures and finishing techniques used to achieve the dull matte of first mourning. Mourning wear generally followed fashion trends, so one could cast one's eye around the room at the chronological arrangement of the exhibition,

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which began in 1815 and ended in 1915, and mark the changes in silhouettes from wide to more narrow skirts, the movement of the waistlines, and the shifting of sleeve types and hem lengths over the decades. The growing circulation of fashion magazines offering guidance to grievers and the increased mechanization of the textile industry brought a wider demand for mourning clothes by mid-century and larger, more ostentatious shops to purchase mourning wear, such as Jay's of London and Besson and Son's Mourning Store of Philadelphia, both establishments considered in the show.

Many grand outfits worn by the wealthy and titled stood out at the exhibition, such as an evening dress of black moiré trimmed with lace and jet suitable for the period of General Mourning following the death of Prince Albert in 1861. Two lovely mauve and purple frocks made by French designers and worn by Queen Alexandria the year following Queen Victoria's death in 1901 were alive with sequins. A black silk taffeta and crape evening dress worn by Queen Victoria in the 1890s (Figure 21) evoked both her extended mourning for Prince Albert and the short, stout stature of her later years. Yet the few examples of more humble, homemade productions had an extra poignancy. A rough American gown from the 1860s of cotton gauze and glazed cotton plain weave had faded to brown. The author of the wall text quoted the diary of one Catherine Ann Edmondston (1823–1875) of North Carolina:

> Have been all this week in a sad task making up my mourning for my dear Papa & today for the first time put it on. The sight of this black dress brings the cause why I wear it more fully to my mind, if possible brings him more vividly before me.

Many women in the nineteenth century repurposed clothes for mourning (none of the dresses in the show were obviously repurposed, although this may be a part of their history now lost), and Lou Taylor discusses the practice by women of modest means of dyeing colored dresses and accessories black and of storing mourning clothes until they would be needed again for future deaths (126). To offer one of many literary examples, when Sir Pitt Crawley dies in *Vanity Fair*, Becky Sharp is found "busy cutting, ripping, snipping, and tearing all sorts of black stuffs available for the melancholy occasion" (476), an example of what Hamlet laments in the lines about the "trappings and the suits of woe." Jalland also explores how some nineteenth-century women borrowed mourning dresses from friends or relatives or altered whatever they could find in order to save on costs (303–04). Still, mourning and crape manufacturers helped spread the belief that it was unlucky to store the fabrics in the house, which led many women to purchase new mourning fabrics rather than reusing them (Jalland 301).

Some of the more vivid accessories of mourning dress did not appear in the Met show, to my disappointment. For instance, underwear and handkerchiefs were often adapted for periods of grieving. Black ribbon was added to plain white chemises, underpetticoats, and drawers, and handkerchiefs gained black borders (Taylor 136). The Met exhibition did display a few mourning bonnets in a glass case, including a fantastical creation with a black raven emerging from its top, with real feathers and glass eyes. I also regretted the lack of mourning caps, such as the Mary Stuart style with a V-point over the forehead. Queen Victoria re-popularized this sort of headgear after Albert's death, modeling hers from paintings of the widowed Mary Queen of Scots (Taylor 138).

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Figure 21. Queen Victoria's mourning dress, 1894–95. Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

While there were a few British and French examples of mourning dress, the Met show focused on America. This was disappointing for this Victorianist, although the American history of mourning varies from the British in fascinating ways. Not surprisingly, the Civil War had a great impact. Many women drastically shortened their mourning periods, since it seemed impossible to mourn for all of the dead, all of the time. However, other women felt something like the opposite. One Amelia Jane Carley (1844–1892) wore a wedding dress, featured in the exhibition, made of gray silk wool poplin with black cording and fringe when she married William Edward Chess (1842–1926) in 1868. While she hadn't lost any family during the war, Carley felt that shades of half mourning showed respect for the widespread losses.

As the show's title indicates, a widow in mourning could be an object of fascination for men, signaling a woman who was both sexually experienced and available, or "dangerously

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independent and alluring" as the wall text had it. A set of 1900–1901 satirical illustrations from *LIFE* magazine, called "A Widow and her Friends," details the travails of a beautiful young widow who is desired by many men and, for this reason, is suspected and disliked by women. So hounded is she by this unwanted attention, she enters a convent, only to attract the clergymen.

A small collection of objects was of special interest to me, and I wished there had been many more. The few pieces of mourning jewelry included seemed to be there merely to fill out the show. Yet, as an essential part of mourning attire, such jewelry deserves a central role in any history of the outward show of sorrow. Moreover, unlike black clothing, these objects have a greater specificity, representing the person being grieved (and the griever and her grief) through tomb-like inscriptions and curls of hair, often gleaned from the corpse. Many mourning jewels followed the dictates of dress and were thus made from materials with non-reflective patinas, like jet and bog oak. Gold and silver were enameled black. One mourning locket with hair at the show had a "CR" on the front and, engraved on the reverse, "In memory of 17 May 1859." This is presumably when CR died, but one wonders: perhaps it was the day the wearer of the locket met the mourned CR? A brooch from the 1850s has this inscription on the back: "Chas. T. Evans, / Obt. at sea, / Sept. 20th 1852 / AE 39 yrs." Mourning jewelry is narrative in a way that clothing can rarely — if ever — be. In Gaskell's *My Lady Ludlow*, a character who looks through the objects left behind by the dead finds their locks of hair the most poignant since they are "the very things themselves": "a part of some beloved body which she might never touch and caress again, but which lay beneath the turf, all faded and disfigured, except, perhaps, the very hair, from which the lock she held had been dissevered" (17).

Grouped with the jewelry were a small number of pictorial representations of mourning or absence. Once again, I wished there had been more of these, as they fascinated endlessly. An album of *cartes de visite* lay open to a page showing Princess Alice dressed in mourning after her grandmother's death. A circa 1850 postmortem daguerreotype by Alphonse Le Blondel of a child could be viewed by raising a black curtain. The *Portrait of Catherine Lorillard* (circa 1810), the most memorable and stirring of these pieces, depicted the daughter of the New York City tobacco magnate Peter A. Lorillard, who died in her teens of cholera. A needlework mourning picture painted in oil on silk and embellished with silk threads, the portrait features a drape over her head symbolizing death. While the face and neck were painted by a professional, her dress and the drapery surrounding her were probably embroidered by one of her female relatives. Like mourning jewelry, this work felt more imbued with memories and keen sorrow than the clothing that filled most of the exhibition.

In sum, I was left thinking of Tennyson's lines from *In Memoriam*:

> In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,
> Like coarsest clothes against the cold;
> But the large grief which these enfold
> Is given in outline and no more. (5. 9–12)

University of Louisville

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