

# **Love, Jealousy, and Genre Interplay in *Great Expectations* and *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel***

**Martin Fashbaugh**

**Department of English  
Black Hills State University  
Spearfish, SD 57799  
[Martin.Fashbaugh@bhsu.edu](mailto:Martin.Fashbaugh@bhsu.edu)**

In Chapter 44 of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Estella informs the protagonist Pip that she is engaged to the snobbish Bentley Drummle, leaving Pip with nothing to lose but to confess unreservedly his long-harbored love for her:

You are part of my existence, part of myself. You have been in every line I have ever read, since I first came here. You have been in every prospect I have ever seen since—on the river, in the darkness, in the wind, in the woods, in the sea, in the streets. You have been the embodiment of every graceful fancy that my mind has ever been acquainted with. The stones of which the strongest London buildings are made, are not more real, or more impossible to be displayed by your hands, than your presence and influence have been to me, there, and everywhere, and will be. (335)

The above dramatic expression of romantic love helps illustrate the first part my argument, which is that many nineteenth-century British novelists used jealousy to facilitate interplay between *narrative* and *poetic* discourse. By *narrative* discourse, I mean the temporal, contingent series of events constituting plot and story, and by *poetic* discourse I am referring to Michael Riffaterre's definition: "the equivalence established between a word and a text, or a text and another text" (19). In other words, *poetic* discourse alludes to contexts beyond the periphery of the temporal, narrative scene.

In the above passage, Pip prefers reveling in the feelings evoked by the sign rather than directly pursuing his beloved, which would require a direct plea for Estella's love and her reconsideration of her engagement to Drummle. At this particular

moment, he is privileging vertical, poetic flight over narrative's grounded path. Of course, we can and should argue that this lyrical language is motivated partly by Pip's ultimate narrative aims of appropriation, for the enticing allurement of Pip's poetic expression has the potential to be an effective, pathos-driven means of convincing Estella to break off her engagement with Drummle in favor of him. However, even if he would fail to use poetic language to convince her to leave Drummle, the speech is an aesthetic means of managing his jealousy and resentment. By ingratiating himself in the imaginative sensations induced by the signs he designates for Estella, he can potentially purge himself of some of the pent-up desire he has for her. Moreover, the hyperbolic nature of his declaration of love—as exemplified in the claim that his imaginative world is as real as the “stones of which the strongest London buildings are made”—undermines the notion that his happiness is dependent on a romantic relationship with Estella. Pip confesses in the passage that his imaginative reveries of her can bring him as much pleasure (if not more) as a real relationship. He gains pleasure in designating Estella as a sacred object who is only obtainable through the many signs of her he can conjure up—“on the river, in the darkness, in the wind, in the woods, in the sea, in the streets.”

What Pip does not admit is that his poetic reverie is derived mimetically from Drummle and other rivals; he likes to think that his love is not contingent on resentment. When we take into consideration the fact that Pip is expressing his love for Estella at a moment when he has lost her to someone else, we can see how such a lyrical passage contextualized within a scene of mimetic rivalry challenges the Romantic belief that sexual desire can be autonomous, separate from a mimetic sphere of influence. As René Girard would contend, Pip at this moment resembles a Romanticist or Symbolist, both of whom Girard claims want “a transfiguring desire which is completely spontaneous,” and do “not want to hear any talk about the other” (39). Pip seems compelled to deny that her desirability in the eyes of other men has some effect on his high estimation of her, even though he admits earlier, while reflecting on Estella's time spent in London at the Brandley home, that “[s]he had admirers without end” (281). In actuality, Pip's poetic expression of love for Estella—that she is part of himself, the “embodiment” of “every graceful fancy” he has entertained—occurs at a mimetic crisis, when he realizes that his opportunity for marrying his beloved has been temporarily or permanently lost due to the fact that she is engaged to someone else. The resentment and jealousy generated from a heightened awareness of Estella's inaccessibility makes her more desirable and more likely to make Pip's estimation of her importance objectively inaccurate. Considering the friendships he establishes over the course of the novel—such as that with Herbert Pocket and Wemmick—and his monetary good fortune that Magwitch has given him, we are not led to think that Estella is always the focal point in Pip's line of vision within the many mimetic, triangular scenes in which he is situated. It is at this crisis point of mimetic rivalry with Drummle, when Pip realizes

that Estella has chosen his rival, that her stock rises so high that all other pursuits and relationships seem worthless. In much the same way that human jealousy and envy work in the marketplace to inflate the value of commodities, Pip's jealousy inflates Estella's value.

Eric Gans provides a theoretical framework for understanding the causality and mechanisms for such poetic inflation. Gans argues that the language of representation of the object occurs when a subject, for whatever reason, either cannot or decides not to pursue the object, which is positioned at the center of mimetic circle, recreating the "originary scene" upon which language originated. In an effort to defer violence, the subject makes the decision to abort the appropriation of the object:

The center of the circle appears to represent a repellent, a secret force that prevents its occupation by the members of the group that converts the gesture of appropriation into a gesture of designation, that is into an ostensive sign. Thus the sign arises as an *aborted gesture of appropriation* that comes to designate the object rather than attempting to capture it. The sign is an economical substitute for its inaccessible referent. (*Originary Thinking* 9)

The object for a desiring subject is at the center, and this conceptualization helps us understand why Pip claims Estella's aura is present in every activity in which he is engaged. We can see how Pip's lyrical proclamation of totalizing love for her creates space where temporal life is at the periphery and the sacred atemporal is at the unobtainable center. To simulate the act of appropriation, Pip lyrically converts the "repellant" Estella into a multitude of memorialized, ostensive signs of designation, and these signs are willfully placed as substitutes for the unreachable referent. Through the rendering of signs iterated as the *aborted gesture of appropriation*, a lyrical chronotope of ideal space-time beyond the temporal, diegetic space of narrative-fiction is created. The signs help him obtain the poetic verticality of transcendence over the immanent mimetic crisis constituting the narrative. Therefore, the narrative-poetic interplay is a consequence of the subject vacillating toward and away from the desired object; narrative discourse is the move toward the center of the circle where the desire object lies, and poetic discourse is the movement away from the center. Jealousy is the principal emotion facilitating this interplay because the jealous subject is clearly placed in a predicament of having to choose between narrative attempts at appropriation and lyrical signification.

## II

The second part of my argument is that the vacillations a jealous subject experiences within a novel like *Great Expectations* shed some light on competing influences of which nineteenth-century British writers were particularly aware. These two influences were the literary marketplace and its antithetical scene of “high art.” While straight-forward narrative discourse satisfies the desires of an ever-expanding bourgeois readership, therefore helping the novelist achieve the cultural and economic capital associated with popular art, poetic discourse represents the scene of high art. Attention paid to jealousy and the novel provides a fresh outlook on how Victorian novelists during the latter half of the nineteenth century were instrumental in changing the British novel’s reputation as popular literature to that of serious literature. Since Jay Clayton’s *Romantic Vision and the Novel*, critics have provided little attention to poetic discourse’s contribution to alterations in the British realist novel’s structure and theme. George Levine’s apt and nuanced understanding of realism unintentionally goes a long way in explaining why poetic discourse sometimes appears in realist fiction: “Traditionally realism is associated with determinism. The anti-romance is the denial of the imagination’s power to control circumstance. And thus the characteristic subject of realistic fiction is the contest between dream and reality; the characteristic progress, disenchantment” (56). Levine’s conception of realism as featuring the “contest between dream and reality” helps explain why the consistent blending of poetic and narrative discourses would be present in a realist novel, for this “contest” can be found at the intersection of poetic and narrative discourses.

But not all works of realism aim to develop such a stark contrast between one’s imaginative vision and the external world. How can a novel that does not invest much energy in developing the imaginative lives of the characters and one that clearly does both be considered works of realism? The answer is that they share the idea that realism places emphasis on the cultural-political institutional controls on the individual. While one type of realist novel takes this fact for granted and focuses almost entirely on a character’s external behavior, another type at least presents us with glimpses into the character’s internal world as he or she fights the losing battle with determinist social forces. The latter type of realism is as much internal as it is external. However, it is this very attention directed toward the imaginative life of the subject that threatens to test the ideological limits of realist fiction because the project of illuminating the nature of this contest between dream and reality subverts realist objectivism.

A novelist’s motivation for such subversion was to achieve a balance between, to borrow Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, *heteronomous* and *autonomous* principles of literary production.<sup>(1)</sup> Out of respect for the heteronomous principle, artists are

supposed to produce art for the sake of earning monetary and cultural capital. Victorian novelists could use professional and sexual jealousy to help develop plots from which middle-class themes such as the dream of upward mobility (like Pip's aspiration to be a gentleman), domestic tensions between men and women, moral issues related to sexual behavior, and problems associated with masculine identity emerge and are examined. The autonomous principle, on the other hand, represents the notion that good art is rendered without concern for its popularity in the marketplace and temporal themes associated with contemporary life, that what matters is its aesthetic quality.

Before discussing novels that aim for aesthetic literariness (while still exhibiting a conscious attempt at market appeal), let us first look at two novels that are noticeably market-driven in order to make clear how the jealous plot is naturally associated with popular, domestic topics. It is important to pursue this tangent in order to show jealousy as situated at the intersection of two distinctive types of realism, both the psychological kind containing a strong poetic undercurrent and the more mimetic, domestic variety affiliated with novels with broader commercial appeal and a more direct connection with domestic and middle-class themes.

Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* depends on the jealous actions of the protagonist Lady Isobel Vane, who has an adulterous affair with the attractive and rakish Captain Francis Levison because he deceives her into believing her husband, Archibald Carlyle, is having an affair with Barbara Hare. After becoming pregnant illegitimately, she leaves the East Lynne estate only to come back later (unrecognizable to Archibald because a railroad accident greatly alters her appearance) to work as a governess so that she can be close to her children. Having discovered her ex-husband has married Barbara, Lady Isobel's desire for Archibald, which is first awakened out of her suspicions of Barbara before her affair with Levison, is intensified now that his love is inaccessible. In *East Lynne*, jealousy appears unambiguously as a product of mimetic desire and is almost exclusively used as a narrative device to advance the plot. Wood's novel uses the jealous circumstance to depict the anxieties of middle-class audiences, who generally believed the preservation of the social order relied on domestic stability.

Anthony Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right* takes a more critical view of the objectification of women than *East Lynne* by showing its debilitating effects on men who are obsessed with maintaining complete control over the terms of their relationships with women. In the character of Louis Trevelyan, Trollope uses male jealousy to expose the negative consequences of a patriarchal order that treats women as property. The jealous sufferer, Louis, essentially dies from morbid jealousy, wasting away in isolation in the English and Italian countryside because his wife Emily refuses to end her acquaintanceship with an old family friend, Colonel

Osborne. Both Emily's compassion for her husband during his bout of insanity and her refusal to give in to his irrational demand make her an honorable and empowering character. Louis's mental illness draws attention to the great irony of the patriarchal order, which is that the unnatural male hubris it enforces has the potential to be as psychologically damaging for men as it is oppressive for women.

As these brief plot summaries illustrate, Wood and Trollope respectively capitalize on the jealous plot to create a domestic drama that raises issues especially interesting to a popular readership. However, these texts are limited in the extent to which they create psychological depth and appeal to literary critics' sensibilities. The work of helping readers become intimately acquainted with a character rather than caught up almost exclusively in the external circumstances of mimetic conflict requires developing a character's internal life through poetic discourse. Naturally, focusing on the circumstances reiterates the ideological position that mimetically-realistic Victorian novels were known for promoting, which was the suppression of individual expression. As Nancy Armstrong argues, these kinds of novels "make the turn against expressive individualism a mandatory component of the subject's growth and development" (8). However, and as Armstrong points out, there is an important irony that occurs when authors switch from using this idea as a principle for limiting their own expressive individualism in plot-driven realist fiction to staging it thematically in their work. Armstrong notes that the creation and subsequent disciplining of the individual subject that occurs in novels of the second-half of the nineteenth century "requires the novel offer an interiority in excess of the social position that individual is supposed to occupy" (8). Armstrong is bringing to light a paradox that exists in novels aiming to stage rather than simply follow the "turn against expressive individualism," which is that to do so requires the production of an aesthetic excess of interiority that the narrative discourse threatens to suppress. It is this excess of interiority that requires the development of poetic discourse and, therefore, the strategic employment of the autonomous principle of literary production. Applying the autonomous principle to literary production means that a strong, poetic undercurrent must form so that the text can refer to circumstances beyond its historical situation.

When the work could somewhat resist certain restrictions of periodization, it increased its potential to transcend the limits of mimetic, domestic realism that had been holding the novel back from consideration as serious literature. Patrick Brantlinger makes note of the "inferiority complex" that haunted the novel throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: "As a genre, the modern novel was born with an inferiority complex: it wasn't classical, it wasn't poetry, and it wasn't history" (3). With a stronger lyrical discourse it still is not classical, poetry, or history, but it can acquire recognition as a genre that is able to, like Romantic lyric poetry and other fine arts, present itself as a messenger of higher truths and draw

conspicuous attention to the novel's potential for genre blending.

Gans helps us understand why this move to the lyric is so crucial in the novelist's endeavor to be considered a serious author of high art. As mentioned before, for Gans the aesthetic is dependent on the *aborted gesture of appropriation*, on the subject's decision to defer desire through the production of the lyrical sign of the desired object, and it is this move in a work of literature that exhibits the difference between "art" and "entertainment." The division between high and popular art "reflects a tension internal" to the mimetic scene of triangular desire: "In the context of the contemplation of the central object in the scene, the moment of art looks back to the renunciation of appetite implicit in the sign, whereas that of entertainment looks forward to the appetitive satisfaction of the communal feast that will follow" (*End of Culture* 171-72). Art features the renunciation of appetite and the deferral of desire, while entertainment privileges appetitive fulfillment. Art, rather than entertainment, prefers the abandonment of the act of acquiring the object in favor of the creative act of representing it.

If we were to use Gans's dichotomy of high vs. popular art when taking into account the fact that the Victorian domestic novel is known for its marriage plot, we may be initially inclined to consider it primarily as entertainment and only secondarily as art, since marriage is the epitome of appetitive satisfaction. However, the degree to which a novel containing a domestic narrative can be considered popular art (or entertainment) varies according to the extent to which the narrative delays such satisfaction. When poetic discourse enables a narrative to transcend chronology and temporality, there is the opportunity for aesthetic deferral and focus on the sign. As D. A. Miller argues in *Narrative and its Discontents*, while many nineteenth-century novels "'build' toward closure, . . . they are never fully or finally governed by it" (xiv). Miller observes that novels focused on the "obsessions" and "idiosyncrasies" of character establish to a great degree independence from the governance of closure: "The text of obsession or idiosyncrasy is intrinsically interminable; as it can never be properly concluded, it can only be arbitrarily abandoned" (41). If what Gans calls the "entertainment" of appetitive satisfaction (marriage) is suppressed by what Miller calls "idiosyncratic" acts of deferral, then we are more likely to consider the text as "high" rather than "popular" art.

It is worth pointing out that jealous subjects are particularly instrumental in both building and deferring desire because they are frequently placed in the position of having to vacillate between taking actions toward appetitive satisfaction and finding ways to defer such satisfaction because of the inaccessibility of the desired object. The jealous subject is frequently searching for creative ways to defer resentment<sup>(2)</sup> by expressing desire for it, and this deferral is represented lyrically rather than through action, forming a poetic discourse that transgresses the temporal

conditions of plot and facilitating poetic-fictional interplay. As a consequence of using the jealous subject to facilitate this interplay, novelists were able to create metafictional passages representative of the author's own precarious, indecisive position in the literary marketplace. Because jealous characters like Pip pivot from acts of appropriation to the imaginative acts of deferral (deferral by designating signs of the aborted gesture of appropriation), they are ideal subjects for representing the Victorian novelist pivoting between the heteronomous principle of meeting the market demand for developing plausible plots within realistic settings and ignoring that demand in favor of lyrical adornment.

### III

There is perhaps not a clearer illustration of jealousy's usefulness in creating and facilitating interplay between poetic and narrative discourses than George Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. The illustration is a self-conscious one, drawing attention to the novelist's own deliberations between autonomous and heteronomous principles of literary production. Because his wife abandoned him for an adulterous relationship with his longtime friend and poet, Denzil Somers, Sir Austin harbors the sexual jealousy and resentment that helps shape his misogynist views of women and low estimation of poets. One of the ways his jealousy manifests itself is in the pedagogical methods he employs in rearing and educating his son Richard. The young Feverel matriculates within a very structured environment that is organized by an antiquated system designed to raise him in accordance with aristocratic principles while protecting him from the perceived immoral influences outside the cloistered world of Raynham. Sir Austin is particularly adamant about shielding Richard from romantic engagements with women until he is twenty-five years old, at which time the Baronet will find him someone to marry. Accompanying the prohibition on sexual relationships is the prohibition on poetry writing. As Sir Austin notes, "No Feverel has ever written Poetry" (130-31).

If his father was his only mediator, Richard could perhaps be content with his father's prohibitions on poetry and romance, but other mediators emerge when he attends school, and, consequently, Richard soon becomes enamored of other pursuits. Richard's main mediating rival is Ralph Morton, who is superior to Richard in sports, excelling in cricket, swimming, running, and jumping. He is "a match for Richard in numerous promising qualities, comprising the noble science fisticuffs" (126). Richard's privileged upbringing stirs feelings of entitlement that make it difficult for him to adjust to social circumstances that challenge such feelings. The threat to his supremacy leads to resentment and jealousy, and he frequently manages these feelings through negative assessments of the rival's personality: "Young Ralph was a lively talker: therefore, argued Richard's vanity, he had no intellect. He was affable; therefore he was frivolous. The women liked him: therefore

he was a butterfly. In fine, young Ralph was popular, and our superb Prince, denied the privilege of despising, ended by detesting him" (126). In an attempt to affirm that Ralph's athletic feats and sexual attraction cover up intellectual weaknesses, the young Feverel exhibits snobbery stereotypically associated with aristocrats.

Despite his father's heavy-handed authority and Richard's awareness of the ledger of athletic losses to Ralph, he cannot resist challenging Ralph to a swimming race across the width of the Thames. Richard's inevitable defeat becomes the impetus for Richard to retire from athletic competitions with Ralph. The circumstances surrounding Richard's loss commence a new period in Richard's adolescence, one in which his attention is redirected. He comically blames the loss on Lady Blandish's infamous Bonnet, which infatuates him as he stands waiting for the starter's gun to begin the race while Blandish sits in the stands among a crowd of onlookers. The Bonnet's splendor distracts Richard enough to get him off to a slow start from which he never recovers. Richard therefore comes to the conclusion that "[i]t was the Bonnet [that] had beaten him, not Ralph . . . the Bonnet was his dear, detestable enemy" (128). While the Bonnet serves as the scapegoat for his loss, it also directs his attention to the scene of romance, serving as the sign of two unobtainable desired pursuits: consummated love and athletic victory.

And now he progressed from mood to mood, his ambition turned towards a field where Ralph could not rival him, where the Bonnet was etherealized, and reigned glorious mistress. A check to the pride of a boy will frequently divert him to the path where lie his subtlest powers. Richard gave up his companions, servile, or antagonist: he relinquished the material world to young Ralph, and retired into himself, where he was growing to be lord of kingdoms: where Beauty was his Handmaid, and History his Minister, and Time his ancient Harper, and sweet Romance his bride: Where he walked in a realm vaster and more gorgeous than the great Orient, peopled with the heroes that have been. (128)

The swimming race becomes Richard's *originary event* upon which he has declared a new object in his life to be sacred. His escapist, romantic imagination conjures up scenes directly related to romantic desire but also indirectly related to his failed quests at athletic accomplishment. To strengthen an ego that has been damaged by another loss to his rival, Richard, like Pip in *Great Expectations*, turns to his imagination, lyrically recovering the cumulative pride he lost to Ralph over a span of many competitions. The Bonnet is both the object anchoring him to the temporal scene and the muse inspiring him to dream of a world beyond the scene.

The atemporal sphere where Ralph is not around to rival him epitomizes Girard's

point that the concept of autonomous desire emanates from the refusal to admit that desire is mimetically derived from the mediating rival. However, in Richard's mind a new order is reformulated through a lyrically-rendered, hermetically sealed world of aesthetic pleasure. By contextualizing such discourse within a narrative scene of loss, Meredith is showing how poetic idealization is connected to resentment and jealousy. Additionally, the scene is metafictional in that it self-consciously demonstrates Meredith's process of negotiating between the demands of the literary market, which asks for domestic fiction focusing on the external rather than internal affairs of the individual, and the aesthetic literary standards drawn up by the literary-critical establishment. By noticeably and somewhat crudely (thus the comical effect Meredith is known for producing) integrating the lyrical discourse within the context of domestic fiction, Meredith finds a "middle way" rather than having to choose between the principles of autonomy and heteronomy.

While the Bonnet is an ideal poetic muse, Richard must unfortunately suppress his inclination to write because of his father's oppressive, mimetically-influential desires. As a young man whose father has ordered him to remain a virgin and refrain from writing poetry, Richard is incapable of creating something tangible out of his sexual desire. However, his lyrical, anti-narrative impulse toward poetic expression is reincorporated into another narrative sequence of events, thanks again to Ralph's intervention. After a day of exercise, Richard retires to his room, where he begins to dream of romantic interludes in faraway places:

He was off Bursley, and had lapsed into that musing quietude which follows strenuous exercise, when he heard a hail and his name called. It was no lady, no fairy, but young Ralph Morton, an irruption of miserable masculine prose. Heartily wishing him abed with the rest of mankind, Richard rowed in and jumped ashore. Ralph immediately seized his arm, saying that he desired earnestly to have a talk with him, and dragged the Magnetic Youth from his water-dreams, up and down the wet mown grass. That he had to say to be difficult of utterance, and Richard, though he barely listened soon had enough of his old rival's gladness at seeing him, and exhibited signs of impatience; whereat Ralph, as one who branches into matter somewhat foreign to his mind, but of great human interest and importance, put the question to him:

"I say, what woman's name do you like best?" (145)

This passage is self-reflexive, as it draws attention to what Meredith's novel is supposed to be if it were to conform to mimetic-realist conventions: a straightforward Victorian realist novel that presents objective reality rather than the

subjective, atemporal plane of existence upon which Richard wishes to remain. The “jumping ashore” represents the changeover from lyrical reverie to domestic narrative, in which Richard will have the opportunity to find a living, breathing love interest rather than the phantoms he has been chasing down in his daydreams. Ralph’s odd question, “what woman’s name do you like best?” commences the rival’s conditioning of Richard for reincorporation into the triangular order of narrative. The scene of mimetic desire has once again shifted.

Ralph has now become a new sort of rival, one who, like Richard, has turned inward: “Instead of the lusty boisterous boy, his rival in many sciences, who spoke straightforwardly and acted up to his speech, here was an unabashed and blush-persecuted youth, who sued piteously for a friendly ear wherein to pour the one idea possessing him.” Judging by these observations, Feverel believes that Ralph “likewise was on the frontiers of the Realm of Mystery, perhaps further towards it than he himself was” (146). The notion that he is “perhaps further towards it” is not an innocuous, passing emotion for Richard but rather a rallying cry for him to show similar romantic passion publicly rather than simply feel it internally. Immediately, Ralph’s interest in female names rubs off on him:

Gradually, too, Richard apprehended that Ralph likewise was on the frontiers of the Realm of Mystery, perhaps further towards it than he himself was; and then, as by a sympathetic stroke, was revealed to him the wonderful beauty and depth of meaning in feminine names. The theme appeared novel and delicious, fitted to the season and the hour. But the hardship was that Richard could choose none from the number; all were the same to him; he loved them all. (146)

Feverel’s problem of not being able to settle on a name creates for him an identity crisis in comparison to Ralph, who, as it turns out, has already chosen a specific name—Feverel’s cousin Clare. The thought of pursuing Clare never occurs to Richard until he learns of Ralph’s love for her, for prior to this Feverel is experimenting with a variety of ideal images to represent what has become, long since his initial flight from the scene of jealousy, a series of solipsistic expressions of love. The flight into solipsism becomes a flight away from the scene of mimetic jealousy and into “the realm of mystery” where the actual name of the female object of desire is immaterial.

By committing to a name, Richard is selecting an object of desire with a renewed mimetic, social consciousness, as illustrated in Richard’s following awakening:

For the first time it struck him that his cousin Clare was a very charming creature: he remembered the look of her eyes, and especially the last reproachful glance she gave him at parting. What business, pray, had Ralph to write to her? Did she not belong to him, Richard Feverel? He read the words again and again; Clare Doria Forey. Why, Clare was the name he liked best: nay, he loved it. (147-48)

Feverel becomes jealous of Ralph, for he is threatening to take as a lover someone to whom Richard feels entitled. Prior to Ralph's disclosure to Richard of his feelings for Clare, Richard has had no serious interest in her, which is a fact that helps illustrate Girard's claim that desire for the object is an artificial projection of desire for the mediator. Richard's jealousy threatens to send the protagonist on a dangerous course of action that will result in yet another mimetic crisis with Ralph.

Of course, Richard is cut off from his pursuit of Clare once he spots Lucy Desborough in the compromising position of being about to lose her balance and fall into the river while reaching for a dewberry. The poetic picture of Richard's first encounter with Lucy that Meredith paints for us suggests that the hero switches from the pursuit of someone (Clare) aroused by temporal, mimetic jealousy to the pursuit of someone (Lucy) who is desirable beyond the mimetic scene. As he rows down the river, burdened by his jealousy over Ralph's love for Clare, he comes across a scene that changes the direction in which the plot is headed: "Above green-flashing plunges of a weir, and shaken by the thunder below, lilies, golden and white, were swaying at anchor among the reeds. Meadow-sweet hung from the banks thick with weed and training bramble, and here also hung a daughter of Earth" (148). Although it is Meredith who is making the poetic allusion to Eve and the Garden of Eden, he is clearly identifying sympathetically with Richard's subjective view of the scene. For Richard, Lucy draws him away from his rivalry with Ralph and become a new love interest. Consequently, the plot both twists and stalls, as a new object of pursuit gives Richard something to do, but the absence of competition allows Richard to take delight in the imaginative, faraway places that Lucy inspires.

The fact that he finds another woman to idealize at the time in which his rivalry with Ralph is reborn is no accident; Lucy is a sign of the appetitive satisfaction he would achieve were he to be successful in beating his competition by winning Clare's affection. Moreover, Sir Austen's mimetic influence also plays a role in Richard's attraction to Lucy, for she resembles the kind of woman Sir Austen would want him to marry at a later date: "Had she stood before Sir Austin among rival damsels, that Scientific Humanist, for the consummation for his System, would have thrown her the handkerchief for his son" (150). First and foremost, however, Lucy offers for

Richard escape from competition with his rival Ralph for Clare's affections. As the following passage shows, the narrator sees the island in which he finds Lucy as an atemporal *paradise*: "He had landed on an Island of the still-vexed Bermoothes. The world lay wrecked behind him: Raynham hung in mists, remote, a phantom to the vivid reality of his white hand which had drawn him thither away thousands of leagues in an eye-twinkle" (149). This lyrically rendered, aesthetic place is constructed with the help of allusion to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. One reason Richard cherishes this Bermoothes-like paradise is because it offers aesthetic escape from his rivalry with Ralph for Clare's affection. Secondarily, by referring to the island as Bermoothes, Meredith is reminding us of Sir Austin's continued mimetic influence on Richard. Implied in the comparison is that Sir Austin is Prospero, Richard is Ferdinand, and Lucy is Miranda. This lyrically-rendered scene is therefore contingent on the mediating influences of both Ralph and his father.

The self-conscious and conspicuous nature of how Meredith explores this relationship between poetic reverie and realist prose provides us with a clear picture of an author mediating between two ideals, autonomy and heteronomy. In fact, Meredith seems to be idealizing his position as mediator. In exhibiting a clear relationship between lyrical idealism and the mimetic mediation that is such a vital part of realist fiction, Meredith is able to live up to his own definition of a "great genius." In his letter to the Reverent Augustus Jessop, Meredith argues that "[b]etween realism and idealism there is no conflict" because a "great genius" is able to show the relationship between illusion and reality. For Meredith, idealism "is an atmosphere whose effects of grandeur are wrought out through a series of illusions, that are illusions to the sense within us only when divorced from the groundwork of the real" (156). Meredith uses narrative in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* to "develop the groundwork of the real" from which lyrical illusions sprout and, in so doing, is able to strike a balance between heteronomous and autonomous principles. And because the jealous subject faces the dilemma of participating in or withdrawing from the point of mimetic crisis, he is the natural subject Meredith can use to establish this symbiosis between illusion and reality.

## IV

This essay's brief analysis of Dickens's *Great Expectations* and more extensive study of Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* demonstrate how novelists can use jealousy to find ways to develop a strong lyrical discourse that, in turn, forms the contours of the dream vision. What *Great Expectations* and *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* therefore accomplish is to show how in the prosaic age of the Victorian novel the poetic imagination provides an influential, ideological legacy in certain realistic fiction. The jealous character is a logical envoy of the lyrical ideal because the moment of realization that the object of desire will be lost to a rival

creates an existential crisis where one's very identity, which had been defined by the subject's pursuit of the object and relationship to the rival, needs to be refashioned, with the imagination serving as the means through which the refashioning can occur. I would therefore argue that, contrary to claims made about realism being dismissive of lyrical idealism, these two novels do not stage the contest between the imagination and concrete reality to underscore the defeat of the former; rather, they show how lyrical idealism can restore agency and provide psychological depth to major characters. Such restorative energy is part of a larger metanarrative of novelists like Dickens and Meredith attempting to assert their individuality within a genre that had a reputation for being oppressively formulaic.

## Works Cited

Armstrong, Nancy. *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719 to 1900*. New York: Columbia UP, 2005.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Ed. Randal Johnson. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1978.

Brantlinger, Patrick. *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth Century British Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998.

Clayton, Jay. *Romantic Vision and the Novel*. Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge UP, 1987.

Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. Ed. Margaret Cardwell. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993.

Gans, Eric Lawrence. *The End of Culture: Toward Generative Anthropology*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985.

—. *Originary Thinking: Elements of Generative Anthropology*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993.

Girard, René. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Trans. Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1965.

Hardy, Thomas. *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Ed. Suzanne B. Falck-Yi. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1993.

—. "Observations, On Life, Art, and Poetry." *The Victorians: An Anthology of Poetry & Poetics*. Ed. Valentine Cunningham. Oxford, UK and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000. 811-13.

Levine, George Lewis. *The Realistic Imagination: Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981.

Meredith, George. *The Letters of George Meredith*. 3 Vols. Ed. C. L. Cline. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1970.

—. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel: A History of a Father and Son*. New York: Dover, 1983.

Miller, D. A. *Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1981.

Riffaterre, Michael. *Semiotics of Poetry*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978.

Trollope, Anthony. *He Knew He Was Right*. London: Trollope Society, 1994.

Wood, Ellen. *East Lynne*. Oxford, UK and New York: Oxford UP, 2005.

## Notes

1. In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu conceptualizes the literary market as a “field of cultural production,” a dialectical abstraction of two opposing principles—the “heteronomous principle” for “those who dominate the field economically and politically” and the “autonomous principle,” otherwise known as “art for art’s sake” (40). [\(back\)](#)

2. For Gans, resentment results from not obtaining the desired object at the center of the mimetic circle. Resentment reminds the reader of the temporal, ontological condition of the individual. [\(back\)](#)