Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2013).

2. Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1982).
3. Jonathan Grossman, "Living the Global Transport Network in *Great Expectations*," *Victorian Studies* 57, no. 2 (2015): 225–50; "The Character of a Global Transport Infrastructure: Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*," *History and Technology* 29, no. 3 (2013): 247–61; see also his "Standardization (standardisation)," *Critical Inquiry* 44, no. 3 (Spring 2018): 447–78. See also Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); and Laura Rotunno, *Postal Plots in British Fiction, 1840–1898: Readdressing Correspondence in Victorian Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Love

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WHAT did they talk about, those eminent Victorians, when they talked about love? For people whose stiff collars, corsets, and customs seemed designed to evade intimacy, they nevertheless bumped into love in every form: romantic love; erotic fixation; affection (sometimes chilling) to children and devotion to husbands and wives; and not the least, love of dogs. God was love; the love of nature led to love of mankind; *In Memoriam* ends with a wedding; and even passionless John Stuart Mill, the thinking machine, wrote a dedication of such intense feeling that it embarrassed his friends. It was love that was real; love that was earnest; and the grave was not its end—for, "if God choose, / I shall but love thee better after death."[1]

At our current moment, we, too, seem a little embarrassed by Victorian love. A strangely Utilitarian account of love is resurgent in our literary criticism, offering an unexpected echo of an earlier era. Our view of the Victorians was once that of Walter Houghton's *Victorian Frame of Mind*: married love was a sacrament; lust something that existed outside of marriage, in both senses—there might be fierce

erotic entanglements (casual or not) outside those sacred bonds, but the nature of marriage was to exclude the animalistic as fiercely as the hearth banished the harshness of the marketplace. Houghton had this in mind when he wrote of love that it was "passion that was very much tempered by reverence and confined to the home . . . and [whose] object was scarcely mortal."[2] "Otherwise," he continued with certitude, "love was not love but lust." True love was familial, and it pointed us, as Alexander Welsh argued, to the "heavenly city" beyond the dusty Victorian streets. "To address a Victorian heroine as 'sister' is merely the prelude to a warmer theme,"[3] as Welsh put it in discussing *David Copperfield*: "the point of transmuting sweethearts and wives into sisters and daughters, or of living snugly with sisters and daughters as well as wives, was not necessarily to substitute one for the other female relation, but ideally to enjoy both, or all three relations in the enclosure of the hearth."[4]

Lust of course has not stayed quite so nicely quarantined as that. Leo Bersani noted the ferocity of romantic love within the marriage plot;[5] Michel Foucault and D. A. Miller questioned the disciplinary force exerted when David Copperfield learned to recognize "the first mistaken impulses of an undisciplined heart";[6] feminists have continued to speak with the passion of Jane Eyre, "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!"[7] "Erotic faith," to borrow from Robert Polhemus, has certainly had its bodice-ripping moment in the sun.[8]

Yet now the "familiar marriage" has returned with a vengeance, and with it, romance seems to have slunk out of the room. Talia Schaffer's recent *Romance's Rival* has more than one good word to say for the marriage of service which Jane Eyre rejected and the devotion which Houghton enshrined. It defends, with considerable wit and depth, the religious mission which St. John Rivers offers Jane, and it wonders why romantic love seems so desperately urgent. For Schaffer, St. John's proposal is not just a sop to convention (they cannot travel together if unmarried) but a vision of a life of Christian usefulness, a proposal fiercely scorned by the passionate heroine, but nonetheless, as Schaeffer nicely points out, strangely mimicked in the way Jane's eventual marriage to Rochester takes on many of the same notions of care, service and even (gasp!) "nursing."

But it takes more than one blinded husband to take the sexuality out of *Jane Eyre*: indeed, romantic love is not so easy to displace from the center of any sites of Victorian literature and culture. If Welsh

imagines marriage as a heavenly city, he also reminds us that "enjoying all three relations in the enclosure of the hearth" has its own kinkier side, "combin[ing] those roles in a single sentence . . . incant[ing] 'This dear face, revered as a father's, loved as a husband's, sacred to me in my childhood as a friend's.'"[9] And staying only with *Copperfield* for the moment, when Welsh reminds us "who, in the language of detective fiction, was the last person to see Dora Copperfield alive,"[10] we must also remember that when David finally proposes to Agnes Wickfield, she (who sat by his first wife's deathbed) confesses that "I have loved you all my life."[11] At this moment the novel reveals a dark, fierce, even adulterous passion at its heart, one that looks less like incest than cannibalism, feeding on the corpses of others, desperate for what it craves. In that view of romantic passion, to borrow from a very late Victorian, Kate Atkinson: "She should have said, 'I have no idea how to love another human being unless it's by tearing them to pieces and eating them.'"[12]

For there remains a savagery at the heart of even the most domesticated love in the Victorian novel. Miss Havisham reminds Pip to "give up your whole heart and soul to the smiter" and Estella that "you can break his heart";[13] Catherine Earnshaw loves Edgar Linton because he is handsome, kind, and rich, "like the foliage," but her love for Heathcliff "resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight—but necessary";[14] even Sam Weller, when he is inspired to write a valentine for his Mary, finds "a highly coloured representation of a couple of human hearts skewered together with an arrow, cooking before a cheerful fire, while a male and female cannibal in modern attire: the gentleman being clad in a blue coat and white trousers, and the lady in a deep red pelisse with a parasol of the same: were approaching the meal with hungry eyes."[15] To love and to eat were not so different after all: by the time of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, the valentine Bathsheba Everdene sends to Farmer Boldwood ("marry me!") is female high-spiritedness, nasty plot snare, and a good man's psychological undoing—and it constitutes a literally murderous debt drawn out of the heroine for much of the novel, until finally her name and her voice disappear. The word "wife" appears four times in the final two pages of the text, and Bathsheba is silenced (consumed) entirely. Cannibalism proves as hard to disavow as sweethearts to "transmute"—the enclosure of the hearth can't keep out fiercer fires. Or rather, the tamest of domestic fires may blaze forth unexpectedly.

So although we imagine the marriage plot as a sorting device, it is not so easy to know what is love and what is service. When the heroine makes her initial, intricate, fatal choice, we might be taking pleasure in the compare-and-contrast suitors, but not only is it difficult to decide which is familiar and which dangerous (is it Henleigh Grandcourt or Daniel Deronda who is the stranger?), but the alchemy of the marriage plot is a preparation for an even darker alchemy to come, one in which, under coverture, a wife disappears into her husband's legal identity. The heroine is both a choosing subject and a piece of property, and the contracting does not end with that first promise, of love, honor, and obedience. If, as Nancy Miller noted, where men get plots of ambition, for women their "ambitious wishes" must be filtered through plots of "erotic longing,"[16] and, as Schaffer demonstrates, women seek not love but "socially rich lives and futures of meaningful work,"[17] it is not clear how to get one without the other. How does one bear a life of daily compromises without romantic faith; how can you live a life of empty adoration without something to yearn for beyond the self? The marriage plot is not just a sorting device, it is a balancing act.

Love remains a (passionate) site of negotiation, because marriage is not a tableau of people fixed motionless around a fire but a constant whirling thing. If the Victorians seem torn between prudishness and prurience; between repression and explosion; between the cozy warmth of the hearth and the erotics of the street, lost lovers forever wailing on some wuthering heath, it is because the ghosts are not so much angry as confused, contorted, contracted, trying to do too much, to *say* too much, when they say "I love." As Welsh hints, and as we risk forgetting, the Victorians were incapable of imagining love as anything but a tangle. But though the Victorians invented Wemmick in his castle, imagining he could keep law and prisons and fardels outside, they also invented love as a way of opening the doors of the home to something larger than the lonely self. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, famous enumerator of things out of reach, offers an answer, again quoted by Kate Atkinson in *When Will There Be Good News*. In writing of love at the end of life, Barrett Browning knew "that when light is gone / Love remains for shining."[18] She wrote those lines for her dog, Flush, and if Virginia Woolf objected to Charlotte Bronte's heroines always saying, "'I love', 'I hate,'"[19] she probably had fewer objections to Flush, about whom she herself wrote a book. What is it that love sees? Something, Welsh is right, that lies beyond the streets, but not necessarily only in the heavens: it lies in the flashing, curious, unknowable eyes of another.

Notes

1. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Sonnet XLIII, *Complete Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Press, 1900), 223.
2. Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 341.
3. Alexander Welsh, *The City of Dickens* (1971; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 151.
4. Welsh, *City of Dickens*, 155.
5. Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
6. D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1989); Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (London: Penguin, 2004), 669, 671.
7. Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (New York: Norton, 2001), 216.
8. Robert M. Polhemus, *Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D. H. Lawrence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
9. Welsh, *City of Dickens*, 155.
10. Welsh, *City of Dickens*, 183.
11. Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 868.
12. Kate Atkinson, *When Will There Be Good News* (London: Black Swan, 2008), 366.
13. Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (London: Penguin, 2003), 240, 60.
14. Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Penguin, 1965), 122.
15. Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (London: Penguin, 1972), 536–37.
16. Nancy K. Miller, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," *PMLA* 96, no. 1 (1981): 36–48, 41.
17. Talia Schaffer, *Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). This wonderful summary is in fact from the book advertisement; similar sentiments appear on pages 4 and 29.
18. Barrett Browning, "To Flush, My Dog," *Complete Poetical Works*, p. 163; qtd. in Atkinson, 75.
19. Virginia Woolf, "'Jane Eyre' and 'Wuthering Heights,'" *The Common Reader* (1916; London: Harcourt Brace, 1925), 225.