

Jim Neilson
The 19th Century Novel Podcast
Episodes 6 & 7

Rhoda Broughton, *Cometh Up as a Flower*

Part One
Chapters 1-10

In its mostly complimentary review of Rhoda Broughton's 1867 novel *Cometh Up as a Flower*, the *Times* of London stated, with obvious exasperation, that it had "no patience with these tiresome ladies who marry the man they don't love and make the poor fellow miserable all through the honeymoon with their sighs and tears and dismal faces" ("Appendix B" 341-42). The plots of 19th century novels often featured unhappily married wives who didn't merely make their spouse miserable with sighs but sought fulfillment through adultery. In fact, every novel I've discussed thus far in this podcast series features a marriage in which one or the other partner commits adultery: Lady Loberough and Arthur Huntingdon in Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Thomas Ashby in Bronte's *Agnes Grey*, Isabel Vane in Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*. To Leo Tolstoy, reliance on this conventional plot revealed an impoverished literary imagination: "Adultery," he declares, "is not only the favourite, but almost the only theme of all the novels" (77). Of course, before his views about the nature and purpose of art changed according to his Christian ethics, Tolstoy had himself written an adultery novel. Some of the greatest novels of the 19th century—Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*—are concerned, like Broughton's, with the plight of adulterous wives.

Rather than dismissing Broughton's plot as commonplace, as does the *Times*'s anonymous reviewer, we might ask: why was this plot so common? For male authors, female adultery could express their fear of female sexuality and be a projection of their own adulterous behaviors and desires. For female authors, this plot could serve as an expression, however disguised and condemned, of women's sexual desire. And its transgressive and titillating nature surely increased book sales. But perhaps the most convincing answer to why novelists so often wrote about adulterous wives was that they were responding to the unsatisfying and entrapping nature of 19th century marriage and thereby demonstrating an understanding, if sometimes under-developed and unconscious, of the restrictive cruelty of the angel in the house ethos which declared being wife and mother a woman's ultimate satisfaction. About these concerns, the *Times*'s reviewer seems oblivious (or else thinks them trivial), dismissing the fact that women were often forced into loveless marriages as "tiresome," thereby enabling him to identify as the victim not a wife because she has married a man she doesn't love but a husband because he is made miserable by "sighs and tears and dismal faces."

One way to appreciate Broughton's novel, therefore, is to ignore its somewhat conventional plot and instead focus on what Broughton reveals about Victorian marriage, how this culture valued commercial exchange over emotional connection, and how these marital arrangements could lead to frustrated sexual desires and unfulfilled emotional needs.

The novel, set in the early 1860s and narrated a few years later by Nell Lestrangle, opens in a family graveyard. It's 9 PM.; the 19-year-old Nell is reading the inscriptions on tombstones and imagining where she'd like to be buried, while at the same time recognizing the folly of imagining a pleasant burial spot. This scene establishes Nell's often morbid sensibility; it's also the first of her many digressions, with which

Broughton frequently opens chapters. And Nell's reading of epitaphs suggests her interest in literature, especially poetry. Reading this simple graveyard verse, she fantasizes that one day she might write an elegy comparable to Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." Broughton also introduces us to three of the book's central characters: first, Nell; second Nell's sister Dolly, whom Nell, anticipating the sisterly conflict to come, imagines would "say it is indelicate and unladylike for a grown-up woman to be scrambling over walls" (38); third, a mysterious man sitting on a tombstone, who we will soon learn is Major Richard "Dick" M'Gregor and who Nell perceives is a gentleman, not "any of the John Smiths or Robert Browns of the parrish [since] . . . the bumpkins in our parts," Nell explains, "are not given to indulging in the sentimental melancholy of pilgrimages to the tombs of their respective Betsys, and Anns, and Marthas" (39). Thus, we learn of Nell's social status and snobbery, though the "rather frayed elbows on [her] venerable holland frock" (36) suggest the Lestrangle family's finances don't match their class status.

This suggestion is confirmed as, returning to her family home, Nell notes that "We had a big house, but were not big people" (40). And she laments one consequence of their financial woes: "People at whom fifty years ago we turned up our noses now turned up their noses at us" (40). She charts the Lestrangle's long family history from arrival with William the Conqueror to fighting in the Crusades with Richard the Lion-Hearted to receiving abby lands from Henry VIII, presumably including their current family home near Manchester. Families like the Lestranges, old-money, long-established aristocracy, would increasingly fall prey to the up-and-coming mercantile classes. But just as Ellen Wood does in her novel *East Lynne*, so Broughton blames this aristocratic family's decline not on the rise of industrial capitalism or on any large-scale systemic forces but on the family's own failings. The Lestrangle family had once, Nell explains, "mount[ed] up to the top of fortune's wheel" (41). But recent generations of Lestranges have plummeted the family to the wheel's bottom by squandering their fortune on gambling and whoring. By attributing financial decline to individual behavior rather than to the larger political economy, Broughton appeals to middle-class readers' belief that through hard work and proper moral behavior they can succeed in this economic system, while because of indolence and immorality some, especially members of the aristocracy, cannot. As a consequence of the Lestrangle family's failings, much of their land—they've gone from owning many thousands to very few hundreds of acres—has been bought up by the rising class of mill owners and others prospering from the cotton trade in and around Manchester.

Taking advantage of its lead role in the industrial revolution and of the reach and power of the British East India Company (with India's large-scale cotton production), Britain dominated the global manufacture of cotton goods in the first half of the nineteenth century. More than cotton imported from India, according to Ronald Bailey, head of the African American Studies Department at the University of Illinois, "cotton grown by slaves in the United States was the main source of cotton used by British textile mills. . . . In 1860 for example, U.S. cotton supplied over 88 percent of the cotton imported into Great Britain" (40). This process, "imports of raw cotton [from India and the United States], the manufacture of yarn and cloth, and the export of finished goods," at its height (between 1831 and 1850) accounted for an astonishing 45 percent of all British exports (285), according to the historian K. Theodore Hoppen. Much of this industry, its textile mills and factories and warehouses and cotton exchange, was located in Manchester, so much so that the town earned the nickname "Cottonopolis." By 1853, there were 103 cotton mills and by 1815, 1,819 warehouses in Manchester, the latter earning the town another nickname, "Warehouse City" ("Cottonopolis"). Work in these factories and living conditions for these workers were abysmal. Alexis de Tocqueville describes the Manchester he visited in 1835:

Thirty or forty factories rise on the tops of hills. . . . Their six stories tower up. . . . The wretched dwellings of the poor are scattered haphazard around them. . . . But who could describe the

interiors of these quarters set apart, home of vice and poverty, which surround the huge palaces of industry and clasp them in their hideous folds. . . . Narrow twisting roads. . . . are lined with one story houses whose ill-fitting planks and broken windows show them up, even from a distance, as the last refuge a man might find between poverty and death. (106)

Setting her book in Manchester amidst an upper class whose wealth is being generated by the cotton trade, Broughton does not once turn her attention to the workers whose labor produces this wealth, either the British factory workers or the American slaves. As one British bureaucrat explained, Manchester's "opulence is . . . really owing to the toil and suffering of the negro" (qtd. in Beckert 244). Nor does she attempt to depict Manchester's slums. It's not Manchester we see but mansions, the privileged, clean, open, glittering world where the wealthy reside.

At 19, Nell has experienced little of this world. She has yet to enter society. She had only once or twice, Nell remarks, "exhibited [her] bare neck and arms to an admiring public" (47). Only once had she been to a ball. And she is about to attend her first dinner party. By contrast, her 23-year-old sister Dolly is worldly wise and a constant guest at social gatherings in pursuit of a rich husband. Dolly parades herself with an air of confidence and superiority. Nell is self-conscious and easily embarrassed. Describing herself as "a gawky young stranger," she enters a drawing-room with a "sense of loneliness, [a] consciousness of [her] shabby clothes, and [an] embarrassment as to the disposal of [her] hands" (59). Nell is all-too-aware of her unfashionable appearance: she wears her sister's hand-me-downs, discovers that her "hair was dressed in a fashion that had died the death a year and half ago" (54), and believes herself ugly, especially when contrasted with the glamorous and seductive Dolly whose "liquid brown eyes . . . had a way of looking up meekly and beseechingly, that no man . . . could resist, [who has] a little sharp cut nose absolutely perfect, a sweet, grave mouth, and an expression nun-like, Madonna-like" (50). "I never knew any woman who could compare with Dolly Lestrangle," writes Nell, "in the art of drawing out and waking into rampant life any spice of the devil which might be lurking latent in a man's soul," an art enhanced by her wearing a "dark tight-fitting habit, out of which her throat rose, like a lily stem from its sheath" (180-81).

With none of Dolly's confidence or coquettish talent, Nell sees for a second time Dick M'Gregor, the man she had encountered in the graveyard, "a tall broad-shouldered man, with yellow hair," a man whose appearance and stature she admiringly compares to a Viking (55). The couple, having, in Hollywood parlance, met cute, now suffer through the predictable stuttering first steps of romance, the miscommunications and wounded egos of uncertain lovers, mostly due to Nell's inexperience, self-consciousness, and self-doubt, in tandem with Victorian social probity. For instance, as the dinner party closes, Dick asks Nell if there would be any use of his going to the churchyard the following evening. To which she coldly replies, "I'm sure I don't know . . . it's nothing to me whether you go there or not" (60). Reviewers compared *Cometh Up* to *Jane Eyre* because of Broughton's use of a naïve first-person female narrator writing in present tense who sees herself, initially, as ugly, and because the book, like Charlotte Bronte's novel, is subtitled "an autobiography" (Gilbert 17). But in the interaction between Dick and Nell, in the ways that pride interferes with their romance, and in its focus on marriage and the upper class, Broughton's novel, especially in its early pages, seems more Jane Austen than *Jane Eyre*.

That Nell is attracted to Dick the reader has no doubt. After he compliments Nell for her "pretty mouth" (57), she describes "the dark grey eyes [that] looked full into mine, with an expression I had never seen in mortal eyes before; an expression that sealed my lips, and sent a sort of odd shiver . . . through my frame" (58). And as she leaves the dinner party, after having spurned his churchyard invite, she sees him "standing under the portico, with the carriage lamps gilding his severe Greek beauty" (60). The next evening,

predictably, Nell wanders over to the churchyard. “There he stood,” Nell writes, “tall and straight, and strong as a young oak” (67). When he asks to shake her hand, she draws off her glove and lays her “hand (a long slim member) in his.” They hold hands, Dick “detaining my not unwilling, though rather embarrassed fingers, holding them as if he had forgotten about them, and looking down (for though I was rather a tall girl, beside him I was small and short enough) at me” (67). M’Gregor is the first man to show interest in Nell romantically, the first man whose hand she has embraced. This innocuous and innocent gesture, though, violates Victorian propriety. Thus, when her father stumbles upon them, he is outraged, looking, in Nell’s words, “extremely astonished and considerably displeased” (70). When they’re alone, Nell’s widowed father, the Reverend Adrian LeStrange, reproaches her. “You’re young and inexperienced . . . and I dare say you meant no harm but I wonder that even *you* did not think it was very nice or maidenly to be out at nine o’clock with that big fellow sprawling at your feet to say nothing of holding your hand” (71). And he is outraged at M’Gregor’s behavior, saying, “He wants a good kicking. . . . Uncommon free and easy, indeed! Walking into another man’s garden, without saying ‘by your leave.’ . . . he won’t come here again in a hurry” (72).

Caught alone at night holding a man’s hand, a man who had not been introduced to her father, Nell has violated a basic code of behavior for young women and has alienated her father from the man she will come to love. Nell’s misbehavior is due to her innocence. But it’s also due to her mother’s having died when Nell was an infant. Like Isabel in Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*, Nell has been raised by her father. Without a moralizing mother in the Victorian vein, girls like Isabel and Nell can avoid some of the conventional domestic instruction women were compelled to learn before entering the marriage circuit. As Nell explains, “If I had had a mother, I should have had to mend my gloves, and keep my hair tidy, and practice on the piano, and be initiated into the mysteries of stitching” (64). But the absence of a mother leaves Nell, like Isabel, unprepared for the emotional tumult and social pressures of courting and seduction. Without a mother, Nell, thrown into the whirl of balls and dinner parties, must rely for advice on the unreliable Dolly, even asking her sister if she was attractive. Dolly’s reply: “I don’t admire you. . . . but that’s no reason why somebody should not. Some people may like red hair and a wide mouth” (51).

Dolly’s response is disingenuous for her sister is actually quite attractive, as she slowly discovers through Dick’s attraction to her. Likewise, it’s Dick’s appearance that first attracts Nell. His walk seems to her “that of an offended angel” (82). He is a “poor, naughty, handsome wolf” and she a “lamb [who] longed to go and put out a friendly paw to him” (85). She can’t stop thinking of him, even when in church: “when I endeavoured to close the doors of my mind against Richard; to observe the Sabbath strictly in my heart: his image pushed the door of that sanctuary [without warning], and dwelt there, defying expulsion” (84). Later, she writes, “The rain dripped from his hat, and from his curly yellow hair, and Heaven’s tears washed his bronzed cheeks; I looked up at him with shy rapture; at that brow ‘that looked like marble, and smelt like myrrh,’ at the honest, kindly, beautiful face; looked into his passionate eyes, and . . . forgot everything in my new-found wonderful bliss” (107). When he implores her to meet him one night, she tells us, “My eyes clave to his face, and feasted on its beauty. I would have gone to meet him in a dungeon, in a charnel, in death’s stronghold itself” (122). This recognition of Dick’s beauty is not merely an aesthetic appreciation. His appearance stimulates her. She experiences an odd shiver through her frame. Her heart beats faster when he approaches. She rushes out to see him like a ball shot from a cannon. And, after being with him, she returns to her room “panting, disheveled, crimson” (109). “My happiness,” Nell recalls, “was not temperate, moderate, sober; it was limitless, frenzied, drunken” (110).

This appreciation of male beauty, this expression of female desire, this yearning to be with a man is contrary to Victorian notions of what a woman should think and how she should feel, let alone what she should openly express. A woman such as Nell (and an author such as Broughton) should not give voice to such

feelings. These desires should remain hidden—or perhaps a woman shouldn't feel them at all. Nell here is either too natural, that is, too responsive to her sexual impulses, or in having these impulses, is unnatural. Some reviewers objected to Broughton's having a female character who voiced her desires. *The London Review*, for instance, complained that "the unmaidenly manner in which the heroine constantly dwells upon her lover's physical charms is not pleasant" ("Appendix B," 339). The novelist Geraldine Jewsbury, in *The Athenæum*, thought the novel, because it so misunderstood women, because it was "ignorant of all that women are or ought to be" (514), written by a man. Jewsbury complained that "The only two phases of existence which the author . . . seems to think women recognize, are, the delight of being kissed by a man they like, and the misery of being kissed by one they don't" (514-15). She concluded that "At every page there is some offence against good taste and good feeling" (515) and that "the story itself is not one to be put into the hands of girls" (514). And *The Spectator* complained that "for some readers [the novel] will have perhaps too much realism; there is too clear an intrusion of the sensuous . . . too much of clinginess and the disposition to embrace" (343).

In the interaction between Dick and Nell, in their clinginess, we can perhaps see how an upper-class Victorian couple might have behaved before marriage. They hold hands. They hug. Dick demands a toll of twenty kisses (108). Their lips "met joyfully, clingingly; parted grudgingly, loathily" (121). The behavior Broughton describes may have been common for upper-class couples, but not so for working class couples who seem to have been considerably more sexually active. "In villages and small towns . . . about 40 percent of brides in the first half of the nineteenth century were pregnant," writes Michael Mason, lecturer at University College, London (66). On the other hand, perhaps the behavior of unmarried upper-class couples like Dick and Nell was more sexual than the conventions of Victorian literature and culture would allow Broughton to depict. Or perhaps Dick and Nell's modest behavior reflects not a cultural norm but Broughton's individual experience; in many of her novels, she focuses on thwarted love affairs, on heartbroken and deserted girls. From this evidence, British bibliographer Michael Sadleir concludes that Broughton must herself have suffered an ill-fated love-affair and that "If this be granted, the slant of all her work is accounted for and the feverish element in the first two novels seen to be natural and inevitable." Her novels draw a picture, Sadleir argues, "of the authoress's girlhood in its revelation of the intensity and bitter disillusion of an unhappy passion and in the explanation it offers of her caustic attitude to life in general and of her preoccupation as a novelist with precocious young -girls entangled in luckless love or loveless marriage" (31).

But Sadleir's speculation is based solely on her novels; there's no evidence that Broughton had had a heartbreaking love-affair. What we do know is that she was born in 1840 in Wales, the third daughter (she also had a younger brother) of the Reverend Delvin Broughton (her grandfather was the 8th Broughton baronet, the Reverend Sir Henry Delves Broughton), and Jane Bennett, whose father was a barrister in Dublin. Like Nell's, Rhoda's family had a long history, going back, on her father's side, to the 13th century ("Broughton baronets," Wood 7). When Rhoda was 11, her father took over the family manor, Broughton Hall, about 50 miles south of Manchester ("Broughton baronets"). In her biography of Rhoda Broughton, Marilyn Wood gives a good description of this home, built in the 1630s and presumably the model for Nell's home: "[An] imposing black and white timbered house, with . . . high gables, overhanging upper storey, fine carving and superb example of seventeenth century Flemish glass in some of the windows" (8). Broughton Hall has gone through several hands since the 19th century and is now owned by John Caudwell, founder of a successful mobile phone company and #966 on *Forbes's* 2019 list of the world's billionaires (down from #722 in 2016).

Rhoda Broughton, like Ellen Wood and the Bronte sisters, was educated by her father, from whom, writes Marilyn Wood, "she acquired a thorough knowledge of English literature and instruction in Greek, Latin

and modern languages, particularly French, German, and Italian” (9). Rhoda’s mother died in 1860, her father in 1863, forcing her and her siblings to leave their family home (Wood 10). In her final year at Broughton Hall, Rhoda, age 22, wrote, in six weeks, a draft of her first novel, *Not Wisely but Too Well* (Wood, 9-10). She seems to have been inspired by the example of Anna Isabella Thackeray who wrote her first novel *The Story of Elizabeth* at age 26 (Wood 1). Over the next few years, living with one of her sisters, Broughton finished this novel, as well as *Cometh Up as a Flower*. With the assistance of her uncle, the novelist and short story writer Sheridan Le Fanu (himself the grandnephew of the 18th century playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan), *Cometh Up* was serialized in 1866 in the journal he edited, *Dublin University Magazine*, and published anonymously as a novel in 1867 by Bentley, the same firm that six years earlier had published Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*. However, Bentley did not initially accept Broughton’s first manuscript, *Not Wisely but Too Well*, its reader, Geraldine Jewsbury (the same person who recommended that Bentley’s publish *East Lynne*) decrying its immorality:

the story is absolute and unredeemed nonsense and the interest is of a kind that I shd [sic] carefully keep it out of the hands of all the young people of my acquaintance. I am sorry you have accepted it and I am sorry it is going to be published at all—the interest is of highly coloured and hot blooded passion—pretended to be quenched in a few drops of luke warm water sentimentality. . . . It is the most thoroughly sensual tale I have read in English in a long time. . . . [It is] a work so *ill* calculated for the reading of decent people. (“Appendix A,” 338)

Her uncle Sheridan Le Fanu’s enthusiasm and support for his niece’s work seems to have been tempered by this reaction. In a letter to Bentley’s, he apologized for her work, writing, “the author’s boldness of style and description arises from an unfortunate ignorance of the actual force of some of what is set down and of the way in which the world—wiser in the knowledge of evil—might read it” (qtd. in Wood 12). Broughton accepted this criticism and rewrote *Not Wisely but Too Well*, explaining in a letter to Bentley, “I . . . quite agree with you as to its unfitness for publication its present state. I will do my best to expunge all the coarseness and slanginess and rewrite those passages which cannot be toned down” (qtd. in Wood 13). Her revisions were successful: the novel was published in the same year as *Cometh Up*.

However much her novels might have been viewed as too hot-blooded and unsuited for decent people, the romance in *Cometh Up* often seems juvenile, no surprise since, as Marilyn Wood explains, “like most young women of her class, . . . Broughton’s main knowledge of life and particularly of sexual love, even if there had been a painful affair in her past, was culled from books, both the serious and the light varieties” (15). Looking back on her life, Broughton remembered its innocent deprivations: “My own early youth was, even according to the then measure of dissipation accorded to girls, so very quiet and unaccented a one, spent in the depths of the country” (“Girls” 38). As she observed, one “feature of Victorian upbringing [was] the rigid law that until marriage all girls should be kept in entire ignorance of the most important facts of physiology” (“Girls” 141). We should remember, too, that at this time young men and women were kept apart. And when together—at balls and picnics and concerts and dinners—they were chaperoned. Broughton notes that association with “young squires and professional men . . . was so restricted and hedged by prohibitions that imagination might and did invest them with a mystery that leant itself to dreams” (“Girls” 141). In other words, this forced separation kept women ignorant about and encouraged them to create ideal images of these strange creatures, men. “All that [young women] had a chance of knowing,” she writes, “was that he was well-favored and polite [and that] he might conceal under his white waistcoat the heart of a Sir Lancelot or the high purity of a Sir Galahad” (“Girls” 141). Broughton’s reference to Lancelot and Galahad—learned perhaps from Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*—suggests the importance of story in shaping expectations—mostly false expectations, of course (unless one is as jaded as Dolly)—about men and love and

courtship and marriage. Separated from men, except in ideal and protected environs, women often learned what they perceived to be the facts about men from fiction. Or as Broughton puts it, “At that period sentiment still exhaled from three-volume novels and harbored in maiden breasts” (“Girls” 141). In this context, it’s understandable that while Nell’s descriptions of Dick and of her feelings for him convey her desire, the contact between them is not especially intimate and not at all passionate. They seem more junior high school students on a first date than a 19-year-old woman and a 27-year-old man in the initial stages of courtship.

Even though these scenes reflect Broughton’s inexperience, the romantic banter between Dick and Nell, especially its condescending tone, is likely accurate to the period. Holding her tightly, Dick says, “don’t cry, poor little girl. . . . what an ill-used little girl she is! . . . Poor little pussy-cat. . . . It’s rather nice . . . having a foolish sort of little girl to kiss and make love to, and bully now and then” (106-7). Much later in the novel, he refers to her as “My own little Nell! My own little snow-drop!” (300). Dick’s referring to Nell as a “little girl,” his speaking to her as if she is a child, is the standard male view of women in the Victorian era. These passages reveal males’ sense of superiority: the male is the adult overlooking the innocent, child-like female, an attitude that is the essence of paternalism. As Mary Wollstonecraft explains, child “is but a civil term for weakness” (23). And this weakness must be protected by a man. But Nell shrugs off Dick’s paternalistic comments to luxuriate in his embrace. “His gold locks and my russet ones blend agreeably together,” she writes, “I had not the slightest desire that he should leave me alone. . . I lay my head on his breast. . . . He kisses me softly, and I forget to be scandalized” (107).

Interrupting this budding romance there appears the wealthy unmarried aristocrat, Sir Hugh Lancaster, a man who has been unsuccessfully pursued by many single women, including Dolly. When he first appears at the Lestrangle home, he is served a lunch of eggs, the family having no other food and an overdue bill with the butcher. But Hugh cares not at all about this odd meal nor this evidence of the decline of the family Lestrangle. His interest is only Nell. But she is uninterested in him. In an attempt at banter, he tells her, “I never can make out what women can have to think about, except their crochet work” and asks “what are your pleasant thoughts about?” Hugh’s comment is no more insufferable than Dick’s telling Nell that “silence is a woman’s best ornament” (93). But Hugh lacks Dick’s charm and good looks. And so Nell reacts resentfully, thinking the question “suited the intellect of a five years’ child” and responding to his question of what she could be thinking about with “Nothing worth mentioning . . . neither fat cattle nor guano” (102). The affable Sir Hugh is not bothered by this remark, replying, “You think they are about the only subjects I am fit to talk about; ah, very good, very good!” (103). From this point on, Nell will face a choice: listen to the urgings of her sister and father—and her sense of duty—and marry the rich Lancaster or follow her heart and marry the penniless M’Gregor. For the time being, her heart wins.

Chapters 11-19

The pressures to marry for money and thereby save the family are great. Dolly, for one, is unequivocal in her view that her little sister give up her childish infatuation with Major M’Gregor and embrace the sober reality of Sir Lancaster. In one of the novel’s more memorable scenes, telling for what it says about money and status and marriage among the upper classes, Dolly rebuts Nell’s proclamations of love. Responding to Nell’s swooningly citing lines of verse and thanking God for being alive and in love, Dolly previews the life her sister would have with Dick: “Life in an old barrack, with no present income, and no future projects hardly seems to me a theme for Hallelujahs, for weeping and gnashing of teeth rather” (123). And when Nell angrily asks her sister why she bothers to return home since all she does is sneer at it, Dolly replies, “I

quite agree with you as there being no place *like* home, not the least for utter destitution of paint, and decent cookery, and hot water pipes, and all the appliances of modern civilization, this baronial residence is undoubtedly unique” (124). Dolly, on the marriage market for several years, is a jaded realist who sees love as a disabling fiction. She even discounts the importance of her family’s noble lineage: “Does the knowledge that one lot of mouldy old men poked at another mouldy old lot in the ribs with pikes four hundred years ago make me feel the draughts less, or you look less like a scare-crow?” (125).

Her experience has given Dolly insight into the intricacies of class and social status. She recognizes that Dick “cannot be anybody *much*” (126) since he is a guest of the nouveau riche Coxes who have no established family history and a fortune recently derived from the cotton trade. Dolly immediately recognizes that the Coxes are using their newfound wealth to propel themselves into the upper classes. “The Coxes are working up,” she explains to Nell, “but they have not go up many rungs yet. I suppose they think they will begin with decayed gentlemen [such as Dick M’Gregor] and hoist themselves up on their shoulders into the society of prosperous ones” (126). Or as she later puts it, “they are going to try to mix a little poor blue blood . . . with their own full-bodied red” (131). When Nell recalls Dick saying that (like her sister) he considers the Coxes vulgar—he had joked that “some of the fluff and flue of Coxe’s cotton mills [was] getting into [his brain]” (93)—Dolly replies that “A man must be rather low before he will go and stay weeks in a tradesman’s family . . . but he must be lower still to abuse his hosts behind their backs” (127). This passage is revealing for the nuances of status Dolly is able to decode: Dick must be poor if he’s staying with the déclassé Coxes; they must be using him to begin their climb up the social ladder; he must be ill-bred if he criticizes them for their vulgarity. For Dolly, on the other hand, their vulgarity goes without saying. They are, after all, mere “tradesmen” who have spent their lives in “calico circles” (129). The fact that their fortune was earned through industry, in both senses of the word, is itself discrediting. For the wealthy aristocracy, born into a life of privilege, look down upon those attempting to join their betters through the vulgar act of earning money.

Dick’s and Dolly’s view of the Coxes is shared by Nell (and perhaps Broughton). The Coxes assertively and ostentatiously display their wealth. Nell describes arriving at their home: “we drew up before a Grecian portico, on which [are inscribed] the arms of the Coxes—arrived last month from the Herald’s College.” That is, to appear as peers of the peers, the Coxes have purchased a coat of arms and thus a family history. As Pamela Gilbert explains, “The Herald’s College maintained, traced, and sometimes invented, family coats-of-arms” (53n2). The ridiculousness of this chasing after status is evident in Broughton’s description of the family crest: “a nondescript antique bird, half cock, half griffin, and supposed to be the Coxe crest, showed its ugly stone-beak and claws all over the house, in every nook and angle where antique bird could perch” (53). Traditionally, a griffin has the body, tail and back legs of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle. Instead of an eagle, the Coxe’s griffin is half rooster—the Coxes’ cock, if you will—obviously an unheroic and common farm animal. The appearance of the Coxes themselves is no less grotesque. Nell describes “a large woman, whose roseate arms were fettered with heavy gold bracelets, fresh from the jeweller’s, and above whose pug face a tiara rose like a mural crown” (53). Besides being large and having a doggish face, this woman is wearing gaudy jewelry (i.e., “heavy gold”). And rather than a long-standing heirloom, this jewelry has just been purchased, reinforcing the Coxes as vulgar social climbers. She wears that most formal and regal of headpieces, a tiara. In saying that this tiara “rose like a mural crown,” Nell is identifying it as no modest headress but a piece that is conspicuously tall. A “mural crown,” a headpiece usually of gold with an abstract shape meant to represent city walls and towers, was a Roman military decoration that became a common symbol in heraldry. The sense here is that this headpiece is ridiculously ostentatious and out-of-place. These often ludicrous attempts to depict themselves as aristocracy resemble what an anonymous cotton spinner wrote in 1818 about the newly rich:

the employers: with very few exceptions . . . are a set of men who have sprung from the cotton-shop without education or address, except so much as they have acquired by their intercourse with the little world of merchants on the exchange at Manchester; but to counterbalance that deficiency, they give you enough of appearances by an ostentatious display of elegant mansions, equipages, liveries, parks, hunters, hounds, &c. which they take care to shew off to the merchant stranger in the most pompous manner. Indeed their houses are gorgeous palaces, far surpassing in bulk and extent the neat charming retreats you see round London. ..but the chaste observer of the beauties of nature and art combined will observe a woeful deficiency of taste. (qtd. in E.P. Thompson 199).

Unlike the Coxes, Sir Hugh Lancaster, the man pursuing Nell, is from a wealthy family of long-standing. Older, smaller, and far less attractive than Dick, Hugh is also far less engaging. He relies on his, in Nell's phrase, "little anecdotic wares" (179). "He is never strong at badinage," Nell writes, "he has a heavy hand at it" (246). He doesn't even adjust his volume when attempting to woo: "Hugh never thought it necessary to lower his voice when he said anything tender. The expression 'love-whisper' never could be applied to his amatory commonplaces; 'love-shout or love-bellow would be more applicable" (183). We experience an example of his romantic patter when, seated on a sofa next to Nell, looking through a book of dog prints, he comments, "Jolly kind of dog that. . . had one just like it myself once, only mine had more tan about the muzzle; best sporting dog I ever had. Came to awful grief, poor brute, though, got caught in a trap and had to be shot" (169). Not exactly a conversation to set a young girl's heart aflutter. Hugh, of course, is oblivious, offering to bring out even more volumes of dog pictures. Or as Nell describes: "He rises to search for more pabulum for my mind and eyes." She implores him: "Oh *please*, won't it do another time. I think I've seen enough pictures" (170). While they have been looking at terriers and retrievers and hounds, a jealous Dick had been watching the two of them as they sat side by side in an air "a casual observer [would see as] very lover-like and *flirtatious*" (169). Nell sees Dick's distress and overhears Dolly telling him that Nell seems "pleased [with] and attracted" to Hugh and that Dick must as a consequence "feel lonely in society" (170).

Nell knows she needs to reconcile with Dick, so the next day, uncharacteristically assertive, desiring to "retrieve last night's disaster," she puts her hand on his arm, calls him "Dick" for the first time, and asks him to "drive her in the dogcart . . . because she cannot ride" (174) on horseback like the rest of the party who are going on a picnic excursion. For a young Victorian girl, this assertiveness, a gross violation of proper behavior, causes her great upset: "As I make this indecently forward proposal," Nell tells us, "my voice shakes, and my heart thumps like a team ram" (174), that is, like an iron-clad ship of the kind used in the American Civil War to ram wooden naval vessels. But this effort, this shouting voice and thumping heart, is worth it: wounded pride healed and the previous night's flirtations forgotten, Dick agrees to drive Nell to the picnic.

Until sister Dolly intervenes.

Standing nearby while "holding her habit up delicately with one hand, and slashing a small [laced up ankle] boot with her whip" (175), Dolly overhears Hugh tell Dick that one of the carriage horses can be unruly. This picture encapsulates Dolly: proper yet sensual ("holding her habit up delicately"), confident and controlling (slashing her boot with a whip), and conniving (listening to Hugh and Dick's conversation). Unbeknownst to her sister, Dolly tells Dick Nell is afraid of this unruly horse and that she would, therefore, rather have the more experienced Hugh as her driver. And so for the picnic Nell joins Hugh, while Dolly joins Dick. Forced to share a picnic lunch with the insufferable Hugh, Nell watches Dolly flirt with Dick and imagines his being made captive by her sister's charm: Dolly wakes "Dick's devil. . . . The great velvet orbs

passionate, passion rousing seek his again; seem unable to tear themselves away. What man can stand it? Dick cannot. . . .” (182). And Broughton adds what seems—to this post-Freud, post-Georgia O’Keefe reader—an overtly sexual image: “[Dolly] plays with the wide-open iris flowers, with the stiff, wet iris stems that lie in her lap” (182). No wonder Dick seems entranced. I don’t know if these stiff wet irises were inserted into the text unconsciously or if Broughton did so intentionally. Certainly, in not excising this description, these flowers that cometh up, the book’s editors and publisher didn’t perceive its sexual suggestiveness.

However sensual Dolly’s behavior and appearance, she has no interest in a man so poor as Dick. She flirts with him because she enjoys exerting her power over men (the only power a woman like Dolly possesses)—and in so doing sends a message to her sister: Dick can’t truly love you if so easily attracted to me. Interestingly, despite her beauty and skill at seduction, Dolly has been unable to gain a husband. I suspect her romantic disappointment is due to her family’s failing fortunes. It’s probably also due to her snobbishness, her reluctance to marry a wealthy man who lacks a title. Oddly, she has been unable to snare the oblivious Sir Hugh Lancaster probably because he seeks a mate more naïve, someone not jaded by experience, someone simple enough to love simple him, a girl like Nell.

As they return to Wentworth manor, Hugh’s estate, their carriage horses are spooked by a passing train, the carriage is overturned, Nell is tossed into a clump of violets, Hugh into a thorny hedge, and the horses gallop wildly away. When Hugh helps Nell to her feet, she faints—to wake up in “a small room where stalest tobacco and stalest beer contend for kinship over the dominion of smell” (187). But it’s not this rustic low-class pub that troubles her; it’s what she sees when she wakes: “oh horror, oh shame, oh infamy! Hugh’s arm is under my head, and his face with the middle-aged eyes and the crow’s feet—his face . . . is within two inches of my nose; he is hanging over me like a mother over a baby” (108), a perception that both emasculates Hugh and infantilizes Nell. To Nell’s dismay, they will remain in this pub overnight as a new carriage and horses are sought for.

As Dick and Nell wait, the elderly landlady regales Nell with the narrative of their arrival, Hugh carrying the unconscious Nell in his arms—about which Nell writes, “vultures gnawing my heart, I, in Hugh’s arms, with my head hanging over his shoulder, and my mouth open! Disgusting tableau! Not only disgusting, but public; witnessed by the two grooms and the landlady, certainly by a barmaid and a host of boozing bores” (190). What is it about this scene—a gentleman carrying a lady to safety—that so disgusts Nell? First, it’s the fact that Hugh has touched her, has felt her body against his. Second, it’s the fact that this incident is so public. A member of the aristocracy with a long-standing family name and title, Nell should behave—and be treated—according to her position: with dignity and an acknowledgement of her superiority. She should not be seen in such an undignified position, unconscious and carried into a public house like a fallen woman. Third, the setting itself is troubling and potentially scandalous. Not only lower-class, pubs in the 19th century were seen, writes the historian F.M.L Thompson, “as centres of a great underworld of sex, indecency, depravity, crime, cock-fighting, gambling, plotting, and subversion” (202), certainly not a place for an upper-class 19 year-old girl to spend the night.

Broughton shows little interest in the working class—the servants and farmhands and millworkers who might entertain themselves at a pub and whose labor supports the Lestranges and the Lancasters. Representatives of the lower middle and working classes barely exist in the novel, although at one point, suggesting the social consequences of income inequality, Nell tells us that she is not fond of solitary walks, “having a wholesome fear of beggermen” (79). This night in the pub, then, is almost the only moment in the novel when we see Nell (or any member of her class) interact with workers.. How alien this world is to her—and how

discomfiting with its stale beer and tobacco smells and its boozing bores, this place where “the barmaid’s teehee, inharmonious, as the laugh of the uneducated always is, rewards [drunken men’s] sallies, and mingles with their haw-haws” (191-2). Nell finds herself in a lower world where the standards of the middle and upper classes do not apply, where men and women can engage in drunken and bawdy conversations. It’s a world where clandestine pairings take place (remember: a significant percentage of lower-class women were pregnant when they married). In this world, freed from upper-class strictures, Hugh can be more demonstrative with Nell, who sees him staring at her, or as she puts it: “taking an inventory of my charms” (194). Nell is spending the night “alone on a narrow seat with a man who will keep edging an inch every five minutes nearer [her] and who never moves his eyes from [her] face” (191).

At this point, feeling uneasy with the slightly creepy Hugh, Nell does something odd. Having bruised her arm in the carriage accident, she pulls down her sleeve and tells us about the beauty of her arm: “What is there in nature or art so pretty, so appealing to the senses as a beautiful arm? Mine was beautiful, round and firm, and polished like marble, that some god had kissed into warm life; with dear little nicks and dimples about elbow and wrist” (196). Given how fully Victorian women’s bodies were clothed, arms and necks and ankles and ears and feet often receive sensuous description from Victorian novelists. The language Broughton uses here would seem to apply more to, say, a woman’s breasts—“round and firm . . . like marble . . . kissed into warm life”—than her arm. This displacement, from a secondary sexual characteristic to a non-sexual body part is the essence of fetishism. A sense of fetish, of sado-masochism, is evident in her further description: “I find a big black bruise, and two long red scratches on the soft-cream white flesh” (106).

In a culture as sexually controlled as that of middle and upper-class Victorian England, in which moral codes had to be followed and even a modest expression of sexuality had to be disguised, Broughton uses men’s and women’s arms to suggest sexual intimacy. It’s easy enough to spot this string of images. It’s more difficult to explain its function. We know that these arms—being touched by a woman, carrying a woman, being bruised and exposed to a man—are in some elusive way sexual. But however suggestive this tale of arms and the man may be of other body parts, these arms remain arms. And yet they’re not just arms.

Nell’s receptivity to Dick’s holding her hand (and her father’s excessive reaction to it) suggest a correspondence between simple acts of touch and sexual desire. Nell’s touching Dick’s arm—after having described him, in what might be read phallically as “stretching his long length” (174)—reveals her willingness to defy convention, to pursue a man, and thereby to fulfill her sexual desire, an interpretation further supported by Nell’s calling this act “indecently forward.” On this reading, Hugh seems to acknowledge his shortcomings when he jealously refers to “that long-legged M’Gregor” (194). Hugh’s carrying the unconscious Nell in his arms into a pub, on the other hand, reminds one of an elopement or a secret tryst. As Nell exposes her arm to Hugh, she tells him it hurts and describes herself “looking up rather ruefully at [Hugh], somewhat after the manner that a dog does that has got a thorn in his foot, when he comes limping up, with upheld paw” (196). Hugh responds to this entreaty by bending down to kiss her bruise, a gesture from which Nell recoils in horror.

The picture Broughton draws—a young girl lifting her sleeve to show bruises and scratches on her “soft-cream white flesh” and looking apologetically into a man’s eyes—could be taken straight from a volume of Victorian erotica. The picture of this helpless beseeching girl exposing her flesh to a powerful man reminds us, as I noted earlier, of how frequently a woman’s attractiveness is equated with her girlishness. For instance, the male protagonist in Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*, like many a Victorian male, is attracted to the childlike aspect of his wife: “[she] had fallen asleep, her head leaning against the trunk of a tree. Her bonnet

and parasol lay at her feet, her scarf had dropped, and she looked like a lovely child, her lips partly open, her cheeks flushed, and her beautiful hair falling around” (150). Hugh’s response to Nell, his desire to kiss her bruise, as a father would console a child, suggests a similar form of attraction. This infantilizing of women—especially this finding beauty in their childlike attributes—suggests, if not pedophilia, a form of sexual deviance. It’s strange, though, that this view should be uncritically depicted by women writers. Broughton and Wood, I suppose, were too innocent to see anything aberrant here and were merely reflecting a common male attitude, one they’d read in novels and seen in their own lives. Or perhaps the fault is mine: living in an age well aware of the evils of sexual abuse and pedophilia, I might be imposing my views on what are truly innocent descriptions of young women.

Nell is aware of what her appearance in this setting signals. When Nell asks Hugh why he didn’t accompany his grooms on their journey back to Wentworth, Hugh replies, “And *leave* you?” (189). At this remark, Nell sees that “Neither words, tone, nor attitude are lost upon the [landlady]. . . She coughs a little, and looks or makes as though she is looking towards” something else (189), attempting to be discrete while “glancing stealthily at [Nell’s] left hand” (190), presumably to determine if she is married. Nell describes her and Hugh’s sitting down to tea as “horribly honeymoonish” (190). The appearance in this lower-class setting of this upper-class couple can mean but one thing: a clandestine sexual liaison. And so the landlady departs, the house grows silent, and night descends, Nell wishing she was still protected by the landlady’s chaperonage (191). In this context, this honeymoonish setting, Nell’s revealing her arm to Hugh and then angrily jerking it away when he brushes it with his moustache is suggestive of a wedding night, naked wife presenting herself to her husband then responding with disgust when his hairy manhood brushes against her. As Broughton does here, Victorian novelists, severely limited in how they could depict sexual behavior; had to disguise, to suggest, to conceal.

Earlier, Broughton had described Dick “stretching his long length, like a big Newfoundland” (174), a big, black, web-footed rescue dog. The Newfoundland first appeared in England, by way of Canada, in the early 1800s. The poet George Gordon, Lord Byron had a pet Newfoundland named Boatswain, for whom he constructed a memorial, on which he inscribed his poem “Epitaph for a Dog”:

Oh man! thou feeble tenant of an hour,
Debas'd by slavery, or corrupt by power,
Who knows thee well, must quit thee with disgust,
Degraded mass of animated dust!
Thy love is lust, thy friendship all a cheat,
Thy tongue hypocrisy, thy heart deceit,
By nature vile, ennobled but by name,
Each kindred brute might bid thee blush for shame.
Ye! who behold perchance this simple urn,
Pass on, it honours none you wish to mourn.
To mark a friend's remains these stones arise;
I never knew but one — and here he lies.

Broughton could have seen a different Newfoundland, Napoleon the wizard dog, a star performer in Van Hare’s Magic Circus, whose death in 1868 resulted in this obituary in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*:

DEATH OF A CELEBRATED FOUR-FOOTED ARTISTE. — Mr. Van Hare's renowned dog, Napoleon, designated “The Wizard Dog,” died on 24th . . . aged twelve years. He was a noble

specimen of the Newfoundland breed (weighing near 200 lbs.) for which he took the prize at the first Agricultural Hall Dog Show. Besides his magnificent appearance and symmetry, he was the most extraordinary sagacious and highly-trained animal ever known. He is now being preserved and beautifully mounted by the celebrated naturalist, Mr. Edwin Ward. ("Newfoundland")

Among the dog prints with which Hugh attempts to entertain Nell were likely some painted by Edward Landseer, whose paintings of Newfoundlands with titles like "Off to the Rescue," "A Distinguished Member of the Humane Society," and "Saved" were so popular that "Landseer" became the official name of a breed of Newfoundland. Broughton's association of Dick with a Newfoundland, then, is not merely due to its size but to this breed's reputation in the popular imagination, which was shaped by Landseer's paintings. As the Wikipedia entry on Landseer concludes, "The paintings combine the Victorian conception of childhood with the appealing idea of noble animals devoted to humankind" ("Edwin").

Broughton continues her use of dog imagery when she describes Nell looking up at Hugh "somewhat after the manner that a dog does" (196). This animal imagery changes dramatically after Hugh's attempted kiss of Nell's bruise. Nell describes snatching her arm "away as from a hyena about to mumble it" (196). To "mumble" in this context means to eat with just one's gums. Since hyenas have powerful jaws and teeth which enable them to eat animal hides and bones, it's odd to describe a hyena about to mumble Nell's arm. A toothless hyena? Broughton chooses this animal, I suspect, because of its general unattractiveness, a furry-faced predator and scavenger, and because of its contrast with the Newfoundland, the one a creature that saves lives, the other one that consumes carcasses. Responding to Hugh's attempted mumble, Nell screams for him to leave her alone "fierce as a young." She is transformed from lap dog to tigress, ferocious and feline, an animal more than equal to a hyena. "Looking volumes of outraged virtue at him," Nell asks, "will you never understand that I hate you?" (196). This excessive response—her virtue has been outraged because Hugh has brushed his moustache against her arm—is evidence of Nell's youth and inexperience and of Victorian culture's strict moral code. But if we perceive the arm kissing as a stand-in for something more sexual, this reaction is understandable. Rejected and hated by a girl he thought sympathetic to his courting, Hugh becomes enraged. Immediately thereafter, their carriage arrives and Hugh and Nell are returned to Wentworth where Nell flees to her room, closing volume one.

Part Two Chapters 20-24

Before we continue with the tale of young Nell, dear listener, let us briefly journey down a different path—where we will consider how Rhoda Broughton presents this tale. Most chapters begin not by continuing the main narrative but by ruminating and digressing. We begin volume two, for instance, expecting to pick up where we'd left off—Hugh and Nell having just spent the night together, now returned to Wentworth manor. Instead, Broughton opens with a quote from William Wordsworth's poem "Intimations of Immortality," which inspires Nell to speculate about pre-existence: "Does any glimmering of memory illumine those days when we lay on our nurse's lap, sprawling, making faces, sucking?" (199). She goes on to wonder about reincarnation but concludes that we can't know about our past lives, if any, though we can "Thank God there is in the future enough to enable us to walk soberly, heedfully, warily, on towards the fuller light" (199). While this passage ends with a typical Christian reaffirmation, other such passages are darker and more morbid. At the beginning of one chapter, for example, she delves into questions of theodicy, of why God created a world filled with evil and suffering: "Can our God be of so refined a cruelty," she asks, "as to have created so many millions of human beings, just to worry their lives out?" (109). Some reviewers

responded unkindly to these digressions, *The London Review* for one complaining that the novel's "philosophy consists in the utterance of worn-out platitudes" ("Appendix One," 359). I agree that these passages offer little original thought, nor are they saved from banality by inventive rhetoric or forceful expression. They can be justified, however, by the precocity of the narrator. These questions about morality and suffering—this attempt to find meaning in life—is the kind of impassioned speculation that a sensitive 19-year-old, or a 22-year-old narrator looking back on her sensitive 19-year-old self, or a 26-year-old author writing from the point-of-view of a 22-year-old narrator looking back on her sensitive 19-year-old self, would ponder and perceive as profound.

Another notable feature of the novel is Broughton's frequent inclusion of lines of poetry. She cites poems more than 50 times, ranging from the famous, like Homer and Coleridge, to the forgotten, like Thomas Ingoldsby and William Edmonston Aytoun. But far and away the most cited—with 17 citations—is that Victorian perennial, Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Just as they criticized her digressions, so reviewers criticized her inclusion of many quotes and allusions, seeing these as Broughton showing off. It's true that this inclusion of lines of verse that refer—often remotely—to the narrative proper reveals her impressive familiarity with a broad range of literary texts. But these citations can also be textually justified since narrator Nell declares herself an avid reader of poetry. For Nell, the only language that can convey the initial stages of her love for M'Gregor is verse. She rhapsodizes, "I could spout tomes of verse. . . . I must go cantering up the green slopes of poetry" (123). At one point, Dick recites a verse from Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and asks Nell if she ever reads poetry. Has she ever read poetry? Barely able to contain her enthusiasm, she replies: "Oh, yes, very often" and runs off the titles of poems by Byron, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Milton, and the obscure Tory politician George Canning. Whereas Dick can share lines of verse with Nell, Hugh—another strike against him—tells Nell, "I'm not up to the dodge of poetry. I don't go in for those kind of things" (185).

But Broughton does. Her appreciation for poetry can also be seen in her frequently lyrical prose, as in this passage:

Beyond the wood, was a meadow all a-blaze with buttercups, and beyond it a garrulous brook, which was the bound of my walk. Arrived here, I sat down in the grass. . . . A little rude handbridge led over the hurrying, clattering stream, and on the other side of it, right opposite to me, rose a mill, and an old farmhouse, with a range of straw beehives and a plat of blue borage under the diamond-paned windows, beside it. The mill was at work, and the water came plunging and dashing and sparkling over the big wheel, as it turned round, dripping. (79)

Another feature of this novel is its often comic tone. Broughton takes delight in the barbed comments of sister Dolly. This character (just as Lady Loborough does for Anne Bronte in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*) frees Broughton from the strictures of respectability and morality and sacrifice—the general passivity—required of middle and upper-class women. Dolly's rebuttals to her sister's outrage are often funny, her cynicism an antidote to Nell's plodding dependance on convention. While Nell is clearly meant to be the novel's heroine and Dolly its villain, it's probably wrong to separate them this way, to see them as warring and unreconcilable alternatives. Better to see them as two aspects of a Victorian woman's consciousness—the one hopeful and idealistic, the other cynical and pragmatic.

Overall, for some reviewers, the seemingly disparate elements of this novel—female sexual desire, Victorian morality, philosophical digressions, literary quotes, lyrical passages, and comic tone—added up to a kind of jumble that didn't conform to the boundaries of conventional realistic fiction. To a contemporary reader, this striking against and sometimes exceeding these boundaries make the novel unique and interesting. It's a

text that often seems at war with itself, playful and self-referential at one moment, conventional and moralistic at the next.

Now back to the story. After her horrible experiences with a conniving sister, a spoiled picnic, a runaway carriage, a lower-class pub and a besotted suitor, Nell is awakened by and instantly angry at Dolly for having 1) contrived to place her with Hugh, thereby setting on its course her nightmarish ordeal and 2) having fastened her seductive glance on Dick. In confronting Dolly, Nell asks a question that's difficult not to read sexually: "Did you want to ride with him yourself?" A question whose double entendre Dolly, if not Nell, seems to comprehend as "she smiles again; a little amused compassionate smile" (201). Dolly explains that she has no interest in the impoverished Dick. Rather, her goal is to see that Nell "should drive through life with [Hugh] . . . and to see [her] as Lady Lancaster" (202). After Nell tells her this will never happen, Dolly draws a bleak picture of what marriage to Dick would look like: "riding in the baggage wagon . . . with several little M'Gregors, male and female, clinging about your skirts" (202). Clearly, Dolly is the villain of the piece, uninterested in love or in any of a potential husband's traits other than his wealth. And she sees raising children as tedious and restrictive. While the novel depicts her as vain, cynical, mercenary, and duplicitous, she, not Nell, truly understands the plight of an upper-class woman with great beauty but little money. Her refusal to give in to domestic cant and her ability to exploit a system rigged against her are admirable. Perceiving marriage as a commercial transaction, she pierces through the gauzy romanticizing of motherhood. Likely, Broughton shared these views, remaining unmarried not due to a broken heart but to an understanding that marriage would restrict her—as a writer and a woman who wished to retain her independence.

In her attempt to push Nell into Hugh's arms, Dolly goes on to falsely claim that Dick, in Pamela Gilbert's words, "likes the expensive and decadent habits of upper-class bachelor life: gambling on billiards, drinking expensive wine, and keeping pricey mistresses" (203n2). By sullyng Dick's reputation and encouraging marriage to Hugh, Dolly is pursuing her own agenda, for should Nell marry Dick, she "will drag down [their] family, and [Dolly] of course with it, even lower than it has already fallen, though it seems pretty nearly at the bottom" (203). Dolly, speaking of a potential wealthy suitor, reveals how completely she is ruled by mercenary desires: "I'd swear to love, honor, and obey not him . . . but his £12,000 a year, his French cook and his opera box. . . . is there any lord between the three seas, so old, so mumbling, so wicked, that I would not joyfully throw myself into his horrid palsied arms, if he had but money; money! Money! Money is power; money is a god" (204).

Nell responds by pointing out that unlike Dolly she is desired by two men and will "soon be a married woman, and able to patronize spinsters" like Dolly (233). This exchange between Nell and Dolly, the former believing in love, the latter in money, becomes increasingly contentious and insulting. And it continues a theme I noted when discussing Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*: that in a patriarchal system which limited their options, restricted their freedom, denied their desires, and controlled their wealth, women were often pitted against one another. Thus, Nell declares, "I should like to go to parties where there were no women, only men. . . . women are so prying and censorious. . . . [whereas] men are good-natured, and take you as they find you, and make the best of you" (63). Nell believes, in accord with the dominant Angel in the House ideology, that women need men, that the two, in their separate spheres with their separate strengths and weaknesses, complement each other. "A household where woman reigns alone. . . leavened by no admixture of the masculine element," she concludes, "is a very dreary thing" (156). She continues: "Women's minds are apt to get narrowed, soured . . . if they have not some male intellect to rub against, and be wholesomely jostled and buffered and sweetened by" (156).

Nell might be able to adhere to this belief and become a Victorian wife if she could marry Dick. But she faces a significant obstacle: a dying father who longs to see her marry well and thereby revive the family's fortunes. Describing the ailing Lord Lestrangle, Broughton turns to conventional Victorian sentiment: "I leaned forwards eagerly to blow kisses at my father, whose face I saw leaning out among the roses. . . . What a sad old face it was! What a yellowing tinge—like a sere November leaf's tinge, that spoke of waning life and waxing sickness—was stealing over it. Poor noble old face! How often I see you now in my dreams, looking out from among the fresh pink rose-bunches" (234). This sad, dying man, framed in roses, is enlivened by the prospect of Nell marrying Hugh. "I believe," he tells her, "that to see you raised to your right level again, and doing something towards bringing the old family back into its right position in the country would add ten years to my life" (235-36). To pursue her romance with Dick, Nell must, therefore, resist her dying father's request and the notion that only marriage to Hugh can save him, a notion Dolly reinforces, telling her sister, "unless some one leaves him a legacy. . . he'll be a dead man" (239). And Nell must struggle against these pressures without Dick's presence, for he has departed with his regiment to Ireland.

Chapters 25-38

While *Cometh Up as a Flower* seems to exist in a timeless world of privilege, the actual world of imperial rule does sometime intrude, as in Nell's reference to Dick's being posted to Ireland. But Nell says nothing more about this. In fact, she seems almost proudly incurious about international affairs. In discussing the American Civil War with her father, which is being fought concurrently with the novel's main action, she says, "I do not think I should have cared very much whether the Confederates conjugated the active or passive voice of the verb to 'whip.' I should have listened with equal indifference to the [talk] of Abolitionists or Secessionists" (61). Violence against slaves—and the perpetuation of slavery itself—is of so little interest to Nell that she can make fun of the issue and care not a whit which side might win. Her minister father, though, exults in the North's defeats. Broughton doesn't explain why Nell's father is rooting for the South. Sympathy for the underdog? Belief in the pastoral plantation myth? One conservative aristocracy sympathizing with another? Perhaps. But it's equally likely due to the war's economic impact on the cotton industry in and around Manchester. With cotton imports from the southern states interrupted by the war, many mills reduced hours or closed entirely, causing mass unemployment and sometimes violent civil unrest, and leading to what became known as "The Lancashire Cotton Famine." At the same time, the reduced supply of cotton increased its value, thereby enriching cotton speculators. According to Harvard historian Sven Beckert, "In 1860, the total value of cotton imports had been £39.7 million and in 1864 it had reached £84 million, despite a much-reduced volume" (249). Broughton makes no reference to this background other than to depict, uncritically, the luxurious lives of the Manchester elites and to note that some are newly wealthy thanks to the cotton trade.

Incurious about the Civil War and its impact upon Britain, Nell seems only vaguely aware of Britain's own use of violence to suppress resistance in its colonies. When she imagines "Dick having been killed in the wars," she can't decide which war this might be, "whether French, Kaffire or Sikh" since there was "an equally remote probability of our picking a quarrel with either of those nations" (159). These allusions suggest the span of the British empire, from India, home of the Sikhs; to France, under Napoleon II an imperial rival against whom the British fought for territory in South and Southeast Asia; to Africa: the word "kaffir," deriving from the Arabic word for infidel, referred originally to all Bantu-speaking tribes in southern Africa, then to only the Xhosa people, and finally to all Africans—as Wallace Mills, History professor at St. Mary's University in Halifax, explains: "By the end of the nineteenth century, [kaffir] had similar connotations and uses as the term 'nigger'" (615). Use of the word "kaffir" in contemporary South

Africa can result in a civil penalty. This racial sensitivity to the word “kaffir,” though virtually unknown in the United States, is common in Britain where one grocery store chain has relabeled “Kaffir limes” “Makrut limes.”

Of the many lands that comprised the British empire, it’s India that’s most frequently mentioned in the novel. Nell imagines Dick dying in a “wild Mahratta battle” a generic, ahistorical term she uses to refer to any exotic and distant combat in India. In actuality, there were three Mahratta wars waged by the British East India Company against the Mahratta empire (from 1775 to 1782, 1803 to 1805, and 1817 to 1819), the last of which ending the empire’s two centuries rule and establishing British rule over the Indian subcontinent. Another reference to India appears in a moment of banter, Nell telling her penniless suitor Dick he is “not related to the Great Mogul” (151), a reference, perhaps, to a Mughul emperor or perhaps to the world’s largest diamond, a 787-carat stone found in India in 1650. Recut and rechristened the Orlov diamond, this stone is believed to be part of Catherine the Great’s scepter, now on display in the Kremlin Army museum in Moscow. Britons’ fascination with Indian diamonds followed the public display of the Koh-i-Nor diamond, a 186-carat stone discovered in India, probably in the 1600s, which became the property of Queen Victoria as part of the settlement of the Second Anglo-Sikh war, and which was put on display at the Great Exhibition of 1851, inspired Wilkie Collins’s 1868 novel *The Moonstone*, and became part of the Crown Jewels which tourists flock to see in the Tower of London. This reference to the Great Mogul, whether despot or diamond, shows how intertwined Indian culture was becoming with British culture, as does Nell’s describing Dolly sitting motionless “as a statue, tinted with life colours, like Vishnoo contemplating his own attributes and god gifts in the shining heart of the Swerga,” the Hindu underworld (156).

Most striking and most disturbing is Dick’s telling Nell, as they sit by a brook in a lover’s embrace that he “knew [Hugh] in India; all through the Mutiny; he is the deadliest shot. . . . They used to get him to pick off those black devils; he bagged a good deal of black game” (150). One might expect Nell to be, at a minimum, surprised by this recounting of what we would consider war crimes, not to mention a casual racism that views Indians as game to be shot, presumably in the same spirit in which an aristocrat like Hugh enjoys fox hunting. Unbothered by Dick’s cavalier retelling of these horrors, Nell instead responds by asking if Dick and Hugh were good friends, before going on to talk of Dick’s financial circumstances, all the while “rub[bing] [her] cheek gently against his shoulder” (151) and then drifting away in a lyrical account of “the rosy flush . . . catching at the tops of the churchyard yews” and the “little amber pools, where . . . tiny baby fish . . . shelter their semi-transparent bodies from the sun” (151).

That these horrors bother Nell not at all, that she unself-consciously moves from “black game” being shot to “tiny baby fish” sheltering their bodies, suggests either a crippling lack of moral intelligence or a belief by Nell, by Broughton, and by a majority of Britons that there was nothing wrong—and in fact much right—with killing “black devils.” At the height of its powers, Britain in the 1860s was convinced of the rightness of its imperial mission. Maintenance of this belief often required one to ignore or to justify troubling contrary evidence. The Indian Mutiny of 1857, “in some respects,” writes Mark Seaman, “a national rebellion against British rule, and in other respects, a military revolt within the ranks of the native army” (16), was unbelievably brutal, with Indian rebels massacring large numbers of British soldiers and civilians. After British East Indian forces surrendered in the siege of Cawnpore, for example, 300 soldiers were murdered. One hundred and twenty women and children who escaped this execution were held captive and ultimately killed, their bodies thrown down a well (“Siege”). Only five men and two women survived these two massacres. Seaman describes the immediate British response: “The effect these massacres had on the British, along with their general contempt for the Indian, combined to make retaliation just as fierce and

probably even more indiscriminate” (19). Writing in his 1858 *History of the Indian Mutiny*, Charles Ball explained that “Throughout the British empire, the shout of the people was for rescue and for vengeance: the blood of their slaughtered country-men, of their martyred women and children, came welling up before their mental vision; and one desire for retribution seemed to pervade all hearts, and nerve all arms” (648). This desperate cry for revenge suggests how greatly the Indian Mutiny shook British confidence. Writes Gautam Chakravarty, English professor at the University of Delhi, “British women had been subjected to systematic humiliation and violence, the news of such events questioned current notions of security, and the inviolability of British power, prestige and person in India” and ended rule by the East India Company (36). Hugh’s murders, Dick’s racism, and Nell’s moral blindness are best understood within this context, this need to reassert the rightness both of Britain’s imperial mission and of the wealth it produced, wealth that enabled the privileged lives of the upper-classes, the jewels and gowns, picnics and balls, carriages and estates of the Lancasters and the Lestranges and the M’Gregors.

Six months pass with Dick serving in Ireland and Nell’s father’s health worsening. Receiving no correspondence from Dick, her longing for him and her despair at his silence and her grief over her father’s decline wear her down. She describes herself as having “hollow . . . cheeks; the corners of the mouth drawn down, and the lines about it puckered up, as if with continual weeping; dark deep shadows under the eyes . . . hair twisted up with such negligent untidiness, as if nobody cared or thought about it any longer; and the figure, the pretty, tall figure drooping and nerveless” (254). Abandoned by Dick, urged on by Dolly, and feeling guilty about her father, Nell begins to reconsider marriage to Hugh, seeing it as her “possible, probable fate” (256). Recognizing that this marriage will likely prolong her father’s life, Nell says, “I was willing to sacrifice all my future years, willing to give my shrinking body to Sir Hugh’s arms and my abhorring soul into his custody” (256). In this denial of self, this surrender of her body, this giving in to a man’s control, Nell is following the Angel in the House model of female behavior—giving up one’s dreams and desires and giving over one’s whole self to the domestic, her resistance to marrying Hugh broken, ultimately, by financial need, by the imminent seizure of the family estate and the painful consequences for her father if he were to face this ruin and with it the “rough world’s jeers” (257).

In the description of the creditors about to pounce on the Lestranges we find perhaps the novel’s most disturbing element: a virulent anti-Semitism. “The children of Israel,” Broughton writes, “had come down upon us like locusts: a dreadful man with a hook nose, thick lips, and a greasy Hebrew face had come to make an inventory of the furniture and movables” (256). Anti-Semitism appears earlier in the novel when Nell talks to Dick about selling an antique watch, to which Dick responds, “What a mercenary person you must be! Are you sure that you have not got some Hebrew blood in your veins?” (92). Nell does not object to this anti-Semitic quip. Instead, she reassures Dick that her family “never had anything to say to the Jews” (93). Much later in the novel, after the Lestranges have had to sell their possessions, Nell rants, “Greasy Jews—the offscouring of the earth— . . . the accursed Israelite dog . . . have been prowling about, trading, as is their want, on the miseries and weaknesses of poor humanity” (290). Having heard nothing from Dick, Nell reluctantly agrees to marry Hugh and with his money to fend off “the children of Israel,” those “beaked Israelite faces [that] swarm before [her] mind’s eye” (271). Since the novel offers no correction, no normative position from which this anti-Semitism is criticized, these views seem endorsed by Broughton and her editors (and by the reviewers who made no mention of the book’s anti-Semitism.) In my previous podcast on Ellen Wood’s novel *East Lynne*, I argued that British attitudes and policies toward Jews became more tolerant as the 19th century progressed. These passages complicate my earlier claim, suggesting not only that anti-Semitism persisted in Victorian Britain but that it was so common and accepted in popular discourse that its appearance in such a gross and revolting manner in Broughton’s novel generated not a word of criticism.

Fear of impoverishment and Israelites pushes Nell into marrying Hugh. But she does so with a sense of horror and dread, comparing her decision to having an arm or a leg cut off and wishing she could “take a whiff of chloroform, and awake to find the limb amputated, the process over, the wooing accomplished” (258). The anesthetic qualities of chloroform were discovered by an English physician, William Morton, in the 1840s. Queen Victoria was administered chloroform when giving birth to her last two children, in 1853 and 1857. Until then there had been considerable debate about prescribing chloroform to women in labor, physicians worrying that doing so could hinder childbirth and some theologians seeing its elimination of the pains of childbirth as against God’s will. To the American obstetrician Charles Meigs, chloroform would stop the “natural and physiological forces that the Divinity has ordained us to enjoy or to suffer.” But Queen Victoria had no qualms about its use, referring to it as that “blessed chloroform, soothing, quieting and delightful beyond measure” (qtd. in Barry).

With no blessed chloroform to ease the pain of marriage to Hugh, Nell suffers, seeing herself as “a pretty white lamb being led out . . . be-ribboned, be-filleted to the slaughter. . . . and the butcher, with his sharp knife gleaming, walks behind her” (272). Raging against the cruelty of a system that forces her to marry a man she does not love and to accept being purchased like any other commodity, Nell denounces marriage as “the most matter-of-fact piece of barter in the world; so much young flesh and blood for so much current coin of the realm” (260). Consequently, when she thinks that “this is my wedding day,” she feels “no tremor, no shyness; only a huge loathing, an infinite despair!” (274). A kind of death, her marriage takes place in a church where “the cold, vault-like air crept through [her] thin clothing, and chilled the marrow of [her] bones; and a colder, bitterer chill grasped at [her] heart, as [she] listened to the grave, grand words” of the wedding service (277). As she leaves church, a new bride, Nell remains silent because, she tells us, “if I had attempted to utter, I felt that I should have shrieked aloud in my great agony” (278). Having a limb sawed off, being led to slaughter, feeling the chill of the grave, Nell lives in a state of hopeless, if melodramatic, despair.

Her reaction to this marriage is so consistently overwrought, her register permanently at high dudgeon, that it raises the question of why Broughton gives Nell such an excessively emotional voice. It could be that Broughton, 27 at the time of the novel’s publication, was recording what she imagined would be her own reaction if she were in Nell’s place. A second possibility is that Broughton is imitating the melodramatic voice expected of the heroine of a Victorian novel. A third possibility is that Broughton is being ironic—she is satirizing the over-ripe expressions and mordant self-pity of young women like Nell. This reading is encouraged by Broughton’s double-voicing—that is, she gives voice simultaneously to the 19-year-old Nell who despised Hugh and the 22-year-old Nell who sees him as a decent, caring man and who sees her earlier self as a spoiled and overly dramatizing ingénue. And one more possibility: all three of these readings can be true. The narrative voice reflects Broughton’s own, which in turn mirrors much of what appeared in popular fiction and was felt by young women of the middle class. But Broughton is too smart not to be aware of the follies and emotional excesses of this voice. And so she gently mocks it.

Within this melodramatic excess and irony, though, we can hear a genuine voice, Broughton’s own, which is outraged by the mercantile nature of marriage, the bride as commodity. Nell asks, “what can be meaner than selling yourself, like a bale of goods or a barrel of beer”? (268). Whereas earlier she had withdrawn in disgust at the brush of Hugh’s moustache against her flesh, after she has accepted his proposal she describes Hugh, “his arm . . . around my waist . . . brushing my eyes and cheek and brow with his somewhat bristly moustache as often as he feels inclined—for am I not his property?” (269). “Has not he every right,” she asks, “to drag me about in whatever manner he wills, for has he not bought me?” (269). Nell, now Hugh’s

possession, bewails her fate: “that accursed arm is still around me—my buyer’s arm—that arm that seems to burn into my flesh like a brand” (270). Nell is a domesticated animal, owned and branded: “I was his chattel,” she writes, “as much as his pet . . . bay mare” (292). She still thinks of Dick, of course, but thinks that thinking about him is itself immoral, that doing so “infinitely more . . . more regretfully, passionately, longingly, now that [she is] Lady Lancaster” makes her “a very bad wicked woman” (292). Tricked into and trapped by an unhappy marriage, Nell can’t even escape through her memories of Dick since this culture has taught her that, as a wife, even thinking romantically—“passionately and longingly”—about a man other than her husband is wicked.

Nell tells us that she is chattel—that is, a slave—like Hugh’s horse. Whereas earlier she had viewed herself as a fierce young tigress, she is now Hugh’s mare; whereas earlier she had spoken of riding with Dick, now it is Hugh who will ride her. As her husband, Nell recognizes, he has the right to put his arms about his wife. “If he might not insinuate his arm round my *waist*,” she asks, “round whose waist might he?” (292). Presumably, Nell and Hugh, one month into their marriage, have been sexually intimate, but this is never made clear. Although we’re merely talking about an arm encircling a waist, we’ve already seen Broughton hint at sexual intimacy in scenes neither sexual nor intimate. Following the code of arms I discussed earlier, Broughton seems to be using a kind of typology, that Biblical exegesis which explains how passages in the Old Testament prefigure the New. In this case, non-sexual scenes anticipate sexual ones—except the latter never appear due to Victorian prohibitions. We have the allusion without the alluded to, the reference without the referent. When we decipher this code, we learn that Hugh, who has a right to sexual intercourse with Nell, no matter her feelings, no matter her disgust, has already—or will soon—insinuate himself in ways more familiar than an unwelcome embrace.

Her days as a newlywed at Wentworth are not the stuff of a young girl’s dreams. She listens to her mother-in-law prate on about “Hugh’s extreme beauty in infancy; thrilling anecdotes of his childhood, and of how he caught the measles; of his habits and customs at various periods in his history; of how often he had broken his collar-bone, etc., etc.” (293). Trips outside the estate offer no escape since Nell, accompanied by her mother-in-law, goes “to pay solemn calls to neighbouring matrons” (293). At other times, she putters about the house with Hugh as he discusses his horses’ pedigrees, echoing, unawares, Nell’s view of herself as his prize mare.

All is drab and tiresome until one night, between gusts of rain, standing on her verandah, she sees “a man step . . . out suddenly—step . . . out into the moonlit gravel walk, where the pebbles are glittering like so many diamonds” (296). It’s Dick M’Gregor, of course, “the young giant with the haggard, beautiful, angry face” (296), returned from Ireland. When they meet, Dick, having learned of her marriage, groaningly asks Nell why she didn’t wait for him. She responds angrily, reminding him that he had not once in six months answered her letters. But Dick tells her he had received only a single letter, which he has kept close to his heart. Nell snatches the letter and reads: “I’m grieved to have to tell you that this first letter must also be the last” (297). The letter goes on to explain that Nell’s father, angry that she had continued to meet Dick after they had behaved shamefully (i.e., were caught holding hands), says he will relent and agree to their relationship only if, after a year of not seeing each other—and not writing to each other—they feel the same about each other. The letter ends with this postscript: “I adjure and implore you not to answer this: *I beg it of you as a proof of your love*. Papa would be sure to see the letter and then we should be in worse case than we are now even. Good-bye again, my own darling” (298).

Instantly, Nell recognizes that this letter has been forged by Dolly and that Dolly has kept her letters from reaching Dick, as a means of getting Nell to marry Hugh. “I’ve fallen into the trap she laid for me!” Nell

bemoans. Dick responds with equal disgust, calling Dolly a “she-devil” and saying he would “tear her limb from limb, though she is a woman” (298). To cap it off, he reveals to Nell that he must leave with his regiment for India the very next day.

“Looking into his haggard, beautiful, terrible face,” writes Nell, “I forgot all I should have remembered; forgot virtue, and honour, and self-respect; my heart spoke out to his. ‘Oh, don’t go . . . don’t you know how I love you? For my sake stay; I cannot live without you!’” (299). Dick says this cannot be, that he cannot live in England and see her with another man, that, in his words, “the world is all hell now, as it is; but that would be the blackest, nethermost hell!” (299). Desperate and overcome with love, Nell says she will leave her husband and journey to India with Dick. But after kissing “wildly, vehemently” (299), Dick tells her, in a deep and shaken voice, “My darling . . . you don’t know what you’re saying; do you think I’m such a brute as to be the ruin of the only woman I ever loved?” (299), at which Nell clings to his neck and blasphemously declares, “I’d rather go to hell with you, than to heaven with him” (300), her hair falling “in its splendid ruddy billows over his great shoulder and [her] arms . . . flung about the stately pillar of his throat” (300). Dick’s response to Nell is that of a respected Victorian gentleman: he could not “bring [her] down to a level with the scum of the earth” (300). Upon hearing Dick implore her “to be [his] good angel” (300), Nell realizes that she has fallen from her angelic heights, is, in fact, “very wicked,” and she thus asks for Dick’s forgiveness. Then, like many a Victorian heroine, she swoons and faints, only to wake up on a sofa with “candles burning low, and the [literal and metaphorical] fire nearly out,” realizing that Dick is gone, truly gone, and that she is “alone—alone for evermore” (300).

The only thing left to do is to avenge herself against her sister, this sister who “had so diligently served her master, the Devil” (302) by telling Hugh of Dolly’s “accomplishment of imitating her . . . handwriting; an accomplishment which would have twisted her graceful neck a hundred years ago” (301). But Dolly, she learns, has become engaged to a wealthy cotton heir, Lord Stockport. The unfairness of Dolly’s happy fate and her dismal one makes Nell recognize how insipid was her view of the world, her belief, inspired by reading novels, in a “story-book code of morality.” “Here is a young woman who has told lies, has forged, has wrecked the happiness of her sister’s whole life, and she is punished; how?” asks Nell, “why by marrying a lord with £80,000 a year. Truly poetic justice is confined to poetry” (315). And so, a change of plans. Rather than to Hugh, Nell will reveal Dolly’s forgery to Lord Stockport, ending her sister’s marriage-to-be and bringing about a semblance of poetic justice. Although Dolly shrugs off Nell’s threat, saying she has “never been very much in love with either Stockport or respectability” (317), Nell discerns “an anxious light in [Dolly’s] great dreamy sensuous eye” (320). Seeing her sister’s “great diamond betrothal ring . . . flashing and sparkling in the fire-light” (in contrast to the moonlit wet pebbles glittering like diamonds upon which Dick strode toward her), Nell tells herself “bitter, bitter will be the parting between Dolly and that jewel of price” (322).

Thus, Broughton prepares us for a dramatic showdown between the sisters, the idealist and the cynic, the innocent and the experienced, the lovelorn and the love-forsworn, the Angel and the demon. We wait for fireworks to explode, a crescendo to climax. But crescendo collapses, fireworks fizzle as Nell tosses the incriminating evidence into the fireplace, explaining, “I yielded up my injuries unto Him, who claims the redressing of all the injustices that have been wrought since the world was” (322). Driven to revenge by her conniving and unapologetic sister, Nell at the last moment turns the other cheek, recognizing that her thirst for revenge is unchristian. Why this sudden change? This affirmation of Christian humility and sacrifice comes about because of Nell’s guilt. What guilt, we might ask since she didn’t leave for India with her soldier lover or have a quick dalliance with him but instead, dutiful and faithful, she remained with a husband she dislikes? She feels guilty because in her mere willingness to leave with him she has sinned.

Dick's reproach to her "smote [her] like a two-edged sword" (300). And she accepts Dolly's "triumph . . . over the ruin of her life [as] a fit penance to her own wickedness" (312). In other words, Dolly's happy engagement and manipulation of her sister's romantic life is apt punishment for Nell's momentary weakness, her readiness to surrender her morals and flee with Dick to the Punjab.

At one point, Nell, the consummate reader, sees her plight mirrored in a novel "all about a married woman, who ran away from her husband and suffered the extremity of human ills in consequence" (313). Some critics, the feminist theorist Elaine Showalter for one, have asserted that Nell is reading Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (Showalter 173). In her notes to *Cometh Up*, though, Pamela Gilbert suggests another source: Anne Marsh-Caldwell's *The Admiral's Daughter*. Gilbert supports her assertion by noting that Florence Marryat in her 1892 novel *The Nobler Sex* pointed to the similarities between the two books and labelled *East Lynne* "a réchauffé" (in other words, a reserving) "of a forgotten romance by Mrs. Marsh" (qtd. in Broughton, 313n.2). It's odd to think Broughton would allude to an obscure novella, one of two that made up a volume titled *Two Old Men's Tales* that was published more than thirty years before instead of alluding to the immensely popular *East Lynne*, which was published just six years earlier. In summarizing the novel Nell is reading, Broughton identifies a plot point found in neither *East Lynne* nor *The Admiral's Daughter*: "the naughty matron is just dying of a broken heart and starvation in a Penitentiary" (314). This detail might suggest that the fiction Nell is reading is a fiction, a book made up by Broughton. Or it might be a novel yet to be identified by literary critics. Or Nell might be speaking metaphorically about the plight of Isabel Carlyle, the fallen wife in *East Lynne*, who is living in disguise in a kind of penitentiary: her former house, alongside her children, her former husband, and his new wife. In fact, contrary to Gilbert's claim, *East Lynne* seems a direct inspiration for Broughton and *Cometh Up* at times almost a rewriting of Wood's novel. In both novels, a motherless girl loses her father and is forced to marry a gentle and pleasant man she does not love, instead of the attractive young Army officer she does. In both novels, the protagonist's marriage is determined by financial need. And in both novels, Jews swoop in to claim their debts upon a father's demise. In one novel, the unhappy bride is seduced into running away by the man she loves; in the other, she wants to run away but is denied this chance by the man she loves.

The female protagonist of *East Lynne*, though, has no conniving sister like Dolly who, with her incriminating forgery in cinders, is free to marry Lord Stockport. He is not of the established family Dolly sought. His grandfather was a hosier who "used to come out to one's carriage door to take orders" (323). Bald and unattractive, he is, according to his best man, "the biggest fool out" (327). Dolly has no love for him—she is marrying for money and title. And she has no female friends, Nell explaining that it was difficult to find twelve young ladies to serve as her sister's bridal party. It's as the guests sit down for the wedding feast that Nell overhears tragic news: Dick M'Gregor has died of fever in India.

Broughton closes the novel with a chapter set two and a half years after Nell had offered to runaway with Dick, "that wintry night," Nell recalls, "when, in my wicked madness, I wanted to sacrifice soul and body to my one, my only love" (330). She now regrets that all her energies were spent on this unfulfilled romance, that "all the love and aspirations [she] had to bestow had been squandered on that intense earthly passion which seemed to be eating up [her] body and soul" (332). Physically and emotionally weakened by her doomed love, Nell is dying from consumption. The morbidity that pervades the novel can thus be attributed not merely to the sensibility of a teenaged girl but also to the sensibility of a young woman who knows she's dying, who is looking back at her younger self with the realistic and painful perception of someone about to die. Or as Gilbert puts it: Broughton shows "the distance between [Nell's] former girlishly frivolous self and her current experience as a young woman chastened by adversity and impending death" (19). Nell gains self-knowledge, becoming a good wife to Hugh and asserting throughout the novel that she was unfair to him, a man who loved her and treated her warmly. Similarly, she shows sympathy for the nouveau riche Coxes because, their bad taste and faux pas notwithstanding, they had been kind to Dick.

Ultimately, Nell experiences, Pamela Gilbert explains, “a religious awakening [that] is likely to be simply overlooked by today’s reader, less attuned to such concerns” (17). I admit being one of those readers not attuned to—and in fact not much interested in—characters’ spiritual growth. But this theme is indeed central to the novel. Nell has the conventional and unexamined faith of someone raised in a proper Victorian home. She reads prayers from “the the Family Bible . . . to the servants in an impressive and quasi-clerical manner every morning and evening” (42). She does so not out of evangelical fervor but because such was expected of a woman of her class. As Judith Rowbotham, Visiting Research Fellow at Plymouth University, explains, “the daily occurrence . . . of some form of religious instruction to her household was the goal that the good woman should strive for” (72). Yet, young and inexperienced, her faith untested, Nell sometimes reveals her shallow belief, telling her sister, for instance, that she’d pray every night for a face as beautiful as Dolly’s and wondering “why God gives some people so many more gifts than others; will he make it up to the poor ugly ones in Heaven?” (50). Without the deep faith promoted by Victorian culture and seeing God merely as “a dim awful abstraction” (84), Nell, after her father’s death, finds no consolation in religion, as she is expected to, but instead sees life “as a great vast chaos, through which men stumbled and tottered to a big black pit at the end” (293).

But Nell’s faith deepens. She had once lamented the unfairness of her fate compared to her sister’s. Whereas the honest Nell had seen the man she loves die and been coerced into marriage to a man she didn’t love, Dolly, who has lied and cheated and shown no interest in anyone but herself or anything but wealth, is married and prospering. But Nell moves away from this shallow and narcissistic calculus toward what was, for Victorians, a profounder faith, which is demonstrated when on her death bed Nell perceives God’s justice in “releas[ing] [her] from the long pain of existence” (333) and—once past the gates of death—reuniting her with her beloved Dick and connecting her to “the ineffable joys of the blessed souls of the just” (334). There is no poetic justice in this world, Nell knows, but the just will be rewarded in Heaven. And so a novel that begins with a couple meeting in a graveyard closes with that same couple, their fates conjoined, about to be reunited in heaven.

The novel’s title, which comes from the Book of Job, asserts the meaninglessness of human existence: “Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of misery. He cometh up as a Flower and is cut down.” This view of the brevity and emptiness of life is apparent in Dick’s and Nell’s fates (and the fates of the many who died young in 19th century Britain). However, Broughton couldn’t completely dismiss the notion of poetic justice and let a heroine full of misery be cut down. This would be too dark a conclusion for a mid-century popular novel, especially one written by a woman. And so Broughton turns to conventional Christian belief and the promise of heavenly reward—the promise, for Nell, of being reunited with her beloved and “see[ing] his hero face immortal *then* in its beauty” (333). For without this reward, the good Nell would be punished, the bad Dolly rewarded, virtue defeated, evil triumphant. Victorian novels could have dark, even tragic endings, of course. But these needed to be leavened with some sort of moral resolution, some sense that proper moral behavior was rewarded and the social order reinforced. In *Cometh Up*, this ending, because it is so sudden and inconsistent with the book’s often mordant sensibility, seems perfunctory, as if Broughton, having taken her narrative to the brink of existential despair, pulls back. Not, I suspect, because of a fear of this darkness but because of a fear that such an unredemptive ending might displease editors, alienate readers and reduce sales.

Broughton’s decision to end the novel conventionally likely contributed to its popularity, for *Cometh Up as a Flower*, while controversial for its depiction of female desire, was a huge hit that set Broughton up for a long and successful literary career. She would go on to write 25 novels, the last, *Lavinia*, published posthumously in 1920. Broughton’s first novel was published just three years after Dickens’s last, *Our Mutual Friend*. And her last novel was published the same year as F. Scott Fitzgerald’s first, *This Side of Paradise*. From Dickens to Fitzgerald, from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf, Broughton’s literary career spanned half a century, beginning at the height of Victorianism and closing at the onset of Modernism. Broughton knew her fiction had passed its prime. Her novels no longer had the power to shock but were

seen as old-fashioned, especially when compared to the works of younger writers such as James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, both of which were published in her lifetime. Aware of how out of step her own writing had become, Broughton remarked that she "began her life as Zola and finished it as [the moralizing Christian writer Charlotte Mary] Yonge" (qtd. in Gilbert 10) and that "in Italy mine was the only English fiction thought innocent enough to be given as pabulum to schoolgirls" ("Girls" 141).

Although she seemed to care little about her literary output and rarely discussed her work, Broughton was a frequent attendee at literary and social gatherings. According to Marilyn Wood, "She delighted in the spoken word and, from all accounts, poured much of her talent and wit into conversations at country house dinners, literary salons and informal gatherings" (5). She was an especially close friend of Henry James, who in one letter to her complained, "how poor a business I find it to be deprived so much of your society" (qtd. in Wood 94). James also admitted to being intimidated by her wit, describing Broughton as someone "before whom I even now tremble" (qtd. in Wood 96). John Sutherland, emeritus professor of Modern English Literature at University College London, claims, remarkably, that "So witty was she that Oscar Wilde supposedly declined to have her in his company lest she outshine him" (86). The essayist and critic Percy Lubbock remembers her dominating presence: "she claimed attention . . . wherever she was seen. . . . the cut of her talk, the cheerful slash of her phrase, the snap and crackle of her wit with all this Rhoda was a personage indeed, not lightly to be engaged, but on no account to be missed or forgotten" (qtd. in Wood 96). In reading *Cometh Up as a Flower*, one can sense the developing wit and intelligence Broughton would demonstrate in full in social circles. But one can also feel how trapped she must have been by Victorian moral and novelistic conventions. In the last year of her life, she wrote an essay reflecting on how much had changed for women "between us of the mid-Victorian era and our eye-opening successors," and she enviously observed that there was "practically no bar any longer placed between the sexes . . . in that of discussing any and every topic, whether relating to morals, manners, hygiene or social problems of however scabrous a nature" ("Girls" 38). Broughton had the misfortune of being born into a culture at odds with her sensibility. If born decades later and thus able to discuss matters scabrous, Broughton might have developed a more original aesthetic, one that would have let her examine more fully the sexual mores and gender conventions that too often cut down like flowers women like Nell Lestranger.

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