

Gissing to be rewriting *Maud*, *The Princess*, and the Laureate's own stunning subversions of standard representations of sexuality and identity. Gissing's letter to his brother Algernon, as he completes *The Unclassed*, quotes Tennyson's mixed description of his own character Maud: "faultily faultless, splendidly null" in a passage where he gives advice to Algernon about drawing a female character named Lucy. It seems clear that Gissing, immersed in Tennyson, is rewriting not only Tennyson's gender politics by concentrating on a subversion of female stereotypes in poems where Tennyson had intricately subverted masculine ones, but is also aggressively recasting Tennyson's class politics.

Gissing places his own story of Maud, Ida, fears of hereditary madness, death, and womanly ideals undone, not among the gentry and business classes, as in Tennyson's poems, but at the margins of the middle and lower classes. Gissing's novel may thus be seen, on closer look, to provide an even more complex narrative language of gender and class by its many intertextual associations with the Laureate's long anti-narrative narrative poems and not just with the sensation novel tradition. My comments should be read, however, neither as correctives nor as complaints, but as dialogue with a major and exciting book.

Penny Boumelha

This fine book addresses itself at once to changes within the structure of British society in the mid to late nineteenth century and to the development of fictional genres within the same period. What brings the two together, in Patricia Ingham's argument, is the role of social ideologies of class and gender. Ingham is to be taken seriously in the emphasis her title gives to language. The principal theoretical framework of her analysis is a linguistic structuralist one, positing the "sign" as the interpretative unit, identifying binaries such as the Angel/Whore opposition as the mechanisms of meaning, and taking a narratological approach to the analysis of such matters as narrative voice or plot structure. At the same time, her major critical focus is indeed the language of class in particular: the lexicon, syntax, registers, dialects, accents and figuration available to nineteenth-century fiction for the representation of one of its key preoccupations, class conflict. Ingham's main argument is centred upon shifts within that language, from the turn-of-the-century stability of "rank," through the mid-century model (inherently conflictual) of a tripartite class structure, to the later layering of the working class into artisans and the worthless "residuum," with the accompanying moralisation of misery. In mapping such shifts, she is inevitably called upon to make clear some particular understanding of the processes of change, and once more Ingham is linguistic in her inflection. The predominant "novelistic language" or "narrative syntax" provides a common stock of signs, but the idiolect of any particular writer "works to re-accent the communal system of signs" (30), allowing new significances and emphases to emerge and thus enabling further change. Such a theory can broadly be paralleled with Russian Formalism, except that its de- and re-familiarisations are specifically ideological rather than narrowly literary, and it comes as no surprise that Ingham's most explicit theoretical reference point is Bakhtin.

From Bakhtin, she takes one of her key analytic tools, an emphasis on the heterogeneity of fictional discourse, and *The Language of Gender and Class* develops a particular and productive focus on this multi-voiced quality, both in terms of contradictory narrative voices and in terms of narrative structures. The main contention holding together the two terms of her analysis is that the coding of femininity in the nineteenth century first enables and then complicates a middle-class understanding of class identity and difference; the construction of gender in terms of complementarity and separate spheres underpins a similar understanding of class, and as the one becomes blurred and difficult, so does the other. In the periodisation which structures the book, the three earlier novels under discussion—*Shirley*, *North and South*, and *Hard Times*—are all fractured by the displacement of issues of class and opposing class interests on to questions of gender and personal relationships within the middle class. In Brontë's and Gaskell's texts, a pivotal episode of collective action by workers shifts the novel from the narrative of class conflict to the narrative of romance, and this particular structure is almost defining of the genre of the industrial novel. In that odd novel *Hard Times*, Ingham finds at once a more and a less conventional narrative syntax; the displacement is almost reversed, so that the real social disaffection and the real threat of disorder are located in gender rather than class, and the pivotal narrative episode is Blackpool's rejection of collective action in the form of unionisation. Louisa the avenging Angel in the House, whom Ingham fascinatingly characterises as the type of the (non)-adulteress, is more effective as a social revolutionary than is Stephen Blackpool.

In the later novels considered (*Felix Holt*, *The Unclassed*, and *Jude the Obscure*), Ingham analyses the effects of the moralisation of class under the impetus of Smiles, Social Darwinism and eugenics. Where the earlier novels are concerned with the alleviation of misery, these later texts focus on questions of worth, improvability and social mobility. In *Felix Holt*, the moral instruction of Esther by Felix figures the necessity for workers, like women, to recognise their inferiority and dependence if social harmony, symbolised by the concluding marriage, is to be achieved. This orderly ideological trajectory is deflected, though, by the text's fallen woman, Arabella Transome, whose sexual illicitness and social prominence serve to undermine the intertwining of class and gender. *The Unclassed* is able to give a voice to the working-class woman as its central figure, largely because, as its title suggests, the novel seeks to refuse the determining structures of class. However, the emergence of a transgendered plot of marital choice and class allegiance, in Waymark's romantic waverings, reinstates the displacement of class conflict by romantic resolution. In Ingham's reading of *Jude the Obscure*, the novel uses its central romance between Jude and Sue to highlight the identity of the two as victims of exploitation and convention, and its onslaught on marriage decisively refutes the paternalist positing of the family as the model for class relations.

All these critical analyses, so briefly outlined here, are in their context of developing argument subtle and illuminating, using points of detail to open up large and significant questions carrying over from one reading to another. I particularly liked the continuing discussion of the function of dialect and non-standard English, as well as the accounts of various recurring metaphors for society and class relationships. Ingham's prose, like her thought, is uncluttered: clean, spare, occasionally tart, it can usefully stimulate fresh ideas and responses in only the briefest of asides. At a few moments such conciseness lends a certain bald assertiveness to her writing, but on the whole the

sense of much left unsaid, implied or stated in the fewest possible words is refreshing; I greatly admired, for example, the sentence and a half in which Ingham points out that the North of England represents at once a place, a period of achieved industrial revolution, and a set of values centred on entrepreneurial skill and self-help, made problematic by the need to reconcile such values with the conditions they create for workers. In the clarity of its argument, the sophistication of its reading and the compactness of its prose, *The Language of Gender and Class* is a significant contribution to the continuing analysis of the importance and the social effectivity of fiction in the nineteenth century.

Response

Patricia Ingham

The three readings of *The Language of Gender and Class* by Penny Boumelha, Linda Shires and Rachel Bowlby are illustrations of the fluidity of all texts: not only Victorian novels but critical books about them are clearly polysemic. All three critics largely agree with what they have read but each has read a somewhat different text.

All accept my general argument that the widely used assertion that class and gender are intertwined in the Victorian novel is borne out by my detailed scrutiny of six of them. They further accept that the chapters on individual novels demonstrate nonetheless shifts in these intertwinings which eventually open up new ways of treating both semantic areas. Shires, however, takes issue with me for appearing to make the novel “develop in a literary greenhouse” and for ignoring the fact that “the poetry of the period is also undoing the knot of class and gender.” This latter point is perfectly true but it is allowed for within my claim that “it is at the level of symbolism and rhetoric that ideological codings can begin to break down” (27). Obviously such characteristics are not exclusive to fictional prose narratives nor would the inclusion of poetic texts do more than elaborate my thesis. The work is essentially offered as one model for the analysis of texts in order to test the axiom that “to examine gender is to embark on a historical analysis of power which includes the formation of class.” Naturally the model would be applicable to poetry and other kinds of writing but, as Shires herself points out approvingly, my study “treats generic structure as signifying practice as well as signifying system” and I attend “to the social importance of genres in structuring specific social meanings and [show] how certain examples of a genre challenge familiar conventions of story, characterisation, narration and audience expectation.” This meant that I divided the analysis of the chosen novels into the sections which form each chapter. To do the same for another genre within the same book would have resulted in an account so complicated as to obscure the argument and more particularly the model that I offer. The intention was to provide detailed illustrations of my particular approach with as much clarity as possible. All three reviewers agree that clarity prevailed and for that I am happy to accept as true Penny Boumelha’s criticism that a “clean, spare, occasionally tart” style can result at times in “a certain bald assertiveness.” I shall take this to heart for the future, and even in this response.