THE VICTORIAN HORIZON

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In *The Boyhood of Raleigh*, John Everett Millais's painting of 1870, a swarthy, tanned sailor points energetically towards the horizon. The eyes of one of the small boys are fixed intently on him; those of the other, Raleigh himself, are directed more downwards suggesting an inward, imaginative visualisation of the sailor's words. In his mind's eye he sees, to quote a contemporary commentator F.G. Stephens, "El Dorado, and the palaces of Aztecs and Incas, temples of the sun, where the sun's face burns in gold; hidden treasures, fair Indian captives, and the fountains of eternal youth" (24-25). On the left of the picture a toy sailing ship placed on the same diagonal as the sailor's outstretched arm suggests how childhood enthusiasms mediated through the narratives and inspiration of the sailor will be transformed into adult exploration, action, adventure. The red ensign on this ship signals its Englishness; the strange feathered cap and the exotic plumage of a dead bird behind the sailor represent the cultural and natural trophies awaiting the voyager across the ocean.

The horizon in this painting marks a boundary between sea and sky, between the visible, material world and the ether. "Horizon" from the Greek *oqinxm* (present participle of *oqineim*: to bound), a bounding circle, a demarcation, a limitation, an ending. But that sailor's pointing finger is carefully positioned just above the dark blue of the sea so that it indicates the apparently limitless possibilities that lie just beyond the reach of sight. The horizon, in other words, marks not just the edge of the visible, but suggests futurity, the space into which the imagination and inner vision may travel: it connotes expansiveness. Its existence brings together space and temporality: the reach of the gaze and the desire to see beyond its physical limitations.

Furthermore this potential for expansiveness goes on and on. For as Cornelius Van Peursen has written, "the really striking fact about the horizon is that it recedes" (182)[1]: it is always there, temptingly, far ahead of us. This phenomenon is invoked in a double way in the best-known of all Victorian poetic horizons when Tennyson's Ulysses, the ocean's rim before him, links his specific voyaging project to the wish to make one's life a continuing process of exploration even against the odds of age and physical weariness: "all experience is an arch wherethrough / Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades / For ever and for ever when I move" (2.19-21). The horizon is only to be perceived as a limitation if we do not move ourselves, for its existence is dependent upon our own capacities for perception. It has no independent, objective existence apart from the role it plays within the human gaze. It is this fact—that the concept of the horizon simultaneously signifies out there, away from us, somewhere towards which we might reach, and yet also is something that is indivisible from our individual physical and conceptual faculties—that makes it such an ideal trope through which to examine Victorian attitudes towards the visual, towards the practice of seeing.

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[1] I am greatly indebted to this stimulating piece "The Horizon" for the ideas it suggests about the nature and properties of the horizon.

Moreover like the very idea of "sight," the idea of the horizon is at once material and figurative. Within Victorian culture the horizon has a visible presence each time it is invoked as marking the rim of the world, the limit of one's sight, the direction towards which one is travelling. But it may also be employed metaphorically to signify the excitement of unfolding interpretive possibilities: exploration in a theoretical as well as a topographical sense.

In Millais's painting, however, the focus is primarily on the geographical implications of travelling towards the horizon, even if one critic did see a further and more personal point in the artist having chosen two of his own sons as models, painting them "with all the charm and pride of a devoted father who projects great things for his offspring" (Harlaw 39). The subject was suggested to Millais by his reading of historian J.A. Froude's *English Worthies*. Froude in his copious writings constantly emphasised the connection between England's "watery dominion" and her imperial and expansionist power. "Take away her merchant fleets," he wrote, "take away the navy that guards them: her empire will come to an end; her colonies will fall off, like leaves from a withered tree; and Britain will become once more an insignificant island in the North Sea, for the future students in Australian and New Zealand universities to discuss the fate of in their debating societies" (2). The colonies of course were particularly identified with horizonal, forward-looking movement: "There," wrote J.R. Seeley in *The Expansion of England* (1881-2), "you have the most progressive race put in the circumstances most favourable to progress. They have no past and an unbounded future"; unlike India with its troubling weight of history and the "vistas" it "opens . . . into a fabulous antiquity" (140). Millais's celebration of Britain's maritime importance, its hunger for overseas conquest, possession and expansion, was among the factors serving to establish him as a quintessentially patriotic painter by the end of the Victorian period: his "Art was wholly fervently British," claimed James Harlaw in *The Charm of Millais* (1913): "—direct, simple and spontaneous. . . . His nationality was a halo around the man: his patriotism the spirit of his life. 'Made in Britain,' is written in golden letters over all his work" (38).

Certainly the horizon could function as a line of limitation as well as of possibility. In terms of pictorial perspective a high horizon, without diagonals stretching out towards it, serves as a kind of wall enclosing the subject and concentrating the viewer's attention onto the specifics of a scene. For all the redemptive possibility inherent in the subject-matter of Holman Hunt's *The Scapegoat*, the firm high line of enclosing arid mountains has the effect of pulling the spectator's eye back to the earthly suffering of the miserable animal. In Leighton's *Flaming June* the high horizon pitches the viewer forwards into a consideration of a figure's interiority. Here, although the sun burns dazzlingly into the sea drawing our attention momentarily towards this luminosity, the horizon has no narrative or temporal suggestivity other than to provide a contrast with the reverie or dream that may be taking place within this narcoleptic body, watched over by a sign of the underworld, the aloe. Her voyaging is to be inward, downward; something which in a broader sense serves to confine the woman as a thoroughly passive object of the gaze, an aesthetic celebration of her beauty in stasis. This may be read as an anxious riposte to the way that upper and middle-class women's horizons were figuratively expanding during the latter decades of the century. For a

woman to launch herself on such seas of self-discovery and social adventuring was a risky act of exposure. In her 1889 poem "Under Convoy" Edith Nesbit seems to figure such perilous exploration as foolhardy, setting up a woman who tries to do "the work that I cannot—":

> As a swimmer alone in mid-ocean
> Breasts wave after green wave, until
> He sees the horizon unbroken
> By any coast-line—so I still
> Swam blindly through life, not perceiving
> The infinite stretch of life's ill.
>
> But wave after wave crowds upon me -
> I am tired, I can face them no more -
> Let me sink—or not sink—you receive me,
> And I rest in your arms as before.

The speaker pleads to the man to hold her, kiss her, provide a leaning post for her; he offers, he thinks, "a haven . . . for the storm-blown and tossed." But the poem pivots; to rest safe is to make the ignoble choice: if "you save me my ease as a woman . . . the life of a soul is the cost!" (46-47). To turn away from the horizon is an act of cowardice denying the promise of the unknown offered by the "infinite stretch" and retreating fearfully into the known.

Certainly the horizon can suggest frightening as well as liberating space. Arnold's "Sea of Faith" no longer stretches out into a comfortable curved plenitude, though once it "at the full, and round earth's shore / Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd." Rather the axis has shifted and Arnold has substituted medieval mapping in all its suggestive flatness for the continuity suggested by a spherical shape. This horizon cannot go on and on, but must give way to desolation, emptiness, and the limits beyond which there is an utter void: the sea's "long, withdrawing roar" retreats "down the vast edges drear / And naked shingles of the world" ("Dover Beach" 3.22-33; 27-28). Arnold moves from the visual to the auditory in terms of figuring his own bleak interiority, which in part evades the problems of representing a curveless earth. It also stresses the way his crisis of belief and purpose is turned in upon himself, the reverse of Tennyson's thumpingly optimistic rhetoric in "Locksley Hall" where the speaker "dipt into the future as far as the human eye could see, / Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that could be" (2.15-16). But for all its retrogressive cartography this is still a post-Romantic poem with Arnold employing the rhetoric of the sublime, his language diminishing the human figure in relation to natural forces, while ensuring that the landscape is not divisible from its responses.

The capacity to shrink the individual in his or her importance is a central characteristic of the horizon's power. This power can be a thoroughly beneficial one. Thus in *Middlemarch* Dorothea famously faces a new day with optimism after spending an introspective night considering her feelings towards Ladislaw and Rosamond: looking out of the window she saw that "far off in the bending sky was the pearly light;

and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance" (544). The horizon has been co-opted into Eliot's perennial solution for personal troubles: placing them in a larger context of forward-looking human duty. Arnold's fearful reaction to the imagined edges of the world and the retreat into selfhood which it induces—or at best by the end of the poem into a slightly shaky coupledom—is in contrast to Charles Darwin at the end of *The Voyage of the Beagle* who asks why it should be that the plains of Patagonia have taken such a firm hold on his visual memory, unlike, say, the green and more fertile Pampas? What is the appeal of these arid wastes? He answers himself by saying that:

> It must be partly owing to the free scope given to the imagination. The plains of Patagonia are boundless, for they are scarcely passable, and hence unknown: they bear the stamp of having lasted, as they are now, for ages, and there appears no limit to their duration through future time. If, as the ancients supposed, the flat earth was surrounded by an impassable breadth of water, or by deserts heated to an intolerable excess, who would not look at these last boundaries to man's knowledge with deep but ill-defined sensations. (484)

Before continuing my discussion of the relationship between the horizon and the search for knowledge and understanding I want to reflect for a moment on the types of stimulus which the horizon offers to the imagination. In the first place the stretch of the horizon offers the kind of pleasure set out by the narrator of Shelley's "Julian and Maddalo" who rides out "one evening with Count Maddalo / Upon the bank of land which breaks the flow / Of Adria towards Venice" (1-3). Positioned, if we visualise this, on what would mark the horizon for an observer of the scene, the narrator looks towards the thin line which divides land and air and comments on the scene's effects: "I love all waste / And solitary places; where we taste / The pleasure of believing what we see / Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be" (14-17). In general terms the horizon powerfully participates in the paradoxical metaphysics of the infinite. This is recognised by Ruskin when in the second volume of *Modern Painters* he discusses the "pure" emotion he first felt when a child "running down behind the banks of a high beach to get their land line cutting against the sky"; an emotion stimulated by the sight of "a light distance appearing over a comparatively dark horizon." However much pleasure we may receive from the effects of light on foreground objects—like dew on grass, or the glitter of a birch trunk—"there is yet a light which the eye invariably seeks with a deeper feeling of the beautiful,—the light of the declining or breaking day, and the flakes of scarlet cloud burning like watch-fires in the green sky of the horizon; a deeper feeling, I say, not perhaps more acute, but having more of spiritual hope and longing." According to Ruskin the aesthetic effects which create this are not attributable to fine form, for the light above the horizon blurs the outlines of things on the ground; nor is the wan and dying light at the day's end conducive to "sensual colour-pleasure":

> But there is one thing which this light has, or suggests, which no other object of sight suggests in equal degree, and that is—Infinity. It is of

> all visible things the least material, the least finite, the farthest withdrawn from the earth prison-house, the most typical of the nature of God, the most suggestive of the glory of His dwelling-place. For the sky of night, though we may know it boundless, is dark; it is a studded vault, a roof that seems to shut us in and down; but the bright distance has no limit, we feel its infinity, as we rejoice in its purity of light. (2: 79-81)

This purity of light folding away into infinity is the effect chosen by John Martin in *The Plains of Heaven* (1853), underpinned as ever in Martin's paintings of futurity by the claim made in *Paradise Lost* that beyond this transient world "is all abyss / Eternity, whose end no eye can reach" (21.2.555-56). Martin's painting employs a consolatory, even inspirational effect, a visualisation of what a belief in an afterlife could give one, for the sensations which the contemplation of the horizon evokes are intimately bound up with the question of mortality, of individual endings. The horizon through its very infinity has the capacity to remind us of our own finitude, of the fact that, to quote the philosopher A.W. Moore, "we are part of a world which is radically independent of us and which we can only ever glimpse from one particular point of view"—however much, we might add, this point of view is itself capable of shifting. This, he says, is an apprehension far more "primordial than the fact that we have edges, even the temporal edges of birth and death. . . . We feel pressure to acknowledge the infinite, and we feel pressure not to. In trying to come to terms with the infinite, we are in effect trying to come to terms with a basic conflict in ourselves" (xi). This, at base, is the conflict between the fact that it would not be good never to die—to be stuck, like Tithonus, with "cruel," endless immortality (Tennyson, "Tithonus" 1.5)—and the fact that nonetheless it is never good to die. Thus while the horizon can suggest the wonder of eternity, too much of it, unrelieved, can mean monotony and tedium. Hence the relief of Louisa Clifton, writing in her *Journal* as the *Barque Parkfield* approached Australia, that her "sickening longing" had been relieved: "there in the far horizon, in the grey colouring of coming twilight, loomed the faint outline of our adopted land" (3); hence the exhausted visual senses of travellers on the American prairies, in desert landscapes, and on the Australian plains. "The eye becomes fatigued with so extensive a view, bounded only by the level horizon" complained William Henry Breton travelling near the Liverpool Ranges in the 1830s (103); and in *The Road to Botany Bay* Paul Carter writes about the importance of the vertical, and of the tree in particular, to those suffering "vertical deprivation" in inland Australia; of its connection to a sense of community and of human mastery over space (286-91). Self-assertion over the loneliness of the infinite horizon is a means of differentiating oneself against one's surroundings and their metaphysical implications.

The second type of stimulus offered to the imagination by the horizon is less paradoxical: it is an aesthetic gratification without the theological underpinning given by Ruskin. While like the first it diminishes the worldly importance of the individual, this is not necessarily a troubling experience. Again the legacy of the romantic sublime suffuses early and mid-Victorian representations of the visually and emotionally pleasurable horizon wherever it may be encountered. Joanna Baillie may at one level be

recording the appalling pollution caused by coal dust in "England's vast capital's air," which forms its own horizon blotting out the line of the Surrey hills, "a curtain'd gloom / Connecting heaven and earth," but simultaneously and explicitly she employs the word "sublime" to describe these effects, which add to the impression of awe created by "this grand imperial town" (65-66). The sublime provides the verbal filter through which "Australie" describes:

> An inland sea of mountains, stretching far
> In undulating billows, deeply blue,
> With here and there a gleaming crest of rock,
> Surging in stillness, fading into space,
> Seeming more liquid in the distance vague,
> Transparent melting, till the last faint ridge
> Blends with clear ether in the azure sky
> In tender mauve unrealness; the dim line
> Of mountain profile seeming but a streak
> Of waving cloud on the horizon's verge. (87-88)

If this writing looks back to Wordsworth, to the ways in which he used images of mist and light in his poetry to break down the eye's search for boundaries, it also looks forward to a modernist preoccupation with the sea. This preoccupation is not with that High-Victorian space of national exploration so much as with the space of contemplation opened up by the sea's vastness. Rosalind Krauss has argued in *The Optical Unconscious* that the sea "is a special kind of medium for modernism, because of its perfect isolation, its detachment from the social, its sense of self-enclosure, and, above all, its opening into a visual plenitude that is somehow heightened and pure, both a limited expanse and a sameness, flattening it into nothing, into the no-space of sensory deprivation" (2).

This is the space or no-space offered by Conrad's horizons, which have both a literal and a figurative significance in his fictions. In *Lord Jim*, for example, Jim recounts what he saw after the *Patna* jolted and tilted: "I could see the line of the horizon before me, as clear as a bell, above her stem-head; I could see the water far off there black and sparkling" (92). Perhaps that verbal jolt between visual phenomenon and auditory simile—"as clear as a bell"—ought to alert one to Jim's capacity for failing to match perception and comprehension. This has already been hinted at when we learn that "the circular stillness of water and sky" gave him the kind of "certitude of unbounded safety and peace" that was "like the certitude of fostering love upon the placid tenderness of a mother's face" (17): a misplaced confidence for a sailor to adopt, and one which, if one considers the range of infant vision and concentration, implies a metaphoric shortsightedness on Jim's part. This balances his inability to choose an appropriate focus when actually gazing out to sea when his "eyes roaming about the line of the horizon, seemed to gaze hungrily into the unattainable, and did not see the shadow of the coming event" (19). After the ship lurches, before he jumps, Jim has no problem in making out what is bearing down on the *Patna*:

> A silent black squall which had eaten up already one-third of the sky. You know how these squalls come up there about that time of the year. First you see a darkening of the horizon—no more; then a cloud rises opaque like a wall. A straight edge of vapour lined with sickly whitish gleams flies up from the southwest, swallowing the stars in whole constellations; its shadow flies over the waters, and confounds sea and sky into one abyss of obscurity. (101-02)

What counts is not the fact of his perception, but his response to it: a cowardly response by one set of standards; an understandable act of self-preservation by another. A choice which, when Marlow attempts to comprehend it, ensures that he (as he puts it) "strained my mental eyesight" (197). For what Jim's action does is to reveal the horizons of his own capacities, his fallibility, his limitations. The sense that each individual whatever their idealism may have such limitations is a major topos explored by the novel. When the elderly merchant Stein talks to Marlow about Jim and about life more generally, about the importance of following one's dream as a successful code by which to live—in a sentence which tails off tellingly into the distance of inconclusive contemplation created by ellipses—Marlow describes how "the whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn—or was it, perchance, at the coming of night? . . . a charming and deceptive light, throwing the impalpable poesy of its dimness over pitfalls" (215). Space within *Lord Jim* is interchangeably inner and outer, topographical and psychological.

This of course could be said to be true of the cultural representation of space throughout the Victorian period. But I want to argue that focusing on the idea of the horizon provides us with a means in which we can trace a shift in the relationship of the individual to such representations of space, a shift which in turn is analogous to the changing ways in which visual perception came to be understood and problematised. As the role of subjectivity, of inwardness, came increasingly to be stressed so there was a manifestation of an increasing articulation that the physiological as well as the psychological dimensions of seeing must be considered. This development can usefully be illustrated by juxtaposing Turner and Whistler, two painters who manipulated the lure of the crepuscular, uncertain horizon in their works.

Conrad's confounding of sea and sky well describes the effects to be found in the later paintings of Turner. These offer a visual mediation between the romantic and the modernist treatments of the sea and the role played by the horizon within them: a horizon which is not so much a clear line between land and sea but a vanishing point or a succession of points towards which the eye is led. In their fascination with the power of light, their denial of the bounding line, their refusal of limitations, achieved not just through the fluidity of the paint work but through the fact that they are structured around colour rather than clear linear perspectives, these paintings present a sublime version of nature powered by energies both dangerous and awe-inspiring, as seen in the whirling vortices of *Snowstorm: Steam-boat off a Harbour's Mouth*. In other paintings such as *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* the menace of a fear-inducing horizon that fades off into ominous, potentially stormy and destructive darkness is paired with the suggestion of a more glorious, less turbulent future; a duality which, to quote Karl Kroeber, "recalls the

Romantic insistence on the provisionality characterizing the inexhaustible phenomena of the natural world to which humankind must accommodate itself" (195). But the importance of Turner's treatment of the indefinite horizon also lies in the way in which it positions—or, it might be more apt to say, unsettles—the spectator and causes one to reflect upon the very process of perception. If Turner's later painting represents as it surely does an unfinished dialogue between artist and subject matter (Gage 126)—something exemplified by his frequent return to Norham Castle, his many reworkings of the *Fall of the Clyde*, his fascination with Venice, and his endless experimentation with the sea—it also may be seen as suggesting an ongoing dialogue between spectator and canvas.

Turner's early work in the late eighteenth-century topographic tradition firmly places the viewer, statically, somewhere in front of the picture space in a position which can be determined by following forwards the receding lines of the linear perspective. But such a construction of a vantage point fails in front of a later work like *Yacht Approaching the Coast* (c.1835-40) not just because of the absence of architectural structure, or even the diagonal of a sloping beach, but because the hazy treatment of light allows no easy purchase on the depth of field. As we concentrate on the differing details—the sails, the buildings on the shoreline—what we become aware of is not so much our imagined presence within a scene but our experience as viewers of a painting, the motion of our own eyes. The *activity* of looking takes precedence over interpretive questions concerning represention.

Yet the intensity with which Turner invests natural forces makes it impossible to ignore his simultaneous appeal to a spectator's more traditional emotional response of human diminution in the face of the sublime. By the time Whistler was painting his *Nocturnes* in the 1870s the insistent tug into the depth of the painted space provided by a radiant sun burning into the horizon, or the vortex of a storm, is replaced by a self-conscious awareness on the painter's part that he is inviting the spectator to witness the manipulation of paint upon a flat canvas surface. His crepuscular horizons in part result from a form of mimesis which conveys the sensations created by particular light effects in a particular location at a particular time of day. But they are also deliberately suggestive because their employment of banks and washes of colour and their orchestration of tonalities make demands on the viewer's subjectivity, associationism, parallelism with other aesthetic forms. And, as Julia Kristeva remarks in *Desire in Language*, colours "have a non-centered or decentering effect, lessening both object identification and phenomenal fixation" (225).[2] Rather than recreating in the spectator the experience of self-diminishing awe which can be incorporated into the aesthetics of the sublime, these canvases invite a more individualised, interiorised personal response.[3] They use that which is outside oneself to focus the attention back on the self:

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[2] See also Rudolph Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: The New Version.*

[3] In invoking "the aesthetics of the sublime" I am deliberately leaving open the possibility of understanding responses to Turner's works according to a Burkean version of sublimity which would locate the essence of the sublime within the natural forces, or the Kantian version which conversely acknowledges sublimity to be a characteristic of the perceiving mind. While there is of course a considerable gulf between these two positions, the generalisations involved in the conceptualisation and

the self is both a source of subjectivity in its psychological dimension and the possessor of a pair of mobile eyes in its physiological one.

The activity of the eye which Whistler's *Nocturnes* demand is not the scanning motion with which one assesses the narrative and moral connections to be drawn between the signifying objects in a mid-Victorian crowded domestic scene such as Martineau's *The Last Day in the Old Home*, or with which one reads the physiognomies and sartorial codes which produce the social and character juxtapositions of Frith's busy *Ramsgate Sands*—in which incidentally, with the exception of the presence of a couple of small girls with telescopes, there is conspicuously little interest in looking outwards from England's complacent shores. In these paintings the eye moves from left to right and along diagonals in a manner analogous to perusing the printed page. Looking at one of Whistler's canvases, however, necessitates the expansion and contraction of the focal gaze. The act of spectatorship involved in approaching the paintings of Whistler's mid-career dramatises the double way—psychological and physiological—in which the issue of visuality was being problematised by the later decades of the nineteenth century. This is the period that marked the shift from the humanistic and morally tinged Ruskinian emphasis—"You do not see *with* the lens of the eye. You see *through* that, and by means of that, but you see with the soul of the eye" (*Elements of Drawing* 27)—to an acknowledgment of the role which that lens has to play in the whole system of perception. It was a period when, to quote Krauss again, thanks to the work of "great physiologists like Fechner, Young, Helmholtz, Hering. . . . The two planes—that of the retinal field and that of the picture—were understood now to be isomorphic with one another, the laws of the first generating both the logic and the harmonic of the order of the second; and both of these fields—the retinal and the pictorial—unquestionably organised as flat" (11).

Like spectatorship, the horizon itself is as we have noted a double phenomenon: separate from the self, away from us, and hence the focus of our desires, sometimes our fears; but also representing a future towards which we move. Horizon, vision, subjectivity—these come together in Hardy's observation in *Far from the Madding Crowd* that "in making even horizontal and clear inspections we colour and mould according to the wants within us whatever our eyes bring in" (16).[4] Yet the horizon is nevertheless something which is indivisible from the perceiving body. As Van Peursen puts it: "Man's optical structure, his bodily height, his erect posture—his whole bodily organism is found to be involved in the sighting of the horizon" (184). While the view and scope of the horizon is necessarily dependent on a body's physical positioning, however, there is also the possiblity of mistakes being made by an individual in interpreting that which he or she sees. Nothing brings this point home more clearly than an anecdote told by R.H.Horne in 1871:

> Seated one evening, during the brief twilight of the antipodes, in the first floor of an inn on the stormy western coast of Australia, I

terminology of each allow little space for the personal, individualised subjectivity which I argue is a feature of the response that Whistler's works invite.

[4] For Hardy's informed interest not just in painting but in the theory of sight, see J.B. Bullen, *The Expressive Eye. Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy.*

> contemplated the fading blue sky through an open window. The sea was, at this time, perfectly calm and colourless, and presented a faint yet clear, dark line of the horizon at an apparent distance of eighteen or twenty miles. There was no sound, either of air or sea. I thought of the ships and boats that had passed over the expanse before me—the space of sea between the window-frame and as far as the horizontal line—and thought of the living freights that those vessels had borne, long since passed away to the dead;—thought of the enormous numbers of fish that had eaten each other, and were all gone into the water, and what not, while similar races were now roaming abroad with the same destinies. I thought of the anxious eyes that had often been fixed upon yonder horizontal line, now becoming much fainter, yet still presenting its definite boundary. . . . Suddenly a most enormous bird—the *roc* of the "Arabian Nights" could have been nothing to it—alighted directly upon the distant horizontal line, which *dipped* with its weight! I started, breathless, and, for an instant, quite confounded. I sprang up, and ran across the room to the window. There was no sea at all. What I had been contemplating so intently in the twilight was the level sky, with the telegraphic line extending across the window at a distance of some twenty yards! The monster bird was an imported London sparrow, who had suddenly alighted on the line, and caused it to make a little dip down! (xlvi-vii)

Horne tells this story, in the course of a piece on the variety of human vision, to emphasise that it made no difference to him whether the horizon around which his speculations clustered was or was not a horizon. "There was no essential difference, to me, between what I imagined and believed I saw, and what would have been the reality" (xlviii-ix). So while the external world does exist out there, for practical purposes it may also be said to exist within the mind.

Seeing within the mind: this brings me to the last important way in which I want to draw together some general notions about the horizon and about Victorian preoccupations with the visual. The horizon is not just that thin line between the world and the air—the material and space—it may also be considered in a more phenomenological sense, especially according to its conceptualisation as developed by Husserl. While in Husserl's early writing, *Ideas* (1913) for example, the horizon can be thought of as a contextual field to which the attention is given inattentively since it is no more than background surrounding an object, an act or an experience, in later works he related the concept far more directly to temporality, to futurity. The idea of the horizon is infused with the sense of possibility, possibilities which are inherent within an experience or a perception but which are at present latent. In *Cartesian Meditations* (1931) he writes that "perception has horizons made up of other possibilities of perception, as perceptions that we *could* have, if we *actively directed* the course of perception otherwise: if, for example, we turned our eyes that way instead of this, or if

we were to step forward or to one side, and so forth" (19: 44). It is this "leaving open," Husserl says, which is "precisely what makes up the horizon" (45).[5]

In *The Origin of Perspective* Hubert Damisch links Husserl's ideas about the horizon and his reflections concerning the origins of geometry with ideas about science and history. Science, as Damisch explains, is never *the* truth, being tied to a specific time and opening onto a future in which it will necessarily challenge its own attainments: the Husserlian horizon, he writes, is "a fact on which the future of science hinges, at every moment—on the extent to which truth exceeds knowledge, on the intention behind any founding act issuing in concepts that bring it to realization" (82). There are copious Victorian testimonies by scientists to the power of sight, especially when assisted by new technologies of viewing: "the eye," wrote Sir David Brewster for example, "carries us to the remotest horizons around, glances upward beyond the voiceless air, through the planetary regions where worlds are but stars" (145). More significant in this context is the scientific desire to press beyond what is visible in the material world, seeing into the future, and actively directing the course of perception otherwise through employing the imagination, seeing with the mind's eye.

"The grandest discoveries, and the grandest applications to practice, have not only outstripped the slow march of Observation, but have revealed by the telescope of Imagination what the microscope of Observation could never have seen" wrote G.H. Lewes in 1874 (315-17) in a passage in which the optical instruments parallel those which in *Middlemarch* Lydgate insists are metaphorically speaking essential to all scientific inquiry. Lydgate argues that "there must be a systole and diastole in all inquiry" and that "a man's mind must be continually expanding and shrinking between the whole human horizon and the horizon of an object-glass" (628). But imagination alone, no more than observation, is enough. Lewes began *Problems of Life and Mind*, from which that celebration of the imagination comes, by stating how it is a fact endemic to all research that after "all efforts there still loom in the distance vast stretches of untrodden ground, and beyond these a region inaccessible to man." But he deplores those who have recourse to metaphysics, who, "impatient to pass beyond the limits of Experience . . . will reject a solution which confines them within the human horizon. That which fascinates them is the hope of passing beyond this horizon. It will, therefore, be incumbent on me to show that such a hope is futile, and *per contra* that every question which can be stated in terms of Experience is capable of an answer on the Experiential method" (1: 14).[6] As Lewes sees it the essence of the horizon is that while it suggests futurity, advance—the exercise of speculation, the involvement of the imagination—its existence is inseparable from materiality, both of the earth itself, and of the perceiving subject.

Finally I turn to *The North-West Passage* (1874), another painting of Millais's from the 1870s. At first glance it would seem to be the antithesis of *The Boyhood of*

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[5] I am indebted to David Woodruff Smith and Donald McIntyre for the chapter "Husserl's Notion of Horizon" in their book *Husserl and Intentionality. A Study of Mind, Meaning, and Language.*

[6] Lewes's objections are not just to those who search after theological answers (and in his repudiation of these he was in complete contrast to Tyndall's underlying, if unassertive, Christian beliefs) and to spiritualism, but also to Hegelians. For his anti-Hegelianism in matters of perception see Peter Allan Dale, *In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture. Science, Art, and Society in the Victorian Age* (66 ff).

Raleigh: this is an interior scene, rather than one where a hand is expansively outstretched across the sea. Indeed although the actual maritime horizon is visible as a sharp blue line through the window on the left, this is of no concern to the painting's protagonists and functions only as a reminder to the viewer of the site of action and exploration. The central mariner is an elderly man, not a future English coloniser--he was in fact modelled by Captain Trelawney, a friend and memorialist of Shelley and the Lake Poets in his youth, and hence the painting provides an accidental if apposite link back to Romantic aesthetics. The room is filled with references to the sailor's patriotic context. There is a portrait of Nelson behind his head, a chart of the northern regions lying open on his left hand, flags draped in the corner. Originally the sense of British global domination would have been still stronger, since Millais initially placed two small children examining a globe in the right-hand corner. The painting was probably the most popular of all Millais's works during the later part of his career; popular, according to his son, "not only for its intrinsic merit, but as an expression more eloquent than words of the manly enterprise of the nation and the common desire that to England should fall the honour of laying bare the hidden mystery of the North" (Millais, *Life* 2: 48). The Franklin expedition of 1847 had consolidated the association of heroic exploration and the cruelty of arctic wastelands, whether in Landseer's picture *Man Proposes, God Disposes* or Swinburne's early poem on "The Death of Sir John Franklin," which plays on familiar tropes of patriotism, expansionism and boundaries within an icy context:

> What praise shall England give these men her friends?
> . . . while the bays and the large channels flow
> In the broad sea between the iron ends
> Of the poised world where no safe sail may be,
> And for white miles the hard ice never blends
> With the chill washing edges of dull sea—
> And while to praise her green and girdled land
> Shall be the same as to praise Liberty—(1:3)

Millais's painting certainly managed to reach around the world as a widely disseminated cheap print: his son recounts seeing it pinned up on the wall of a Bushman shepherd's hut in the Great Karoo in the form of "a gaudy German oleograph." He asked its owner what he thought of it: "In reply to my inquiry, he pointed to the Union Jack as displayed in the picture, and said in broken English, "I like that cotton goods. It would make good clothes" (Millais, *Life* 2: 55). John Millais tells this as a jokey tale, but the anecdote brings home strongly the Eurocentric nature of the expected response to Millais's images of the horizon, something which reinforces the cultural specificity of the ideas about the horizon which I have been discussing.[7] The phenomenon of the horizon is

[7] Francis Spufford notes that this picture "also performs its evocation of the English exploring spirit without needing to make any reference whatsoever to those tens of thousands of other 'natives,' as remote as any Hottentot from the national community primed to interpret it, who have a rather closer connection with the Arctic: the indigenous inhabitants of the ice. It seems that *The North-West Passage* is complete

quite different to peoples with other notions of travel, trade, and invasion.[8]

In the case of Millais's painting, however, not all the potential travel relates to actual seas. The sailor's daughter "sits at his feet, reading," as Millais junior says, "what we may take to be the record of previous efforts to reach the Pole. He is at home now—this ancient mariner, stranded on the sands of life, like the hulk of an old ship that has done its duty—but as he listens to these deeds of daring, the old fire burns within him, and in every lineament of face and figure we see how deeply he is moved." He gazes straight ahead of him, but this gaze is resolutely sited away from the yacht outside the window as his voyaging takes place towards and beyond an imagined icy horizon. The words of travellers are transmitted through his daughter; if her dutiful posture reminds one of Gwendolen's dissatisfaction in *Daniel Deronda* when she complains that "we women can't go in search of adventures—to find out the North-West Passage or the source of the Nile" (135), who can tell where she may be travelling in her own mind's eye?

Visualising in the mind's eye, observing the natural world, interpreting paintings—in all these and many other acts of spectatorship, the process of seeing incessantly moves between the subjective and the objective, blurring the distinction between the two. Throughout the period Victorians were fascinated with the technology of vision whether the apparatus concerned was located outside the body (as in the case of the telescope, the microscope, the camera lens, or optical toys) or whether it was an integral part of it: the eye. But for them problematising vision meant much more than a consideration of the conceptual and mechanical implications of these means of seeing. It involved acknowledging the individualism involved in perception, both the individualism of consciously evoked social knowledge and experience, and of factors of memory and association which belonged to the increasingly investigated world of the unconscious.

Examining visuality in an interdisciplinary context—exploring its problematisation within science and within literary texts as well as within art criticism—shows it to have been a continual point of return. Visuality was crucial to Victorian debates about the place of the individual in the world. Like the horizon it formed a connecting line—sometimes clearly so, sometimes hazy and indistinct—between the material and the invisible worlds, between the apparently knowable and the realm of hypothesis, between the figured and the imaginative, between the body and the mind. The essential vehicle, the mediating instrument, was the eye: something which itself partook of this dual function, both subjective and objective. One may look at eyes and speculate upon them; in turn one is using one's own eyes through which to see. The eye is a means of obtaining information, a data-retrieval instrument; a way of reaching beyond the body's boundary, yet inseparable from that body. A physical reality, eyes are

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without Inuit either. No harpoon or fur or vanishingly tiny tacked-up drawing of a kayak represents them, though they appear in almost every account of almost every journey. What makes Millais's omission particularly telling is that in this he appears to go against the grain of the Victorian fascination with the polar peoples. They were far from being generally ignored" (187).

[8] Although she does not specifically explore the notion of the horizon the discussion of ethnography and distance in Mary Helms's *Ulysses's Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance* is of particular relevance here.

at the same time a symbol for the spirit, the world within. "Eyes," asked Mary Coleridge, in a poem of 1896:

> Eyes, what are they? Coloured glass,
> Where reflections come and pass.
>
> Open windows—by them sit
> Beauty, Learning, Love, and Wit.
>
> Searching cross-examiners;
> Comfort's holy ministers.
>
> Starry silences of soul,
> Music past the lips's control.
>
> Fountains of unearthly light;
> Prisons of the infinite.

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