

REVIEWS

***Imagining Inclusive Society in Nineteenth-Century Novels: The Code of Sincerity in the Public Sphere*, by Pam Morris. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2004. x + 260. ISBN 0-8018-7911-6. US\$44.95 (hardcover).**

***Literary Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, selected and introduced by Brian Crick and Michael DiSanto. Harleston, Norfolk: Edgeways, 2004. xxiv + 292. ISBN 0-907839-81-9. Price not known.**

Pam Morris's new book is a very welcome contribution to the literature on the mid-nineteenth-century English novel that examines the fiction of this period in the light of contemporary experience of, and debates about, the changing configurations of society and politics. As Morris acknowledges, it is partly indebted to groundbreaking studies such as Catherine Gallagher's *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction* (1985), Mary Poovey's *Making a Social Body* (1995), and Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1989) and *Fiction in the Age of Photography* (1999), but it focuses on novelists' grappling with "the problem of social inclusiveness, rather than difference and division" (5). Arguing that the decades of the 1840s through the 1860s saw rapid transformations in the way mid-Victorians conceptualised their social structure, political leadership and the interaction thereof, Morris tracks these movements through six novels: *Shirley* (1849), *Henry Esmond* (1852), *Bleak House* (1851), *North and South* (1855), *Romola* (1863) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). The novels are also discussed in relation to the efforts of non-fiction writers to engage with social and political change – especially contributors to the major high-brow periodicals, plus key thinkers like Thomas Carlyle, J.S. Mill and Matthew Arnold. As far as political and social theory is concerned, the book draws usefully and discriminatingly on the work of such figures as Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Benedict Anderson, Linda Colley and Cornelius Castoriades. This is a rich, well-informed and insightful study, and, although it is hardly possible to be entirely original in treating novels which are familiar critical terrain, I found Morris's overall approach did illuminate all of them.

The "code of sincerity" invoked in the book's subtitle is central to its argument. In the early nineteenth century, Morris claims, when political life was dominated by the aristocracy, political discourse still operated via a "code of civility" based on a sense of shared values and an accepted notion of "human nature." Political leaders, meanwhile, depended for their influence largely on a kind

of physical glamour often enhanced (as in Wellington's case) by the aura of military conquest. But as military distinction became less available, while political power came to depend on conciliating ever-larger and more varied social groups, those seeking to influence others adopted instead a "code of sincerity." Unlike the "code of civility," this did not assume a homogeneous audience, but "privilege[d] the notion of inevitable differences and individual distinctions" (22), yet the impression of sincerity conveyed by would-be leaders was vital to their influence. Carlyle was the most prominent advocate of this code, while in politics, Gladstone was the most effective exemplar of its power. But as novelists such as George Eliot and Dickens came to recognise, this kind of "sincerity" could be fake and manipulative. As a result, human interiority itself might become suspect as a locus of value. At the same time, both novelists and others struggled to conceptualise as inclusive, a society in which the spread of visual media, as well as the theory of evolution, were rendering more visible what seemed to be an amorphous and repellent mass of slum-dwellers. Hence the public sphere was reconfigured as "the realm of popular mass culture and an aesthetic realm that perceived itself in terms of social and cultural distinction and discrimination" (220).

The chapter on *Shirley* is one of the best. Morris interprets the novel's rather rebarbative narrative voice as showing that Charlotte Brontë, unlike Jane Austen thirty years earlier, possessed, in the very heterogeneous public sphere her narrator addresses, no "known community" (61). Correspondingly, the novel itself foregrounds exclusions of various kinds, while also demonstrating an underlying yearning for union and belonging. Moreover, representation of the Yorkshire temperament, embodied especially in the Yorke family, provides "a utopian glimpse of an inclusive community based upon a public code of sincerity as the discursive ideal, interpellating all speakers in relationships of mutual respect and regard" (82). The novel explores, too, modes of leadership: Brontë, Morris argues, finds it difficult to imagine a non-military, non-authoritarian kind of heroism, as is exemplified by the novel's ambivalent treatment of Rev. Helstone and Robert Moore and their responses to both working-class agitation and women.

Henry Esmond also articulates, according to Morris, a mid-Victorian desire for a more inclusive political world based on affinity rather than hierarchy. Its early eighteenth-century setting enables the novel to demonstrate comprehensively the pitfalls of a monarchical and aristocratic hegemony which sacrifices masses of people (notably in warfare) to its own self-interested ends, while it signals as well the growth of a code of sincerity in the writings of Addison and Steele and the figure of Esmond himself. Yet Esmond's voice as narrator (which Morris analyses tellingly), suggests that his sincerity may be more a matter of style than of substance.

North and South emerges from this study as the most optimistic of the six novels as far as prospects for social inclusiveness are concerned. Revising recent interpretations of Gaskell's novel which concentrate on Margaret Hale's gender role,

Morris sees her class identity as more significant, in that she and her father initially represent the earlier code of civility based in the aristocracy and gentry, where apparent disinterestedness makes them an important non-partisan forum for the views of workers and employers. In the novel's inter-class interactions, nevertheless, this code is superseded by a code of sincerity, in which mutual regard and frank self-expression acknowledge the existence of differences.

The two Dickens texts, as well as *Romola*, disclose for Morris less ease in accommodating social differences, particularly in confronting mass society. While obviously identifying the inadequacies of the traditional ruling elites, *Bleak House* also registers the concomitant dispersal of power into an impersonal state and the control of professional experts. The novel is ambivalent about this change, contrasting the selfless Allan Woodcourt, who deals with cases of individual distress, with the power-hungry lawyer Tulkinghorn (whom Morris aligns with the apparently ubiquitous sanitary reformer of the day, Edwin Chadwick). But the text itself has difficulty in treating the mass of pauperism as other than "a mythic and amorphous social evil" (123), and its salient individual case, Jo the crossing-sweeper, as other than a mere unit of this social evil, impervious to rational analysis. *Romola* expresses for Morris a similar problem, since, while it champions individual acts of succour actuated by "passionate tenderness," these acts are never realised imaginatively: suffering people are generalised as "Pale Famine," while Florentine public life is governed by party interest and calculation. The crucial form of change represented as possible is individual – but isolated – self-transformation. Morris argues persuasively that the novel is Eliot's challenge to Mill's belief in a democratic community based on a collective truth and justice achieved by free debate.

Both *Romola* and *Our Mutual Friend* also trace, for Morris, the degeneration of the code of sincerity as practised by would-be leaders. In Eliot's novel, Tito, and to a lesser extent Savonarola, deploy a manipulative version of sincerity to move people for their own ends. In *Our Mutual Friend*, the code of sincerity is harnessed by figures like the Veneerings and the Lammles to project "a sentimentalized, flattering fiction of interiority" so as to elicit trust, while the public sphere becomes "the circulating space of sensationalism, financial rumor, and sentimental and repetitive banality" (209, 207). Since human interiority is a fiction, the novel locates what truth and knowledge do exist in performance and visibility: this is the principal significance of Wrayburn's lack of an inner self.

For Pam Morris, Victorian novelists recognised degeneration and corruption, but still felt hope for the future. For the editors of a new collection of Matthew Arnold's literary criticism, degeneration has so afflicted university English Departments over the last twenty years, that their book has been published as a sort of rearguard action, but with little apparent hope in its efficacy. Brian Crick, in his introduction to his and Michael DiSanto's selection, *Literary Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, laments that Arnold's critical positions have been (in their view) relentlessly

belittled in recent decades, so that his work has almost disappeared from university curricula, replaced by courses focusing on contemporary literary theory or the dubious claims of women writers (he believes that "Goblin Market" has now become chronically canonical).

Crick makes a good case for the continuing interest of Arnold's literary criticism, especially in his comments on Arnold's influence on writers such as James, Conrad and D.H. Lawrence. He also points out that, in criticising Arnold in "The Perfect Critic" (and thus, as Crick sees it, unwittingly initiating the twentieth-century onslaught on Arnold), T.S. Eliot was making the same move as Arnold had done in his own essay on Emerson, when he dismissed much of the *oeuvre* of a man to whom he himself owed a great deal, Thomas Carlyle. But I found the tone of parts of Crick's introduction unnecessarily defensive, while the shots at modern English Departments were rather scattergun.

The question of the projected audience is important as far as both the introduction and the editorial practice here are concerned. The editors have produced a book in a climate where they feel it is unlikely to be set for study, and Crick ends by wondering whether Arnold "stands a better chance of being read outside the institutions of higher learning" (xxiv). Whatever readership is envisaged, however, it is assumed to possess already considerable knowledge of Arnold, his era, and the literature familiar to him and his original readers.

Any selection of Arnold's literary criticism will involve omissions and/or inclusions which will not satisfy all Arnold aficionados, and I have no quarrel with the particular choices made here. The selection includes the most famous pieces, such as the Preface to Arnold's *Poems* of 1853, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," "On the Modern Element in Literature," "The Study of Poetry," "Literature and Science" and the essay on Wordsworth, plus other familiar ones such as the essays on Heine, Joubert, Marcus Aurelius, Byron and Keats. The inclusion of less anthologised pieces, the Preface to Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* and the essay on Tolstoi, is very welcome, as suggesting that Arnold is less dismissive of both eighteenth-century poetry and contemporary fiction than is sometimes assumed. But although Crick explains some of the editors' choices, there is no effort to contextualise them in Arnold's life, his intellectual development, or his overall output, for the benefit of those not already conversant with Arnold.

More worrying is the sketchiness of the editorial material offered here. There is basic publication information about each selection, and also translations of many of the quotations from other languages – albeit credited to people other than the editors. Not of all, however: the two lines of Heine that Arnold himself did not render into English are left untranslated, together with the French couplet with which they are compared. Similarly, the lines of Chateaubriand cited in "Joubert" to exemplify his "rich and puissant nature" (69), remain opaque to those unable to read French. Moreover, Arnold's many references to non-English authors and texts, and to prominent figures of his day, are left almost entirely unglossed. To consider only

the 1853 Preface – there would be relatively few readers, even among those free from the taint of late twentieth-century English Departments, who would know about all of the following: Orpheus, Musaeus, the Sophists, Hesiod, Schiller, Achilles, Prometheus, Clytemnestra, Dido, *Hermann and Dorothea*, *Jocelyn*, the *Iliad*, the *Oresteia*, Merope, Alcmaeon, Polybius, Menander, Mr Hallam and M. Guizot. Or who would have a full understanding of this passage from “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time”: “[. . .] Luther’s theory of grace no more exactly reflects the mind of the spirit than Bossuet’s philosophy of history reflects it; and [. . .] there is no more antecedent probability of the Bishop of Durham’s stock of ideas being agreeable to perfect reason than of Pope Pius the Ninth’s” (34). Then, in “The Study of Poetry,” well-known quotations from Shakespeare are glossed, while the reader is offered no help in identifying Sainte-Beuve, Pellisson, M. Charles d’Héricault, Clément Marot, “the *Imitation*,” M. Vitet, “Christian of Troyes” or “Wolfram of Eschenbach.” Given the quality of the primary texts here, it is regrettable that the editors have lacked the foresight or the commitment to make Arnold’s writings more accessible to a potential new readership.

Joanne Wilkes

***Lords of Misrule: Hostility to Aristocracy in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Britain*, by Antony Taylor. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. xii + 233. ISBN 1-4039-3221-2. £45 (hardback).**

In *Lords of Misrule*, Tony Taylor adds to an emerging body of scholarship that is revising the place of the aristocracy in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British history. Whereas an earlier, Whiggish historiography had constructed a narrative of a largely benign aristocracy, prepared to compromise in the face of increasing democratisation and ultimately marginalised by the early twentieth century, the new historiography, following the work of Martin Weiner, F.M.L. Thompson, David Cannadine and others, has highlighted the aristocracy’s centrality to the economy and politics in Britain well into the twentieth century. Taylor’s particular interest is in what he calls “plebeian readings of the aristocracy” (10), those rhetorical critiques of the powerful by the powerless, which helped fuse working class radicalism with Liberalism and the emerging Labour Party in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. He argues – convincingly I believe – that this anti-aristocratic sentiment acted as “a central plank” (15) connecting the diffuse and often contradictory politics of reform that dominated those years. In the process, the book also contributes to our understanding of the composition of later Victorian and Edwardian society and social relations.