THE LOGIC OF TRASH IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies novels, government public health reports, and journalism to draw conclusions about the logic that informs how the Victorians thought about trash. This logic, which I term the logic of trash, asserts that trash tells a story, and trash stories always feature a moment of rejection followed by decay. The Victorians were optimistic about trash and viewed it as something that could be repurposed and improved, and, under the right circumstances, made lucrative. However, trash was also a spectacle of decay, so they also believed that looking closely at it could give them important insight into their ultimate fate. The Victorian desires to both identify with trash and to discard it were at odds with each other, but the logic of trash shows that the conflicting desires to push trash away and to humanize it can be reconciled when trash is used as a metaphor for the rejects of society. Stories that use this metaphor follow the progress of rejected people as if they were trash (proceeding through the stages of discarding, recycling, and decay), and they cause writers to reflect upon their own death as they reflect upon the stories of these individuals, or even to wish for the death of groups they perceived as troublesome as a means of discarding both them and the image of human mortality they represent.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to people with messy houses, cars full of coffee cups and fast food wrappers, and office desks piled high with crumpled paper and scribbled notes.

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INTRODUCTION

The Queen's Tobacco-Pipe

In the 1850s, Peter Lund Simmonds, a prolific journalist and decorated researcher for the Royal Society of Arts, began to study recycling. After publishing a couple of shorter papers on the topic that were very well-received, Simmonds penned the first volume of *Waste Products and Undeveloped Substances* (1862), an impressively detailed catalogue of all the different types of waste that the British Empire produced, both in the British Isles and in the colonies. The book was so popular that Simmonds released what is known as the second edition in 1873. "Edition" is not really the right word for it, though; in actuality, it is a completely different book, rewritten in even more detail, with even more analysis and sophistication, and, if possible, even more zeal for recycling. Simmonds's reputation as an expert on salvaging refuse became so well established that the Royal Society of Arts asked him to prepare an exhibit on waste and its uses for the International Exhibition that took place in Vienna in 1873. The different volumes of *Waste Products* describe many fascinating curiosities from the world of Victorian waste management, but one from the 1873 edition stands out as being particularly emblematic:

> In the very center of the large tobacco warehouses in the London Docks there is a great kiln, familiarly known as the Queen's Tobacco-pipe, which consumes as "waste" an enormous quantity of articles….Whatever is forfeited, and is too bad for sale, be it what it may, is doomed to the kiln....And strange are the things that sometimes come to this perpetually burning furnace. On one occasion the attendant informed us he found nine hundred Australian mutton hams. These were warehoused before the duty came off. The owners suffered them to remain till the duty ceased,…but this not being allowed, they were left till so damaged as to be unsaleable. Yet a good many, the man declared, were

excellent, and he often made a capital addition to his breakfast....On another occasion he burnt thirteen thousand pairs of condemned French gloves.

In one department of the place often lie many tons of the ashes from the furnace, which are sold by auction by the ton to gardeners and farmers as manure, and for killing insects, or to soap-boilers and chemical manufacturers. In a corner are generally piled cart-loads of nails and other pieces of iron which have been swept up from the floors or have remained in the broken pieces of casks and boxes which go to the kiln. Those which have been sifted from the ashes are eagerly bought up by gunsmiths, sorted and used in the manufacture of gun-barrels, for which they are highly esteemed, as possessing a toughness beyond all other iron, and therefore calculated pre-eminently to prevent bursting.

Gold and silver, too, are not infrequently found amongst these ashes, for many manufactured articles if unsaleable, are broken up and thrown in. There have sometimes, indeed, been vast numbers of foreign watches, which professing to be genuine gold watches, but discovered to be gross impostors, have been ground up in a mill and then flung in here.

Such is the Queen's Tobacco-Pipe, unique of its kind and in its capacity of consumption. It is *the* Pipe, and establishes the Queen of England, besides being the greatest monarch on the globe, as the greatest of all smokers—not excepting the Grand Turk or the Emperor of Austria, the greatest tobacconist of Europe. (Simmonds 262-263)

This passage, with its breathless enthusiasm about the sheer volume and variety of trash that finds its way to the Pipe, as well as the ability of the Pipe to consume it, is a representative example of the overall optimism many Victorians felt about trash and waste

management. Furthermore, by designating this The Queen's Tobacco-Pipe, no less, the passage attributes pure Englishness to waste management, an Englishness that surpasses the qualities of the Turks, representatives of the East, and the Austrians, representatives of Europe. Furthermore, it is foreign goods that are being burned up here: defective watches, surplus hams, and condemned gloves from *other* nations, while the thrifty English make use of that foreign waste in ingenious ways.

This passage is also marked by another important characteristic of many Victorian descriptions of trash: each piece tells a story. In addition to the story of the Pipe itself, every item that is put in the incinerator has its own story as well. We have the mystery of the 900 hams and what happened to them. We also have the tale of the discovery and punishment of the imposter watch, and the stories of the thrifty recyclers and what they are able to do with the bits of iron they find. Victorian writing about trash always tells a story because every item of trash has a timeline that begins with its life as a functional thing, is interrupted by being discarded, and then continues with what happens to it afterwards, ultimately ending in the ground.

Over the course of my research for this dissertation, I have read many Victorian texts about trash and recycling and taken note of the trends that unite all of them. These trends, when considered together, form what I have termed the logic of trash. Stories that follow the logic of trash feature pieces of trash whose trajectories are narrated using the conventions of biographical narrative or human characters whose life stories follow the trajectories of trash. In either case, these stories invite readers to recognize the things that are human about trash, and the things that are trash-like about humans, with the most notable of these commonalities being our shared final resting place. Another defining feature of these stories is that they all are characterized by a moment of being cast out and discarded. Therefore, trash stories provide an ideal vehicle for

authors to apply the symbolism of trash to groups whom they despise, and in so doing, to put to rest whatever anxieties they may have raised by pointing out the mortality that human beings share with trash. This dissertation analyzes how the logic of trash plays out in Victorian writing, which I argue helps us to understand what Victorians thought about death, what they thought about marginalized groups, what role material possessions played in their lives, and what were their concerns about trash and its effects on them. Though my study is primarily focused on nineteenth-century Britain, the logic of trash carries over into the present day, and understanding what the Victorians thought about trash can help us understand ourselves as well.

Victorians had a different lexicon for talking about trash than we do today in twenty-first-century America, so it is important to establish what terminology this dissertation uses and why. Informally, Victorians usually referred to trash as "dust" or "rubbish," but when they were talking about matters of sanitation, it became "waste," "refuse," or, when it got out of hand, a "nuisance." Furthermore, garbage pickup was called "public cleansing" when it took place at a municipal level and "rag picking," "finding," "collecting," or "scavenging" when it was done by private individuals (though a parish-funded garbage collector could be called a "public scavenger"). All these terms are to some degree euphemistic. Rag pickers did not only pick up rags; they also gathered all kinds of domestic waste, which they not only picked, but often ate, wore, or sold, and Victorian "dust" was a lot chunkier than the fine gray powder that the word brings to mind. Therefore, in the interest of clarity, I will often use the American words "trash," "garbage," and "litter." Though these American terms also have their more precise meanings ("garbage" refers to food waste or offal, "trash" refers to tree branches and leftovers from pruning, and "litter" refers to straw used to absorb animal waste in a barn or cage), they are still less euphemistic and simply refer to more specific types of trash, rather than to things that are

significantly different from trash, as is the case with "dust" and "rags" (OED, Merriam Webster). For similar reasons, I exchange the Victorian term "public cleansing" for the contemporary American term "municipal solid waste management" since the latter cannot be confused with other Victorian sanitation activities such as watering the roads. Additionally, the locational precision of "litter" makes it a convenient term to discuss outdoor street trash in my first chapter.

However, most importantly, the American usage of the word "trash" is a particularly significant term for this project because it refers to both material "things that are no longer useful or wanted and that have been thrown away" and "a worthless person" or "such persons as a group" (Merriam Webster). Therefore, because the equivalence that Victorians drew between human beings and refuse is a central topic of this dissertation, "trash" is the term I return to most often.

A Brief History of Waste Management

The history of Victorian Britain's sanitation has been thoroughly studied.[1] However, though in recent years scholarly interest in recycling has increased, the topic of municipal solid waste management has been somewhat overshadowed by the topics of sewers and water quality. Christopher Hamlin's *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick* argues that the disproportionate focus on sewers in the scholarship is a result of the fact that sanitary reformer and politician Edwin Chadwick has had an outsized influence on our historical documentation of that time period, and therefore his particular passion for water quality colors our scholarly record of Victorian public health. Indeed, many of the texts that compose our historical record of

[1] See Pamela Gilbert's *Mapping the Victorian Social Body*, Michelle Allen's "From Cesspool to Sewer: Sanitary Reform and the Rhetoric of Resistance" and *Cleansing the City: Sanitary Geographies in Victorian London*, Nicholas Goddard's "19th-Century Recycling: The Victorians and the Agricultural Utilization of Sewage," and Anne Hardy's "Parish pump to private pipes: London's water supply in the nineteenth century" for just a few of many sources on the topic.

municipal solid waste management are official sanitary reports that provide a broad survey of sanitation as a whole; trash is only one of many topics they cover, and there is definitely a heavier emphasis on drainage than there is on anything else, probably because water-borne diseases were such a scourge in the nineteenth century.[2]

Brian Maidment, in *Dusty Bob*, a cultural history of the British dustman, takes note of some additional factors that make our image of Victorian waste management less clear. He writes that most of our evidence about nineteenth-century dustmen is based on several Victorian sources in which journalists such as James Greenwood and R. H. Horne wrote accounts of going to a dust-yard, being shown around by the foreman, and having all the different types of garbage and methods of recycling explained to them. Maidment then shows that these sources were heavily influenced by stereotypes and urban legends about dustmen that spring from a large number of caricatures that were drawn during the Regency period, thus calling into question their historical accuracy (14). It's true that Horne's "Dust; or Ugliness Redeemed" (1865) is a combination of fiction and nonfiction, which means that it shouldn't really be used as an objective informational source on the topic. Meanwhile, Greenwood's "Mr. Dodd's Dust-Yard" (1867) is similar enough to Horne's piece to make a reader wonder whether perhaps Greenwood borrowed most of his insights from Horne rather than from whatever he found when (if?) he visited a real-life dust-yard. However, I am not entirely persuaded that journalist Henry Mayhew's "Of the Street Finders and Collectors" (1851) from his four-volume work *London Labour and the London Poor* (which may have served as a source for both Greenwood and Horne) is as derivative as Maidment seems to suggest. Indeed, Mayhew actually offers two additional compelling answers to the question of why municipal solid waste management has not

[2] John Snow's 1854 cholera map, which revealed that sewage had tainted the water from the Broadstreet pump, thus triggering a deadly outbreak, helped establish definitively that polluted water was causing infectious diseases.

been as thoroughly documented as other aspects of Victorian public health. First, he shows that as late as 1841, dustmen weren't being counted in the census (163). Second, he reports that dust contractors, who employed dustmen and owned dust-yards, didn't allow their employees to divulge information about their trade:

> [A dustman] hinted to me the difficulties I should experience at the commencement of my inquiry, and I have certainly found his opinion correct to the letter. I have ascertained that in one yard intimidation was resorted to, and the men were threatened with instant dismissal if they gave me any information but such as was calculated to mislead….With employers,…to seek to ascertain from them the profits of their trade is to meet with evasion and prevarication at every turn; they seem to feel that their gains are dishonestly large, and hence resort to every means to prevent them being made public. (168)

So, the focus of the sanitary reports on drainage, the fictional or semi-fictional nature of journalism on the topic of dust-yards, the lack of a census record, and the unwillingness of dust contractors to allow the details of their work to be documented have given us a patchy image of what Victorian municipal solid waste management really looked like.

Nevertheless, despite some noticeable gaps, we still know a great deal about Victorian Britain's trash. The Victorian period was a moment of transition wherein antique and technologically advanced waste collection systems competed with each other to accommodate the rapidly industrializing nation's increasing volume of trash. At the same time, newly formed governing bodies that reported on and oversaw sanitation were trying to impose order on what had hitherto been a rather disorganized enterprise. One of the most important developments in the history of British waste management was the publication of the 1842 *Sanitary Report*, a massive report on the sanitary condition of Great Britain composed of many different accounts

by journalists, physicians, and politicians on sanitary problems all over the nation. Chadwick was the main editor and organizer of the report, and its purpose was to draw attention to all the worst problems of British sanitation as a way to advocate for the formation of an official board of public health to regulate sanitation and enforce greater cleanliness. Though, as I have mentioned, this report most prominently features drainage, trash is nevertheless not a neglected topic. The *Report* discusses food slops discarded in the street, kitchen ashes, heaps of animal and vegetable matter, garden waste, slaughterhouse waste, and even neglected clotheslines causing a tripping hazard, all concerns about problems with managing trash, and all designated to be under the jurisdiction of a board of health. The *Report* was successful in its goal, and in 1848, the first Public Health Act was passed, which instituted the General Board of Health to oversee Britain's sanitation for the very first time. The Board's purview included trash.

Before the formation of the General Board of Health in 1848, there was no government oversight of waste management except in the form of general nuisance laws. Nuisance laws prohibited the accumulation of nuisances (anything foul or dangerous) on private property, but they left responsibility for getting rid of a nuisance in the hands of the person or people who had created it and provided little in the way of resources to assist with removal. The need for garbage collection was met by pauper street sweepers and independent dustmen who went from house to house collecting garbage or gathered it from informal dumps that built up outside slums. Sometimes these individuals were employed by parishes, and sometimes they were not, though Brian Maidment notes that, as early as 1838, parishes were instructing dustmen not to dump the refuse they collected within London's city limits, which suggests that parishes exercised some authority over dustmen at this time (30).

Virtually all evidence indicates that these unofficial measures were insufficient. The 1842 *Sanitary Report* gives many detailed accounts of the nation's poor sanitary condition, and all these accounts repeat the claim that poor people had the greatest burden of inadequate waste collection because of their crowded streets and homes, inadequate access to water or any kind of latrine or outhouse, and dwelling places in close proximity to pigs and other livestock. Poor communities had no means of removing such overwhelming messes. So great was the buildup of refuse that some of Britain's most impoverished people subsisted on the dumps described in the sanitary reports, which grew to prodigious size because dustmen refused to collect them because of residents' inability to provide tips.[3] Parishes and towns often felt that they were not responsible for maintaining the cleanliness of these poorest neighborhoods. In another report written in 1845, Lyon Playfair (a prominent scientist and politician) records that in Lancashire "the only streets recognized by the authorities are those dedicated to the public. Unpaved and unsewered streets are not so dedicated, and, therefore, although from their bad condition calculated to retain filth of every description, they do not receive the benefits arising from the visits of the public scavenger" (20). By contrast, in middle-class neighborhoods, dust contractors who employed fleets of dustmen saw to it that household waste was regularly gathered.[4] So,

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[3] Lee Jackson in *Dirty Old London* (2015) reports that such neighborhoods were referred to by dustmen as "dead pieces" (10). Mayhew provides more explanation for the dustmen's refusal to collect rubbish without tips: "The collectors are in the habit of getting beer or money in lieu [of higher wages], at nearly all the houses from which they remove the dust, the public being thus in a manner compelled to make up the rate of wages, which should be paid by the employer, so that what is given to benefit the men really goes to the master, who invariably reduces the wages to the precise amount of the perquisites obtained....[Consequently], the collectors are forced, as it were, to extort from the public that portion of their fair earnings of which their master deprives them; hence, how can we wonder that they make it a rule when they receive neither beer nor money from a house to make as great a mess as possible the next time they come, scattering the dust and cinders about in such a manner, that, sooner than have any trouble with them, people mostly give them what they look for?" (173).

[4] Mayhew records:

> The labourers employed in a dust-yard may be divided into two classes: those paid by the contactor; and those paid by the foreman or forewoman of the dust-heap, commonly called hill-man or hill-woman. They are as follows: --

there was great inequality in the way that Victorian trash was gathered and disposed of. The Public Health Act of 1848 endeavored to improve the overall sanitation of Britain by addressing these problems.

The sanitation measures that the newly formed General Board of Public Health suggested were only that—suggestions—and it was entirely optional for parishes and their citizens to decide to follow them. Nevertheless, though the Public Health Act of 1848 lacked teeth, by the mid-nineteenth century, the sanitation movement had still significantly influenced public policy. Most notably, in response to the cholera epidemics, which were caused by widespread pollution of drinking water by sewage, Joseph Bazalgette designed the Thames Embankment (which reclaimed about 22 acres of marshy land from the river as a way to contain flooding and pollution) and the London sewer system, both of which were completed by 1875.[5] That same

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I. LABOURERS PAID BY THE CONTRACTORS, OR,
   1. *Yard foreman*, or superintendent, This duty is often performed by the master, especially in small contracts
   2. *Gangers of dust-collectors*. These are called 'fillers 'and 'carriers, 'from the practice of one of the men who go out with the cart filling the basket, and the other carrying it on his shoulder to the vehicle.
   3. *Loaders* of carts in the dust-yard for shipment.
   4. *Carriers* of cinders to the cinder-heap, or bricks to the brick heap.
   5. *Foreman* or *forewoman* of the heap.

II. LABOURERS PAID BY THE HILL-MAN OR HILL-WOMAN
   1. *Sifters,* who are generally women, and mostly the wives or concubines of the dustmen, but sometimes the wives of badly-paid labourers.
   2. *Fillers-in*, or shovellers of dust into the sieves of the sifters (one man being allowed to every two or three women).
   3. *Carriers off* of bones, rags, metal, and other perquisites to the various heaps; these are mostly children of the dustmen. (172)

[5] These innovations were badly needed because the cities located on the Thames and its tributaries had been dumping their waste of all kinds—slaughterhouses, dye factories, and domestic household sewage being amongst the worst offenders—into the Thames, assuming that the natural movement of the water would be sufficient to carry it out to sea where it would no longer pose any threat to residents. Mayhew laments: "Formerly, in our eagerness to get rid of the pollution,...our only care was to carry off the nuisance from the immediate vicinity of our own residences. It was no matter to us what became of it, so long as it did not taint the atmosphere around us.... [S]o we laid down just as many drains and sewers as would carry our night-soil to the nearest stream; and thus, instead of poisoning the air that we breathed, we poisoned the water that we drank. Then, as the town extended...each new row of houses tailed on its drains to those of its neighbours, without any inquiry being made as to whether they were on the same level or not. The consequence of this is, that the sewers in many parts of our metropolis are subject to an

year, the Public Health Act of 1875 would give more power to local authorities and allow them to take charge of waste collection directly.

Once rubbish was removed from streets and dustbins, Victorians found a broad array of uses for it—or tried to, anyway. For example, they adopted the optimistic but ultimately unsuccessful practice of sewage farming in the late nineteenth century. This involved transporting urban sewage out to rural areas to be used as fertilizer, but it did not make crops more fertile than regular irrigation did, and the process of moving it from the cities to the fields was far too labor intensive to be viable long term.[6] There was also a brisk trade in paper recycling, wherein old rags were gathered from British households and turned into paper in mills.[7] Simmonds also proposes that a variety of different vegetable waste matter from the colonies could be made into paper, though there is little evidence that his advice was taken (indeed, *Waste Products* spends a great deal of time suggesting how various things *could* be reused in addition to how they actually *were* reused). Furthermore, Pierre Desrochers argues that industrial waste was often successfully repurposed and used again in different industrial processes. However, as Lee Jackson and Maidment record, by far the most lucrative form of recycling during the Victorian period was the use of ashes from domestic kitchen fires for making bricks and fuel. In the 1890s and into the early 1900s, certain parishes even built destructors that could turn ashes into electricity.

Unfortunately, the Victorians experienced on a smaller scale a reality we have encountered in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as well: eventually, so much waste was

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ebb and flood like their central stream, so that the pollution which they remove at low-water, they regularly bring back at high-water to the very doors of the houses whence they carried it" (161).

[6] See Nicholas Goddard's history of sewage farming and Chadwick's chapter on the subject in the 1847 *Sanitary Report*.

[7] See Patrick Chappell and Leah Price for a far more detailed account of paper recycling. Price gives information about this matter in the context of book history.

produced that recycling was not profitable anymore. Indeed, Simmonds notes that there was a use for almost anything, but only if there was a market for it. He writes:

> Philosophically, nothing should be lost. Commercially, much may be thrown away. If worn-out shirts could not be made into brand new paper at a profit, we should not at the present moment be checquering it with ink. So long as bones are a substitute for lime in agriculture, and it is cheaper to dissolve or grind them than to quarry limestone, crush it, and carry it to the land, so long only will they be thus used. There is no other argument but the commercial one that will keep shinbones from the dust-bin and ash-heap. Soap-suds and dirty water can be more profitably applied. Dirt, which is cheap enough, is utilised as long as it gives us a clear profit. (11)

And, eventually, recycling was not profitable anymore, even for the Victorians. Mayhew reports that by the mid-nineteenth century, garbage collection enterprises such as street sweeping and dust gathering had stopped being lucrative in and of themselves, and had become "a matter of duty rather than an object of desire" (167). There was too much rubbish, there was not enough demand for it, and the technologies that could turn it into something useful were too expensive.

Victorian Trash and the Environment

The Victorian struggle to manage and reuse waste bears some resemblance to our own. This raises the question: were Victorians aware of the power that trash had to pollute the environment, and if so, how does that affect our interpretation of their writing about trash? For us, trash is unquestionably an environmental disaster, but I argue that Victorians did not view trash the same way that we do, and their writings are not well-served by trying to impose upon them a present-day perspective of trash as an environmental crisis for the nonhuman world. Victorians were aware that some of their activities, such as producing smoke, could affect the

nonhuman world, and they were aware that trash could contaminate and pollute other human beings. However, as I will show, they did not view trash as something that had a significant effect on the nonhuman world. Instead trash was made by and for humans, and its primary effects, both for good and for ill, were on humans. This perspective is also reflected in the Victorian logic of trash, which attributes a human biography, a human mortality, and a moment of rejection by humans to trash and doesn't depict environmental crisis.

Jesse Oak Taylor has written that though the Victorians did not share our understanding of environmental pollution, we can still find in their novels the seeds of the worldview that led to our own awareness of climate change. He then goes on to argue that Victorian writing depicted "climate models" that can tell us about how Victorians thought about air pollution. Taylor concludes that "Instead of expressing explicit concern about the vulnerability of the natural world, environmentalism offered the Victorians a mechanism for understanding the relationship between the human species and its habitat in dynamic interaction," and realist novels, cartoons, and nonfiction sources demonstrate what this understanding looked like through Victorian eyes, particularly with regard to their depictions of the dangers of smoke (23). Indeed, texts such as Ruskin's *Stormcloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884) and George Perkins Marsh's *Man and Nature* (1864) famously have expressed their authors' anxiety about air pollution and environmental degradation, often using a tone and content that are accurately described by Laurence Buell's notion of toxic discourse, or, "expressed anxiety arising from perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification by human agency" (31). This discourse is "both always immoderate and yet always being reinforced by unsettling events," by which Buell means it uses extreme and emotional terms to make its points, but also that these extreme emotional terms have some basis in reality (34). Ruskin and Marsh both fear that human beings

are permanently altering their environment, and describe their concerns in urgent terms that capture the imagination and are designed to provoke action.

However, other Victorian texts, such as William Stanley Jevons's *The Coal Question* (1865), demonstrate that Victorians were not quite on the same page as we are today when it comes to pollution. A contemporary reader might expect *The Coal Question*, which is about the overuse of coal, to address air pollution as one of the main drawbacks of excessive dependence on this resource, but this is not the case. Instead, Jevons calls for Britain to reduce its use of coal, not because he fears human beings are irrevocably changing their environment, but rather because if they use up their coal reserves, they will lose their place of prominence on the world stage.[8] In Chapter 6, entitled "Of British Invention," Jevons critiques simplistic British nationalism, enumerating all the different types of artistic, intellectual, and technological innovations that the British could not come up with on their own and had to learn from Continental nations instead. He concludes that the British owe the success they have had, not to their superiority, but to the abundant reserves of coal that are available to them. He writes, "by far the greater part of the arts and inventions we have of late contributed, spring from our command of coal, or at any rate depend upon its profuse consumption" (101). Should Britain run out of this resource, he fears it will run out of ingenuity as well:

> With the fuel and the fire, then, almost anything is easy….But when this fuel, our material energy, fails us, whence will come the power to do equal or greater things in the future? A man cannot expect that because he has done much when in stout health and bodily vigour, he will do still more when his strength has departed. Yet such is the

[8] This is not to say that *The Coal Question* is completely irrelevant to environmentalist discourse. Antoine Missemer, for example, has persuasively argued that by trying to envision different sources of energy as a solution to the problem of resource depletion, Jevons laid the foundation for the field of environmental economics, even though his efforts were not originally intended to serve the purpose of preserving the environment.

> position of our national body, unless either the source of our strength be carefully spared, or something can be found better than coal to replace it. (136)

Far from critiquing coal as a fuel source, Jevons writes, "coal…commands this age….With coal almost any feat is possible or easy; without it we are thrown back into the laborious poverty of early times" (2). It is only coal's scarcity that Jevons laments. *The Coal Question* is an important text in the history of environmentalism because it is one of only a handful of texts that calls for the British to reduce the rate at which they consume resources. However, his reasons for demanding this action are fundamentally different from twenty-first-century calls for similar action.

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the Victorian view of trash was even farther removed from our present-day environmental concerns about trash than their view of smoke was from our present-day environmental concerns about emissions. Again consider, for example, the Queen's Tobacco-Pipe. The Tobacco-Pipe is a furnace burning up copious amounts of discarded things and belching the smoke into the sky. The resulting ashes of things such as incinerated watches, Simmonds reports, are then spread on fields as insecticide or fertilizer. A present-day reader sees in the Pipe a picture of shameful waste of food and goods, of substances that must not be burned because of the fumes they produce, of pollinators that should not be killed, and of an omen of the ever-burning fires of our own day that are gradually warming the planet. By contrast, to Simmonds, it is evidence of the ingenuity of modern industry, of Britain's superiority to other nations that cannot compare with "the greatest of all smokers" Queen Victoria, and of his society's ability to find a use for anything, whether by recycling it or by burning it.

It should come as no surprise that the Victorians did not share our view of trash. The very concept of "the environment," or the idea that human beings are just one of many biological entities living in an ecosystem upon which we have a disproportionate impact, usually a detrimental one, is rooted in science and looks to science for solutions to mitigate the harm we have done. However, the Victorians were in the process of inventing the scientific concepts that would eventually give rise to the notion of "the environment." Indeed, the OED records that the first usage of the word "environment" to mean "The natural world or physical surroundings in general, either as a whole or within a particular geographical area, esp. as affected by human activity," did not occur until 1948 (OED).

Furthermore, Raymond Stokes records that it wasn't until the 1960s that what he calls the "scientification" of public cleansing began, and this "scientification" is what gave rise to the view of trash that we have today that regards it as something that has a negative effect on the environment. In *The Business of Waste*, Stokes shows that though Victorians were concerned about the sanitary risk unruly trash posed, they weren't really thinking of it as what we would now call an environmental hazard. In the Victorian period, trash pickup was part of what was known as "public cleansing," and the focus on removing even quite severe messes was cast as a local problem of sanitation and cleanliness, not a problem to be understood within a conception that the environment at large was deteriorating as a consequence of human daily life. Stokes writes:

> Scandals in waste disposal...led to public pressure on lawmakers for tighter legislation, which in turn needed to be underpinned by new scientific knowledge embodied in newly trained professionals operating in newly created organizations. Essentially then, this was a dynamic, evolving relationship that--especially in the course of the 1970s--was both

> caused by and resulted in a reconceptualization of household waste. Domestic waste had hitherto been seen variously as unsightly, a squandering of precious resources, and/or a potential danger to public health, but eminently controllable and therefore not particularly hazardous. Instead, it came to be viewed as an insidious form of environmental pollution that required effective regulation and coordination at the national level. (158)

Some events that were necessary for the public view of trash to change in this way were 1) the large-scale distribution of disposable plastic packaging caused by the prevalence of "home shopping" (mail order) in the 1960s and '70s, 2) the burning of plastic waste in trash incinerators becoming commonplace, and 3) the subsequent discovery of the harmful chemicals produced by burning and melting plastic and other trash (138-139). Furthermore, the discovery of the harm caused by plastic waste was part of a cascading awareness of other types of environmental harm as the extent to which post-war prosperity had polluted the earth began to become apparent. That prosperous period, as well as the surge of spending, consumption, and trash it produced, had not yet occurred in the nineteenth century.

Trash pollution was not punished severely under British law until the 1970s. The only penalty for dumping toxic waste was a fine up until an incident in Nuneaton, Bedfordshire in 1971, where residents discovered that someone had been dumping cyanide waste near a disused brickyard where children were known to play (Weinraub). This incident resulted in the creation of the Royal Commission on Environmental Management and also for the first time instituted a jail sentence for inappropriately disposing of toxic waste (Weinraub, Stokes 174). Prior to that, no such organization and no such punishments existed.

In fairness, an important factor to consider in how Victorians punished waste dumping is that their trash was simply not as toxic as our trash is, and they did not have the technology to

produce nearly as much of it as we do. Industrial waste could be quite harmful, but individual, everyday, Victorian households did not have the ability to produce the sheer tonnage of permanent, hazardous waste that modern-day households can barely avoid producing just by eating, dressing ourselves, communicating with each other, and practicing basic hygiene. Such massive production requires technologies and widespread spending power across all classes that were not available to the Victorians. Therefore, a Victorian person seeing a discarded bottle in the grass drew different conclusions about it than would a twenty-first-century person. Ann C. Colley raises some interesting points about this in her article "Class Pollution in the Alps." Her article is about the effect tourists had on the Alps, and she writes:

> With so many going up, down, and across in these regions, there was also naturally a problem with refuse. Surprisingly, there are not as many references in the diaries and narratives to this consequence as one might expect, and, as far as I know, there were no concerted efforts to clean up the well-trodden mountains...; however one does come across entries that speak of the litter as if it were an accepted part of the prospect. These entries casually mention the 'several corks and broken bottles lying about.' And one can read about M. Paterson's dream of rambling from one mountain solitude to another, 'without stumbling against champagne bottles, or meeting with signs of humanity.' (38)

However, though Victorians observed these messes with disapproval, Colley's take on how they interpreted them demonstrates key differences between how they were thinking of trash and how we think of trash. She argues that "For the Victorian, the so-called *cockneys* were the real pollutants," not "the scarring of the landscape," and that

> the real vulnerability was not found in the landscape but in the tottering class structure surrounding these mountains. The introduction of cheaper excursions threatened to

> collapse the social framework and upset its sensitive ecosystem. These Victorians hoped that in spite of changes in the landscape itself, the Alps would 'last our time,' but feared that the divisions among the classes would not. (38-39)

In other words, the broken bottles and corks were not a sign that human beings could harm the Alps; they were a sign that commoners were invading spaces that had hitherto been the exclusive territory of the wealthy.

In fact, I argue that Victorians even had a bit of a soft spot for trash that prevented them from seeing the harm it could do to the nonhuman world. Perhaps the most interesting manifestation of how Victorians thought about trash's relationship with Nature occurs in Richard Jeffries's *Nature Near London* (1881), a work of nature writing. Jeffries makes the argument that the scenery surrounding Britain's largest city was just as pristine and attractive as anything one could find in the country, a strange companion piece to the accounts of disgusting refuse accumulating on every street corner that I have referenced in the previous section. The world he describes is quiet and peaceful, filled with lush greenery and teeming with animal and plant life. Jeffries incorporates the Victorian notion of trash as a useful and valuable resource into the serene landscapes he describes. For example, he tells of how "litter" (consisting of straw and bits of corn) from a wheat rick serves as food for birds (25-26). In addition to this, Jeffries describes how outdoor rubbish heaps, which we would call informal dumps (or "tips" to use the British term), are actually a natural habitat for rats and crows (96-98). Jeffries acknowledges that rats and crows can be pests, but he describes them in the same way that he describes the babbling brooks and chirping sparrows that populate the rest of the book. For Jeffries, the crows and rats are part of Nature Near London, and the rubbish heaps they live in are their habitats, just as the streams are habitats to the fish. Additionally, Jeffries takes note of a moment wherein the

process of assembling a rubbish heap is actually carried out by the local wildlife—in this case, ants. He writes:

> The majority [of ants] still moved in one direction, and I found it led to the heap of rubbish over which they swarmed. This heap was exactly what might have been swept together by half-a-dozen men using long gardens' brooms, and industriously clearing the ground under the first of the fragments which had fallen from them. It appeared to be entirely composed of small twigs, fir-needles, dead leaves, and similar things….This heap was, in fact, the enormous nest or hill of a colony of horse ants. The whole of it had been gathered together, leaf by leaf, and twig by twig, just as I had seen the two insects carrying the little stick, and the third the brown leaf above itself. (104)

Jeffries marvels at the way that animal behavior mirrors human behavior, specifically, the behavior of collecting bits of rubbish into a pile. So, not only is trash part of Nature, but creating dumps is a natural behavior. This pairs well with the British desire to use sewage for fertilizer, as well as Simmonds's discussion in *Waste Products* of how to use bones, blood, coprolites, and fish to fertilize crops. Embedded in the larger discussion of recycling was a discussion of using certain kinds of human-produced garbage to improve the natural fertility of the nonhuman world.

In addition to viewing trash as part of Nature, Jeffries echoes the other authors I have studied in taking the view that trash can be the protagonist of a story, a quality I argue is not shared by any other type of pollutant. Taylor has provided an intriguing discussion of the ways that Victorians used sensational cartoons to tell the story of smoke pollution, depicting industry and home cooking/heating fires as characters that conjured a grim-reaper-like specter in the form of smoke. Taylor then points out the irony that this dangerous smoke was more than just a pollutant; it had symbolism that struck at the heart of what it meant to be British. He writes,

“Not simply the center of the home, the hearth [where coal was burnt] represented the very heart of the nation, and thus London itself” (3). Therefore, smoke pollution, the terrifying menace depicted in the cartoons, was the byproduct of the most comfortable and the most British part of Victorian domestic life. These cartoons pointed to the terrible truth that Britain’s day-to-day activities were summoning a malignant cloud to choke them. However, the Victorian view of the story of trash is fundamentally different. First of all, though the grim reaper may be a character, it doesn’t really have a story. There is no moment when the grim reaper was born, no account of what happened to it in life or when or how it will die, and that type of biographical story, I argue, is uniquely characteristic of trash. Additionally, just at a basic metaphorical level, Jeffries doesn’t view the trash as posing a significant threat to nature near London. In fact, he cannot resist attributing whimsical human-like qualities to pieces of trash. For example, he writes that little fragments of chaff “have wandered across the road and lodged on the mound, and others have roamed still farther round the corner” (70). This sentence turns pieces of straw into travelers. More significantly still, Jeffries takes several pages to write a long aside about a museum collection of leftover crockery abandoned by previous residents from times past. He writes in great detail about the ways these leftovers can tell us the story of British working class cultural history:

> But in this collection of old English jugs, and mugs, and bowls, and cups, and so forth, exhibited in the Museum, there is the real presentment of old rural England. Feeble pottery has ever borne the impress of man more vividly than marble. From these they quenched their thirst, over these they laughed and joked, and gossiped, and sang old hunting songs till the rafters rang, and the dogs under the table got up and barked. Cannot you seen them? (186)

He then goes on to describe all the clever slogans that are written on these jugs and drinking vessels as a way to show that his primary readers' eighteenth-century ancestors were not all that different from them. From this, we can gather that domestic trash held a unique place in the Victorians' view of waste because it was the only kind of waste that was made into the protagonist of a story. Even when writers were trying to highlight something unsettling about trash, trash was still in some important way a representative of human beings. The fact that trash tells a story is one of the most important things about the logic of trash, and the fact that Victorians viewed trash in this way is an important reason they didn't consider its impact on the nonhuman world.

However, though Victorians didn't share our view of trash as something that could harm Nature, they knew that it could harm human beings, particularly in the context of the city. As I have mentioned, in Britain, the poor were saddled with the greatest burden of trash because garbage pickup in slum neighborhoods was neglected, and the health consequences of living so close to large piles of rotting kitchen refuse were obvious. Additionally, these neighborhoods were plagued by inadequate or nonexistent sewerage and unswept streets (a significant concern in an era of horse travel). Many Victorian writers wrote impassioned pleas on behalf of the poor, demanding some remedy to the suffering that their polluted surroundings caused them.[9] These writers' work fits into the category of environmental justice writing, and they demonstrate that Victorians were cognizant that trash, when it took the form of poorly managed domestic waste in London's poorest neighborhoods, posed significant danger to human beings—and as Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" would emphasize, a disproportionate danger to the poor.

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[9] This will be discussed more in my first chapter, where I write about Dickens, George Godwin, and Chadwick's views on the topic. Additionally, see Barbara Gates's "Greening Victorian Studies" for information about Octavia Hill, a philanthropist who advocated for sanitary improvements in poor communities. For some other fictional depictions, see Dickens's *Bleak House* and Gaskell's *Mary Barton.*

In summary, the Victorians knew that trash could harm human beings, and they advocated for pollution to be reduced, but they did not view trash as a cause of environmental crisis as we do today. Furthermore, the Victorian logic of trash explains how Victorians could have been conscious of the harm trash could do to human beings and not conscious of the harm it could do to the nonhuman world. The logic of trash is centered on seeing the human things about trash and the trash-like things about humans. Therefore, trash is a *human* thing, produced by *humans* with a *human* story, and its primary effects, both positive and negative, were on *humans*. Out in Nature, trash is a human emissary, showing that humans have passed through and telling a human story, but not posing any significant harm. However, among other human beings, the meaning of trash changes. The fact that trash can pollute and cause harm to people is one of the chief reasons that calling someone trash is such an insult, and the power of that insult is the reason that the logic of trash deploys the metaphor so frequently.

The Logic of Trash

With Victorian trash now placed in its historical context and terms defined, another basic question remains to be answered: What exactly was trash to the Victorians? What, in fact, is trash to us? The Simmonds passage about the Queen's Tobacco-Pipe is clearly about trash, and Simmonds identifies all the objects he mentions as trash. However, a reader could be excused for not immediately recognizing 900 Australian mutton hams and 13,000 French gloves as garbage. So, this brings us to the question: what is trash and how do we know? Understanding what trash is will in turn lead us to understand what the logic of trash is and, according to this logic, why trash tells a story, why those stories portray marginalized people as trash, and why the Victorians used those stories to think about their mortality.

In *On Garbage*, John Scanlan argues that one reason it is hard to identify trash is that it is always defined in contrast to something else--in other words, the only reason one thing is trash while another thing isn't is because the trash thing has been separated from the non-trash things. This is why trash stories always feature a moment of discarding and why they lend themselves so readily to talking about people whom society has discarded. Scanlan writes, "The creation of garbage is the result of separation," and therefore, it is "the formlessness from which form takes flight" (15, 24). When Scanlan says that trash is formless, he is referring to the fact that anything can be trash, and that, therefore, trash does not have any recognizable qualities by which we can identify it. Additionally, the longer something remains trash, the more it loses whatever form it may still have. We can see this in the Simmonds passage about the hams. The only thing that makes these hams any different from others is the fact that their owners haven't paid the duty on them, and for this reason, they have to be discarded. This unpaid duty is what causes their separation, not anything specific about the hams themselves. However, the longer these hams linger near the Queen's Pipe, the more trash-like they become—in other words, the longer they are trash, the more they lose their form.

In addition to taking virtually any form, trash can also change from being trash to being not-trash, a transformation that happens in stages, and this is why trash objects tell a story. Michael Thompson, Igor Kopytoff, and Arjun Appadurai write about how and why commodities change in value over time. Thompson begins by writing that "possessable objects" can be divided into three categories, "valuable, valueless, and negatively valued" (2). He further elaborates that valuable items can be described as either durable (by which he means that they never lose their value or even continuously gain value) or transient (by which he means that they

are always depreciating in value) (9). Objects depreciate in value, steadily becoming more like trash, but trash objects can also occasionally get their value back. He writes:

> a transient object gradually declining in value and in expected life-span may slide across into rubbish. In an ideal world...an object would reach zero value and zero expected life-span at the same instant, and then...disappear into dust. But, in reality, it usually does not do this; it just continues to exist in a timeless and valueless limbo where at some later date (if it has not by that time turned, or been made, into dust) it has the chance of being discovered. (9)

According to Thompson, rubbish objects, once they get "discovered" by the wealthy, can then be transformed into durable objects. As Thompson's point suggests, trash is hard to study because it doesn't stay put, and because it can and often does stop being trash, either briefly or long-term. Furthermore, as Igor Kopytoff notes in "The Cultural Biography of Things," commodities have a life cycle. He introduces the idea that commodities don't just change, but also that they have lives as we do. Interestingly, Kopytoff doesn't mention trash as part of that life cycle. However, with Kopytoff and Thompson in mind, I argue that one way to consider how commodities change over time is to assert that all things are trash, just at different points in trash's biography. One stage of trash's timeline is its time as a commodity, after which it may be thrown away, later to be reclaimed, reused, and then thrown away again. This explains the goods that wind up in the Queen's Tobacco-pipe. To return to the hams, we can see the ways these hams go from being trash to being not-trash and back to trash again in the way that the attendants try everything they can to find some way to sell them or make use of them. As a result of their efforts, some of the hams are transformed from trash into breakfast, though others are not so lucky. Everything that goes into the pipe is on its way to its final end, but the route these goods

take to get there may be circuitous. They may go into the pipe and then be reused on the other side, or they may simply end their lives as ashes fertilizing a field. Each piece of trash has its own biography, and this is why the logic of trash states that trash tells a story.

Trash stories can be quite complex, and trash can be an active character. Many of the phases of trash's life are under human control, but trash also has its own agency. Scanlan is correct in noting that trash's main defining quality is the fact that it is thrown away, a view that can be enlightened by placing it within the context of Bill Brown's "Thing Theory," in which Brown makes a distinction between things and objects. To summarize, Brown argues that we interact with objects intentionally, but things hover in the background outside our awareness. He elaborates: "As they circulate through our lives, we look *through* objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture—above all, what they disclose about *us*), but we only catch a glimpse of things" (4). However, things can make themselves known by getting in the way and causing problems. Brown writes:

> We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production, distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. (4)

The subject-object relation Brown refers to here is the fact that things (the objects) are defined by the fact that they are generally ignored by people (the subjects) until people are forced to confront them by dealing with an inconvenience they cause. I argue that trash has a similar relationship with us. When we (the subjects) throw trash (the object) away and forget about it,

we are defining trash by its relationship with us as the thing that we discard. This is partly what Scanlan means when he says that trash is defined by separation. Then, like Brown's things, trash hovers in the background after we push it out of our sight, sometimes popping into view to inconvenience us.

Scanlan and Thompson both assert that trash is hard to see, with Thompson going so far as to assert that there is a "conspiracy of blindness" preventing us from seeing it (4). Furthermore, Brown's point that things linger out of sight reinforces this claim. It's difficult to understand how trash can be said to be invisible when every one of us can probably find a piece of trash right now, merely by turning our heads or at most taking a few steps. But, what these writers are getting at is that though trash can be hard to define, hard to categorize, and hard to appraise, it is really only hard to see because we refuse to look at it.

Why won't we look at trash today? Thompson, Appadurai, and Kopytoff all refuse to look to look at trash themselves when they make the point that sometimes things are removed from the market and are designated as not for sale any longer because of their unusually high value. These three call that a permanent state. However, even extremely valuable things, no matter what their economic longevity, will eventually succumb to physical and chemical ephemerality. Human beings may agree to remove things from the cycles of the market, but no one can remove anything from the downward spiral of mortality. Eventually, decay will win: even the most valuable treasures will become trash when they physically dissolve or when some disaster happens to destroy them, and this is why the logic of trash always connects trash with death.

In *Death: The Art of Living*, Todd May writes about a classroom activity that he did in his philosophy seminar on the topic of death. He asked his students to list four or five of the most

important things in their lives on paper and then pass the lists up to him. May then tore the lists up and threw them away as an object lesson on what death does to all of us (5-6). In this class, May used trash to remind his students of their mortality, and this perhaps provides the key to the real reason we don't like to look at trash. It reminds us of what will happen to us. Like us, trash is also ultimately headed in one direction: the ground.

With these things in mind, the logic of trash comes into focus. The logic of trash helps us solve a puzzle: how to reconcile ourselves to the fact that we decay, either metaphorically or literally. Trash stories, which always feature a moment of rejection, invite us to envision what happens on the other side of being discarded. Some trash stories wherein the moment of discarding is a moral or social event suggest that partial redemption is possible. Other trash stories view the moment of being discarded as being a moment of death, and when they think of what comes after, they try to come to terms with the reality of physical decay. The story of trash is also the life story of the material objects that we use in our everyday lives, and it replicates and bears witness to human life stories as well. As I have shown, Victorians were optimistic about trash and viewed it as something that could be repurposed and improved, and, under the right circumstances, made lucrative. However, trash was also harmful and insanitary and a spectacle of decay, and therefore they also felt that looking closely at trash could give them important insight into their ultimate fate. The Victorian desires to both identify with trash and to discard it, to make a living off trash and to recognize it as a picture of death, were at odds with each other, but the logic of trash shows that the conflicting desires to push trash away and to humanize it can be reconciled when trash is used as a metaphor for the rejects of society. Stories that use this metaphor follow the progress of rejected people as if they were trash (proceeding through the stages of discarding, recycling, and decay) and also examine the economic value these people

possess in addition to their sentimental value. They also cause writers to reflect upon their own death as they reflect upon the stories of these individuals, or even to wish for the death of groups they perceived as troublesome as a means of discarding both them and the image of human mortality they represent.

My project participates in a larger conversation about the role of sanitation, waste, and material culture in Victorian novels. Natalka Freeland's work on Elizabeth Gaskell's novels and William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson's essay collection *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life* were influential in the development of this dissertation. These texts analyze the metaphorical meanings of the things that human beings traditionally have pushed away from themselves and discarded. They also share an interest in the topic of disgust, with reference to Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, and Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger.* My project does discuss how writers draw equivalences between trash and people, but rather than delving into the psychological or anthropological meanings of disgust, it follows in the footsteps of Elaine Freedgood's *The Ideas in Things* and Eileen Cleere's *The Sanitary Arts*, both of which take a more historicist approach. Freedgood tells the story of objects in Victorian fiction in *The Ideas in Things*. She writes that "Victorian thing culture…has left for us a rich archive of stories about things," which she then analyzes in realist novels (8). Though, unlike Freedgood, I do not shy away from metaphorical readings—in fact the nonfiction texts in particular often invite metaphorical readings—I am inspired by her attention to the cultural history of objects to uncover aspects of their meanings that we might have missed otherwise. Furthermore, Eileen Cleere's discussion in *The Sanitary Arts* about how sanitation and cleaning can form the basis of a narrative has informed my idea that discarding and decay can form the basis of a narrative. I also echo Talia Schaffer's observations about the

need for more targeted analyses of Victorian things, and her work on literary representations of handicraft (some of which are made out of repurposed trash) in *Novel Craft* influences my work. Lastly, Patrick Chappell and Emily Steinlight's analyses of superfluous characters in Dickens's novels and the ways these characters are related to trash, have laid a foundation for my project.

My dissertation builds upon these approaches to reveal what could be considered the shadow cast by Victorian thing culture. The reason looking into a dustbin rewards our curiosity is that trash shows us such a clear picture of what society values in the negative image of what they don't value. Things as a broad category are very interesting, but trash is a type of thing that is fundamentally defined by rejection. A piece of furniture in a bedroom, a book, or a handmade item from a craft bazaar can show us much about a culture, as Freedgood, Price, and Schaffer have so skillfully shown. But a piece of trash shows us these things *and* the values that dictated it be thrown away. Furthermore, this unifying quality that defines all trash—that it is defined by rejection—is the reason the logic of trash is so consistent throughout the texts I study.

This dissertation will explore representations of trash in Victorian writing, with each chapter focusing primarily on a particular novel. Since trash so often is portrayed as telling a story, turning to literary representations of trash proves to be an effective way to understand both Victorian beliefs about trash, and about the things for which trash was most often used as a metaphor. Additionally, the novels I have chosen, Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865), Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853), and H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1886), were widely read novels that had an enormous impact on their culture, and therefore they are good indicators of what a broad swath of Victorian readers were interested in. Nonfiction texts also provide trash stories and trash biographies, and so my dissertation pairs the novels I study with relevant nonfiction companion

texts. Victorians viewed trash as something that told a story, and both fiction and nonfiction writers built biographies around the objects.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters, each of which studies a different aspect of Victorian trash and the stories it tells. Chapter 1, entitled "Trash Punishments in *Our Mutual Friend*," argues that Dickens depicts three characters transforming into trash in *Our Mutual Friend* in order to condemn them for neglecting their families. In so doing, he provides a detailed historical account of the different types of trash that polluted London and also uses the metaphorical significance of trash to call for improved sanitation and poor relief as well as to describe working waste-management techniques such as dust-yards and paper mills with approval. Finally, with each trash transformation I study, Dickens meditates on death, first demonstrating how readers can see themselves in the dying character, but then using his disapproval of their behavior to withdraw empathy from them and to portray their deaths as a punishment. I pair this novel with Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1850-1852), William Godwin's *Town Swamps and Social Bridges* (1859), and another Dickens text, "A Paper Mill" (1850), in order to show how the fictional representations of waste and of troublesome people parallel the ways nonfiction writers described Britain's real-life waste management.

Chapter 2, entitled "Precious Trash in *Ruth*," demonstrates how Gaskell delves deeper into the question of what it means to view marginalized individuals as trash, specifically, fallen women. In this chapter, I go into more detail about the Victorian logic of trash and about the structure of trash stories, placing them in the context of their ancestor, the it-narrative, or, a story told from the perspective of a material object. I show that trash stories often follow the structure of it-narratives, but trash stories are unified by the fact that, no matter how many twists and turns the trash takes on the way, it always follows an unavoidable path to the grave, a reality that

mirrors the human condition. In this sense, all people are trash, but, in *Ruth*, Gaskell explores how fallen women specifically were disproportionately treated like trash, showing that Victorians displaced their anxiety about death onto fallen women. This tendency manifests itself in the way that Victorians seemed to want to hasten these women down the path towards the grave as punishment for their sexual choices, a claim that I support by referring to three nonfiction texts about fallen women by prominent Victorian authors: Dinah Mulock Craik's *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* (1858), Mary Jeune's "Helping the Fallen" (1885), and William Rathbone Greg's "Prostitution" (1853). Gaskell argues that rather than hastening them forward, society should treasure fallen women and hold onto them, just as people retain things that normally would seem to be trash as keepsakes because of the sentimental value such objects can have. Gaskell can't quite let go of the idea that fallen women are made defective by their sexual history, but she nevertheless does her best to advocate for them by demanding that society treat them more kindly.

Chapter 3, entitled "Gothic Trash in *She*," takes a literal view of what it means for a human being to be trash; that is, it analyzes what it means for a corpse to be trash. This chapter shows that Haggard's *She* (1886-1887) uses the conventions of Gothic horror to uncover the terrible secrets of how real-life Victorians processed corpses for reuse and recycling by comparing those practices to the sensational rituals of a cannibal tribe. I also reference Simmonds's *Waste Products and Undeveloped Substances* to demonstrate that Haggard's Gothic revelations about trash are not only true, but even understate the real horror of the ways Victorians processed corpses. Haggard then uses the horrors of Gothic trash to meditate on why the reality that corpses are discarded and recycled can inspire the reader with such horror, concluding ultimately with an expression of anxiety about exactly how much of a recycled thing

can be completely transformed by waste management, and how much of it lingers on to haunt future consumers. Haggard then puts the fears he has raised to uneasy rest by discarding Ayesha, the femme fatale who serves as the embodiment of Gothic trash.

So, without further ado, let us inspect the ashes of Queen Victoria's pipe.

CHAPTER I

TRASH PUNISHMENTS IN CHARLES DICKENS'S *OUR MUTUAL FRIEND*

Introduction: Turning People into Trash

Our Mutual Friend is most commonly regarded as a book about money, a book that argues that money is nothing but trash and that those who would hoard money will only harm themselves. This is certainly true. But in addition to this, it's also a book about how certain people are trash, specifically, a group to which Dickens himself belonged: men who neglect their families. Dickens's novel features half a dozen men falling into or being pushed into the River Thames, and all them are all guilty of severing ties with or mistreating the people with whom they have the closest bonds. Riderhood abuses his daughter, Eugene won't marry Lizzie because of her station in life, Bradley spurns his colleague Miss Peecher and stalks Lizzie, John discards his family name, Gaffer Hexam cuts off his own son and forces his daughter to remain illiterate, and even Radfoot, who appears in the novel for only a few pages, betrays a friend. The characters who flounder in the river have obstinately turned on lovers, friends, daughters, sons, and fathers, and in turn, Dickens portrays the river into which they fall as a common dump site for dead bodies. The prevalence of discarded bodies living and dead emphasizes Dickens's preoccupation with the combination of trash and death. But there is additional symbolic significance: the men who fall into the Thames are guilty of treating the important people in their lives like trash. For figuratively discarding the bodies of friends, lovers, and family, Dickens punishes these men by discarding their literal bodies as pollution in the Thames.

I argue that in the Victorian mindset, trash has its own logic, and according to this logic, trash can be used to tell stories about an object's descent from wholeness into decay. Human beings can then recognize their own mortality within these trash stories, and by extension, their

kinship with trash. However, recognizing the humanness of trash is unsettling, so authors often depict the people they despise as trash so they can recognize the humanness of trash without having to accept it in themselves. In this chapter, I argue that Dickens's unusually detailed picture of Victorian London's trash in *Our Mutual Friend* provides us with a correspondingly sophisticated and detailed view of the logic of trash. Dickens examines several different types of trash (river pollution, litter, and rags for a paper mill) that were common in London at the time and draws an equivalence between each type of trash and a particular male character who neglects his family. Dickens then informs the reader about what the trajectories of actual litter, pollution, and rags were in historical London by narrating the story of each character as if he were following that same trajectory. While all of these stories basically follow the logic of trash as I have described it, Dickens's specialized knowledge of London's sanitation allows him to make more nuanced analyses of the logic of trash and how it applies to people in different stations of life and locations. As I read through this massive novel, I found more than a dozen characters who have stories like this—six are dumped in the river, another six are dumped in the street, and one is dumped directly into a scavenger's cart. However, I have decided to focus primarily on the three most detailed trash stories: the story of Rogue Riderhood as river pollution, the story of Mr. Dolls as litter, and the story of Eugene Wrayburn as rags that get recycled. In each of these stories, in addition to educating the reader about waste in London, Dickens also uses these stories about trash to invite his readers to think about how all human beings share the common fate of death. However, he doesn't sustain these insights for long, instead relieving the reader of that burden by displacing the death onto the trash character and heaping opprobrium on that person for his neglect of his family so that instead of thinking, "We all will die," the reader can instead think, "This good-for-nothing deserves to die."

The theme of "waste" is unavoidable in this novel, and consequently, it has attracted a vast amount of critical attention. Most notably, Dickens's heavy-handed comparison of dust and money has led most critics to conclude that *Our Mutual Friend* seeks to teach readers the lesson that "money corrupts" in some way, whether money takes the form of the Victorians' burgeoning consumer culture, capitalism in general, what Ruskin termed "illth" (a portmanteau of "ill" and "wealth"), or the moral vice of miserliness and worship of Mammon.[10] Additionally, many have sought to historicize Dickens's portrayal of waste in the Mounds and the River Thames. Humphrey House was one of the earliest critics to historicize the Mounds when he argued that they contained human excrement (House 167). This assumption was foundational for later interpretations of the dust/money metaphor, including those of Earle Davis and Eve Sedgwick, both of whom derive their focus on disgust and transgression from the idea that the Mounds and the River are locations where bodily waste was dumped. Additionally, Pamela Gilbert and Michelle Allen, among others, have placed Dickens's representation of the polluted River Thames in *Our Mutual Friend* in the context of the pollution of the historical Victorian River Thames, which resulted in the terrible cholera epidemics of the 1830s and 1850s.[11]

In addition to portraying trash in great detail, as the above critics have explored, Dickens also writes stories about characters who are turned into trash. The distinctive metamorphoses into trash that the various characters of *Our Mutual Friend* undergo is part of a larger pattern in his body of work. As Dorothy Van Ghent has famously argued, Dickens often writes about people as if they were things and things as if they were people.[12] This technique is particularly

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[10] See J. Hillis Miller, Humphrey House, Monroe Engel, Eve Sedgwick, Peter Gurney, Catherine Gallagher, Nancy Metz, Earle Davis, and others.

[11] See Michael Worboys's *Spreading Germs* for a closer look at the development of germ theory and an overview of the different diseases that plagued Britain during the Victorian period.

[12] In her own words: "Dickens' fairly constant use of the pathetic fallacy (the projection of human impulses and feelings upon the nonhuman, as upon beds and houses and muffins and hats) might be considered as incidental

distinctive in *Our Mutual Friend* because Dickens so often turns the characters not just into things as a broad category, but specifically into trash. Patrick Chappell and Emily Steinlight provide important reference points for thinking about human trash in Dickens's work. Steinlight writes about Dickens's "supernumeraries" (by which she means the characters who seem to be a surplus of one kind or another), and in this category she includes figures of abject poverty such as Jo the crossing sweep as well as shallow middle-class duplicates such as Buffy, Cuffy, et al., all characters from *Bleak House.*[13] Steinlight's concept of the supernumerary can be productively applied to the characters who are processed as trash (or, trash characters) in *Our Mutual Friend*. She argues that Dickens doesn't attempt to advocate for supernumeraries by asserting that the poor aren't superfluous after all but rather by showing that poor, middle class, and rich are all equally worthless and superfluous. Chappell applies the idea of supernumeraries to characters in *Bleak House* who are compared to waste paper. Unlike Steinlight, he focuses primarily on subaltern characters as the main representatives of Dickens's supernumeraries, and he argues that these waste paper characters linger on in the narrative in the same way that waste paper does: "Via the novel's metaphorics of paper waste, these characters become individuals who, like documents, cannot be easily disposed of or eliminated—figures who after their deaths turn out to have a lingering influence and even a perverse use value in the narrative economy"

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stylistic embellishment if his description of people did not show a reciprocal metaphor: people are described by nonhuman attributes, or by such an exaggeration of or emphasis on one part of their appearance that they seem to be reduced wholly to that part, with an effect of having become 'thinged' into one of their own bodily members or into an article of their clothing or into some inanimate object of which they have made a fetish…This device of association is a familiar one in fiction; what distinguishes Dickens' use of it is that the associated object acts not merely to *illustrate* a person's qualities symbolically--as novelists usually use it--but that it has a necessary metaphysical function in Dickens' universe: in this universe objects actually usurp human essences; beginning as fetishes, they tend to--and sometimes quite literally do--devour and take over the powers of the fetish-worshiper" (129-131).

[13] Here, I include her full definition: "A figure of ontological uncertainty, the supernumerary at once designates that which exceeds the maximum allowable number (thus the number of units in excess of the total) and that which appears in excess of number as such: the uncountable mass of life that defies containment. It marks as a category that which exceeds categorization, rendering inclusion and exclusion equally impossible" (234).

(794). These scholars, who identify ways in which Dickens transforms people into things and then ways in which he talks about people as trash (both literal and metaphorical) provide an important foundation for my discussion of the logic of trash because they highlight how marginalized or despised characters are transformed into things or waste in Dickens's writing. My project, in turn, highlights how these patterns in Dickens's writing partake in the larger pattern this dissertation observes about Victorian writing overall—the logic of trash—wherein characters of whom the writer disapproves are portrayed as trash to reconcile readers and authors with the reality that the categories of trash and human have significant overlap. Both Steinlight and Chappell eventually conclude that Dickens doesn't sufficiently answer the question of what to do with supernumeraries in *Bleak House*, but I argue that he does answer the question, after a fashion, in *Our Mutual Friend*: he throws them away. This isn't as much of a cop out as it might appear because of the logic of trash, to which Dickens adds additional layers by using his knowledge of the details of different kinds of Victorian trash (water pollution, litter, and paper mill rags) to provide nuance for his depiction of these characters' ultimate fates and the impacts they have on the people around them.

When Dickens turns a character into trash in *Our Mutual Friend*, he is punishing that character. Dickens's trash punishments follow a specific pattern that relies on wit and poetic justice to an extent that is almost joke-like.[14] To name one example, Gaffer Hexam, the waterman who robs corpses pulled from the river and another neglecter of family ties, is punished by being drowned and then being pulled out of the river as a corpse himself, towed

[14]*Our Mutual Friend* uses conventions from other genres, and Dickens's penchant for customized punishments may spring from his interest in fairy tales, something Cynthia DeMarcus, Victoria Williams, and Shirley Grob have all taken note of. These critics mainly note the ways that some of the characters in the novel closely resemble fairy tale characters such as Little Red Riding Hood, the wolf, Cinderella, and the Fairy Godmother, but the customized punishments have something of the fairy tale about them. Meanwhile, Monroe Engel has also compared London in *Our Mutual Friend* to hell, and the joke-like punishments may come from that as well.

along by his own boat. To make sure we don't miss the irony, Dickens has the people who find him spell it out: "The object he had expected to take in tow floats by, and his own boat tows him dead, to where we found him, all entangled in his own line" (175). They even check his pockets for money, just as he was famous for doing to the dead bodies he found in the river (175). Writers often use poetic justice when they come up with ways to make sure villains get what is coming to them. However, Dickens's usage of this technique is particularly significant because so many of these different punishments involve turning characters into pieces of trash and exploring in exact detail how such types of trash would change over time in real life. Additionally, in keeping with the logic of trash, punishing these characters by turning them into trash gives Dickens an opportunity to reflect on death. When Lizzie discovers her father dead, Dickens writes the following passage wherein he emphasizes to the reader that, like a piece of trash, Gaffer cannot hear or respond when his daughter calls to him now that he is dead:

> Father, was that you calling me? Was it you, the voiceless and the dead? Was it you, thus buffeted as you lie here in a heap? Was it you, thus baptized unto Death, with these flying impurities now flung upon your face? Why not speak, Father? Soaking into this filthy ground as you lie here, is your own shape. Did you never see such a shape soaked into your boat? Speak, Father. Speak to us, the winds, the only listeners left you! (174)

In this passage, the reader may feel discomfort as we are drawn to think of how we, too, will not be able to hear the call of loved ones once we transform into corpses ourselves, but because Gaffer's death is a punishment, the logic of trash prompts us instead to nod with indignation at how this man who neglected his daughter has now justly been punished by being separated from her forever. After this, the police officer describes Gaffer as "this man that was" and changes the pronoun by which he refers to him from "him" to "it," establishing with even more finality that

Gaffer's death has rendered him trash (174, 175). Dickens makes a practice of condemning groups he despises by turning them into trash. In discarding these men, Dickens either condemns London for related crimes—specifically, the pollution of the river and inadequate poor relief—or promises hope in the form of recycling. Finally, Dickens's trash punishments of despised characters give him a pulpit from which to preach sermons about human mortality, emphasizing first that we all share the same fate, but then alleviating that discomfort by making death (or near-death) into a punishment for evil deeds, rather than an unavoidable reality.

The Dust-yard: A Disclaimer

Our Mutual Friend is famous in the history of Victorian waste management for being one of the most detailed depictions available of dust-yards and how they work. Brian Maidment shows that the portrayal of Mr. Boffin was one of the most influential and enduring representations of a dustman, and Lee Jackson refers to the novel as a primary source for his chapter on the history of dustmen. The whole narrative takes place against a backdrop of the enormous dust mounds of Boffin's Bower, which house a mysterious fortune buried in muck and provide the controlling metaphor for the book's overarching theme that money is garbage and garbage is money. And, yet, gallingly, the stories about characters that take place in the nineteenth-century equivalent of an actual dump do not follow the logic of trash like the rest of the novel. Indeed, many scholars have noted that the dust-yard plot doesn't follow the same rules as the rest of the story. Mary Poovey and Lauren Goodlad have made the important point that the Dust Mound plot is sealed off from the other more realist plots, and that the sentimentality of its happy wealthy marriage at the end doesn't sit easily alongside the novel's other subplots.[15] I find this to be true with the logic of trash as well. Trash stories, as I define them, are

[15] See also Shirley Grob, who argues that the difference between the two plots is that the dust-yard plot can be best understood as a fairy tale.

characterized by a moment wherein the protagonist (be that a literal piece of trash, a character who stands in for a piece of trash, or some combination) is discarded, and then the rest of the story consists of a narrative of that item/character's decay or of their partial (never complete) rehabilitation, salvage, or recycling. A story of transformation does take place on the grounds of Boffin's Bower—the story of Bella Wilfer's education, wherein Mr. Boffin and her husband John use a ruse to teach her to be a better wife—but this story is not really a trash story. Bella's story does not follow the logic of trash because it does not tell the tale of someone who is discarded and what happens after. Instead, it tells a story of how John and Mr. Boffin find gold where they *expected* to find trash when, after being tested, Bella proves that she values love more than money.

Due to its resemblance to a modern-day landfill, many contemporary readers tend to think of the Dust Mounds in *Our Mutual Friend* as places of storage where the most worthless of unusable trash must go when no other alternative remains. However, unlike a landfill, which passively contains the things that are dumped in it, the nineteenth-century dust-yard was a place where people searched for profit. In the mid-twentieth century, critics of *Our Mutual Friend* were very interested in the idea that the Mounds were full of human waste because of the symbolic potential such interpretations could have for supporting Freudian readings of the text.[16] Even after the prevalence of Freudian criticism declined, many still have tended to view the Mounds as static heaps of garbage from which one can extract a profit only with the greatest

[16] A memorable quote from Davis's *The Flint and the Flame* (1963) provides a good example of the assumptions behind these readings: "That anyone would value above all else whatever drips from the body of society seemed to [Dickens] to rouse the incarnate infernal….From Parliament to wealthy mansions to filthy business houses to narrow streets to slums, in every part of London he saw mankind straining and struggling over a dung heap trying desperately to produce money or whatever could be measured in pounds and shillings. The quintessence of his symbol was dust and trash; its parallel form was the cesspool of the Thames, draining off the slime and ooze from the wasteland of life. His pen became an excretory organ spouting out a sizzling cover for all the organic corruption which lay festering in the values that money set, the awful offal of Victorian standards" (266).

reluctance.[17] Scholars including House and Nancy Metz base their negative valuations of the Dust Mounds on the disgust factor; the broad line of reasoning is that the Mounds are bad because they are full of London's insanitary decaying castoffs, and by connecting money with insanitary decaying castoffs, Dickens is saying money is filthy and wasteful, just like trash. Even scholars who interpret the Mounds as sites of production, such as Catherine Gallagher, view their positive potential as a paradox. She writes, "Despite the death versus life metaphors in the passages that introduce us to the dustmen, the transmission of life into inorganic matter and thence into money is not consistently presented as life destroying in the novel. On the contrary, it is portrayed as a sanitizing process and one in which a pure potential called 'Life' is released" (93). In other words, though the Mounds may be filthy, they are also a sanitary device designed to contain filth, which makes them a filthy thing that works in the service of cleanliness. In all of these readings, the main problem with the Mounds is that they contain trash or that they are dirty and disgusting, negative qualities that either remain symbolically unresolved, or are eliminated by sanitation.

However, closer inspection of the primary sources reveals that though night soil men (who emptied cesspits) and dustmen were often the same people,[18] dust-yards were generally not the location in which human waste was stored, and therefore, the idea that the Mounds stand in as symbols of filth or disgust needs to be reexamined.[19] In actuality, dust-yards (at least as they

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[17] Humphrey House's initial speculation that the Mounds contain excrement leads him to say that "the idea of Silas Wegg prodding them with his wooden leg becomes almost intolerable" (167). In the same vein, Monroe Engel writes, "The dust heaps were filth, ordure, excrement, but nevertheless, money" (134). Similarly, Nancy Metz calls them "that monstrous image of vulgarity and unloveliness, the dustheap" (68). Catherine Gallagher writes of Old Harmon accumulating the Dust Mounds that "The expense of his life is a self-burying; dust erupts from him and settles on him, so that accumulation and interment are the same thing" (92).

[18] Henry Mayhew writes: "any nightman will work as a dustman or scavager [sic]; but it is not all the dustmen and scavagers who will work as nightmen" (172). [CHECK]

[19] Maidment records: "The Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Act of 1848 …finally ensured that the disposal of ordure and the removal of dust became entirely separate activities in the eyes of the law" (29).

were portrayed in Victorian journalism) were places of productivity, technological ingenuity, and hard work paying off. Describing the natural habitat of the London dustman, Henry Mayhew writes of the dust-yard that “the whole yard seems alive” with activity as the women dust sifters bustle back and forth processing London’s ashes and kitchen garbage (171). R. H. Horne’s educational short story in *Household Words* entitled “Dust: or Ugliness Redeemed” (1850), which is widely regarded as an inspiration for *Our Mutual Friend*,[20] tells a romanticized story of how lovable yet grotesque dust sifters are able to help a suicidal young man find hope and love. The story also informs readers of what exactly goes on in the dust-yards; Horne describes the dust mounds not as piles of worthless waste, but rather as productive workplaces, staffed with specialized dust sifters and divided into “different departments,” including soft-ware (“all vegetable and animal matters [sic]—everything that will decompose”) and hard-ware (“broken pottery, pans, crockery, earthenware, oyster-shells, &c.”) (380).

“Dust: or Ugliness Redeemed” depicts the heterogeneity of the contents of the dust mound, but also the classification processes that transform Londoners’ dust from a mixed up mass of garbage into carefully sorted piles that can then be sold at a profit. Horne writes about how the sifters are able to make use of “bits of coal” discarded by “accident and servants' carelessness”; cinders are sold to laundresses, braziers, and brick-makers; hard-ware is used to make roads; and soft-ware can be used for manure after animal bones and fur are removed for their own separate uses (380). Rags are recycled, as are “tin things” and “bits of old brass, lead,” and glass (380). Horne writes in complimentary terms about the people who work in the dust-yard, emphasizing their productivity and industriousness: “Meantime, everybody is hard at work near the base of the great dust-heap. A certain number of cart-loads having been raked and

[20] See Frank Gibbon for a more in-depth analysis of the connections between *Our Mutual Friend* and “Dust.”

searched for all the different things just described, the whole of it now undergoes the process of sifting. The men throw up the stuff, and the women sift it" (380). Though it is true at one level that Dickens's Mounds are heaps of trash and that trash is often filthy, it is important to recognize that dust-yards were not inert storage space, but dynamic places of waste processing and sorting. Jackson records that "[The dust-yards] were, in effect, recycling centres, with not only dust and sundry labourers, but related plant—including a furnace for material that was not recyclable, and some machinery" (21).

Additionally, Mayhew and Horne both document that actual treasure—discarded things that are valuable in and of themselves and don't need recycling—may frequently be found in the dust-yard. For example, Mayhew includes treasure—"money and jewellery"—in a list of items that may be found from sifting the Mounds (Mayhew 171). Similarly, Horne reports, "As for any articles of jewellery, silver spoons, forks, thimbles, or other plate and valuables, they are pocketed off-hand by the first finder. Coins of gold and silver are often found, and many coppers" (380). What's more, one of the main plot points of Horne's story is that a man rediscovers a lost title deed in the Mounds (384). Therefore, dust-yards, though they were filled with trash, were not always places where trash stories ended, but were also places where treasure was discovered. Careful examination and testing, were the main activities of the dust-yard as its workers tried to determine which discarded objects were worth something and which were not, and sometimes, the sifters found things that should never have been discarded in the first place.

These details reveal that the dust-yard subplot is not quite as cut off from the rest of the novel as it might seem. The fact that this subplot involves sifting and testing Bella's character in order to assess its true worth and determine whether any use can be made of it is true to the spirit of how trash was managed in dust-yards, just as I will argue that Dickens's representations of

pollution in the Thames, litter in the streets, and recycling in a paper mill are true to the spirit of how trash behaved in these places too. However, the ultimate outcome of the sifting to which Mr. Boffin and John subject Bella reveals she is "true golden gold," and not trash at all. The idea that Bella's reformation is brought about through sifting casts an interesting new light on a comment she makes about herself after her reformation, just before she is about to go to Lizzie's wedding. She tells her husband, "I am a little thing myself--I always was. But in great things, I hope not; I don't mean to boast, John, but I hope not!" (745). A little thing could fall through a sieve, but a thing that is not little might be a treasure, exactly what the sieve is designed to filter out of the dust.

It seems that all the protagonists of the dust-yard subplot are gold, for Dickens lavishes riches on all of them, which is ironic given the number of public renunciations of money they make. Consider this one, which Bella makes in defense of John: "'I would rather he thought well of me,' said Bella, 'though he swept the street for bread, than that you did, though you splashed the mud upon him from the wheels of a chariot of pure gold—There!'" (599). Or, in another case, Sloppy's statement to Jenny, "I should be better paid with a song than with any money," conveys essentially the same message (810). Yet even though the characters all renounce money, these renunciations do not result in the money actually disappearing, but rather in the money accumulating. The Harmon house contains an aviary, cases of jewels for Bella, flowers everywhere, and a lavish nursery, all of which they parade before Bella's poorer family when they come to visit (804-808). In fact, these characters who are said to be so unattached to money retain it throughout the entirety of the novel, sharing it only with other members of the Harmon estate. Mr. Boffin shows his generosity by giving all his money to John, who then shows *his* generosity by allowing the Boffins to live in the exact same house with the exact same

status and accommodations that they began with. The sacrifices that John, Bella, and the Boffins make don't actually cost them anything, and the imaginary poverty John imposes on himself and Bella is easily shucked off the moment he tires of it.

Ostensibly, the Harmons are rewarded with riches and are allowed to ascend the social ladder because they have proven themselves to be above corruption by money: they are true golden gold because of their good deeds and selflessness. However, Dickens cues the reader to understand that his representation of Harmons and Boffins is not intended to be true to life because a parody of it can be found in the lessons taught to the paupers at Charley Hexam's school. In this little tale, Dickens mocks the exact kind of story he seems to be telling about John Harmon and Bella:

> So, unwieldy young dredgers and hulking mudlarks were referred to the experiences of Thomas Twopence, who, having resolved not to rob (under circumstances of uncommon atrocity) his particular friend and benefactor, of eighteenpence, presently came into supernatural possession of three and sixpence, and lived a shining light ever afterwards. (Note, that the benefactor came to no good.) Several swaggering sinners had written their own biographies in the same strain; it always appearing from the lessons of those very boastful persons, that you were to do good, not because it was good, but because you were to make a good thing of it. (214-215)

Bella plays out the same scenario Dickens mocks in this short anecdote. John and the Boffins conspire to create circumstances of uncommon atrocity with which to test her character: John pretends to be unjustly fired by his wealthy benefactor, who then forces Bella to choose between her love and riches. Bella resists the temptations of money and chooses love instead. She is then handsomely rewarded with riches in return. Like Thomas Twopence, she lives a shining light

ever after as an ideal wife for John, but while the novel seems to want us to believe this outcome when it happens to Bella, it clearly doesn't believe that such prosperity and virtue are available to the dredgers and mudlarks in the story, or even to other virtuous characters in the novel such as Lizzie Hexam and Jenny Wren (772).

The disparity between the dust-yard subplot and the rest of the novel suggests that Dickens isn't attempting to offer a coherent message about why some people are prosperous and happy and others aren't. Deirdre David essentially gives up on finding a logic in Dickens's choices, writing that "escape from social misery is fabulously effected by the naked, authoritarian hand of the novelist rather than achieved by the individual character in ways we find convincing in terms of a plausible relationship to all that has preceded that escape" (66). Indeed, my claim that the logic of trash does not apply to Bella simply because she is not trash while other characters are would seem to support David's thesis. However, there may be another reason why Dickens allows the Harmons and Boffins to flourish more fully than anyone else. I argue that Dickens uses some of the trash stories in *Our Mutual Friend* to call for improvements to London's infrastructure in order to keep the river cleaner and to provide more effectively for the needs of the poor, but perhaps Dickens depicts the Harmons and Boffins finding gold in the dust-yard again and again because in their case he is drawing attention not to a problem but to a solution: he is showing the reader that dust-yards genuinely worked pretty well at managing London's waste. Indeed, the mountain range of garbage ends up "melting" away as the carts and horses take it off to be sold, and the mountains in that range are valuable enough to be sold, even though we are told that Old Harmon has already "coined every waif and stray into money long before" (503, 779). Perhaps the dust-yard enriches the virtuous characters of *Our Mutual Friend*

in the second to last chapter, "Persons and Things in General," because Dickens felt that functioning dust-yards could do this for London, too.

The Thames

Outside of the dust-yard, Dickens features many stories about characters who neglect their families that follow the logic of trash, and Rogue Riderhood's is a story of trash as a poisonous river pollutant. In this trash story, Dickens follows the logic of trash by turning Riderhood into trash and discarding him into the Thames to follow the same trajectory that a piece of material pollution would have followed in the river Dickens knew from life. In so doing, he educates the reader about London's water pollution problem. While Gaffer's drowning facilitates Dickens's meditations on how a corpse can no longer hear when people call, Riderhood's near-death experience asks the reader to consider how death serves as a universal commonality among all people, no matter how different they are. However, when Riderhood won't change his ways, even after a near-death experience, Dickens drowns the character again, this time with no meditation on what he has in common with the reader, thus using the logic of trash to discard the character and separate readers from the discomfort of considering their mortality.

Dickens's description of Riderhood as a pollutant is one of the places where Victorian writing about trash has some overlap with the contemporary environmentalist movement. Londoners promiscuously dumped their pollution, trash, and bodily waste into the Thames during the Victorian period, and Dickens wished to put an end to this practice. Like the Mounds, the polluted river has attracted a great deal of attention in literary criticism about *Our Mutual Friend,*[21] and many scholars have analyzed the river in the historical context of the public health

[21] See Dorothy Van Ghent and Monroe Engel for some of the foundational analyses of this symbol, particularly with regard to its being a powerful transformational force. Cregan-Reid and Sedgwick add to this the idea that the river

reforms that sought to curb that pollution. Agnes Kneitz joins Jesse Oak Taylor in portraying Dickens as an environmental justice writer, pushing for reform to relieve the poorest of London's citizens from the burden of pollution. Gilbert's discussion of how Dickens's views may have been informed by the writings of George Godwin, who was pushing for sanitary reforms in poor areas, supports this thesis. In the same vein, F. S. Schwarzbach shows how the Thames was transforming, just as London was, for the better as the result of sanitary improvements (198). In addition to recognizing the pollution of the Thames, Allen adds that the geography of the river matters too, and has pointed out that the extent of the river's pollution—and by extension its symbolism—varies depending on where along the river the events of the story are taking place, with the most corrupt and immoral things taking place downriver where all the pollution has accumulated, even as the upstream portions of the Thames sparkle with clear water and happy, productive people.[22] These writers all agree that Dickens was deeply interested in the state of the river and that *Our Mutual Friend* is a humanitarian call for the cessation of pollution.

Indeed, Dickens eloquently describes the river's filthiness in *Our Mutual Friend*, writing that "the accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed from higher grounds, like so much moral sewage, and to be pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk it in the river" (21). The idea that Dickens may have wished to spur his readers to clean up the Thames is affirmed by the fact that his interest in water quality wasn't confined to his fiction. He wrote extensively in *Household Words* about how the Thames was being contaminated, with particular attention to trash. "The Troubled Water Question" is an informative article seemingly designed

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in *Our Mutual Friend* has the power to violate human bodily integrity, specifically portraying it as a rapist who preys upon men.

[22] See also David, who explores themes of cleanliness and sanitation specifically with regard to Riderhood, asserting that the river in the novel carries out Dickens's "work of bourgeois improvement" by expunging Riderhood's "poisonous and infectious presence from the novel" (64). However, instead of interpreting Riderhood as something that pollutes the Thames, David views the Thames as something that cleanses Riderhood away.

to teach the public about how processes such as water filtration work that also doubles as an exposé of how representatives of the London water companies have overstated their ability to purify the Thames's water before piping it into British houses. In it, Dickens describes some of the ways that trash polluted the Thames. He writes that a grating is necessary "to intercept stray fish, murdered kittens, or vegetable impurities," and that the river's "unwholesomeness arises from contaminations received during its course…, such as the black contents of the common sewers, and the refuse of gut, glue, soap, and other nauseous manufactures; to say nothing of animal and vegetable offal, of which the river is the sole receptacle" (50). In "The Troubled Water Question," Dickens shows that once the water gets to the water company, some filtration and purification take place, but the article emphasizes that the Thames itself remains as dirty as ever. The grating keeps the trash out of the water company's facility but leaves it still afloat in the river. Only the portions of its water that have been piped out for profit are purified, leaving the river itself in the same disgusting condition.

Dickens's concern about the Thames appears in *Our Mutual Friend* in the way that he portrays Rogue Riderhood as a pollutant. Riderhood contributes to the "moral sewage" Dicken expounds upon early in the novel. Murder, blackmail, robbery, framing, and extorting elderly widows are among his many offenses. Riderhood also works as a dredgerman, searching the river for anything of value that may have fallen into it, and occasionally robbing people and dumping their bodies in the river. Riderhood subsists on the literal pollution of the city while his behavior pollutes it morally. To emphasize this comparison, the imagery of trash is often used to describe Riderhood. Echoing Dickens's details from "The Troubled Water Question," Riderhood's hat is described as "an old sodden fur cap, formless and mangey, that looked like a furry animal, dog or cat, puppy or kitten, drowned and decaying" (148).

Later, Riderhood is run down by a steamer, an experience that nearly kills him, and during this incident, Dickens describes his body as undergoing the process of turning into trash. Then, following the logic of trash, Dickens uses this transformation as an opportunity to think about death. When Dickens describes how Riderhood's body has been damaged by the accident, he emphasizes that Riderhood is changing from a human being into an object, writing, "In sooth, it is Riderhood and no other, or it is the outer husk and shell of Riderhood," and calls his body a "flabby lump of mortality" (443, 444). Here, Riderhood's body ceases to be a man, and instead becomes a husk and a lump, found floating in the river like so many other husks and lumps that pollute the water.

Riderhood is never portrayed as more human and relatable than when his body becomes a husk. Because of his reputation for cruelty and dishonesty, Riderhood has little in common with his acquaintances other than the fact that he will die, but when they see that commonality, it affects them profoundly. Dickens writes:

> No one has the least regard for the man: with them all, he has been an object of avoidance, suspicion, and aversion; but the spark of life within him is curiously separable from himself now, and they have a deep interest in it, probably because it *is* life, and they are living and must die....Neither Riderhood in this world, nor Riderhood in the other, could draw tears from them; but a striving human soul between the two can do it easily. (443-444)

The people who pull Riderhood out of the water recognize in his transformation into trash the terrible thing that will one day happen to all of them too, and they pull him out of the water as a way of vicariously preventing it for themselves. Additionally, when it becomes clear that Riderhood will recover, Pleasant Riderhood hopes that perhaps when his spirit returns to his

"empty form," "that the old evil is drowned out of him, and…his spirit will be altered" (445). Again, by calling him an "empty form," Dickens emphasizes that Riderhood's drowning has materially changed him in a way that draws an equivalence between him and an empty vessel, or a type of trash. Yet when Riderhood revives, we see that his near-death experience has not changed him at all. He becomes his old corrupt self again. Consequently, his rescuers lose interest in him, and he returns to the river to work as a lock operator.

Riderhood's story doesn't end here. Though Dickens gives readers a moment to consider how their deaths will be like Riderhood's when all of us are one day turned to trash, he withdraws that empathy when it becomes clear that the dredgerman has not changed his ways. Later in the story, he drowns Riderhood again, transforming him into trash when Bradley murders him. This time, as with Gaffer Hexam, the indignation Riderhood's actions inspire allows Dickens to use the logic of trash to relieve the reader from having to come to terms with how trash and human are alike, and instead invites us to approve of Riderhood's transformation into trash as a just punishment rather than relate to it.

As if to underscore Riderhood's status as a moral pollutant, Dickens depicts Riderhood as following the same trajectory that a piece of literal trash would follow if it fell into the Thames, both while he lives and after he dies. As I have mentioned in my introduction, Londoners far overestimated the ability of the tidal motion to carry contaminants out to sea. Take, for example, this account by George Godwin (an architect, advocate for working class housing, and editor of *The Builder*) entitled *Town Swamps and Social Bridges*:

> During the discussion of the mode to be adopted in draining London, the assertion that sewage-matter is washed backwards and forwards by the tide, and is long before it gets out to sea, was derided. The fact, however, is unquestionable. Look at the next sketch.

> It shows the way in which a dead dog, under our own eyes, travelled. We thought he would get away: however, after a time, and after whirling in sight, moving against the tide, but much nearer to the shore; he turns off again towards the sea, and returns this time much sooner than the last; and after describing various circles, as shown by the arrows in the sketch, he is deposited in the slime, together with other specimens of his own and allied families. (55, italics his)

After being discarded in the Thames, Riderhood follows the trajectory of the dead dog who is washed back and forth for a long time before finally disappearing, swirling back and forth in the water polluting everything he comes into contact with. Indeed, as we see, his near-death experience doesn't change him, and he returns to going up and down the river causing trouble.

Riderhood is one of several men who fall into the Thames, and we can see in all of their stories how sluggish is the tidal motion that the Londoners hoped would carry their pollution away from them. The river won't swallow Riderhood, and it also won't swallow anything associated with him. When Riderhood and Radfoot attempt to murder John, John comes back up again and claims the Harmon fortune anyway, and Radfoot winds up dead instead. Radfoot's corpse doesn't manage to disappear either; shortly after his death it floats back to the surface to be misidentified. Similarly, when Bradley Headstone attempts to sink Riderhood's clothes in the Thames to erase the evidence of Headstone's attempt to frame Riderhood, the clothes come back to the surface too (713). Even Riderhood's thoughts mimic the floating and sinking of trash in the river. Dickens tells us that "the subject-matter in his thoughts...came lumbering up, by times, like any half-floating and half-sinking rubbish in the river" (634-635). When, at last, Bradley succeeds in drowning himself and Riderhood, they yet again don't stay under; the narrator reports that, despite sinking to the bottom, inevitably, "the two were found" (802). Riderhood is

the worst sort of sanitary nuisance. He lingers and lingers, and only stops causing trouble when he sinks to the bottom. Even then, he merely transforms from a moral pollutant into a physical one.

The trash story of Riderhood allows Dickens to draw a graphic picture of water pollution in London, highlighting the repugnant quality of the waste that found its way into the water and also showing how incapable the Thames was of flushing this waste out. Additionally, in telling Riderhood's story, Dickens asks the reader to think about how all human beings can see in trash a pattern of our own mortality. However, Riderhood himself is too callous to be affected by the recognition of his mortality, and consequently Dickens discards him a second time, this time without asking readers to see ourselves in him.

The Street

According to Dickens and Godwin, the river was filled with the dead, human and animal alike. But a different kind of waste circulated in the streets of London: litter. Litter can be distinguished from other types of trash by the fact that it is widely scattered out in the open in public view. Horrible though it may be, the trash of the Thames is at least confined within its banks. By contrast, litter is laid out in its full state of decay for all to see, and it wanders with complete freedom until someone catches it or until it gradually disintegrates over time. Therefore, the trash story Dickens tells about litter features a character who is discarded outside and gradually decays over time in a public manner. The unfortunate protagonist of this trash story is Mr. Dolls, the alcoholic father of Lizzie's friend Jenny Wren, the doll's dressmaker, and yet another neglecter of family ties. As a man who is so dependent upon his daughter that she

calls him "her bad child," he can clearly be categorized alongside the many neglectful fathers in this novel, but he also belongs in another category: that of the destitute poor.[23]

Victorians often considered the problems of poverty and of waste management together. Their tendency to offer better sanitation as a solution to poverty has been well documented. Scholarship on nineteenth-century sanitary writings has shown that sanitary rhetoric was used to reinforce doctors' authority and to give expression to British anxieties about race and class,[24] and Stallybrass and White have famously analyzed the combination of horror and fascination with which the Victorian middle classes eagerly observed the poor. Additionally, those who wrote about poor sanitation in impoverished areas often drew equivalences between the poor and the trash in the midst of which they lived. For example, despite what seems to be a sincere interest in improving their wellbeing, Godwin conflates the poor people for whom he advocates with their refuse. In calling for better sanitation in poor neighborhoods, he writes that "the basement story of nearly all the houses was filled with fœtid refuse, of which it had been the receptacle for years," and illustrates the effects of such conditions with the quip, "as the house, so the inmate" (6). Similarly, Mayhew and Chadwick suggest that people who were so poor they had to subsist on street trash resembled trash themselves. Chadwick quotes an eyewitness who says that "the bone-pickers" are "Often hardly human in appearance" (165). In the same vein, Mayhew observes of a "bone-grubber" that "his ragged coat—the colour of the rubbish among which he toiled—was greased over, probably with the fat of the bones he gathered, and being mixed with the dust it seemed as if the man were covered with bird-lime. His shoes—torn and tied on his

[23] Note that Silas Wegg, the Lammles, and the Veneerings are pictured on the street after they lose all their money. Wegg is even dumped in a scavenger's wagon. Even if Dickens doesn't feature them circulating on the street with the same level of detail with which he describes Mr. Dolls, the street is clearly still the place where *Our Mutual Friend*'s characters find themselves when they come face to face with the prospect of poverty.

[24] See Gilbert, Poovey, Bewell, Howell, O'Connor, and Metz. Louise Penner and Eileen Cleere have further noted the ways that sanitary writers used conventions of fiction to help get their points across.

feet with pieces of cord—had doubtlessly been picked out of some dust-bin while his greasy bag and stick unmistakably announced his calling" (141). Another individual, a pure finder whom Mayhew interviews, is described as "a poor old woman resembling a bundle of rags and filth stretched on some dirty straw in the corner of the apartment" (144). The poorest citizens of London, according to Godwin, Chadwick, and Mayhew, strongly resembled the trash around them.

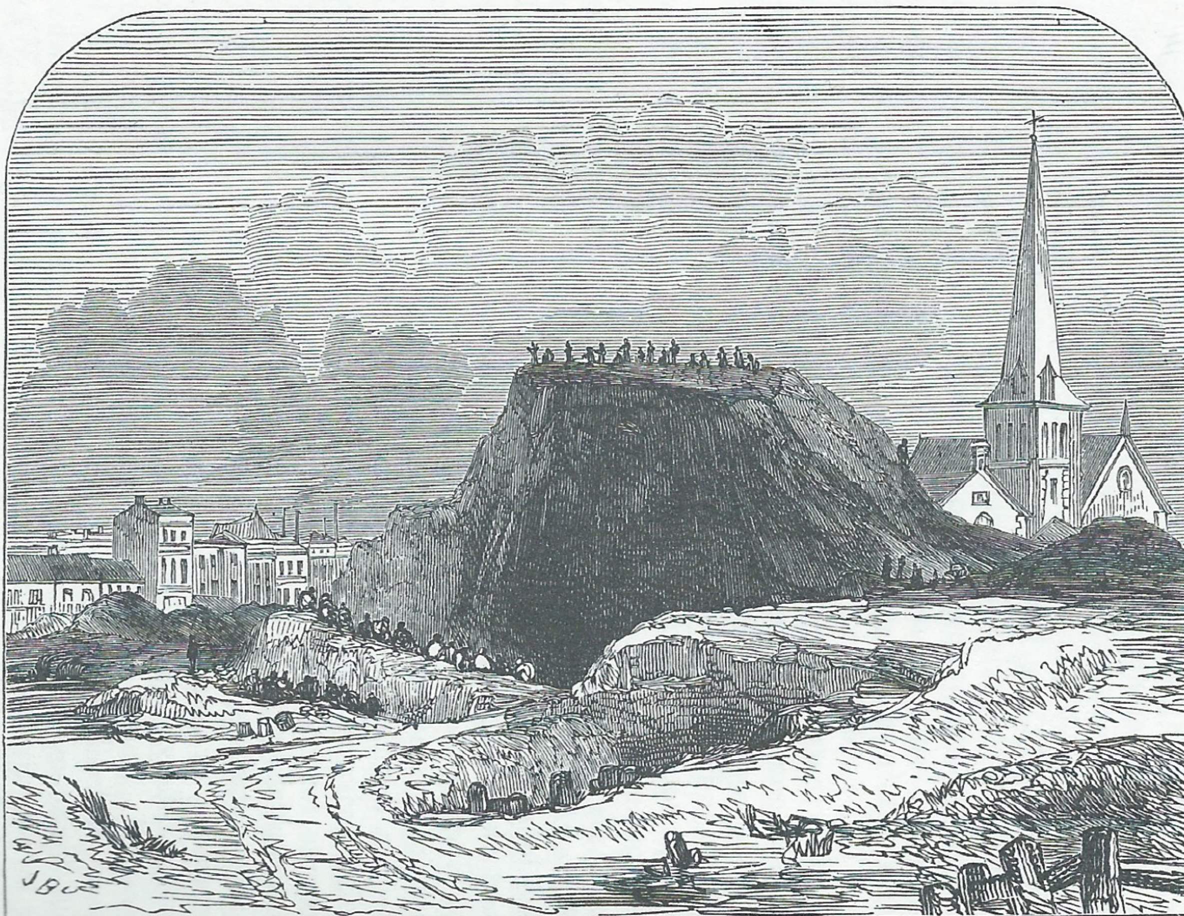
Following the example of journalists and public health officials who took particular note of the presence of garbage and refuse in the streets as one of the biggest indicators of poverty, disease, and/or moral decay and who drew equivalences between poor people and trash, Dickens uses the problem of public trash as a way to discuss the topic of urban poverty. In so doing, he depicts Mr. Dolls as a piece of litter and narrates the story of his gradual disintegration after the manner of the logic of trash. Dickens disapproves of Mr. Dolls's alcoholism and neglect of his daughter, and so he subjects him to a trash punishment. At the end of this story, Dickens again reflects on the nature of death. With Gaffer, he reflects on the inability of the dead to interact with the living; with Riderhood, he reflects on how our common fate can bring us together. In the case of Mr. Dolls, Dickens reflects on the injustice of how deserving and undeserving alike are subject to death by juxtaposing Mr. Dolls's death with that of Betty Higden, a selfless widow.

The difference between litter and other types of trash is essentially a difference in location. Litter is trash that not only has escaped from the confines of a house or dustbin, but also is out in the open, offending the eyes of people who aren't used to seeing it there. For example, Godwin expresses concern about the visual aspect of trash when he describes with horror an enormous pile of rubbish gathered outside a slum neighborhood. In a sensational style,

he reports that the neighborhood of Crab-tree Row and Nova Scotia Gardens was in "a condition of things not to be thought of without astonishment and fear" (23). He continues, "An artistic traveler, looking at the huge mountain of refuse which had been collected, might have fancied that ...some...monster picturesque crag, had suddenly come into view....At the time of our visit, the summit of the mount was thronged with various figures, which were seen in strong relief against the sky (23). Included next to this description is a woodcut of the trash mound in question, which depicts the heap as an ominous black block with tiny people perched on top of it, dwarfed by its bulk (Figure 1).[25] The rubbish pile is horrible because it is made of discarded waste and because it is huge, but Godwin is particularly alarmed that it is so conspicuous. It is "thronged with figures" and stands out "in strong relief against the sky." It has taken a central position in full view of everyone for miles around rather than being swept out of sight in a sanitary fashion. This dust heap should not be confused with dust-yards like the Mounds; no one owns or manages it, and it is not enclosed on private property. Instead, the dust-heap Godwin describes is a heap of trash that has grown to such an immense size because this neighborhood is a so-called "dead piece," or a slum neighborhood that no dustmen would visit because of residents' inability to provide tips.[26]

[25] See Gilbert for more on Godwin's visual rhetoric in the images in *Town Swamps and Social Bridges*. Gilbert also goes into more detail about how this text can be seen as a companion text for *Our Mutual Friend*, with an emphasis on water quality, rather than trash.

[26] Jackson writes: "Slums and poor areas were referred to as 'dead pieces' by the dustmen, and treated accordingly. It was not unknown for the tenements and crowded courtyards in East End districts not to see the dustcart for weeks on end, conveniently overlooked in favour of more remunerative portions of the parish. Such wilful negligence created a vicious circle as miscellaneous rubbish accumulated, making collection even less appealing" (10).



Nova Scotia Gardens, and what grew there.

Figure 1. "Nova Scotia Gardens, and what grew there" from George Godwin's *Town Swamps and Social Bridges*

Godwin mentions this rubbish heap not solely to marvel at it, but also to try to offer suggestions for how it could be removed. He writes that philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts has removed dust-heaps like this before and replaced the tenements near them with better housing, and though he fears that the housing she has provided is not "quite the sort of place that those for whom it is intended will go to," he references her work as a suggestion of the type of steps that need to be taken to eliminate rubbish heaps like this one (23). Furthermore, though Godwin is alarmed by the publicness of the heap, it would be inaccurate to attribute this alarm to mere pearl-clutching at the sight of an unseemly spectacle; instead, to Godwin, the publicness of the heap is a testament to how far gone London is, and how much work needs to be done.

Town Swamps and Social Bridges is a humanitarian text that endeavors to appeal to its readers' compassion in an effort to improve the lives of the poor, but it is interesting to consider how some of the rhetoric Godwin uses to express his concern about the necessity of preventing poor people from winding up "in the street" follows the logic of trash and underscores the equivalences he has drawn between poor people and litter. His argument displays a concern about containment, overflowing, contamination, and gradual decay. Don't destroy the tenements of the poor without replacing them, he warns, or else "many people will be turned out of their lodgings, and will be forced, unless proper provision be made, to flood the neighbouring localities" (21). Earlier, Godwin has set us up to understand the gravity of such a disaster by reporting that the neighborhoods in which the poor live are "filled to overflowing with the worst sorts of wretchedness and vice" (9). Furthermore, once they are allowed to overflow into the street, Godwin uses the logic of trash to argue that the conditions of the poor will deteriorate even further because, like litter, they will decay. Of course, Godwin is referring to the fact that a person's quality of life greatly suffers when they lose their housing, but the language he uses to

convey this point also suggests a trash story, or a story of decay after discarding. For example, when offering a reformatory as a possible solution to urban poverty, Godwin writes, "[The superintendent of the Britannia-street Reformatory] knows many who, if they had been left *in the street*, would have been a pest to the country, but are now filling situations in life, and becoming useful members of society" (4, italics mine). Later, he writes, "Would it not be better, wiser, cheaper, of the country to turn the neglected infant population *of our cellars and streets* into [good artisans], instead of allowing them to become, *as they unquestionably must become if uncared for*, rogues and thieves, if nothing worse?" (4, italics mine). In these passages, we can see that Godwin envisions "the street" as an agent of decay and presumes that those who circulate through it are transformed into rogues, which in turn causes them to become "a pest," a word that can mean both plague and nuisance, once again drawing an equivalence between poor people and poor sanitation. The streets gradually degrade the people who linger in them by facilitating their transformation into criminals.

The street also has a degrading effect on trash. Litter, a public nuisance, is characterized not just by its location but also by its gradual disintegration. There is no set point at which an item that winds up in the street becomes litter, but the longer it stays in the street, the more disgusting it becomes. Increasing amounts of dirt cling to litter the longer it stays outdoors, and weather, natural decomposition, and foot traffic change its physical form. To give a commonplace present-day example, take "the five second rule," the idea that if someone drops a piece of food on the ground but picks it up immediately, it's still safe to eat. The rule suggests that the longer it is on the floor, the more it turns into trash, and if abandoned in public, it will become litter. There is a time-sensitive quality to litter, and it becomes filthier the longer it stays

in public. Godwin seems to envision a similar process to be the fate of the poor who have found their way into the street, and Dickens subscribes to this view as well.

David Chappell's essay "Paper Routes: *Bleak House*, Rubbish Theory, and the Character Economy of Realism" provides an important foundation for writing about Dickens's impoverished characters as rubbish. He writes that "*Bleak House*—and, by extension, the realist novel as a generic form—organizes itself around a narrative horizon beyond which lies a dynamic state of character potential akin to the category of rubbish. As readers, we sense this boundary in the movement of characters out of and back into narrative visibility as a novel's plot develops" (805). Chappell shows that characters such as Jo, the crossing sweep, appear and disappear throughout the narrative in a way that Chappell believes is related to Victorian ideas about waste paper and its potential to be recycled and made useful. Chappell continues, "Dickens's repetitive description of Jo as 'very ragged' seems always weighted toward the raw materials of recycling, not its products.... In the sense that he exists within the web of figurative language that continually reduces both papers and persons to bundles, then, Jo is one of the most notable of the novel's many such bundles" (799). Chappell shows how Dickens draws equivalences between the crossing sweep and trash, and I argue that Jo finds a close relative in *Our Mutual Friend*'s Mr. Dolls, Jenny's alcoholic father, and ultimately, another of Dickens's bundles. Furthermore, in addition to designating Mr. Dolls as trash, I show that this character undergoes a trash story, in which Dickens traces the story of his disintegration after the manner of a piece of litter. Then, by showing how Mr. Dolls's and Betty Higden's stories complement one another, I show that Dickens's message about death in this trash story is that death is an injustice, since it treats the virtuous and the vicious the same.

Dickens draws a vivid picture of the human sanitary nuisance by depicting an impoverished alcoholic as a piece of litter. Litter is characterized by its public disintegration. Darin Graber establishes the relationship between public space and alcoholism and between Mr. Dolls and Steinlight's concept of the supernumerary. In this essay, he writes about how Mr. Dolls's position in space is related to his status as a supernumerary and discusses "the geographical or spatial nature of being an alcoholic" (126). He writes, "[Jenny] orders him into a corner 'directly' and onto 'a particular chair of disgrace,' claiming her ownership of this space. Then, once he sits, she proclaims her knowledge: '*I* know where you've been to!' The unnamed location from which he must have returned has produced his state (126)." The space that Graber argues has produced Mr. Dolls's state is the public house, but though it is unseemly to be drunk at a bar, it is even worse to be drunk on the street, and by walking through the door in a state of intoxication, Mr. Dolls is evidence of more than one type of locational transgression: not only has he gone to where he was not supposed to go (the pub), he has also then paraded his drunkenness in an inappropriate place—out of doors for all to see. This transgression also establishes his connection with litter, whose defining quality is its publicness.

Mr. Dolls's story follows the logic of litter: he is highly visible and he degrades over time, buffeted this way and that around the streets of London, growing less and less recognizable until finally his life comes to a close and he is removed from the street by the police. Mr. Dolls's character is not well-defined. Litter undergoes a process of gradual degradation, and by the time we meet Mr. Dolls, he has been lingering in the street for some time. His identity has been worn away by his disease, to the extent that we are never even told his name, and most of his dialogue has been reduced to the repetition of the same phrase, the price of a specific amount of alcohol: "three penn'orth rum."

So, Mr. Dolls has many qualities that parallel those of litter, but Dickens takes this equivalency farther by describing Mr. Dolls's last moments in the street as if he were a piece of litter circulating in a public place. The final scene of Mr. Dolls's life (which takes place in Book 4, Chapter 9, entitled "Two Places Vacated") begins when "the bad child, having been strictly charged by his parent to remain at home in her absence, of course went out…in the very last stages of mental decrepitude" (729). He is compelled out of the house, out into public view, and the "of course" in the above quote suggests that this behavior is predetermined. Mr. Dolls has no control over what he does.

Once in the street, Mr. Dolls circulates through town alongside the street litter. Trash accumulates upon his person and surrounds him at all times. Conscious that he is about to have a fit of delirium tremens, he chooses the Covent Garden Market as the place where he will have the fit, a place that Dickens says attracts "the worst of the solitary members of the drunken tribe" (729). Among the attributes of the market that he imagines make it hospitable to alcoholics, he writes,

> it may be the companionship of the gin and beer that slop about among carters and hucksters, or it may be the companionship of the trodden vegetable refuse, which is so like their own dress that perhaps they take the Market for a great wardrobe.... Of dozing women-drunkards especially, you shall come upon such specimens there, in the morning sunlight, as you might seek out of doors in vain through London. Such stale vapid rejected cabbage-leaf and cabbage-stalk dress, such damaged-orange countenance, such squashed pulp of humanity, are open to the day nowhere else. (729)

Dickens imagines not only that "the drunken tribe" wear trash as clothing, but also that they look to it for "companionship," recognizing in trash something like themselves. The clothing of the

“women-drunkards” is like discarded cabbage, and their faces are like squashed oranges, showing that they even look like trash. In this passage, Dickens moves Mr. Dolls to the location of literal rubbish: the market floor, alongside other alcoholics who have taken on the appearance of bruised fruits and vegetables.

Now that Dickens has placed Mr. Dolls next to trash, he degrades him still further by covering him with refuse, breaking him up and dirtying him a little bit more with each paragraph. While Mr. Dolls is in his fit, some children street scavengers pelt him with litter from the streets, after which “he was much bespattered, and in worse case than ever” (730). Afterwards, he goes to a public house for some rum and attempts to leave without paying for his drink, for which he is punished “by having a pail of dirty water cast over him” (730). This usage of water as a weapon against Mr. Dolls calls to mind Godwin’s calls for improved sanitation as a solution to poverty since washing is one of the most basic tools of maintaining cleanliness. However, in this case, the drenching to which Mr. Dolls is subjected is not designed to cleanse him, but rather to wash him away. The water does indeed get rid of him. It causes him to have another fit, from which he never really recovers.

In a worse state than ever, Mr. Dolls attempts to find Mr. Lightwood and Eugene, who have given him money and alcohol in exchange for information in the past. Their clerk sees him coming, and, able to tell from a distance that Mr. Dolls is drunk, he closes the door, and, in Dickens’s words, “left that miserable object to expend his fury on the [door] panels” (730). Mr. Dolls’s status as refuse out in the open is now permanent; he is outside for good, and will not be admitted back indoors, and as Dickens’s story shows, he confirms all of Godwin’s worst fears about what happens to those who wind up in the street. The clerk calls the police, who arrive with a stretcher, and Dickens tells us that “he was rendered a harmless bundle of torn rags by

being strapped down upon it, with voice and consciousness gone out of him, and life fast going" (730). Here, we can see one of the most explicit material metamorphoses into trash in this novel, and perhaps in all of Dickens's work: Mr. Dolls transforms from a person into a bundle of rags. In this scene, the threat that Mr. Dolls poses as a public sanitary nuisance is neutralized when he is swept out of public view by the police.

Mr. Dolls's last circuitous journey through the streets at the end of his life has another parallel in *Our Mutual Friend*: the last journey of Betty Higden. Like Mr. Dolls, Betty too is very poor, she goes out of doors one last time never to return, she wanders from one place to another while her health is failing, and ultimately, she dies in public view. Yet Betty is not trash; during her last journey, she is never described as dirty, she never appears alongside trash, and far from being forced outside, she is constantly invited to come back in. Dickens includes her alongside Mr. Dolls in order to advocate for improved poor relief. But Betty is not just there to shame the architects of the New Poor Law; she's also there to shame the undeserving poor.

The parallels between Betty and Mr. Dolls are striking, and they serve as explicit foils of each other, with Betty being almost preposterously preoccupied with wishing to not be a burden to her loved ones or to the state, while Mr. Dolls is nothing but a burden to everyone he meets. Both are obsessed with a particular sum of money: for Mr. Dolls it is "three penn'orth rum," while for Betty, it is the small pouch of money she carries with her at all times containing just enough to pay for her own burial. Both have children or grandchildren: Betty goes off to die alone rather than inconvenience Sloppy or his benefactors, while Mr. Dolls is so dependent upon his daughter that she calls him "her bad child." Both are stuck out of doors during their last journeys through the street, but while Mr. Dolls bangs on doors to be let in only to be rejected, Betty finds herself surrounded by concerned people trying to take her in, whom Dickens tells us

she fends off "almost fiercely," so afraid is she of the prospect that they will turn her over to the parish (507). However, the imagery of trash is conspicuously absent from Betty's story. Only once does trash-like imagery turn up, and that again is to shame both the poor law and the undeserving poor:

> Now, she would light upon the shameful spectacle of some desolate creature—or some wretched ragged groups of either sex, or of both sexes, with children among them, huddled together like the smaller vermin for a little warmth—lingering and lingering on a doorstep, while the appointed evader of the public trust did his dirty office of trying to weary them out and so get rid of them. (505)

These poor people are ragged and verminous, and the police officer's work is dirty. Betty remains pristine, though, in order to draw a contrast between her own purity and their filth.

If Betty Higden can be interpreted as a plea to readers to understand that some poor people are virtuous and deserving of compassion, Mr. Dolls is Dickens's callous way of asserting, "but others are trash." As is often the case in *Our Mutual Friend*, neglect of family ties is the crime that Dickens punishes most severely. Mr. Dolls, always squandering his money on alcohol, forces his disabled daughter to support him. On the night he comes home drunk, Jenny Wren has the following exchange with her father after she tells him to go to bed without his dinner:

> 'No, don't starve me,' he urged, whimpering.
>
> 'If you were treated as you ought to be,' said Miss Wren, 'you'd be fed upon the skewers of cats' meat;—only the skewers, after the cats had had the meat.'(242)

In this image, Mr. Dolls is such a burden to the family that he doesn't have a claim on even the cats' meat because the cats, just by doing what they naturally do and killing vermin, are

contributing more to the household than he does. Consequently, the meal Miss Wren declares he deserves is trash in the form of empty used skewers.

Dickens, like most writers who employ the logic of trash, associates trash with marginalized individuals, but even though they are both extremely poor, it is not trash that links Betty with Mr. Dolls, but the death they both die in the streets, and this shared fate is the center of Dickens's message about the injustice of their situation. Though Betty is portrayed as being far more virtuous than Mr. Dolls, the systems of poor relief and sanitation that Dickens depicts treat the deserving and the undeserving poor the same way.[27] As I have mentioned, the problem of trash accumulation in impoverished areas of London was largely a result of the parish-subsidized dust contractors neglecting these "dead pieces," leaving heaps of rubbish like the one Godwin depicts in *Town Swamps and Social Bridges*. Dickens seems to draw on this context when he uses the image of incompetent dust shoveling as a metaphor for poor relief in a sermon-style castigation of his government:

> My lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, when you in the course of your dust-shovelling and cinder-raking have piled up a mountain of pretentious failure, you must off with your honourable coats for the removal of it, and fall to the work with the power of all the queen's horses and all the queen's men, or it will come rushing down and bury us alive….For when we have got things to the pass that with an enormous treasure at disposal to relieve the poor, the best of the poor detest our mercies, hide their heads from

[27] See Talia Schaffer's chapter "Betty Higden as the Mutual Friend" in *Novel Craft*, which goes into more detail about the ways Betty connects the characters. Schaffer argues that Betty is representative of the failing art of reusing waste to make handicrafts. Though Dickens was enamored with the idea that waste could be reused for handicrafts, Schaffer shows that all the characters who make these types of handicrafts in *Our Mutual Friend* fail, suggesting that he recognized that this way of doing things was on its way out. Perhaps this could be read as an implicit critique of Betty's refusal to accept help, even though her death is also clearly meant to critique the inadequate poor relief offered by London's parishes.

> us, and shame us by starving to death in the midst of us it is a pass impossible of prosperity, impossible of continuance....This boastful handiwork of ours, which fails in its terrors for the professional pauper, the sturdy breaker of windows and the rampant tearer of clothes, strikes with a cruel and a wicked stab at the stricken sufferer, and is a horror to the deserving and unfortunate. We must mend it, lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, or in its own evil hour it will mar every one of us. (503)

Here, Dickens envisions the work of politicians composing the poor relief bill to be the same as that of dustmen shoveling and raking up dust and ashes. Again tapping into the Victorian tendency to refer to the poor as trash themselves, Dickens uses tidying away Londoners' cinders and scraps and making them useful as a metaphor for poor relief. But like London's neglectful dustmen, the politicians have only been able to bring about a catastrophic pile-up of trash. Dickens takes aim at both his legislators and at the undeserving poor in his critique of this metaphorical waste management system. He takes care to point out that not all the poor are created equal, and that an important purpose of the poor law would not just be to care for "the stricken sufferer," but also to succeed "in its terrors for the professional pauper, the sturdy breaker of windows and the rampant tearer of clothes" (503). Additionally, Dickens's metaphor wouldn't have any teeth if the trash pollution to which he refers wasn't infamous enough for his reader to recognize as a problem. Taylor writes, "Dickens's…vision anticipated many of the tenets of what would come to be known as environmental justice, or the differential degree to which the poor are subjected to the effects of environmental degradation" (61). In calling for improved poor relief with the language of refuse collection, Dickens calls the undeserving poor trash, but hopes that the virtuous non-trash poor will benefit from the city's thorough

cleansing—a cleansing that would wash away both the undeserving poor and the trash they resemble.

Their moments of death reinforce Dickens's verdicts on Mr. Dolls's and Betty's respective cases. Betty dies in the arms of Lizzie Hexam, who speaks kindly to her and gives her a kiss. By contrast, Mr. Dolls is given an ironic punishment for his alcoholism: Not only does delirium tremens kill him, but when he actually does die, he is surrounded by bottles. Lying on the bed under the window of the doctor's examination room, Dickens describes how the light plays off the bottles in the window, reflecting Mr. Dolls's face and casting shadows on him:

> the window becoming from within a wall of faces, deformed into all kinds of shapes through the agency of globular red bottles, green bottles, blue bottles, and other coloured bottles. A ghastly light shining upon him that he didn't need, the beast so furious but a few minutes gone was quiet enough now, with a strange mysterious writing on his face, reflected from one of the great bottles, as if Death had marked him: "Mine." (731)

A slave to bottles throughout his lifetime, Dickens depicts him now as reduced to a bundle of rags and still unable to escape them. And, as is characteristic of the logic of trash, this paragraph, which meditates on the full details of Mr. Dolls's death, recognizes the human-ness of trash and the trash-ness of humans, but by laying this comparison upon someone whom Dickens despises, Dickens relieves the reader from having to recognize a picture of their own mortality in Mr. Dolls's situation.

The Paper Mill

The final trash story I study in *Our Mutual Friend* is the story of Eugene Wrayburn, another relationship neglecter who, like Riderhood, is discarded in the river. However, unlike Riderhood, Wrayburn is fortunate enough to be rehabilitated and recycled by Lizzie Hexam, the

woman he loves. By reading this segment of *Our Mutual Friend* as a companion piece to an 1850 article in *Household Words* entitled "A Paper Mill," we can see that Eugene's story is a trash story that follows the logic of trash by tracing his progress through a series of stages that closely resemble the trajectory of rags going through a paper mill. Eugene doesn't die, but Dickens still uses this moment to talk about death, closely examining Eugene's fading in and out of consciousness just as he examines Riderhood's. Unlike Riderhood, Eugene chooses to change his ways, and consequently, Dickens allow him to survive.

Dickens was intrigued by paper mills, and Chappell and Price have shown that Dickens was caught up in his century's enthusiasm for transforming waste through recycling (Chappell 790-791, Schaffer 129-143). We never see the inside of the paper mill in *Our Mutual Friend*, and it is only mentioned a handful of times. Nevertheless, it occupies a place of importance in Chapter 6 of Book 4, in which Eugene and Lizzie finally meet, despite Lizzie's efforts to avoid him. The chapter's first sentence—"The Paper Mill had stopped work for the night"—makes the mill a presiding presence over the events that follow, facilitating Eugene's transformation from a selfish bachelor into a good husband (689). In this segment of the novel, Lizzie, the beautiful daughter of Gaffer Hexam (and, more importantly for the purposes of this section, a paper mill worker), is being pursued by two men: Eugene Wrayburn, a careless dandy, and Bradley Headstone, a schoolmaster with a violent temper. Eugene, whom she really loves and who loves her too, will not make her an offer of marriage because of her lower station in life, but neither will he leave her alone. Disregarding her reputation, he insists upon trying to see her, debating inwardly about whether or not to seduce her, while Lizzie flees from him as best she can. Meanwhile, Bradley, whose offer of marriage Lizzie has refused, is consumed with jealousy, and he plots to murder his rival. But Bradley knows he won't be able to work up the gumption to

murder Eugene unless he sees Lizzie and Eugene together. Soon enough, Bradley gets his wish. He witnesses Lizzie and Eugene declaring their love for each other, and, after Lizzie leaves, he assaults Eugene and hurls him, grievously injured, into the river. Eugene is carried downstream where Lizzie again finds him, and with "supernatural" strength, she pulls him out of the water and carries him to safety. She then nurses him back to health, after which he marries her (700). The paper mill may be closed at the beginning of the chapter, but at this point in the novel, the work of recycling is just beginning. In this episode, Dickens processes Eugene like rags in a paper mill, pulverizing him first, washing him through water, and reassembling him into something better. Lizzie, a paper mill worker, brings about his transformation while the actual mill looms in the background.

Most critics agree that Lizzie is a transformative figure who redeems Eugene, and her rescue of him from the river has commonly been regarded as a moment of symbolic cleansing or baptism, more specifically a cleansing that is gendered feminine. For example, Gilbert contrasts Lizzie's role in the river with her father's to show that Lizzie is a sort of savior figure: "If Gaffer Hexam, allied to the bottom of the river, is a degenerate father Thames, Lizzie will become the regenerating mother figure who will bring life out of the purer waters upriver....[S]he will suffer for the sins of the world;...she will create the domesticity and love out of which redemption may emerge" (122). Sedgwick includes Lizzie's subplot in her examination of the gender implications of the river and the people it submerges, arguing that "men are always dragging each other into the river; and only one person, Lizzie, has the skill to navigate a rescue. At the same time, women are in control only in correctly understanding the current of power as always flowing away from themselves. Gazing into the river, both Lizzie and Eugene read in it the image of Lizzie's inability to resist ruin" (172). Poovey also uses Lizzie's story to analyze the

gender implications of *Our Mutual Friend*, viewing her as more of a male fantasy than an actual character. She writes, "If Lizzie can be like a man [with super strength and economic autonomy] when Eugene needs to be pulled from the water and like a woman when he is ready for a wife, then is it possible that her character is *not* an expression of some underlying female nature but merely the effect of a man's needs?" (174). Lastly, Gallagher studies Lizzie's redemption of Eugene as a part of Dickens's discussion of trash. She writes, "In his speech to Lizzie as his body returns to a state of animation, he stresses the equality of garbage and wealth by turning her into both: 'You have thrown yourself away,' said Eugene, shaking his head. 'But you have followed the treasure of your heart...[Y]ou had thrown that away first, dear girl!' Hence Eugene and Lizzie are equally garbage and treasure to one another" (Gallagher 108). By contrast, in my reading, though Eugene is trash at first, he is trash that is recycled into something better, while Lizzie brings about that process by serving as a metaphorical mill worker, assembling Eugene into something better after his beating at the hands of Bradley Headstone.

I argue that this particular feminine cleansing parallels the progress of paper through the British paper mill, a process that Dickens wrote about in more detail in his 1850 *Household Words* essay "A Paper Mill." By reading Lizzie and Eugene's romance with this essay in mind, we can see that Dickens depicts Lizzie and the paper mill as powerful entities that can rescue and redeem trash and men, and, bizarrely, in both texts, he also depicts this process as a sexual one. Dickens melds virtuous women with industrial recycling, and makes these feminine recyclers the saviors of men and the saviors of trash. Lizzie has the titanic strength of a steam-powered recycling engine; the sight of her sparks the beginning of Eugene's pulverization, submersion, scattering, and regathering; and her tender care at last transforms him into a new, pure, useful form.

Dickens was not alone in assigning women the duty of seeing to the trash, and more specifically, of making sure old worn out rags were put to good use. This was not necessarily a trivial duty. Rags, the raw material of paper made in paper mills, were one of the most important types of waste that recycling advocates felt they needed to repurpose and conserve. The demand for paper products was so great that Britain actually imported rags from the Continent, meaning that a lack of British rags kept the empire dependent on Europe, a circumstance that undermined the Empire's nationalist desire for complete independence. Yet many felt that Britain's dependence upon European rag imports was a consequence of household carelessness, not an actual deficiency in supply. Simmonds laments in *Waste Products and Undeveloped Substances* (1862): "There are more rags wasted, burnt, or left to rot, than would make our paper manufacturers independent of all assistance from abroad" (136). The problem of insufficient raw material for paper was no small concern in 1860s Britain, and though Simmonds looked elsewhere for alternatives to rags, he still assigned to women housekeepers the primary responsibility for sorting and preserving this raw material and for putting a stop to waste. He gives detailed instructions: "Every housekeeper ought to have three bags--a white one for the white rags, a green one for the coloured, and a black one for the waste paper (the three might be furnished for 1s.), which would prevent litter, waste, and the trouble of collecting when the demand came" (135). Meanwhile, Lyon Playfair, another journalist and sanitation advocate, ascribes womanly qualities to the actual mechanism of chemical processing. Marveling at the way the budding field of industrial recycling promised to transform trash into new products, Playfair writes, "Chemistry, like a prudent housewife, economises every scrap" (qtd in Simmonds 3). For Playfair, chemistry is a model of good behavior, carrying out the role of the thrifty recycler that Simmonds wanted real-life housekeepers to play. Housekeeping, chemistry,

and recycling, to these two writers, are, at their best, exemplars of feminine thrift and responsible home-making as they ensure that the remains of the family's clothing are not wasted.

Dickens joins these two in feminizing the paper trade in his educational essay "A Paper Mill," which may have been an inspiration for *Our Mutual Friend*. In this essay, the narrator envisions himself as a bale of rags being processed in the mill and turning into paper. Dickens's article imbues the paper mill with mystical power--specifically, feminine, transformational, and even sexual power over the body of the narrator.

Throughout "A Paper Mill," Dickens emphasizes that the mill workers are women, and also that they aren't just turning the narrator--who identifies himself by saying, "I *am* rags"--into paper, but that they're purifying him too (530). Furthermore, this purifying transformation eventually becomes a sexual encounter as well. The narrator begins in a room where there are "three-score women at little tables," and narrates how "I am distributed among these women, and worried into smaller shreds--torn cross-wise at the knives" (530). This isn't a horrible or violent experience, though; the narrator actually seems to enjoy it and reports that the result of this worrying and shredding is that "Already I begin to lose something of my grosser nature" (530). Next, in the boiling room, the narrator again attributes feminine qualities to the facility, telling us that the room is "a very clean place, 'coddled' by much boiling, like a washerwoman's fingers" (530). He also describes the room with more overtones of spirituality by saying it looks "as if the kitchen of the Parish Union had gone into partnership with the Church Belfry" (530). Once he has completed this stage, in which he is boiled and bleached, he reports, "I am a dense, tight mass, cut out in pieces like so much clay--very clean--faint as to my colour--greatly purified--and gradually becoming quite ethereal" (530). The narrator enjoys his processing at the hands of the women workers and views it as having a purifying effect upon him.

After this whimsical introduction to the process of papermaking, the narrator uses the second half of the essay to describe what the rags experience when they enter the actual mill. Now manipulated by machinery instead of by human hands, the story acquires an erotic tone that depicts the rags and the machinery as entities that have gendered physical bodies that interact with each other. First, the narrator imagines himself and the rags as food that the grinders' rollers eat. Dickens writes:

> After I have been aired a little, I am again conveyed (quite white now [after bleaching], and very spiritual indeed) to some more obliging rollers upstairs.
>
> At it these grinders go, 'Munch, munch, munch!' like the sailor's wife in MACBETH, who had chesnuts [sic] in her lap. I look, at first, as if I were the most delicious curds and whey; presently, I find that I am changed to gruel--not thin oatmeal gruel, but rich, creamy, tempting, exalted gruel! As if I had been made from pearls, which some voluptuous Mr. Emden had converted into groats! (530)

This "gruel" is then served to the paper mill's engine. Once he enters the engine, the narrator rhapsodizes still more enthusiastically about his experience there, characterizing it as a transformative, mystical, and erotic experience:

> And now I am ready to undergo my last astounding transformation, and be made into paper by the machine. Oh what can I say of the wonderful machine, which receives me, at one end of a long room, gruel, and dismisses me at the other, paper!
>
> Where is the subtle mind of this Leviathan lodged? It must be somewhere--in a cylinder, a pipe, a wheel--or how could it ever do with me the miracle it does! How could it receive me on a sheet of wire-gauze, in my gruel-form, and slide me on, gradually assuming consistency--gently becoming a little paper-like, a little more, a little

> more still, very paper-like, indeed--clinging to wet blankets, holding tight by other surfaces, smoothly ascending Witney hills, lightly coming down into a woolly open country, easily rolling over and under a planetary system of heated cylinders, large and small, and ever growing, as I proceed, stronger and more paper-like! How does the power that fights the wintry waves on the Atlantic, and cuts and drills adamantine slabs of metal like cheese, how does it draw me out, when I am frailest and most liable to tear, so tenderly and delicately, that a woman's hand--no, even though I were a man, very ill and helpless, and she my nurse who loved me--could never touch me with so light a touch, or with a movement so unerring! How can I believe, even on experience, that, being of itself insensible, and only informed with intellect at second hand, it changes me, in less time than I take to tell it, into any sort of paper that is wanted, dries me, cuts me into lengths, becomes charged, just before dismissing me, with electricity, and gathers up the hair of the attendant-watcher, as if with horror at the mischiefs and desertions from the right, in which I may be instrumental! (530-531)

The narrator can't believe that the paper mill's engine is just a mindless machine, but insists that it must be both sentient and kindly disposed to him, and that it is the intensity of his experience with her—for the mill is yet again a woman—that is evidence of its sentience. He waxes eloquent about its touch, an even better version of a tender, delicate "woman's hand," and in assuming the identity of the rags that directly experience being rolled, dried, and cut into lengths, the narrator imbues the rags with bodily sensation as he describes the "miracle" the machine is "do[ing] with him," in which he finds himself "clinging to wet blankets," "rolling over and under," "sliding" various places, all under the care of something like a "woman's hand" that "touch[es] me with so light a touch," and dismisses him "charged...with electricity," as a ream of

paper at the end. Over the course of its processing in the mill, the rags have been completely transformed into pure paper, "very clean," "purified," "ethereal," "very spiritual indeed," with its "grosser nature" left behind, a transformation that becomes a sexual encounter. But the paper, purified after its fling with the mill, is immediately at risk of becoming instrumental in "mischiefs and desertions from the right" after it reemerges on the other side. Since the purpose of pure, blank, white paper is to be written upon, Dickens suggests, the paper could be used for pretty much anything, no matter how nefarious. An added layer of coyness can be found in the fact that since this whole story is narrated on a piece of paper, it's almost as if the pages themselves were narrating their literal history, and that the "mischiefs and desertions from the right" spring from Dickens's own press as he prints this very story on them. So the erotic encounter with the womanly paper mill saves and redeems the dirty masculine rags, but not quite so effectively that the newly cleaned paper cannot immediately run astray again.

In this story of infatuation with a paper mill, Dickens repaints the roaring industrial engine in seductive feminine tones, imbues the women mill workers with a spiritual power, lends greater significance to the seemingly humble task of recycling, and romanticizes his century's technological progress. Moreover, though one might be inclined to view the influence of mill workers over rags as a tyrannical one, Dickens depicts the women workers as servicing the rags, stimulating the narrator's body and purifying him into a better version of himself. So he not only uses the women workers to define what a mill is, but also uses the mill to define what a woman is, and from the point of view of "A Paper Mill," the women exist to attend to the needs of men, even when they have the most power.

The story of the rags proceeding through the mill finds its counterpart in Eugene Wrayburn's run-in with Bradley in *Our Mutual Friend*. David calls the novel's paper mill "an

image of flawless industrialism—industrialism without dirt, noise or exploitation" (82). However, the novel's paper mill and Lizzie, its featured worker (along with her assistant and fellow rag handler Jenny, the dolls' dressmaker), are not just a picture of industrialism, but of recycling specifically, and of recycling as a process operated by women and catalyzed by their sexual and domestic power over men. The miracle of the paper mill and of Eugene's story is that women are able to use this power over men to reform them. The two women successfully process Eugene and repurpose him into something better, an enterprise that, like the encounter with the mill in "A Paper Mill," is partly a sexual experience.

It is the sight of Eugene and Lizzie's sexual chemistry that prompts Bradley to try to murder Eugene. Dickens tells us, "All [Bradley's] pains were taken, to the end that he might incense himself with the sight of the detested figure [Eugene] in her company and favour, in her place of concealment" (546). And Bradley is not disappointed when he at last witnesses the two of them together. During their meeting, in which Eugene repeatedly attempts to embrace her, Lizzie at last is forced to reveal what Dickens calls "his first full knowledge of his influence upon her" (690-691, 694). After this revelation, Lizzie manages to depart having staved off Eugene's advances temporarily, but Eugene now believes that he can successfully seduce her. He says to himself, "She must go through with her nature, as I must go through with mine. If mine exacts its pains and penalties all round, so must hers, I suppose" (696). Brian Cheadle has argued that Eugene's thoughts at this moment are "virtually a prefigured rape" (89). From Cheadle's perspective, Eugene's "nature" is to seduce, while Lizzie's nature is to refuse, and the "pains and penalties" Eugene thinks her nature will exact of him are simply the discomfort of verbal rejection, while the pains and penalties he plans to inflict on Lizzie will take the form of rape. However, I propose that Lizzie is more attracted to Eugene than Cheadle's analysis would

suggest. After speaking to her, Eugene exults, "Yet I have gained a wonderful power over her, too, let her be as much in earnest as she will!" (696). He discovers this power when he forces her to "disclose her heart," making her reveal, in her own words, "the wonder and pleasure" she felt at "being noticed" by him (696, 695). Here we see that both of their natures are attracted to each other; Lizzie is simply trying harder to resist because the pains and penalties of succumbing—which, rather than literal rape, I argue, are risking pregnancy, losing her job and reputation—would be so much worse for her.

Yet though in my opinion Eugene is not a would-be rapist, his selfishness in disregarding Lizzie's future wellbeing is enough to earn him a punishment from Dickens in the form of being turned into trash. Their discovery of their mutual attractions initiates the pulverization stage of Eugene's processing in the paper mill. Bradley Headstone attacks Eugene and dumps him in the river. Though the rags in "A Paper Mill" seem to enjoy being sliced, boiled and beaten to a pulp, Eugene's human body undergoes the same transformation with more difficulty. In *Our Mutual Friend*, transformation into trash is a punishment, and Eugene's processing in the paper mill, much like Mr. Dolls's death surrounded by bottles, is tailored to fit his specific misdeeds. As a penalty for spurning the female waterman, he is retrieved by her from the river and towed in a boat like one of the corpses she and her father used to fish out of the water. His pulverization and submersion begin the process of physically breaking him down to help him take leave of his "grosser nature," just like the rags. Eugene feels Bradley's blows "mashing his life," after which, with "another great crash, and then a splash," he is dumped in the river to die (698). Now, with his body beaten to a pulp, Eugene will be washed, first in river water, and then again in the waters of unconsciousness while he is trying to recover. Once ashore and in the care of his nurses and doctors, he finds himself constantly "wandering away," his consciousness dispersing

and disappearing repeatedly, but then returning and reassembling (737). The Eugene who resurfaces at the end of all this is not the same as the Eugene who went under the water the first time.

Once Eugene has entered the sick room, Lizzie and Jenny take on the roles of nurses and paper mill workers. Let's return again to the description of the erotic transformation that takes place in "A Paper Mill":

> How does the power that fights the wintry waves on the Atlantic, and cuts and drills adamantine slabs of metal like cheese, how does it draw me out, when I am frailest and most liable to tear, so tenderly and delicately, that a woman's hand--no, even though I were a man, very ill and helpless, and she my nurse who loved me--could never touch me with so light a touch, or with a movement so unerring!" (530-531)

Lizzie, "possessed by supernatural spirit and strength," like the engine that can slice up adamantine, carries Eugene from one stage of his transformation to the next, and when he is frailest and most liable to tear, Jenny, with a "natural lightness and delicacy of touch," draws him back to health (700, 739). The women who operate the paper mill and the women who care for Eugene are miracle and mill workers, and they process away his impurities. He emerges on the other side with his sexual desires reformed, and is immediately married, before he's even well enough to stand. Unlike the rags transformed into paper, Dickens seems to intend for us to understand that Eugene's new purity is permanent.

So the paper mill demonstrates the transformative power women can have over men, as well as the transformative power paper mills can have over worn-out rags. However, the mill is a much fainter presence in the novel than the litter in the street, the muck in the river, or the dust in the Mounds, and as David and Allen have noted, Dickens's picture of the mill is not

particularly accurate and effaces the pollution that paper mills dumped into the river. Dickens's endorsement of paper mills (and of women's power to redeem men) is more of a fantasy than a direct attempt to address a social problem.

As with Riderhood and Mr. Dolls, Dickens follows the logic of trash, inflicting the trash punishment on Eugene because he belongs to a group of whom the book officially disapproves—those who neglect family ties—which makes it easy for the reader to see the humanity of trash without having to see the things about trash that inhere in all of us. However, Eugene's is a more hopeful trash story, wherein a person—even a person whose terrible behavior has incurred a trash punishment—may emerge on the other side of having been discarded severely battered, but still useful. Similarly, the message Dickens uses trash to convey to us about death is a more hopeful one. Eugene survives his transformation, and his brush with death has taught him to reevaluate his priorities. He refers to Lizzie as "the preserver of my life" and declares that were he to do any less than "fight it out to the last gasp, with her and for her, here, in the open field" (by which he means that he needs to resist the Voice of Society, which tells him that Lizzie's station in life is too low for him), he would deserve to be told "that she would have done well to turn me over with her foot that night when I lay bleeding to death, and spat in my dastard face" (812). In other words, he now envisions himself as a person who could die and who depends on others to keep him alive, and this has taught him to stop neglecting family ties. Additionally, the physical effect that nearly dying has had on him has made him a gentler person. He tells Mortimer "I am hardly strong yet, you see, for I am not man enough to refer to her without a trembling voice—she is so inexpressibly dear to me" (812). The message that Dickens uses Eugene Wrayburn's trash story to convey about death is that coming close to death can change a person. The counterexample of the intractable Riderhood offers the caveat that even this will not

work for everyone, but Dickens still offers the grim consolation that some of the discards of society can be repurposed after a beating.

Conclusion

Our Mutual Friend tells the story of people who are trash, taking particular pains to condemn men who neglect their family ties. This novel not only uses metaphor and symbolism to connect human beings with trash, but also draws on Dickens's detailed knowledge of London and the types of trash that polluted it to trace these characters' progress through stories that resemble the trajectories of the specific types of trash to which Dickens compares them. Riderhood stands in for river pollution, swirling back and forth fruitlessly rather than going under the first time, and adulterating the waters of the Thames with his "moral sewage." Mr. Dolls stands in for litter, circulating through the streets as he gradually decays. Lastly, Eugene stands in for rags in a paper mill, washing through the water, being pulverized, and then emerging on the other side repurposed into something new.

All three of these stories provide Dickens with opportunities to discuss the topic of death. Initially, his musings on death tend to focus on ways that we all suffer the same fate, with the bystanders coaxing Riderhood's spirit back into his body as best they can after his near death accident. However, because Dickens punishes these characters for their crimes, he does not feel the need to empathize with them beyond a certain point, and in his indignation, he draws conclusions about the injustice of death and the difference between the deserving and the undeserving in order to separate the reader from the characters he condemns so that they can stand in judgement over them without having to confront their own mortality for very long. Dickens also uses these trash stories to call his city and its leaders to account, drawing attention to the pollution of the Thames and demanding better relief for the poor.

It is curious that Dickens takes such elaborate umbrage at men who neglect their families, since he did not treat his own family with the kind of respect he seems to espouse in this novel. *Our Mutual Friend* was serialized between 1864 and 1865, a chaotic period in Dickens's life. Cheadle writes in *The Cambridge Companion to Dickens*: "By the 1860s Dickens's domestic life was in tatters, with his wife discarded, his home sold, his family a disappointment (even Kate, his favorite daughter, having married precipitately to get away from it all), the letters enshrining the past put to the bonfire, and his relationship with Ellen Ternan illicit" (78). Cheadle's choice of words is significant: the domestic life is in "tatters," Dickens's wife has been "discarded," and the letters tossed into the fire. No stranger to family turmoil growing up—indeed, the impact of his formative experience being forced to work in a boot-blacking factory to pay off his father's debts has left its imprint on most of his novels—the adult Dickens separated from his wife, took custody of all of their children but the oldest, had an affair with an actress less than half his age, and fathered at least one illegitimate child. Perhaps in subjecting the men of *Our Mutual Friend* to such stringent punishments, Dickens was attempting to do some penance for his own mistakes.

CHAPTER 2

PRECIOUS TRASH IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S *RUTH*

Introduction: Trash and the Victorian Fallen Woman Narrative

In her book of essays *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (1858), novelist Dinah Mulock Craik attempts to offer some consolation to unchaste women who wish to be redeemed by issuing the following invitation, "'Come, just as you are--ragged, dirty, dishonest. Only come, and we will do our best to make you what you ought to be'" (268). Similarly, in her more sympathetic "Helping the Fallen" (1885), Mary Jeune (a prominent socialite and philanthropist) gives the following instructions about housing so-called "fallen women" together in penitentiaries: "The first is the necessity of keeping the different classes of women apart—that is, having the work go divided that the more degraded women are never brought into contact with those who are less guilty" (675). Lastly, businessman and political commentator William Rathbone Greg makes the point in his lengthy essay "Prostitution" (1853) that the fallen woman is treated unjustly because society considers her to be "irretrievable," that she is "thrust down," and that "every door is shut upon her" (20). Craik, Jeune, and Greg also repeatedly refer to fallen women as "outcasts." Though none of these three widely read authors would have called women who had sex outside of wedlock "rubbish" or "trash" directly, Craik, Jeune, and Greg, all of whom claimed to be trying to show kindness, demonstrate that it was not particularly controversial to refer to the unchaste woman as ragged and dirty and degraded, as something that can contaminate and stain cleaner things, and, most importantly, as something that is cast out from the domestic hearth, or, for the purposes of this chapter, something that is discarded. In other words, many Victorians, even when they were trying to be sympathetic to them, described fallen women as trash in all respects but in name.

Respectable Victorian middle-class views of and behavior towards fallen women were characterized by the logic of trash. According to the logic of trash, marginalized characters, such as fallen women, are depicted as having trash-like qualities and as following a life story that resembles that of a discarded item. The logic of trash invites readers to see in trash their own mortality, but by attributing that mortality to a person of whom the writer disapproves, the logic of trash helps readers avoid the discomfort of confronting their mortality if they so choose.

The pristine ideal of Victorian womanhood was defined in part by contrasting it against people who didn't or couldn't conform to the standards of heterosexual, childbearing, patriarchal marriage that were its foundation,[28] and one of the most frequently discussed of these problematic people was the fallen woman.[29] Much ink was spilled debating about whether fallen women were victims or villains, and, in either case, how they should be punished for losing their chastity. Fictional stories about fallen women comprised a substantial portion of this ink, and *Ruth*, Elizabeth Gaskell's 1853 novel, participates in making the case for how fallen women should be treated by retelling a familiar story of a woman who is seduced by a lord as a young girl and bears a child out of wedlock. Unlike Dickens, who never questions the logic of trash, but simply employs it, Gaskell's contribution to both my thesis and to the larger conversation about the fallen woman is to go to what she sees as the source of the problem of fallen women—the Victorian logic of trash—and to advocate for Ruth by reimagining what trash is and how it

[28] Elizabeth Langland in *Nobody's Angels* discusses how the ideal of the "angel of the house" was preserved by separating her from men and from the poor and working classes, and Lynda Nead in *Myths of Sexuality* writes about how "respectable femininity" was defined in contrast to deviancies such as adultery and prostitution and how this respectable femininity was used as a means of establishing the middle class and giving it the power to regulate and control the working classes.

[29] As Langland, Nead, Mitchell, Romero Ruiz, and Mumm have noted, the definition of the term "fallen woman" had a broad application during the Victorian period, and, in addition to women who had sex out of wedlock, could include such diverse categories as "female thieves, tramps, alcoholics, and those who were described as feeble-minded," but in this chapter, I focus specifically on women who had undergone a sexual fall (Mumm 527).

should be treated. This advocacy takes the form of slowing down time for as long as possible to stave off the death of which trash always reminds us. Gaskell slows her characters' and her trash's progress towards their ultimate decay and treasures them for their sentimental value in order to make room for them to still be a force for good instead of discarding them right away as pollutants.

Garbage is created by separation, specifically through the act of throwing an unwanted item away in order to keep the home clean. John Scanlan in *On Garbage* asserts that garbage is "the remainder of...neatness" (16). Clean things are as much a testament to the existence of garbage as garbage itself because their very purity is evidence that garbage was removed to make them what they are. By the same logic, Victorians separated themselves from fallen women on the grounds that they were dangerous and impure, and they designated specific receptacles to contain them or repurpose them, such as Magdalen hospitals, lock hospitals, and religious penitentiaries. This act of separation was framed as a protection of unfallen women, which, as Lynda Nead has argued, also was a protection of the ideal British home; the home was the woman's sphere, upon which the supremacy of the Empire was based (Nead 24, 92). Nead writes, "This entire range of representations can be understood as part of the ceaseless categorization of acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviour; it worked to re-define respectable and non-respectable individuals and groups and was part of the obsessive attempt to segregate the pure and the impure" (97). So, the stakes were high, and the integrity and tidiness of the British home were maintained by discarding fallen women, just as the integrity and tidiness of a literal home are maintained by discarding trash.

The act of designating a person as trash might seem to be a way of ending discussion about them, but in fact, for Victorians, discarding the fallen woman was just the beginning of

their conversation about her, and as Nead, Amanda Anderson, and others have noted, these conversations often involved telling the same tale about her demise over and over again. The idea of the fallen woman's inevitable decline runs parallel to the economic trajectory Michael Thompson describes in *Rubbish Theory* as the inevitable decline of transient objects on their way to becoming rubbish. Thompson writes:

> What I believe happens is that a transient object gradually declining in value and in expected life-span may slide across into rubbish. In an ideal world, free of nature's negative attitude, an object would reach zero value and zero expected life-span at the same instant, and then...disappear into dust. But, in reality, it usually does not do this; it just continues to exist in a timeless and valueless limbo where at some later date (if it has not by that time turned, or been made, into dust) it has the chance of being discovered. (8-9)

Thompson's statement describes an economic progression and explores the nature of rubbish as a taste category. An equally important material progression takes place after an object has been designated as rubbish and discarded. In fact, the state of being "rubbish" is actually not timeless at all. Rubbish objects are always decaying, just as transient objects are moving towards becoming rubbish, and though an article of rubbish may occasionally be fished out of the heap, dusted off, and enter circulation again as Thompson describes, for most rubbish, that inevitable fate of decay exerts a constant inescapable pull on everything that has been cast onto a rubbish heap. As an item decays, its hazard as a contaminant increases, and its resemblance to its former state as a clean and whole item fades faster and faster. Victorians described fallen women as entering a state of decay after having extramarital sex. Indeed, the fact that Victorians described the loss of chastity as a "fall" mirrors the downward progression that a newly discarded item

undergoes on its way to the rubbish heap, heaps that are virtually always on or in the ground, lower down than whole items, which, in contrast to rubbish, are located in easy reach and within eyeshot.

If it seems particularly unpleasant and callous to describe human beings in these terms, it is. I write to critique this language and to highlight the often subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) dehumanization of fallen women that such language perpetuated, even when it was used under the guise of offering to help women who were experiencing unjust punishment for their sexual choices. In addition to my critique of this practice of talking about a person as if she were trash, I also note that by accusing the fallen woman of being subject to decay, Victorians inadvertently highlighted a profound commonality between the chaste and the unchaste, the commonality of which trash always reminds us: mortality. Part of the reason that we find decay of any kind disgusting (and therefore, part of the reason that calling a person rubbish has any power as an insult) is that it reminds us of what will one day happen to all of us. The story of trash is always ultimately a story about death, and the Victorians' fascination with the idea that the fallen woman's fate was inevitable was, as Anderson notes, a way for them to explore the idea of determinism more broadly and to deal with their anxieties about subjectivity and autonomy. She contends: "If on the one hand the fallen woman is seen as victimized or even constituted by forces that exceed her control--the force of a degrading urban milieu, the inescapability of pre-scripted downward paths--on the other hand she can serve as a threatening manifestation of those very forces that constituted her" (16). Nead also points out that the fallen woman's descent into ruin was often portrayed as inescapable because this portrayal could be utilized "to regulate the threat of sexual deviancy; the implications of deviant femininity could be contained and controlled by constructing the prostitute as an object to be pitied, a victim in need

of reclamation and charity" (139). Yet while the fear of inevitable decay could be used as a threat to keep fallen women in line, it was the fear and certainty that their own decay was inevitable that gave Victorians the notion that this threat had any cultural power.

Nead also notes that these depictions of what I have termed the fallen woman's decay displayed "extraordinary consistency" in their representation (139). Sally Mitchell's comprehensive analysis of social problem novels of the period provides evidence of just how prevalent such conventions were, and she shows that fallen women in these novels were depicted as going through a series of predictable stages: first, the women are abandoned by their lovers, then they lose their reputations and are cast out by society. After this, they usually lose their homes, become very poor, and bear children out of wedlock. Next, their story is interrupted by some sort of terrible tragedy: they either consider or commit suicide or infanticide, or they become prostitutes, or do all three. Sometimes a lucky fictional fallen woman will be rescued by a well-meaning benefactor and (rarely) even get married (generally after emigrating to the colonies), but she can never be restored to her former purity. More often, the fallen woman dies (see Mitchell, Chapter 2, "The Social Problem"). Anderson writes that this repetitive Victorian narrative about the fallen woman's life after her fall made her seem to lack autonomy and to lose control of her circumstances.[30] This pervasive viewpoint held that the fallen woman's fate is laid out for her from the moment she takes that first fateful step and loses her chastity. That fate is an unavoidable discarding by society.

In addition to novelists, many nonfiction writers also believed that the fallen woman's fate was inevitable, and they traced the same set of stages for her that many fiction writers did.

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[30] See also George Watt for information on the separation of fallen women from unfallen ones. Watt argues that novels both advocated for and challenged this separation in a unique way that nonfiction and art could not.

For example, Craik in *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* imagines the progress of the fallen woman (in this specific example, a fallen woman who also lies about her situation) to be an inexorable one-way journey. She writes: "The wretched girl [who lies about her fall]...in terror of losing a place, or of being turned from an angry father's door, fabricates tale after tale, denies and denies till she can deny no longer, till all ends in a jail and a charge of child-murder" (274). For Craik, the fallen woman is likely to be tempted to lie out of self-preservation, and those lies are a slippery slope that ends in moral and physical ruin. Similarly, Greg's "Prostitution" outlines a similar trajectory, albeit one that results from society's rejection rather than from the fallen woman's dishonesty. He calls that trajectory an "almost irresistible series of sequences, by which one lapse from chastity conducts ultimately to prostitution" (Greg 19-20). These writers take it as a given that a sexual fall sets an unfortunate woman down a one-way track towards disaster, just as trash is set down a track towards decay when it is discarded.

Gaskell's *Ruth* joined this conversation about inevitable falls, moral decay, and trash and made its own claim about how fallen and unfallen women should be separated, what the fallen woman's ultimate fate actually was and should be, and whether or not fallen women were trash. At the center of this critique is a statement about the relationship between trash and time: Gaskell doesn't dispute the inevitability of the fallen woman's demise, but she argues that both fallen women and trash should be held onto for as long as possible instead of being hastened to the rubbish heap. Ruth, Gaskell's novel argues, may be trash, but her life is still crucially important and valuable, and compassionately lengthening her story, as opposed to shortening it out of indignation about her liaison with Mr. Bellingham, is the way to give her the chance to contribute to her community for the good of all.

Ruth tells the story of the titular heroine Ruth Hilton, who is seduced at the age of sixteen by a young aristocrat named Mr. Bellingham and subsequently becomes pregnant. When Mr. Bellingham abandons her, Ruth begins to follow that familiar track laid out by Gaskell's contemporaries. She loses her job and her home and is on the verge of committing suicide. However, at this point, Ruth's downward progress through the conventional narrative is postponed when she sees Mr. Benson, a curate with a hunched back, take a bad fall on his way to stop her from killing herself. Ruth puts aside her wish for death and goes to help him. Mr. Benson and his sister Faith adopt Ruth into their household and disguise her as a widow named Mrs. Denbigh. Under this assumed name, the novel allows Ruth to transform into an individual who is indistinguishable in terms of behavior, manners, and virtue from the chaste women around her. In other words, Gaskell separates Ruth from society, only to bring her back; she throws her away and then fishes her out of the rubbish heap, places her in the clean and tidy home of a respectable curate, and insists that none of the characters outside of the Bensons (who already know her secret) can tell that Ruth is anything less than a model of perfect womanly behavior. A prominent wealthy family in the town even hires Ruth to be their daughters' governess, a task at which she excels. In this sequence of events, Gaskell asserts that though Ruth's transgression has in an important sense ruined her, her past doesn't contaminate anyone who comes into contact with her, not even the impressionable girls entrusted to her care.

Later on, however, Ruth's past catches up to her. Her name is discovered to be Ruth Hilton, not Mrs. Denbigh, and she loses her position. At this point, Ruth has almost arrived at the end of the fallen woman's conventional narrative, and there is no hope of restoring her to respectable society. Yet instead of letting her go forward to her sealed fate, Gaskell again postpones Ruth's downward progress. The Bensons don't reject Ruth, unlike the rest of the

town. Instead, they treasure her. Consequently, because Ruth stays instead of being driven out, she, the woman whom the town rejects, takes on the work that no one else will take: she becomes a nurse during a dangerous typhus outbreak, and she saves many lives. When, at last, Ruth reaches the final stage of her downward progression and dies trying to save her thoughtless ex-lover, the postponements Gaskell has allowed to Ruth have made a huge impact for good, not just on Ruth, but on the small town and on her family. Her son has had a good mother to guide him as he grows into a young man, and her good example has inspired Mr. Davis, the town's doctor, to offer him an apprenticeship: "His being your son," Mr. Davis says, "the son of one whom I have seen--as I have seen you, Mrs. Denbigh (out and out the best nurse I ever met...)--his being your son is his great recommendation to me" (358). Furthermore, many paupers in the hospital have kept their lives as a result of Ruth's ministrations, and Ruth's funeral is attended by "troop after troop" of the people she helped (373). Lastly, she has been a source of happiness to the Benson household and to the girls under her care. Gaskell doesn't depict a fallen woman who is able to (or even one who *should* be able to) escape her ultimate fate, but by slowing that narrative down and spacing out the stages of decay, she makes room for a good life.

Throughout this story, Gaskell uses trash objects as metaphors for her heroine. She does so not to agree with her contemporaries that fallen women deserved to be thrown away, but rather to confront her society's prejudices and name them for what they were. Her close scrutiny of Victorians' treatment of trash shows that they treated trash and fallen women the same and that the role trash plays in Victorian society can be understood as a metaphor for the role fallen women play in society. Gaskell compares Ruth to trash and then shows how her virtuous friends love and treasure her, and at the same time, how they also love and treasure their material trash. In pointing out these parallels, she imagines a new way of assessing value, both of material

objects and of human beings, and she advocates for this new value system as a solution to the problem of the fallen woman: A society that values trash ensures that valuable things are not thrown out while they can still be useful and, likewise, that women like Ruth are not prematurely sent to their deaths before they have completed all the good they can do for the world.

Ruth caused an uproar. Though she did have her sympathetic readers, Gaskell laments in her letters that men at her church had burned their copies of the novel and forbidden their families to read it (Letter 150, p. 223). She also reports that London's Bell Library had withdrawn copies of *Ruth* from circulation (Letter 151, p. 223). Gaskell, however, didn't envision herself as a radical, and she was intimidated and hurt by the vehemence with which readers criticized her novel. Writing to her close friend Eliza Fox, she expresses chagrin at the way readers were receiving *Ruth:* "Now *should* you have burnt the 1st vol. of Ruth as so *very* bad? even if you had been a very anxious father of a family? Yet *two* men have; and a third has forbidden his wife to read it; they sit next to us in Chapel and you can't think how 'improper' I feel under their eyes" (223). Additionally, to R. Monckton Milnes, a well-known writer and politician who wrote to her in praise of *Ruth*, she writes about how hard she tried to make her novel inoffensive and honest, and to what great lengths she went to avoid sensationalism or sentimentality:

> I am so glad you liked 'Ruth'. I was so anxious about her, and took so much pains over writing it, that I lost my own power of judging, and could not tell whether I had done it well or ill. I only knew how very close to my heart it had come from. I tried to make both the story and the writing as quiet as I could, in order that 'people' (my great bugbear) might not say that they could not see what the writer felt to be a very plain and earnest truth, for romantic incidents or exaggerated writing. (225)

Gaskell cared deeply what readers thought of her and of her novel, and she took their criticisms to heart. Despite all the controversy, she claimed that she was not trying to upset the status quo, but rather, as she writes in a letter to Anna Jameson: "I think I have put the small edge of the wedge in, if only I have made people talk & discuss the subject a little more than they did" (Letter 153, 226). In other words, she wanted to wedge things open only to a small degree, and to inspire only a little bit more talk and discussion, as opposed to breaking the cracks apart or inciting a quarrel.

The particular type of conversation Gaskell seemed to be trying to spark is one that appears to defend its fallen heroine. *Ruth* goes out of its way to portray those who reject its heroine as heartless hypocrites and to portray Ruth herself as virtuous. Mr. Bradshaw, her harshest critic, is shown to have turned a blind eye to his colleagues' political bribes. Gaskell writes, "He hoped that Mr. Pilson did not mean to allude to bribery; but he did not express this hope, because he thought it would deter the agent from using this means" (207). Yet Mr. Bradshaw envisions himself and his family to be the purest of the pure in contrast to Ruth's sin. After heaping abuse on Ruth when he discovers that she has an illegitimate child, he replies to his daughter's attempt to defend Ruth by saying, "It only convinces me more and more how deep is the corruption this wanton has spread in my family.... She has turned right into wrong, and wrong into right," and later expresses disgust that his "own innocent children" may have been "contaminated" by her influence (279). However, the girls in Ruth's care grow up to be virtuous, while Mr. Bradshaw's older son Richard, who has not benefited from Ruth's guidance, grows up to imitate his father's hypocrisy, ultimately humiliating the family by defrauding Mr. Benson and forging his signature. So Gaskell shows Mr. Bradshaw to be someone who will not admit his own flaws and whose parenting has taught his own son to commit crimes. The novel

uses his refusal to even consider showing mercy to Ruth as some of the clearest evidence of his hypocrisy, and by extension, of society's hypocrisy in disproportionately punishing fallen women.

Moreover, before Ruth's fall takes place, Gaskell signals that she will be challenging her readers to think differently from the conventional wisdom of society when she writes about an old friend of Ruth's who sees her with Mr. Bellingham: "The poor old labourer prayed long and earnestly that night for Ruth. He called it 'wrestling for her soul'; and I think that his prayers were heard, for 'God judgeth not as man judgeth'" (45). In other words, Ruth's soul, according to Gaskell, is safe, despite her transgression, because God does not judge her, a fact that she places in direct contrast to whatever "man" might think about her. Therefore, it seems clear that *Ruth* is a novel that advocates for fallen women in fairly straightforward terms.

However, literary critics are conflicted as to whether or not *Ruth* successfully does this. George Watt, Anderson, and Mitchell argue that it does, largely by means of positive representation. Mitchell states:

> Mrs. Gaskell devoted a whole novel to the unchaste woman and made her a heroine. She showed that motherhood leads to social as well as religious redemption, that the unchaste woman does not differ essentially from the woman who has not sinned except in the strength she develops by taking personal responsibility for her life, and that a woman can, by her exercise of womanly virtues, compel society to respect her. (40)

In other words, these critics believe Gaskell advocated for fallen women because she redrew a fallen woman to be a sympathetic character rather than an object of condescension or disapproval.

Nevertheless, though Gaskell does portray Ruth as an admirable person, she never truly departs from the repetitive narrative told in other fallen women novels: like the women in those novels, Ruth bears a child out of wedlock, is rejected by society, contemplates suicide, is treated like a prostitute by her lover (though she never accepts the money offered her), and ultimately dies. The misery of her situation is only mitigated by the fact that the kind Bensons never abandon her, and her good works redeem her at the end of her life when she nurses the poor in a plague hospital and when she sacrifices her life by caring for the father of her child while he is sick. Moreover, after her death, her son is taken on as an apprentice by the local doctor, a man who reveals that he himself is also a bastard. So, Ruth's son (and bastards as a general category) are allowed to live without shame in the world of this novel, and Ruth herself is honored by all who love her, but, in spite of these concessions, her story still follows that pattern of inevitable descent that the very people Gaskell was most trying to confront believed to be the appropriate fate for fallen women. Audrey Jaffe, in her essay "*Cranford* and *Ruth*," argues:

> *Ruth* attempts to elicit sympathy for a generally unsympathetic Victorian type by exploring the intricacies of individual motive and character, but the techniques required to neutralize the issue of Ruth's sexuality are finally inconsistent with those of characterological realism. Ruth's lack of introspection has the effect that, as Victorian critics noted, she seems less a fully realized character than the vehicle of a moral message, and a somewhat unclear one at that. (56)

In another essay on *Ruth*, Jaffe discusses the message Gaskell conveys about class in addition to the message she conveys about fallen women. Again, Jaffe argues, Gaskell's revolutionary impulse doesn't quite manage to storm the Bastille. She writes, "rather than dissolving class boundaries, the novel's plot allows characters to forget that such boundaries ever disturbed

them" (61). Additionally, "The invention of Mrs. Denbigh [i.e. the fact that Ruth could not live under her own name in the town and instead had to take on an assumed name that made her appear to be married and her son to be legitimate] might be read as a sign of Gaskell's awareness of the difficulty, even impossibility, of gaining sympathy for her heroine--an implicit acknowledgement that sympathy for the fallen woman *as* fallen woman is impossible to achieve" (62). Indeed, Gaskell seems to insert only the smallest edge of the wedge, and despite its attempts at advocacy, *Ruth* rehashes a great deal of old territory and reinforces a lot of well-established cultural assumptions.

It's true that *Ruth* doesn't upset the ultimate trajectory of the fallen woman narrative. Indeed, Gaskell seems to cede the point that it is inevitable. However, she mitigates the damage this fate does by giving Ruth the precious gift of time. In other words, it is not the final destination of the fallen woman that Gaskell disputes, but the speed at which she is forced to go there. Gaskell doesn't overturn the logic of trash or object to the idea that a marginalized person should be called trash, but she does ask us to reexamine the trash stories that were always told about these characters, specifically questioning why they move so quickly. The rate of time's passage as it relates to Ruth is a prominent theme in this novel. For example, Faith Benson meets Ruth for the first time right after Mr. Bellingham has abandoned her, and, after giving "a low whistle" of disgust at the sight of Ruth's ill health (a consequence of both heartbreak and pregnancy), she has a knee-jerk reaction that is representative of the cultural attitude towards fallen women's passage through time that Gaskell wished to challenge: "It would be better for her to die *at once*, I think," Faith says (95, italics mine). The very sight of Ruth's suffering is so disgraceful that Faith wishes it gone immediately, specifically by hoping for her death to come "at once," in contrast to a death that comes later on after a longer passage of time. Faith wishes

to speed up Ruth's story by hastening her out of the world as quickly as possible. However, she repents of her impatience when her brother Thurstan rebukes her for her lack of compassion. So, she asks him instead: "how would you have this girl treated?," to which Thurstan responds with the exact opposite of having Ruth "die at once": "It will require *some time*, and much Christian love, to find out the best way," he replies (101, italics mine). In response to Faith's wish to cut Ruth's time short, Thurstan proposes to offer Ruth more time; similarly, in response to Faith's low whistle of disgust, Thurstan offers "much Christian love." So more time and a slower, longer story are equated with Christian love.

Many Victorians asserted that the fallen woman could go nowhere but down after a sexual fall, and they had that route mapped out for her in detail through a series of predetermined stages. To them, the fallen woman's life was a simple, downward-sloping line. By contrast, Gaskell suggests that though perhaps some things about the fallen woman's story were inevitable, the speed at which those events had to take place is adjustable, and the line of the narrative isn't necessarily a uniformly downward progression. Adding more time to Ruth's life allows Gaskell to let the downward line dawdle on its way to the bottom, going up for a moment and then back down, lingering in the more pleasant elevations for a little while longer. Ruth's suffering, Gaskell proposes, can be mitigated by slowing down her story and elongating it, thereby providing wide spaces between the predetermined events of her fated demise to leave room for Ruth to be happy. The downward line model offers fallen women a severely abridged life, while Gaskell offers her a whole one: she fills the gaps between the typical events of the fallen woman's story--abandonment, suicide attempt, child born out of wedlock, public humiliation, rejection by friends, and death--with meaningful relationships, experiences in respectable society, watching her son grow up into a good person with a promising future, doing

good deeds, and earning the praise of her community--all opportunities other novels about fallen women generally don't allow their heroines to have. So, though Ruth ultimately goes where many Victorians seemed to agree she was headed all along, Gaskell lets her go places fallen women were almost never allowed during those precious spaces between stages. In this way, she doesn't actually argue that Ruth isn't trash, but instead shows that despite becoming trash, she can still have great value to those who love her if only they treasure her instead of discarding her right away, just as one would treasure a broken watch that evokes memories of a lost loved one instead of discarding it because it doesn't work anymore.

Additionally, she also suggests that if merely slowing down could make such a huge difference in the life of someone like Ruth, then perhaps slowing down is a worthy goal in and of itself, as she shows by holding up the Bensons as the model family. The Bensons' simple no-frills home proposes a slower-paced life of thrift as a better alternative to a fast-paced life of fashion. The atypical family unit of two spinsters, a bachelor, and a celibate single mother proposes prolonged platonic love as a better alternative to a one-night stand or a mercenary marriage. Yet I argue that the most significant of these slow-downs as a metaphor for Ruth is the family's hoarding of their trash. The broken watches, shorn hair, and salvaged scraps of paper that the Bensons treasure instead of discarding them show that recycled trash should be kept for its own sake and in spite of its flaws, just as Ruth should be kept for her own sake and in spite of her flaws. The reward for these unconventional modes of living is literally the difference between life and death to others, since extending Ruth's life makes her a nurse to the sick, a good mother to her child, and the savior of her lover. Extending time is how Gaskell increases the value of both trash and Ruth.

Ruth and It-Narratives: Trash, Time, Narrative, and Themes

Victorian fallen women novels tell stories of women who are doomed, first by connecting too closely with a man, and then by separating from him too soon. After that, they journey downwards towards death and humiliation. I have noted that this motif is something like the economic trajectory of trash as described by Thompson, but it also finds a literary parallel in the it-narrative genre--stories that are also, from one perspective, about how objects eventually find their way into the rubbish heap. It-narratives, a genre that came to prominence in the eighteenth century, also known as novels of circulation, are picaresque tales told from the perspective of an object, and as those objects change hands (by being given away, thrown away, or stolen), they tell readers messages about their society.[31] It-narratives were in vogue during Gaskell's formative years, particularly as instructive literature for children, and there is a good chance that she would have read popular it-narratives such as Mary Mister's *The Adventures of a Doll* (1816) growing up. These stories are united by a common interest in critiquing materialism using anti-luxury discourse, tattling on the vices of members of all levels of society, and exposing women's sexuality and its commodification. *Ruth*, which examines many of these same themes, uses broken, damaged, or discarded material objects as metaphors for the heroine and her life. I argue that Ruth's story--which follows the familiar, repetitive downward spiral of the fallen woman story--resembles an it-narrative in plot structure and themes. Gaskell's contribution to the discussion of fallen women is not so much to tell us a story we have never heard before, but rather to use the connection between fallen women and material trash to explore the reasoning behind how fallen women are defined and how Victorian society treated them, and also in order to suggest solutions to these problems. For Gaskell, the solution to the problem of trash and the

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[31] See Blackwell's *The Secret Life of Things*.

problem of fallen women is for society as a whole to eschew money in favor of affection, thus justifying the decision to save both women and material possessions that have lost their value.

Like *Ruth*, it-narratives, in addition to being stories about materialism and stories about women, are also stories about trash, and specifically, how trash is a little more complicated than it might seem. The dividing line between trash and not-trash is rarely clear in it-narratives. The objects in these narratives start pristine and then deteriorate over the course of the story. Often, the way they pass from one owner to the next is by being discarded, and then, by means of being reclaimed or repurposed or sold fraudulently, they return to being not-trash again. Sometimes the transformations are quite extreme, as in Richard Fenton's *Memoirs of a Wig* (1815) when the urine-soaked, fire-singed wig of a corrupt judge is rehabilitated by an enterprising butler and next graces the head of King William IV, only to fall into being used as a rag to polish shoes by the end of the story. The protagonists of it-narratives find their status as trash or treasure to be constantly changing, but at the same time, there is never any hope that they could return to being new. For example, in *The Genuine Memoirs and Most Surprising Adventures of a Very Unfortunate Goose Quill* (1751), the narrator begins its story by reminiscing about the days before it was on its way to being trash--that is, when it was still attached to a goose: "Never have I been so happy in any Situation as when my Mother in all the pomp of Vanity and Love clapped her wings and looked on me her greatest Ornament," it tells us (3). Sadly, the quill tells us, it's all downhill from there, and the story will only end with it "reduced to the low Degree" after having "rubbed through so many unfortunate Hours" (1). The quill tells readers these things at the very beginning of the story, so that we know (just as readers of Victorian fallen women narratives knew) its degraded fate is inevitable. But, like *Ruth*, the quill's journey downward is filled with detours.

Part of the complexity of the trash story is that the change into trash is both gradual and subject to the whims of different owners. "One man's trash is another man's treasure," as the saying goes, but because of the ever-present realities of dirt and weather and wear and tear, the ability to dispute the object narrators' value has a limited shelf life. Eventually, after enough decay, there comes a point when trash loses its potential to be reclaimed as treasure, and though this ultimate fate is not always depicted in it-narratives, its reality is always present in the background. At the same time, the fact that these objects are allowed to flirt with and elude the rubbish heap so often suggests that, despite their downward trajectory, object-narrators can nevertheless extend their stories almost indefinitely, like an asymptote continually approaching but never quite meeting a curve, as long as their narrators continue to strike the fancy of at least one person.

All the items undergo significant deterioration over the course of their stories: the wig of *Memoirs of an Old Wig* is stabbed, burned in a fire and doused in a urinal, worn out by the scratching fingers of Alexander Pope, and is on the verge of being used to shine shoes when the human narrator of the story's frame narrative discovers and rescues it, finding, despite his excitement over the wig's elegance, that its many adventures have left it with a smell "that tainted the ambient air" (3). Similarly, the shoes and slippers of *Adventures of Shoes and Slippers* have chocolate spilled on them, are torn apart by women who fight over them, are worn out by much use, and are immersed in mud, to the point that they eventually wind up under their mistress's bed, unable to be worn anymore. In *Memoirs of a Goose Quill*, the quill, too, narrates its physical deterioration and narrow escapes from the rubbish heap, and it also watches, aghast, as another object (a wig) is thrown in the fire, a terrible fate that it is relieved it doesn't have to share. So, the journey towards the trash heap may be inevitable, and it may be a steady

downward descent, but the meandering path that these objects take on that route are full of adventures and brushes with the heights of the aristocracy and the depths of poverty and crime. They will all eventually become trash, and they often come perilously close to that state. Similarly, Ruth's extended story carries her towards her inevitable fallen woman fate (dying for the sake of an unworthy lover), and on the way, she is allowed to have detours into more pleasant walks of life, even as she nears and narrowly escapes common demises like suicide, prostitution, and becoming a mistress.

But how can *Ruth* be an object narrative when Ruth is a person, not an object? As Deirdre Lynch notes, the line between a person and an object becomes hazy when we start talking about keepsakes. A keepsake is an object that stands in for a person and through nostalgia reminds the owner of someone who is no longer present. She writes,

> The keepsake's narrative is a story of dispossession. (It is our nostalgia that makes us value it as a metonymic object, one memorializing the special experience of which it was a part. But nostalgia's demands are insatiable, and this keepsake, accordingly, records loss as much as preservation. It records, that is, its status as a mere substitution.) At the same time, paradoxically, it is also a story of possession of the most absolute, intimate kind. (Thus this nostalgic story in itself is the property of the possessor and not the object, for, inalienable and ungeneralizable, that story can encompass the experience of one particular person only. In this way, when a souvenir is purchased or a keepsake is bestowed upon a 'significant other,' the possessor is in a position to 'inscrib[e] the handwriting of the personal beneath the more uniform caption of the social.') (73)

In other words, keepsakes are objects that stand in for someone who is missing, and just as they conjure the missing person by prompting remembrance, so they also remind of that person's

absence by virtue of the fact of their existence. *Ruth*'s protagonist is defined by her loss of sexual innocence, a quality that is constantly evoked by her personal demeanor of blamelessness and modesty (27). Ruth's passivity and the manner in which she is passed from one person to the next endow her with object-like qualities. When she loses her chastity, she loses an important measure of her social value. But when the Bensons reclaim and treasure her, Ruth comes to stand in as a keepsake for herself, a nostalgic reminder of the person she used to be, and the person the Bensons still see in her.

As I have suggested, Gaskell's method of advocating for Ruth is to elongate her story. She arrests her progress down the predetermined stages of the fallen woman narrative, taking her out of circulation so that her value stops depreciating while she is in the care of the Bensons. It-narratives share some common characteristics that enable them to tell stories about sexuality and materialism. The genre is defined, not just by the fact that the stories are told by object narrators, but also by similar narrative techniques that facilitate their ability to critique materialism and sexual immorality. Liz Bellamy provides some general guidelines on what constitutes an it-narrative and what some of their most common themes are, namely, 1) that object narrators do not have independent agency, and 2) that the objects circulate between otherwise unconnected characters (121). It-narratives send their object narrators through many different hands, and while sometimes one or two of the most important owners may return to the story later on, for the most part, previous owners disappear after they have lost the object. Ruth, though not an actual material object, is a passive character who is shunted from her parents, to her guardian, to the sewing factory owner, to Mr. Bellingham, to the Bensons, with very little control over her fate, and, in another resemblance to it-narratives, these different people who keep her and control her do not have any connection to each other except their connection with Ruth. After her

parents die and Ruth is taken in by a distant acquaintance of her father's (a wealthy maltster who knows Ruth only as "a young girl whom he could not remember ever to have seen"), who then transfers her to Mrs. Mason, whose only connection to him is that he has "heard of" her (34, 35). Then, Mr. Bellingham discovers her during a chance encounter at a ball, and Mr. Benson stumbles across her on his way home while on vacation in Wales for an "annual holiday" (59). Like the object protagonist of an it-narrative, Ruth bounces from one person to the next with little control over her journey, and most of these previous caretakers never resurface again. Only Mr. Bellingham, her child's father, ever returns to the main plot after having disappeared earlier. So, Ruth circulates among unconnected characters, just like the object narrators of it-narratives, which enables her to highlight the same themes of materialism and sexuality in a way that is very similar to what it-narratives do.

As Gaskell and virtually all the writers of it-narratives in both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries seem to have been aware, stories about material objects are excellent vehicles for moral lessons. In addition to sharing a similar narrative structure with it-narratives, *Ruth* also combines the sexual and economic themes of the eighteenth century with the modest and didactic tone of the nineteenth. It-narratives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries served different purposes, with the narratives from the eighteenth century (the century with which it-narratives are most commonly associated) serving as social satire and narratives from the nineteenth century providing instruction for children. Eighteenth-century it-narratives, which are often risqué, satirize the commercialization of society and what the jaded narrators see as rampant sexual immorality. For example, *The Genuine Memoirs and Most Surprising Adventures of a Very Unfortunate Goose-Quill* (1751) details the love letters between a married woman and her other lovers and makes fun of its current owner (presumably the tale's actual

human author) by complaining about his terrible breath and rotten teeth when he uses his quill as a toothpick (25). Similarly, *Memoirs of an Old Wig* (1815) spills the beans on its many different wearers' misbehavior--including one owner who joins the "Camisars [sic]" (probably meaning Camisards, or French Huguenots), which the author portrays as a bizarre sex cult whose arcane rituals are the source of the wig's power to speak (51). As the genre changed over time, the narratives became less satirical and more didactic, and they lost most of their salacious themes and became geared primarily towards children. In this form, they often instilled lessons about compassion for animals and taking care of one's possessions. *Ruth*, though it shares the didactic and decorous tone of the nineteenth-century it-narratives, makes many of the same social critiques that eighteenth-century it-narratives made.

Similarly, Ruth's circulation among different characters exposes their vices and virtues, shows us her perspective on her own fate, and implies her fundamental equality with everyone around her since nothing about her suggests that she is anything other than perfectly chaste and respectable while she is disguised as Mrs. Denbigh. As Jaffe notes in "Under Cover of Sympathy," Ruth is a vehicle for Gaskell's moral lessons:

> Only a few things circulate between the Bensons and Bradshaw households: money in the form of pew-rents, gifts from Bradshaw, and Ruth....Both as Mrs. Denbigh, a character invented by Faith, and as Bradshaw's employee, she exposes the vulnerability of the home on whose security Bradshaw stakes his identity and that of his family, the home that would place her irretrievably outside it and define her as incapable of redemption. A conduit for the feelings of others and a figure of 'silent rebellion' herself, Ruth enables the expression of class feeling whose existence the Bensons cannot own. (57)

This pattern, I argue, is another parallel between *Ruth* and an it-narrative. As Ruth is exchanged between different characters, a commodity for their use and disposal, she facilitates similar critiques by bearing passive witness to their immoral behavior and/or their selfless virtue. During her tenure under Mrs. Mason's care, Ruth exposes how exploitative apprentice masters like Mrs. Mason mistreat their workers. Mrs. Mason makes the sewing girls sew so late and get up so early that they can only sleep for three hours (11). Meanwhile, Ruth also bears witness to how young women of the upper classes seem to care more for their dresses than for working-class women when a spoiled attendee at a ball doesn't even thank Ruth for mending the dress she ripped while dancing, but only scolds her for being slow (17). During her time with Bellingham, Ruth shows how young male aristocrats treat working-class women as if they were disposable when he impregnates and abandons her. Then, when his mother tries to pay Ruth off and chooses not to make her son take responsibility for his actions, she shows how upper-class women are often complicit in this mistreatment (76). Finally, under the Bensons' care, Ruth's story provides a positive moral example through an inside view into the lives of those who show true compassion for others even as it also critiques religious hypocrites like Mr. Bradshaw. *Ruth* delivers these lessons to readers by passing its heroine from one character to the next so that she can bear witness to their vices and virtues, just as if she were an object narrator in an it-narrative.

In another similarity with it-narratives, *Ruth* teaches anti-luxury lessons by showing that material value is actually inversely proportional to sentimental value--and sentimental value is the value that Gaskell endorses as true value. Gaskell highlights these moral lessons with references to trash; money behaves like trash and trash is valued like money. Jaffe observes that "Ruth treats valuables as though they are worthless" and asserts that "the sheer illogic of Gaskell's economic structure" constitutes "a fundamental disruption of the reification on which

capitalist exchange depends" ("Under Cover" 214, 209). Consequently, the novel teaches readers to eschew materialism by placing a high value on trash and pricing monetary gifts as worthless. So, the characters return or discard expensive gifts and treasure their trash.

One of the main ways Gaskell shows that money is trash is by having her virtuous characters discard it. Towards the beginning of the novel, Ruth rejects actual cash when, as the chambermaid reports, she leaves Mrs. Bellingham's bank-note "lying quite promiscuous, like waste paper, on the floor" after Mr. Bellingham has abandoned her (90). To be sure, though the innocent Ruth doesn't seem to be conscious of the full extent of the insult this gift suggests, rejecting the money is Gaskell's way of rejecting Mrs. Bellingham's implication that she is a prostitute. Still, the act of discarding the money is part of a larger pattern. When asked to explain her inclination to reject the money, Ruth replies:

> "I have a strong feeling against taking it. While he," said she, deeply blushing, and letting her large white lids drop down and veil her eyes, "loved me, he gave me many things...and I took them from him gladly and thankfully because he loved me--for I would have given him anything--and I thought of them as signs of love. But this money pains my heart. He has left off loving me, and has gone away. This money seems--oh Miss Benson--it seems as if he could comfort me, for being forsaken, by money." (107)

The money, to Ruth, represents Mr. Bellingham's fundamental misunderstanding of the depth of the bond she felt with him, as well as her own misunderstanding of the meaning of his gifts. Additionally, control of the money is connected to the ability to evaluate things as trash or not-trash. Bellingham gives Ruth money in exchange for the right to forsake her, or to put it in terms of trash, to discard her. So, Ruth discards the money as a way to show that her love, though it might be trash to Bellingham, is actually priceless.

Meanwhile, Faith Benson captures another aspect of the difficulty of monetary gifts, which is their trash-like power of sullying relationships with ulterior motives. She approves of Ruth's decision not to accept the money by adding, "I am glad of it, that I am! They don't deserve to have the power of giving: they don't deserve that you should take it" (107). The problem with expensive gifts, Gaskell suggests, is that at some level, they represent the giver's desire to purchase power over the receiver, and accepting the gift means the receiver agrees that the giver is entitled to (or deserves) that power.[32] Expensive gifts, no matter how well-intentioned, are always compromised by an implied ulterior motive. Their cash value renders both givers and receivers complicit in an economy that treats the most precious parts of life as commodities to be bought and sold. Another example of this can be found in the scene where Mr. Bellingham (who has changed his name to Mr. Donne) discovers that Leonard is his child and attempts to give the child a very expensive watch, Mr. Benson (who thinks Mr. Donne is trying to bribe him in the upcoming election) returns the watch (240-1). Mr. Donne tries to bulldoze over Mr. Benson's objections by saying, "I allow no one to interfere with what I choose to do with my own," but Mr. Benson refuses to allow Mr. Bellingham that power by sending the watch back anyway after Mr. Donne is not present and can no longer object, thereby thwarting Mr. Donne's efforts to purchase his son (241). Mr. Donne and his mother offer gifts of money under the guise of charity, but in reality, Gaskell shows that these gifts are sullied by an ulterior motive: they are actually attempts to pay for (and therefore to acquire power over) things that the characters they are paying haven't offered up for sale, such as sex, children, and love. Therefore, the virtuous characters must discard the objects that are the physical manifestations of these inappropriate actions because, as both Gaskell's novel and it-narratives suggest, these exchanges

[32] See Marcel Maus's *The Gift*, an anthropological study that examines how giving gifts places obligations on and lowers the status of the gift receiver.

teach moral lessons about proper behavior and virtuous priorities, and rejecting corrupt gifts is a way to be model of virtue. In *Ruth*, this means that expensive gifts are returned in order to demonstrate that genuine affection is far more precious than money, and to reject the power grab that such gifts imply.

A less offensive gift from Mr. Bradshaw, a length of fine muslin for Ruth, is not rejected, but is still unwelcome, and Gaskell again uses the exchange to illustrate another moral point: that even when the giver isn't trying to gain power over the receiver, gifts can be inappropriate because their cash value is out of proportion with the level of affection the giver and the receiver share. Ruth's reasoning behind disliking the muslin helps us understand the money ethics of the novel. She explains that she doesn't want it because he "had no right to offer it me" (131). Mr. Benson, trying to understand what she means by that, sums up the reason these gifts are unacceptable when he says:

> "I understand what you mean. It is a delight to have gifts made to you by those whom you esteem and love, because then such gifts are merely to be considered as fringes to the garment--as inconsiderable additions to the mighty treasure of their affection, adding a grace, but no additional value, to what before was precious, and proceeding as naturally out of that as leaves burgeon out upon trees; but you feel it to be different when there is no regard for the giver to idealise the gift--when it simply takes its stand among your property as so much money's value. Is this it, Ruth?" (131-132)

This quote shows that in the economy of *Ruth*, the monetary value of a gift actually detracts from its value overall. Only a gift that offered "inconsiderable additions" of cash value to the much more important treasure of affection would have been received with genuine thanks. Later in the story, Mr. Benson shows another nuance of this problem when he too returns a gift to Mr.

Bradshaw. Even though the two have been good friends in the past, Mr. Bradshaw's gift becomes unacceptable after they have a falling out. Mr. Bradshaw attempts to continue paying pew-rent after leaving the church because he knows Mr. Benson is not wealthy, but we are told that "this Mr. Benson could not suffer," and the money is returned to Mr. Bradshaw "as being what his deserted minister could not receive" (302). On the one hand, Ruth rejects gifts that the giver had no right to give, while on the other, Mr. Benson rejects gifts that he cannot receive because he no longer shares a bond of friendship with the giver. For Ruth, the problem is that she has never felt strong affection for Mr. Bradshaw, while for Mr. Benson, the problem is that an old friendship has disappeared, and though Mr. Bradshaw's gift was acceptable before, without that friendship, it no longer is. In a third example of an inappropriate gift that is rejected, Mr. Donne tries to give Sally a sovereign to console her while she is mourning Ruth, which Sally indignantly rejects because she doesn't want payment for her feelings (369). So, the common theme that unites the power grab gifts and the misguided gifts is that monetary gifts are, at best, a gaudy decoration to the garment of already precious affection (as opposed to a tasteful fringe) and at worst, a bribe. Without any affection, they, like trash, only take up space, create clutter, or even pollute good relationships.

Gaskell's spin on the lessons circulating objects in stories can teach us comes from her novel's position on trash: though money is not an acceptable gift to give in exchange for love, trash is. The reversed economic value system, with trash at the top and money at the bottom, is the foundation for *Ruth*'s anti-luxury message. Trash gifts are valued because of their worthlessness, not in spite of it, because that monetary worthlessness is, to Gaskell, a testament to the sincerity of the giver. Unlike monetary gifts or gifts of finery, trash gifts avoid sullying relationships with ulterior motives or with being out of proportion with the intimacy shared by

the giver/receiver. A worthless item cannot be used as a bribe, and no level of intimacy is small enough to make a trash gift inappropriate since the value of the trash gift is 0. With all ulterior motives and inappropriateness gone, trash gifts have only one purpose: to express affection. Therefore, their inherent sincerity makes gifts of trash more valuable than ever. For example, though Mr. Benson will not accept Mr. Bradshaw's pew money after their falling out, he does accept Mr. Bradshaw's son-in-law Mr. Farquhar's literal trash--his old newspaper--as a gift:

> They were speaking about politics, when Mr. Farquhar learned that Mr. Benson took in no newspaper.
>
> "Will you allow me to send you over my *Times*? I have generally done with it before twelve o'clock, and after that it is really waste-paper in my house. You will oblige me by making use of it."
>
> "I am sure I am very much obliged to you for thinking of it. But do not trouble yourself to send it; Leonard can fetch it." (306)

This gift serves two purposes beyond its surface value of providing the Bensons with knowledge about current events. First, the gift of trash is given in the spirit of reconnecting estranged friends, and because it is a recurring gift (every time Mr. Farquhar finishes with his paper, he gives it to Mr. Benson), it gives the two families a regular opportunity to speak to one another again. Second, by requiring young Leonard to come fetch it, the paper compels the boy, who has been hiding from the shame of having recently discovered his illegitimacy, to get outside into the healthy air where he can recover his constitution and learn how to get used to his new station in life. This gift of trash also participates in *Ruth*'s pattern of prolonging a condemned item or a person's inevitable decay to make room for a good life. Instead of hastening the newspaper into the trash when he is done with it, Mr. Farquhar prolongs the life of his trash by giving it as a gift

for someone else to use and discard (or perhaps give away again), and in so doing, leaves time for the trash to promote healing in his circle of friends.

Another example of a precious trash gift is Mr. Farquhar's scrap paper, which Jemima keeps because she is in love with him. In this example, the very trashiness of this gift is the aspect of it that most clearly shows its great value. When Jemima's sisters find it, they immediately know what it is:

> "Jemima...sent me to her desk for an envelope, and what do you think I saw?"
>
> "What?" asked Elizabeth, expecting nothing else than a red-hot Valentine, signed Walter Farquhar, *pro* Bradshaw, Farquhar, & Co., in full.
>
> "Why, a piece of paper, with dull-looking lines upon it, just like the scientific dialogues; and I remembered all about it. It was once when Mr. Farquhar had been telling us that a bullet does not go in a straight line, but in a something curve, and he drew some lines on a piece of paper....She had treasured it up, and written in the corner, 'W.F., April 3rd.' Now, that's rather like love, is not it? For Jemima hates useful information just as much as I do, and that's saying a great deal; and yet she had kept this paper, and dated it." (181)

Elizabeth expects to find a "red-hot Valentine," but the "dull-looking" note is all the more special because it is trash. Even a piece of scrap paper is precious to Jemima as long as it has Mr. Farquhar's handwriting on it, and the worthlessness of the paper is more of a testament to Jemima's affection than a red-hot Valentine. After all, anyone might keep something as significant as a red-hot Valentine, but only someone truly head-over-heels in love would keep a piece of trash.

Similarly, the Bensons also place a high value on garbage because of the disinterested sincerity it implies. For them, trash is not only good enough to be a gift; it is also good enough to be the very decor of their houses, which they demonstrate by using dilapidated furnishings that a more materialistic owner would have considered trash. Gaskell writes:

> Then as to the [Benson] house. It was not one where the sitting-rooms are refurnished every two or three years; not now, even (since Ruth came to share their living) a place where, as an article grew shabby or worn, a new one was purchased. The furniture looked poor, and the carpets almost threadbare; but there was such a dainty spirit of cleanliness abroad, such exquisite neatness of repair, and altogether so bright and cheerful a look about the rooms--everything so above-board--no shifts to conceal poverty under flimsy ornament--that many a splendid drawing-room would give less pleasure to those who could see evidences of character in inanimate things. (172)

Gaskell goes out of her way to emphasize the seeming worthlessness of the furniture in the Benson home. The Bensons must keep furniture that is shabby, worn, poor-looking, and threadbare because of their poverty. But the shabbiness of their furniture--shabbiness that would have rendered it trash to someone who didn't have their priorities in order--results in daintiness, neatness, and pleasure for the inhabitants, and the fact that they don't try to conceal that shabbiness is a testament to their honesty. The furnishings are neat and dainty *because* they are worn and poor-looking, not in spite of it. Gaskell sums it up earlier when she writes, "the little daily self-denials,--all endured so cheerfully, and simply, that they had almost ceased to require an effort, and it had become natural to [the Bensons] to think of others before themselves" (111). For Gaskell, renouncing wealth and fashion is a way of embracing kindness to others. The Bensons' practice of keeping worthless things instead of discarding them and replacing them

with finery is the act that demonstrates their disdain for wealth and high regard for love. Gaskell then rewards and endorses their way of life by depicting the resulting shabbiness of their home as having a positive aesthetic influence on the Bensons' belongings.

Later in the story, an anecdote about a carpet helps establish Ruth's virtue. When it appears that a worn-out carpet cannot be kept any longer and must be thrown away, Ruth demonstrates her thrift and therefore her usefulness to the Benson household by the manner in which she finds a replacement. Gaskell tells us that upon the "unmendable wearing-out of the parlour carpet, which there was no spare money to replace,...they cheerfully supplied its want by a large hearthrug that Ruth made of ends of list" (309). Here, after multiple reuses, even the Bensons must at last throw away their old carpet, but Ruth makes up for finally letting this item escape into the next stage of its story of decay by prolonging the life of another type of trash. Instead of throwing away the seemingly worthless scraps of fabric that are too small to be made into a garment, Ruth recycles them, turning them from trash into raw material for another replacement carpet, which she and the Bensons will doubtless continue to use long after others would have thrown it away, thereby "cheerfully" supplying their wants. In other words, the Benson household values trash so highly that when they must finally discard their carpet as trash, they replace it with another one made out of more trash. This, in turn, is a testament to the family's thrift and virtue, which prolonging the life of their trash gives them an opportunity to prove, and it gives Ruth a chance to do some good for the family that helped her.

Another part of Gaskell's justification for the value of trash is to show that it is not always contaminating (unlike the gifts of money and finery that contaminate with ulterior motives or cash value that is out of proportion with intimacy). In fact, in *Ruth*, when trash affects those who come into contact with it, that effect is a salutary one. For example, trash is a

sign of sincerity at Ruth's funeral that has a good moral influence on Sally. When the poor people whom Ruth has cared for so well come to her funeral, we are told that "Each had mounted some rusty piece of crape, or some faded black ribbon" to mourn her, and the sight of this display is so powerful that it causes the Bensons' servant Sally's sorrow to overcome "the little quaint vanity of her heart" (373). The rusty crape and faded ribbons are not just a sign of the mourners' poverty, but also a sign of their purity of heart, and prolonging the life of their trash by wearing it as finery actually makes Sally have a change of heart that makes her a better person. In contrast to Sally, whom Gaskell describes as vain because she is pleased at the prospect of wearing some "very handsome mourning," the poor mourners display mourning ribbons made of materials that Sally would have thrown away. The very fact that the poor mourners save and wear this trash is a testament to their sincerity. They willingly undergo what Sally would have considered an indignity (wearing trash) because they want to show how much they cared for Ruth while she was alive, and they do not care about appearances. Prolonging the lives of these rusty, faded scraps again has the effect of making room for acts of virtue. So *Ruth*'s stories about objects mirror the anti-luxury message conveyed by many it-narratives, even as Gaskell's inverted value system provides a new take.

Another theme *Ruth* shares with many it-narratives is its specific focus on women, exploring the theme of lost virtue and its consequences. Stories about objects bring out the connection between anti-luxury discourse and women's sexuality in a unique way. In "*Ruth*'s Perverse Economics: Women, Hoarding, and Expenditure," Natalka Freeland draws attention to the ways that money and sex are intertwined in Victorian culture. Victorians treated marriage as a financial transaction and priced women based on their most marketable qualities, with virginity being one of those that fetched the highest value. Towards the end, she writes, "Throughout

Ruth, value is defined not by exchange but by its conspicuous absence: this hoarding economy reverses the hypostatization which makes money and women endlessly interchangeable" (215). Freeland argues that Gaskell uses Ruth's various acts of inverting the cash nexus, whether with her money, her labor, or her body, to show the unfairness and moral bankruptcy of a social system that views women's bodies as commodities. Similarly, as Bonnie Blackwell has noted, many it-narratives are thinly-veiled stories about women's sexual promiscuity and prostitution, and they often carry the message that a woman's value depreciates after having multiple sexual liaisons. She says, for example, that *Adventures of an Old Shoe* and *Adventures of a Black Coat*, which feature garments that lose their shape after many wears, are lewd metaphors for how women's bodies are worn out, stretched, and damaged by age and sexual encounters. Freeland's observations work well as companions to Blackwell's in my interpretation of *Ruth* because they show the ways that circulation, both sexual and material, are connected. *Ruth* and it-narratives use stories about objects in similar ways to draw conclusions about fallen women and what they deserved.

History and Adventures of a Lady's Slippers and Shoes (1754), an it-narrative that takes the form of two overheard stories told from the perspective of a pair of shoes and a pair of slippers that are lying under their mistress's bed in a state of disrepair and talking to each other, provides a particularly relevant companion narrative to *Ruth*. *History and Adventures of a Lady's Slippers and Shoes* is essentially an extended enumeration of all the different types of women the author can think of and the pitfalls into which they can fall. The shoes and slippers both facilitate and pass judgement on women's flaws and misdeeds. They tell about vain women who get into shouting matches over the beautiful shoes, a disrespectful woman who beats her husband with a shoe, and a woman who accepts the shoes from an adulterous lover, among

others. Additionally, these narrators also praise women owners who are particularly beautiful or virtuous, such as an innocent girl who barely escapes being assaulted by a scoundrel who offers to fix her shoe as a pretext for lifting her skirt, or the woman who rejects the gift of the shoes from a man who is trying to get her to cheat on her husband with him. In the "Lady's Shoe," the beautifully embroidered shoes are passed from one vain female owner to the next, and each time, the narrator takes note of the frivolous pleasure these women get from the luxurious shoes, with such frivolities being associated with adultery and domestic violence. Similarly, *Ruth* uses stories about objects (and depicts Ruth herself as a circulating object) in order to comment on what is the proper way for women to behave.

These anti-luxury stories, particularly when connected with a luxury enjoyed by women, often serve to teach about proper sexual behavior and to mock and satirize those who have transgressed. Bellamy writes,

> In the absence of an affective resolution and a structurally significant marriage plot, circulation narratives and object tales portray instead the commodification of sexuality. By focusing on all relationships as commercial transactions, because only such transactions come to the attention of the narrator, the novels necessarily present a negative image of contemporary society that accords with the satirical function of the form. (127)

It-narratives connect the exchange of material objects to the exchange of women, thereby highlighting the ways that consumerism and materialism affect society's attitudes about women's sexuality.

Though she is not a narrator, Ruth, like the object narrators of it-narratives, is sullied by her past, but that doesn't mean her story is over. Similarly, like these object narrators, the fact

that her end is predetermined doesn't compel her to take a straight route to that ending, with the result that she is allowed to take many detours into happier territory on the way there. Gaskell's use of the same kinds of narrative techniques that it-narratives use also lends itself to exploring the same kinds of themes this genre explores. She depicts Ruth as a passive possession handed off from one keeper to the next in order to offer critiques of materialism and of women's behavior and also to depict the great things Ruth is capable of in spite of her fall. Additionally, she complements Ruth's passage through the story as a figurative discarded and decaying object with stories about literal trash. In these stories about trash, particularly when contrasted with the stories about finery and monetary gifts, we can see Gaskell's solutions to the problems *Ruth* highlights, namely, that sentimental value is the value that truly matters, that keeping things that would normally be discarded has moral value in and of itself, and that money and wealth can be just as contaminating and harmful (if not more so) as shabby furniture, waste paper, scraps of old fabric, or fallen women. In fact, as Gaskell's spin on the logic of trash shows, these things that seem like trash are actually the most valuable of all because their lack of cash value renders them incorruptible and uncorrupting vehicles for expressing true affection.

The Broken Timepiece

One of the most significant ways Ruth's story bears a resemblance to an it-narrative--specifically, an it-narrative about trash--is the way Gaskell compares her to Mr. Benson's broken watch. Gaskell both reinforces and disputes Ruth's status as trash by showing such close parallels between Ruth and the watch, a piece of trash that becomes precious by virtue of its sentimental value. The symbolism of the stopped watch also emphasizes Ruth's peculiar relationship with time, and the fact that it is broken represents her lost chastity. However, Gaskell uses Mr. Benson's high regard for this watch, as demonstrated by his taking it out of

circulation instead of throwing it away, as a means of showing what her solution to the problem of the fallen woman is: love and delaying her forward movement in time to spare her the inevitable consequences of her sin for as long as possible. By using a stopped watch to stand in for Ruth and to draw attention to time delay as a solution to the fallen woman's plight, Gaskell challenges the harshness of those who held the same views that Faith expressed early on about Ruth--that it would be better for her to die "at once."

Keepsakes are a way of defying time. On the one hand, as Deborah Lutz notes, "A lock of hair from the head of some beloved one is often prized above gold or gems, for it is not a mere purchasable gift, but actually a portion of themselves, present with us when they are absent, surviving while they are mouldering in the grave" (Lutz 135). Keepsakes connect their owners to a past version of their human counterparts that no longer exists, even if the person is still living. The lock of blonde hair of a youthful lover doesn't fade to gray. On the other hand, keepsakes defy time in another way as well. They take objects out of the story of depreciation--out of their progress towards becoming trash. As Thompson notes, trash objects can become durable if they are reclaimed by wealthy patrons who have the power to imbue these objects with permanent value by declaring them art or history. Average human beings can't make trash objects permanently durable to the entire economy, but they can make them durable to themselves. They can take these items out of circulation temporarily and freeze them in time so that their value stops depreciating for as long as the owner treasures the bond these keepsakes represent.

Gaskell makes the clear connection between Ruth, trash, and slowed down time by drawing a symbolic comparison between Ruth and Mr. Benson's broken watch. This choice is significant at many levels. First, it continues the novel's examination of materialism versus

virtue. The use of watches as a metaphor for materialism has often been observed elsewhere in literature, most notably for this paper in the eighteenth-century it-narrative *The Adventures of a Watch!*. In this text, the author remarks in the preface on the purpose and meaning of a watch. He writes:

> It informs the man of business when to rise; the man of pleasure (if he possesses a watch) when to go to bed, though indeed day-light serves that purpose much better….It also instructs the man of taste when to dine; the belle when to dress; the beau when to take his drops; the cit[33] when to go on change; and the man of understanding how to number and make a proper use of those few hours Fate hath allotted. [The watch] appertains...to the pocket, which, when well lined, is generally the most respected. Besides, 'tis no vulgar watch, but a watch of fashion! a gold Repeater, elegantly chased! Listen to it attentively" (2-3).

The significance of a watch in this it-narrative is to move the market forward, to show off fashionable taste, and to bear witness to the extent to which its owner's pocket is well-lined. In other words, the symbolic significance of watches is the opposite of all the values *Ruth* espouses. Therefore, Ruth takes the form of a broken watch: unfashionable, incapable of speeding its wearer from one task to the next, damaged by the past, and devoid of monetary value. Yet, as we know from the novel's economic system, these qualities actually increase the value of an object for virtuous characters by Gaskell's measure, even as they decrease it for the shallower, more materialistic characters. Therefore, the broken watch has measureless value for Mr.

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[33] The *OED* defines a cit as "A citizen (in various senses). Usually used more or less contemptuously, for example to denote a person from the town as opposed to the country, or a tradesman or shopkeeper as distinguished from a gentleman (cf. citizen n. 1b, 1c)."

Benson because it stands in for his grandfather as a nostalgic keepsake--and it has value to the novel because it symbolizes Ruth.

Ruth resembles Mr. Benson's timepiece in another very important way: the watch is trash, and Gaskell assigns that same harsh evaluation to Ruth, but, like the watch, Ruth is not the type of trash that contaminates. Trash is so central to *Ruth* because the virtue of valuing that which others discard provides the justification for valuing Ruth. At one point, Ruth expresses her fear that she might be trash shortly after she has been given a second chance with the Bensons:

> When Ruth had shut her door, she went again to the bed, and looked at her boy till her eyes filled with tears.
>
> "God bless thee, darling! I only ask to be one of His instruments, and not thrown aside as useless--or worse than useless."(155)

Ruth knows that she has a purpose, just as much as a watch has a purpose, but she fears that her fling with Mr. Bellingham has rendered her, not just ineffective, but also contaminating. However, though Gaskell does indeed allow Ruth to be connected to broken keepsakes, she insists that Ruth is not a contaminant, as her presence only improves the girls under her care.

Nevertheless, when Ruth's past finally comes to light, her town and friends do not understand that she is not a contaminant, and both she and the Bensons are ejected (like trash) from the community they were once a part of. The next few chapters describe them as looking in on the world of their former friends from the outside. When they hear about Jemima's engagement, Gaskell tells us that it "seemed like a glimpse into a world from which they were shut out" (313). Ruth and the Bensons are shunted outside the bounds of their community when Ruth's past seems to pose a threat of pollution to the pure girls in her charge, and the Bensons

are themselves considered to be contaminated by their proximity to her. However, Gaskell insists that Ruth's fall has not made her a contaminant--just broken, and therefore redeemable because nostalgia and pity can transform trash into a keepsake.

Therefore, in spite of the negative consequences they have to endure, the Bensons, who understand Ruth's true value, still refuse to throw Ruth away. Even though her community has forcibly moved her to the next stage of her decay as decreed by that inescapable fallen woman narrative (social ostracism and expulsion), the Bensons' love freezes her where she is. At this point, Ruth can't move forward in time, and she also can't move forward in the process of her decay as a fallen woman. Even after Ruth's past with Mr. Bellingham/Donne is revealed and Ruth can no longer serve her purpose and can no longer be of use to them, and even when the Bradshaws and the townspeople attempt to sweep her into the dustbin, the Bensons arrest her progress. They take her out of circulation altogether and treasure her as a keepsake. In a conversation with Jemima, Gaskell reveals how Ruth's value has nothing to do with the cash she does or doesn't bring in:

> "Mr. and Miss Benson won't hear of my going away," said Ruth, sadly.
>
> "They are quite right."
>
> "But I am earning nothing. I cannot get any employment. I am only a burden and an expense."
>
> "Are you not also a pleasure?" (417-8)

The power of Gaskell's story--and also the power of the trash keepsake--is that it is based on a value independent from cash value, simultaneously independent from and more powerful than money. The value of trash keepsakes cannot be quantified, and because of this, their worth exceeds that of even the most valuable treasures from the bank vault.

Gaskell's comparison between Ruth and the watch tries to establish two seemingly contradictory evaluations of Ruth's value. On the one hand, the broken watch is more precious than any finery because of its sentimental value, but on the other hand, Gaskell still insists that brokenness is a flaw. One way she reinforces what brokenness means for Ruth is to contrast her with a whole and working watch. Shortly after she meets the Bensons, earlier in the novel, Ruth must get rid of an expensive working watch--a beautiful piece of finery given to her by Mr. Bellingham. When Mr. Bellingham abandons her, she sells the watch so that she doesn't have to accept Mrs. Bellingham's fifty pounds. When Ruth gives it away, Gaskell writes: "'That is good of her,' said Miss Benson, her sense of justice satisfied; and, remembering the way in which Ruth had spoken of the watch, she felt what a sacrifice it must have been to resolve to part with it" (108). Separating from this new beautiful watch is Ruth's way of renouncing once and for all her precious yet unchaste connection with the giver. But also, it's Gaskell's way of 1) asserting that Bellingham's gift of a precious valuable thing isn't the right metaphor for Ruth, 2) punishing Ruth for her mistake by requiring her to make a painful sacrifice in order for "justice" to be "satisfied," and 3) establishing Ruth's peculiar relationship with time. Instead of the working fashionable watch, the broken watch is the watch that represents Ruth. It is a representation of her lost chastity, the thing about her that made her and women like her seem like trash to a broad swath of the Victorian public. Gaskell doesn't object to this designation. She doesn't mind conceding that Ruth is in an important sense broken by her fling with Mr. Bellingham. Thus, the beautiful working watch that Mr. Bellingham gave her is not only a connection with past immorality, but also dishonest by the logic of the novel. Yet the broken watch that more closely matches her is more precious than the fine one because its trash status neutralizes its potential to be a bribe and represents pure disinterested affection untainted by cash value. By contrast, Mr.

Bellingham's watch, though it is beautiful and functional by every outward measure, is a gift he lavishes on Ruth because she is his mistress; like his other gifts of finery, it is basically a bribe.

Gaskell establishes the true value of the watch in part by showing how characters who "don't get it" disapprove of it. For example, Mr. Bradshaw expresses his frustration that Mr. Benson keeps the watch instead of throwing it away:

> "I never knew his watch to be right in all my life--it was always too fast or too slow; it must have been a daily discomfort to him. It ought to have been. Depend upon it, his money matters are just in the same irregular state; no accounts kept, I'll be bound."
>
> "I don't see that that follows," said Mr. Farquhar, half amused. "That watch of his is a very curious one--belonged to his father and grandfather, I don't know how far back."
>
> "And the sentimental feelings which he is guided by prompt him to keep it, to the inconvenience of himself and every one else." (324)

The watch, a broken timepiece, is used here by Mr. Bradshaw as evidence of Mr. Benson's misguided sentimentality. His habit of keeping broken things makes him seem like a fool to Mr. Bradshaw, who values money so highly. Therefore, Mr. Bradshaw notes that since Mr. Benson believes a piece of trash to be precious, his economic priorities must be faulty, and therefore, Mr. Bradshaw expects Mr. Benson's money management to be faulty as well. Treasuring the broken watch is evidence that Mr. Benson doesn't have an affinity for economics as Mr. Bradshaw knows it, that not only is Mr. Benson overly sentimental, but he also fundamentally doesn't understand or value money. It is no coincidence then that these same sentimental feelings prompt Mr. Benson to welcome Ruth into his household. By valuing Ruth, Mr. Benson again flies in the face of money-centered value systems, value systems that Gaskell asserts are also

inextricably connected to the social forces that devalue women who have sex outside of marriage. *Ruth*'s stance on the value of trash keepsakes moves beyond individual items with personal value. Therefore, Gaskell advocates for Ruth, not just by having Mr. Benson value her as he values a keepsake that reminds him of his father, but also by connecting her specifically to a broken watch and its frozen relationship with time.

Like a broken timepiece, Ruth experiences time in an unusual way, almost as if she is conscious of Gaskell's narrative intervention on her behalf. She seems unable to move forward. Ruth thinks to herself:

> She herself did not feel changed. She felt just as faulty--as far from being what she wanted to be, as ever. She best knew how many of her good actions were incomplete, and marred with evil. She did not feel much changed from the earliest Ruth she could remember. Everything seemed to change but herself. Mr. and Miss Benson grew old, and Sally grew deaf, and Leonard was shooting up, and Jemima was a mother. She and the distant hills that she saw from her chamber window, seemed the only things which were the same as when she first came to Eccleston. (321)

In this image, Ruth feels that she is "faulty" because she can't move forward in time. She watches others change around her, but stays still in time herself. In fact, Gaskell tells us that Ruth experiences all time like the present. Mr. Benson says of her, "It is part of her character--part perhaps of that which made her what she was--that she never looks forward, and seldom back. The present is enough for her." This way of living in time characterizes the way she experiences motherhood as well. With every stage of her son's development, Gaskell tells us that "Ruth mourned a little over the vanished babyhood, when she was all in all, and over the childhood, whose petals had fallen away; it seemed as though two of her children were gone--the

one an infant, the other a bright thoughtless darling; and she wished that they could have remained quick in her memory forever, instead of being absorbed in loving pride for the present boy" (257). Because Ruth herself does not change, she feels every stage of her son's growth as a loss and wishes she could experience all of those stages together at the same time instead of losing any of them. Like a stopped watch, Ruth is stopped in time. In Gaskell's formulation, being stopped in time means not progressing forward in a timeline that leads to the rubbish heap, and therefore, being stopped in time means she is still capable of doing good during this long pause. Ruth's chastity is broken, and this makes her trash. Her broken time is what saves her.

Conclusion

So, what, ultimately, does Gaskell add to the conversation surrounding fallen women? *Ruth* follows the same basic story as a fallen woman narrative following the logic of trash, and it doesn't challenge those stages or where the heroine ultimately ends up. Yet, by performing the minor miracle of adding time to Ruth's story, Gaskell gives Ruth room to move from one caretaker to the next and to teeter on the brink of the rubbish heap without quite falling in (like an object in an it-narrative). Gaskell allows Ruth to have a fuller experience of life and mitigates the severity of the punishment society brings on her as a result of her affair with Mr. Bellingham.

However, though Gaskell evidently wishes Ruth to have more time and a better quality of life, she disapproves of the Bensons' means of giving this to her, i.e., by passing her off as a widow. Gaskell writes:

> Ah, tempter! Unconscious tempter! Here was a way of evading the trials for the poor little unborn child, of which Mr. Benson had never thought. It was the decision--the pivot, on which the fate of years moved; and he turned it the wrong way. But it was not for his own sake. For himself, he was brave enough to tell the truth; for the little helpless

> baby, about to enter a cruel, biting world, he was tempted to evade the difficulty. He forgot what he had just said, of the discipline and the penance to the mother consisting in strengthening her child to meet, trustfully and bravely, the consequences of her own weakness. (102)

So Gaskell comes across as deeply conflicted about the moral implications of her stance. The decision she designates as "the wrong way" is also the very decision that gives Ruth the safety and stability to raise her son in a way that will strengthen him to meet the consequences of being an illegitimate child. Additionally, "the wrong way" is a direction Mr. Benson takes out of compassion and out of desire to spare an innocent person from being punished for something that was not his fault. Yet, despite all her equivocations, Gaskell still declares that allowing Ruth to pass as an unfallen woman is "the wrong way." Therefore, turning the "the right way" is what happens when Ruth's secret finally comes out. In other words, for Ruth to live honestly, in Gaskell's formulation, her sexual history has to be general knowledge. After all, how else could she avoid living as an unfallen woman, since Gaskell goes to great lengths to show that her character is no different from (and often is superior to) that of her more chaste peers?

However, though, in keeping with the logic of trash, Gaskell does ultimately bring down the gavel in condemnation of the marginalized person she has been portraying as trash, she also levels a critique at society. She heavily implies without overtly stating that the Bensons wouldn't have had to lie about Ruth if townspeople like the Bradshaws could just have looked past her status as a single mother to see the virtuousness and innocence that Gaskell insists are still very much a part of her disposition. In other words, Gaskell believes Ruth should not live dishonestly, but also, that the revelation of her past should not cause the shocked gasps that it does. Jaffe writes that "In addition to being concerned with the fate of fallen women, *Ruth*

expresses Gaskell's general interest in individual sympathy as a solution to divisive social problems," and this rings true with Gaskell's focus on the Bensons' individual acts of kindness towards Ruth as the solution to her problem ("*Cranford* and *Ruth*" 51). However, the larger social critique remains: *Ruth* demonstrates that in order to show fallen women the mercy they deserve, society must first be willing to look past their sexual histories to see who they really are as human beings.

Gaskell's message is modestly revolutionary, but she never quite reaches the point of saying that Ruth is not trash. Gaskell, at the end of the day, views Ruth's lost chastity as an irreparable flaw. Gaskell writes that Mr. Benson takes Ruth to church intending "carefully to eschew everything which she might feel as an allusion to her case" (129). But, quoting Psalm 51 (the psalm that is said to be David's prayer of repentance after he commits adultery with Bathsheba), Gaskell counters, "But where is the chapter which does not contain something which a broken and contrite spirit may not apply to itself?"[34] and subsequently, Ruth breaks down in despair in the middle of the service out of contrition for her sin. In response, Gaskell tells us that "Miss Benson...loved Ruth the better for this self-abandonment" (129). For Gaskell, another important part of Ruth's value as a trash keepsake is that she knows herself to be broken, and she abandons herself. Ruth *knows* she is trash, and this is part of what the Bensons find so attractive and redemptive about her. Therefore, with this self-discarding, Ruth accepts what will be her ultimate fate (dying young for the sake of an unworthy lover), and despite temporarily assuming

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[34]I find this psalm interesting from a trash point of view because the psalmist is essentially begging God not to discard his broken and unclean heart as trash, but instead to repurpose it and clean it. Abridged version for context:
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence….
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (Ps. 51:10-11a, 17)

the guise of Mrs. Denbigh, she never even attempts to forget her past or remarry--not even when Mr. Farquhar seems to be more attracted to her than he is to Mimie, and not even when Mr. Bellingham, her first love, finally proposes. Despite its hopeful tone, and despite Gaskell's desire to do the best for her heroine, *Ruth* was never going to have a classic happy marriage plot ending. It was always a trash story, headed in one downward direction, however much Gaskell may have allowed her heroine to tarry along the way. So, Gaskell's final word on the fallen woman is "Throw her away--but not yet."

As for trash, Gaskell's verdict is that it is worth keeping. Unlike Dickens, she doesn't write about the type of trash that could pollute a river or clutter a street. In fact, her trash actually *can't* pollute because she refuses to throw it away. Gaskell views trash as something to be salvaged, and as the leftover traces of precious things that have taken place and precious people who are gone. Meanwhile, by contrasting trash with finery, she asserts that subsisting on trash is a superior way of life to a life of constantly replacing the shabby with the new. It was common for Victorian housewives to use old paper and candle ends and other leftovers to make decorations as a type of handicraft.[35] Gaskell lends new significance to this practice. A world filled with trash, she envisions, is a world without bribes, a world where you never have to fully say good-bye to the things and people who are gone. By contrast, a pristine and fashionable world is one that has been purchased at the cost of discarding the things that attach you to your past and by wasting things that still had the potential to do good in the world.

Interestingly, Gaskell actually saves the trash for longer than she saves Ruth. For example, rather than throwing away Ruth's hair after shearing it off at their initial meeting, Gaskell tells us that "Sally had carried away the beautiful curls, and she could not find it in her

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[35] See Talia Schaffer's *Novel Craft* for a more detailed account of Victorian handicraft in Gaskell's oeuvre.

heart to throw such lovely chestnut tresses away, so she folded them up carefully in paper, and placed them in a safe corner of her drawer," and that's the last we hear of them (122). Gaskell ultimately discards Ruth by killing her, but she won't do the same with her hair. Similarly, Mr. Benson never discards the broken watch, Mimie never throws away Mr. Farquhar's old paper, and the story of the old newspaper stops after the Bensons agree to receive it as a gift. The only item of trash that is ever discarded--the old rug--is immediately replaced, not with a new one, but with a rug made of yet more trash. Gaskell clings to trash, performing her narrative magic of adding time to it in order to prolong its life and stave off its decay. Gaskell won't let her characters live forever, but she can't bear to discard the things that evoke their memories.

At the end of the day, Gaskell is a bit of a hoarder. Trash is defined by the fact that it must be thrown away, so by depicting her most virtuous characters as holding onto it indefinitely, there is a certain amount of irrationality which this book is content to indulge without really offering much justification. After all, eventually that old newspaper *will* turn yellow and fall apart, a reality Gaskell never discusses. But though her postponement of that end is a testament to the extent to which she dreads it, Gaskell isn't here to dwell on the end of the story of trash. After all, that type of hastiness is what her book asserts created such unfair conditions for the fallen woman. Instead, Gaskell invites us to partake of Ruth's timelessness and meditate with her on what good things can be made of trash in the present moment.

CHAPTER 3

GOTHIC TRASH IN H. RIDER HAGGARD'S *SHE*

Introduction: Is a Corpse Worse Than a Ghost?

Towards the beginning of H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887), a curious incident takes place wherein a servant discovers the body of Mr. Vincey, the father of one of the novel's protagonists. Holly, our narrator, tells the servant that he looks as though he has seen a ghost, to which the servant replies, "Yes, sir, and so I have...leastways I've seen a corpse, which is worse" (23). In this moment, the novel doesn't offer any justification for the servant's statement, and it isn't quite as self-explanatory as the servant seems to assume. After all, every one of us will become a corpse one day. In fact, there is arguably no other quality about us that we are guaranteed to share with every other human being aside from this common fate, so in this sense there is nothing more familiar and unexceptional than a corpse. Why, then, would a corpse be worse than something as sensational and out of the ordinary as a ghost?

This anecdote is a good example of one of the overarching problems that this chapter will argue *She* explores, namely, the problem of what it means for a corpse to be trash in Victorian Gothic fiction. This chapter analyzes two texts together, *She* and Peter Lund Simmonds's *Waste Products and Undeveloped Substances* (1862, 1873). I argue that these authors use Gothic themes and narrative techniques to convey their messages about what it means for the human body to be trash and for that trash body to be recycled. Additionally, I argue that Simmonds's text, a sanitation text and not a novel, unintentionally highlights the Gothic things about trash, while Haggard writes about those things explicitly.

To understand what it means to write about human body trash and recycling in Gothic novels, it's important to establish what is meant by the term Gothic. The Gothic, as I use the

term in this chapter, refers to stories that 1) have a recognizably Gothic aesthetic, often featuring such familiar tropes as Egyptomania, undead beings, femmes fatale, large sprawling labyrinthine buildings, and lavishly depicted violence drawn in a sensational style; 2) reveal troubling secrets about the readers and their society; and 3) take all those secrets out in the open, but then don't really put them back to rest, instead allowing them to cause the reader an unease that lingers.[36] Gothic trash, then, is trash that has a gothic aesthetic, displays society's troubling secrets, and doesn't disappear quietly, instead lingering on to haunt us. In the texts I explore, Gothic trash takes the form of the mummified corpses of an ancient land because images of skulls, bones, death, and ancient Egypt are part of the Gothic aesthetic. Furthermore, the fact that corpses are a form of trash—specifically a type of waste that Victorians reused, repurposed, preserved, and disposed of—reveals troubling secrets about the strange and unseemly things for which the Victorians used the dead, about the grotesque future that awaits all human beings, and about the nature of recycling waste itself. Lastly, Gothic trash lingers on after it has revealed its secrets.

In this chapter, I establish that the trash in *She* has a Gothic aesthetic, but, more importantly, I focus on which particular fears Haggard uses these conventions to confront, and, by comparing *She* to a few important passages in *Waste Products and Undeveloped Substances*, I identify how the remains of the dead were Gothic trash to real-life Victorians as well as to the characters in Haggard's novel. For Simmonds, trash lingers on with what seems to be an unintentional Gothic resonance, by means of the writer's optimistic vision of recycling wherein

[36] My definition is informed by Jerrold Hogle's description in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* of the purpose of the Gothic: "What better symbolic mechanism can there be, multidirectional as Gothic figures are, for abjecting betwixt and between, anomalous conditions where opposed positions of many kinds keep blurring into each other and threatening us with the dissolution of our normal cultural foundations for the identities we claim to possess? The Gothic...allows us…to define ourselves against these uncanny abjections, while also feeling attracted to them, all of this in a kind of cultural activity that as time passes can keep inventively changing its ghosts of counterfeits to address changing psychological and cultural longings and fears" (16-17).

trash continues to give and give, long after it has been thrown away, an optimistic vision that I will demonstrate is actually a site of grotesque horror. By contrast, in *She*, Haggard explicitly highlights the Gothic characteristics of trash to make the point that some English waste management practices are as strange and horrible as those of the Amahagger and to mull over the question of what happens to us after we die. Discovering the overlaps between an unintentionally Gothic nonfiction text and an intentionally Gothic novel highlights Victorian fears and hopes for recycling as well as their fears and hopes about making use of the dead.

In *She*, Haggard depicts for us an African tribe of cannibals called the Amahagger who live in and on the mortal remains of an ancient civilization called Kôr while under the rule of a white sorceress queen named Ayesha. This conjunction of two civilizations allows him to use this Gothic story to explore two sets of related fears: the fear of lingering after death, and the fear of the contaminating power of recycled trash. The fear of lingering he explores by representing Holly's meditations on the morbid spectacle of the embalmed Kôr people. While fretting about their fate and imagining himself in their shoes, Holly (and the reader) question just how much of what we used to be in life—our essence—lingers on in our bodily remains after we've died, and to what degree that essence is affected by or even conscious of what happens to the physical body. Conversely, the depictions of the Amahagger grotesquely reusing human bodies in *She* allow Haggard to explore a second set of Victorian fears about waste management itself that runs parallel to Holly's fears about his essence lingering on after his death. Namely, by depicting the Amahagger's reuse of corpses as grotesque and horrible, *She* articulates the fear that some essence of what trash used to be before it was discarded lingers in recycled things, just as Holly fears that some essence of a human being lingers after they die. This fear is based on the logic that if recycling could truly and completely turn one thing into another, there would be no shame

in reusing anything, no matter how weird. It would be fine to reuse a corpse if its corpseness were completely gone after you put it to use; it is only its status as a former corpse (a former human being) that makes it horrible. In other words, though a corpse can be turned into something else, the fact that it used to be a human always remains, continuing to makes it grotesque, thus indicating that some shadow of what it used to be lingers on. Because of this, Haggard shows that living people who reuse trash are unwittingly being contaminated by their use of recycled goods because of that lingering essence of trash, which Haggard depicts by showing the Amahagger to have degenerated over time while living in the remains of their ancestors' waste.

Having raised the Victorian fears I have just mentioned by depicting trash with a Gothic aesthetic, Haggard then, in true Gothic fashion, offers an uneasy resolution that doesn't lay those fears back to rest. First, he borrows a common trope from Victorian sanitary texts of transforming women into trash to neutralize trash's threat of contamination, which can be seen in Ayesha's (the white sorceress queen of the Amahagger) death scene. Ayesha's death and transformation facilitate the male characters' escape and tie up the plot's central conflict to bring the story to a close. However, rather than allowing this strategy to alleviate his readers' fears, Haggard turns it into a primal trauma and allows Gothic trash to follow his protagonists back to England. Familiar Gothic elements such as Egyptomania[37] and menacing portrayals of female sexuality connect *Waste Products* and *She* to the larger tradition of the Gothic, and, like the most effective Gothic stories, these texts also haunt their readers by confronting them with unbearable truths: specifically, the horrifying reality that the categories of Trash and Human do indeed have

[37] The term "Egyptomania" refers to the obsession many in the West felt and still feel for Ancient Egypt. In Victorian Britain, this resulted in British colonists and tourists stealing items of archaeological significance from Egypt. Many of these are housed in the British Museum to this day. See Ronald Fritze's *Egyptomania: a History of Fascination, Obsession, and Fantasy* for a helpful overview of the topic.

some overlap beyond the purely figurative. Together, these two texts use the conventions of the Gothic to explore the phenomenon of the human body being treated like trash.

My preceding chapters have highlighted the ways that trash does not clearly cross over into the rubbish heap and remain cooperatively in its final resting place, the ways it can circulate through the streets contaminating what it touches and calling for wrongs to be righted, the ways it can be resurrected for reuse or linger where it does not belong. Additionally, I have pointed out that trash, in its inexorable progress toward decay, brings us face to face with our own mortality. In these different capacities, trash can be a metaphor for technology and progress run amok as well as for a fear of degeneration. In these ways, trash is undead, and it haunts us, bringing to us the same warnings and messages that the unquiet dead have always brought to the living in fiction. As I have been discussing in this dissertation, Victorians often thought of trash as a metaphor for the human body and as a metaphor for people whom they despised or marginalized, and they used this metaphorical power to highlight the ways that human bodies transform—when they are discarded from a living state to a dead one, from a respectable state to a tainted one, or, alternatively, when they are recycled and repurposed into a better (if never quite perfect) condition. For example, in my first chapter I show that Dickens transforms human bodies into trash in order to teach moral lessons in *Our Mutual Friend*, and in my second chapter I show that Gaskell traces the story of Ruth's life and death as the story of trash in *Ruth*. These authors draw metaphorical parallels between the life and death of human beings and the life and death of trash, but *She* comes face to face with the notion that, at the very end of everything, there is no need for a metaphor because human bodies literally become trash after death. Trash is a Gothic figure in Victorian culture, and *She* is one of its most compelling portraits.

So, with these things in mind, we can see why a corpse is worse than a ghost: a ghost is separate from the dead body and all the indignities to which the twin forces of physical decay and thrifty human recyclers will subject it when it becomes trash. A ghost is not trash, nor can it be because it has no material form. But a corpse is trash, and the servant is horrified to discover one because it serves as a reminder that the same fate lies in wait for him too.

Contamination, Reuse, and Lingering after Death

She is widely regarded as a foundational Gothic text that has inspired many later culturally important works of adventure fiction, from *Heart of Darkness* to *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusad*e. Indeed, *She* was uniquely appealing to its Victorian readers, selling more than 30,000 copies in its first few months, garnering a great deal of praise for Haggard, and further demonstrating its cultural prevalence by inspiring several parodies (Showalter 87). Scholars largely agree that in *She* Haggard thinks through common Victorian hangups about mortality, sexuality, women, and indigenous people in the colonies. For example, Gregory Chwala and Kelly Hurley explore how the Gothic renderings of sexuality in *She* facilitate Haggard's exploration of the changeable nature and fragility of the human body. Richard Pearson analyzes a different facet of the sex/death theme, adding "that Haggard was engaged in a project to restructure the gothic around the new discipline of archaeology....Moreover, Haggard's texts emphasize a linking of sexual desire and death, a gothic desire, which is implicated in the processes of exhumation and 'resurrection' characteristic of late-Victorian archaeology" (218-219). Others have shown that *She* is about instilling fear of the Other, whether that be so-called "savages" from Africa, or the figure of the New Woman who was coming to prevalence during this period.[38] Indeed, Stephen Tabachnik critiques this quality in *She*, stating rather dismissively

[38] See Showalter, McClintock, Ardis, Auerbach, and Murphy.

that the novel locates “the source of irrationality and perversity” “conveniently and reassuringly in She or in mysterious natives,” in contrast to “the best Gothic horror stories,” which locate that perversity “squarely in us” to communicate the message that “we bear watching, not a sinister ‘them’” (198-199). However, though *She* is most definitely about the Other and the things that make those who are different from us terrifying, I argue that Haggard’s ultimate goal in depicting women and “savages” in their most sensational and threatening forms is not to locate evil comfortably far away in people whom he believed were fundamentally alien and inferior, but rather to terrify readers with the prospect that they are not as different from these characters as they might like to think. The appeal to common Victorian prejudices only makes the comparison more horrifying. The practices that Victorians share with their sinister counterparts in *She* are waste management practices.

Trash, for Victorians, was a site of conflicting fear and promise. On the one hand, Victorians were enamored of the industrial progress of which their increasing volume of trash was evidence, and they were excited about the potential recycling had for generating wealth. On the other hand, they were also aware of the horrible side of waste management: they were very vocal about the sanitary nuisances that accumulating trash caused, and, additionally, as I will show later, they indulged in some appalling waste management practices themselves. This combination of promise for the future that masks terrible secrets and hidden costs should be a familiar one to readers of Gothic mad scientist fiction, in which it is a commonplace for scientists such as Victor Frankenstein or Dr. Jekyll to devise some amazing scientific innovation with wild promise for the future, only to discover the horrible unintended consequences that are the price of their explorations into the unknown. These horrible consequences involve terrifying specters—monsters and living corpses—but also point to real-life problems that had some

nightmarish aspect to them and usually appealed to their audience's prejudices. For example, *Frankenstein* (1818) expresses its era's fears about eerie real-life advances in technology such as galvanism, while *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) is commonly held to provide a Gothic spin on recent cases of multiple personality disorder, an illness that continues to attract the attentions of Gothic fiction writers to this day (Luckhurst xiv-xxiii). At the same time, both of these stories are supercharged by tapping into Victorians' efforts to distance themselves from people whom they deemed to be less desirable than themselves.

In the same fashion as these other Gothic novels, *She* depicts Victorian waste management as a discovery with unforeseen consequences. For Victorians, the wild promise uncovered by recent technological innovations in waste management was unlimited wealth and total independence from foreign imports. Haggard makes these technological innovations Gothic by highlighting some real-life recycling methods Victorians used that repurposed the bodies of the dead in shocking ways. Additionally, like other Victorian Gothic fiction, Haggard's story catalyzes the horrors it describes by connecting them to his readers' racism and classicism, specifically by evoking the idea that poor sanitation could cause English people to degenerate.

Degeneration was an increasingly prominent concern towards the end of the nineteenth century, and it is important to understand this idea in its context before discussing how Haggard employs this theme in *She*. In *Faces of Degeneration*, Daniel Pick provides a definition of the concept as articulated by zoologist Edwin Ray Lankester, who asserted that degeneration is "a gradual change of the structure in which the organism becomes adapted to less varied and less complex conditions of life" (216).[39] The theory was that a diverse environment would promote

[39] This definition comes from Lankester's "Degeneration: a Chapter in Darwinism" (1880), which is about degeneration as it takes place among animals. For more on degeneration in humans, see Henry Maudsley (1855), who gives more detailed information on the mechanisms by which he believed outside factors could affect fetuses.

the growth of a species by requiring it to rise to the challenge of ever-increasing complexity; however, when a species' environment is too uniform, the species adapts to that less complex environment by becoming less fit—i.e. degenerating. A wide variety of (sometimes contradictory) factors were thought to facilitate degeneration in the 1880s when Haggard was writing *She*. On the one hand, Stephen Arata describes in *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* a commonly held perspective during the Victorian period that degeneration was a moral problem, the result of "an unhealthy excess of civilized refinement," and that "degeneration was simply another word for evolution under civilized conditions" as well as "the dark side of progress": some Victorians "imagine[d] decay not as the reversal of progress but as its culmination" (91). So, in this case, the less complex environment was one that had become too easy as the population's increasing quality of life reduced stimulating agents such as hunger and exposure to the elements, which caused suffering, but also built character. From this perspective, degeneration was caused by enhanced standards of living and the increasing easiness of life. It was a disease of overindulgence and loss of traditional values.

On the other hand, Pick points out that crowded insanitary conditions were also thought to cause degeneration, and Hurley adds that "Degeneration theory posited that certain physical and nervous disorders, spawned by modern industrial and urban life, could be both spread and inherited by social contact, and might even be passed down to offspring in aggravated form. Industrial toxins, drug and alcohol abuse, and unsanitary urban conditions initiated this downward spiral, as did newfangled technologies like railway travel and telegraph, which increased the pace of modern life and rendered its subjects fatigued and hysterical" (Pick 200, Hurley 196). From this perspective, it was actually the opposite of overindulgence that caused degeneration: extreme poverty and illnesses caused by a more urbanized way of life were the

culprits, and they reduced the complexity of a species' environment by excluding the comfort and cleanliness that human beings need to thrive.

There is a general consensus among scholars that these Victorian fears were a response to the massive social changes that were taking place in the nineteenth century. For example, Pick writes "that the socio-biological theory of degeneration emerged in and beyond the 1880s most powerfully as a counter-theory to mass-democracy and socialism" and that "a new widely shared agenda of questions about the body, the city and degeneration emerged, brought about in a complex late-nineteenth-century interaction of scientific theories and political perceptions" (218, 200). Pick's work highlights how social changes that called into question traditional values raised a kind of moral panic that was expressed in Victorian fears that the English race was deteriorating over time. In other words, as scientific breakthroughs, advancing industrialization, and changing social mores altered the way people in Western society lived and thought, many began to doubt that humanity was proceeding in the cultural direction that it ought to be headed, and, from a more evolutionary perspective, doubted that natural selection was promoting the improvement of the human species under the conditions of late nineteenth-century Western life.[40]

Haggard's *She* is preoccupied with the theme of degeneration, and for Haggard, like the Victorian sanitary reformers, this degeneration is connected to sanitation. *She* prominently features two African civilizations: the ancient and long-gone civilization of Kôr and the savage Amahagger. When Holly and his friends visit this strange land, Holly invites the readers to envision Kôr as a parallel to the British empire at its height, while Kôr's lackluster descendants,

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[40] See also Patricia Murphy for a contrasting perspective in *She* about how Victorians viewed the trajectory of Christian history as a corrective to the doubts generated by scientific progress.

the Amahagger, are a picture of what Britain's future might hold. Many have taken note of the theme of degeneration that is present in *She*. For example, as Arata has noted, "The novel encourages us to see Great Britain's fate presaged in the history of Kor [sic], the once great, now annihilated race whose ruins house the savage Amahagger" (101).[41] Arata believes that the first supposed cause of degeneration that I mentioned—moral failings as a result of social and political changes—is the correct description of Haggard's view. However, I argue that *She* also depicts degeneration in the second sense, as a sanitary problem. Specifically, Haggard shows that living in such close proximity to Gothic trash, in the form of the corpses of Kôr, has caused Amahagger society to degenerate.

Fear of degeneration provided a powerful incentive to improve Britain's sanitary condition in the nineteenth century, an incentive that was rooted in racism and classism. In *Raw Material* Erin O'Connor describes some of the racist mythology of Victorian sanitation by writing about nineteenth-century interpretations of the symptoms of cholera. She observes that because cholera caused its victims to shrivel up and become darker in color with dehydration, British people during the cholera epidemics in the 1830s and 1850s viewed that transformation as a sign that cholera could change the race of white people to become darker, and since cholera originated in India, they concluded the disease was changing white British people to be more like darker-skinned Indian people, whom they assumed had already been victims of degeneration (21-22).

[41] See also Tim Murray, who writes that the type of degeneration Haggard feared had to do with the fact that "In Haggard's view England was great because it had its best and brightest living outside, unable to stomach the moral lassitude and greed that he felt was on the rise at home. These were the English engaged in imperial service. None the less the seeds of collapse had been sown and the process of decline had already begun in England" (Murray 182).

In addition to its racist roots, the drive to improve sanitation appealed to Victorian classism as well. It took many years to learn the true cause of cholera (infected fecal matter contaminating drinking water), but Victorians linked the disease with poor sanitation early on,[42] leading them to conclude that living in the midst of waste and filth could cause people to degenerate. Though there was a real need to improve sanitation in order to mitigate the cholera outbreaks, sanitary reformers mixed this concern for sanitation with a classist belief that poor sanitation could degenerate human beings to the level of animals, thereby claiming that poor people who had to live in insanitary conditions were subhuman. For example, Edwin Chadwick says of the rag pickers, whom he has just described in lurid detail as living in filth: "I have not observed that these creatures were savage, but they were thoroughly debased. Often hardly human in appearance, they had neither human tastes nor sympathies, nor even human sensations, for they revelled in the filth which is grateful to dogs, and other lower animals, and which to our apprehension is redolent only of nausea and abomination" (164-165). Chadwick believed that rag pickers were subhuman because they lived in filthy conditions, and he uses their situation as evidence for his widely read sanitary report's thesis that a board of health needed to be established to keep Britain healthy. For Chadwick and others like him, poor sanitation caused these individuals' animal-like state, and improving Britain's sanitation was the solution. So the theory of degeneration was rooted in racist and classist assumptions that darker-skinned people and poor people were less evolutionarily fit than white upper-class people, and these assumptions

[42] In "The Public's View of Public Health in Mid-Victorian Britain," Sigsworth and Worboys record that in the early days of sanitation reform, sanitation brigades were sent to areas that had outbreaks of cholera to wash the streets and houses. These efforts were intended to alleviate cholera by making things cleaner, but they often made the outbreaks worse because they sluiced contaminated water all over the neighborhoods.

filled many Victorians with the fear that under circumstances of poor sanitation and widespread epidemic they might transform into these groups whom they regarded with contempt.

The relationship between sanitation and degeneration is prominently featured in Victorian fiction, as Eileen Cleere has described in *The Sanitary Arts*. Cleere takes note of the relationships between dirt and degeneracy and cleanliness and virtue in Victorian fiction, in particular that Victorian "sanitary fictions repeatedly sought to liberate Victorian aesthetics from the putrescence of the picturesque" by tidying up pretty but moldy and harmfully damp villages, airing out dusty decorations, and eschewing the tendency to idealize picturesque poor people. She sums up what she believes the ideals and the aesthetics of Victorian sanitation were: in the words of Ruskin, "to get your country clean and your people lovely" (Ruskin, qtd in Cleere 54). Cleaning up the country would clean up the people, and Cleere shows that Ruskin's beliefs about this subject became foundational assumptions for the racist, classist, and ableist eugenics movement, which sought to solve what eugenicists believed to be the problem of degeneration by eliminating populations they deemed undesirable from the gene pool.

Haggard's *She* clearly participates in these conversations about degeneration and sanitation. Cleere writes about what she terms "sanitary narratives," or stories that tell the story of sanitation proving to be the solution to the plot's main conflict. *She* is a sanitary narrative in the sense that poor sanitation is one of its main conflicts, but unlike the narratives Cleere describes, *She* is a tale of sanitation Gothic horror, telling a tale of a sanitary disaster in the form of a society swamped in corpses, which the Amahagger treat as trash to be recycled. In fact, they base their entire lives and culture upon reusing corpses and their accoutrements. They use grave clothes to make their everyday garments, they sleep in tombs, they eat off of embalming tables,

they use corpses for fuel, and they practice cannibalism.[43] This society is characterized by being the complete opposite of the sanitary ideals that Cleere shows sanitation reformers espoused. The Amahaggers' society overflows with the leftovers of the dead, and, following the sanitary logic, which dictated that the moral character of a society would degenerate if exposed to poor sanitation, the Amahagger themselves, whom Haggard describes as possessing "evil countenances," exhibit the kind of unvirtuous behavior to which Victorians most feared insanitary people would succumb: the Amahagger are violent, sullen, oversexed, and resentful of authority, as is most evident when they disobey their monarch's orders by attempting to murder and eat a member of the protagonists' traveling party when Job refuses the advances of one of the Amahagger women (76, Ch. 8).

A skeptic might counter that the conditions the Amahagger live in, however morbid they might be, are not actually insanitary. Because of the Kôr people's skill at embalming, "the whole mountain is full of dead, and nearly all of them are perfect," as Billali says, indicating that the corpses are not emitting any of the odors of decay that the Victorians believed were the

[43] I am not the first to take note of this: two scholars, Barri Gold and Chwala, have formed some theories about how to interpret the Amahagger's use of corpses as waste recycling. Their work establishes that the stories about the Amahaggers' recycling practices are about trash, and they connect Haggard's representation of waste management with contemporary ideas about recycling as something that is good for nature. I am indebted to these scholars for starting the conversation about how Haggard discusses waste management in his representations of the Amahagger. However, in contrast to these two, I argue that Haggard is not attempting to connect recycling and nature, but rather commenting on the perils of recycling. It wasn't until the aftermath of the consumerism boom of the 1950s began to cause overflowing landfills (which weren't invented until the 1920s) in the 1970s that recycling was adopted by environmentalists and thereby became something that was "good for the earth" in the public imagination (see Stokes, Chapter 5: "Politicizing Household Waste"). Prior to that, nineteenth-century recycling in Britain was framed as virtuous thriftiness that was good for the Empire and for the economy (this is extensively documented in virtually all Victorian sanitary texts. See Chadwick, Mayhew, Playfair, Simmonds, and others). Then, early- and mid-twentieth-century recycling was framed as patriotism in the service of the war effort (see Stokes and the documentary "The Story of Waste Management in the UK," produced by the Center for Environmental Policy at Imperial College London). Therefore, though these scholars' contributions are important, I don't believe that Haggard, either consciously or unconsciously, was attempting to portray the Amahagger as in harmony with nature, but rather, that he went into such detail about their recycling habits as a way to create a Gothic representation of some rather horrifying waste management strategies that the British were already practicing, and thereby to issue a warning about the degeneration that could lie in store for British people who shared Amahagger attitudes towards the human body as trash.

mechanism by which insanitary conditions harmed people (157).[44] Furthermore, Haggard goes out of his way to point out that the Amahagger are not physically stunted, which could lead one to conclude that they aren't degenerating. Indeed, the Amahagger are described as having "a magnificent build," as "exceedingly handsome," and as physically fit enough to carry the party around in litters for miles and miles (75). However, halting the putrefaction of these substances hasn't removed their potential to be agents of degeneration, and *She* explicitly frames these characters' cultures in terms of selective breeding, and therefore, in terms of their inferior evolutionary fitness.

First, though the Amahaggers' physical health has not deteriorated, the overabundance of garbage in which they live is still a *cultural* pollutant. Characterized by "evil-looking" faces and "an aspect of cold and sullen cruelty," the Amahagger have no respect for or understanding of their duty to their neighbor, as can be seen when they won't help Billali when he falls into the swamp (113-115). Their cultural degeneration is also apparent in the way that they don't seem to have the ability to invent things or express themselves artistically. Earlier, we learn that the yellow linen with which the Amahagger clothe themselves is actually antique fabric taken from the preserved bodies of the Kôr people. Holly remarks, "This linen I afterwards discovered was taken from the tombs, and was not, as I had at first supposed, of native manufacture," suggesting that using graveclothes in this way is a sign that the Amahagger either can't or won't come up

[44] Worboys explains: "Zymotic theory was rooted in Liebig's ideas of decomposition and degeneration, where disease was seen as 'a spreading internal rot, that...came from an external rot, and… could be transferred to others.' The agent responsible was assumed to be a chemical and was referred to as a 'zyme,' or, more usually, a 'ferment,' because of its ability to excite chemical changes or the breakdown of tissues. Zymotic disease ferments were thought to arise from a number of sources. At one extreme was the noncontagious diseases, such as malaria and cholera, whose poisons arose spontaneously from rotting vegetable matter in the environment and were quite durable. At the other pole were the highly contagious diseases, such as smallpox, whose poison or virus was assumed to be short-lived, having arisen spontaneously, or been nurtured, in another animal body….Septic ferments, also thought to be of animal origins, were believed to be simpler, being the breakdown products of freshly rotting tissues" (35).

with any better alternative of their own and are in fact content to wear yellowed fabric that had been clothing a corpse for thousands of years instead of learning to "manufacture" it themselves (121). As Pick has pointed out, degeneration means becoming adapted to less varied and less complex conditions of life, and in the case of the Amahagger, those limiting conditions of life are created by their society being located in what is essentially a giant tomb. They are cut off from contact with the outside world and they live in the midst of things that are old and gradually dwindling away, rather than in the type of dynamic changing environment that would stimulate them to create or to change. Natalka Freeland articulates the relationship between the Amahagger's surroundings and their cultural decline in her essay "The Dustbins of History: Waste Management in Late-Victorian Utopias." She writes, "The Amahagger's recycling--a strange mix of applied archeology and ecological economics--can only lead to decline and decay: a people whose everyday appliances are erstwhile burial equipment, and who live literally in the tombs of their extinct forerunners (who themselves rehearsed the customs of the necrophilial Egyptians) cannot join the nineteenth century's march of progress" (228). [45]

Additionally, Haggard takes pains to connect their culture to their evolutionary fitness. Ayesha tells us that because of their cultural degeneration, the Amahagger are actually an evolutionary dead end, and that she had to use selective breeding to artificially preserve them because they would have died out naturally without her intervention. She says, "Were it not for me, generations since had ye ceased to be, for of your own evil way had ye destroyed each other" (160). The Amahaggers' degeneration is moral and cultural, and this degeneration is both a

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[45] See also Shawn Malley, who interprets their preoccupation with the leftovers of their forebears as evidence of their backwardness as a society, writing that "Haggard populates his ruins with a people known as the Amahagger, or 'People of the Rocks '(i.e. of the 'ruins')....Within the novel, they illustrate (as Tylor and other anthropologists and archaeologists allowed for) degeneration within the evolutionary scheme" (Malley 286).

consequence of their being swamped with trash and the cause of their dependence upon it for their daily necessities. On the one hand, their proximity to such vast quantities of trash limits the complexity of their environment, and on the other, their subsequent perversity as a species makes them content to continue to live and subsist off the trash.

As I have shown, Haggard's story capitalizes on Victorian racist and classist fears of degeneration to fill white English readers with horror. And yet, even as Haggard connects the Amahagger to colonized people and poor people, their grotesque rituals also accomplish the Gothic purpose of shedding light on the horrors that lurk in white middle-class culture. In fact, the Amahaggers' customs are not that alien to some common Victorian practices regarding the usage of the bodies of the dead. Firstly, the Victorians reused human bones. In vol. 2 of *Waste Products and Undeveloped Substances*, Simmonds includes a table composed by Dr. H. Schwarz about how much phosphate of lime may be extracted from various kinds of bones. The table is followed by a short description of the ratios of gelatin and cartilage that can be extracted from bones (96). Rather chillingly, the table contains an entry for "Human Bones," presented completely without explanation or commentary. This is enough to give a modern-day reader pause all by itself, but it doesn't hold a candle to a practice Simmonds describes with enthusiasm in another part of the chapter. In that section, he tells the readers about how human bones from the colonies were used in Britain as fertilizer:

> We import bones from all countries--Australia, South America, Europe, Africa, the great seats of the fisheries, and even from the battle-fields and the Pyramids of Egypt. A correspondent of the 'Times,' writing lately from Alexandria, humorously remarks:-- 'Fancy mutton fattened on ancient Egyptians! It's a fact--a horse chestnut is not a chestnut horse, but, by a sort of *sorites* inverted, we may arrive at the idea of a *gigot*

which shall consist in great part of the dwellers of Memphis. The other day at Sakhara I saw nine camels pacing down from the mummy pits to the bank of the river, laden with nets in which were femora, tibia, and other bony bits of the human form, some 2 cwt. [two hundred weight] in each net on each side of the camel. Among the pits there were people busily engaged in searching out, sifting, and sorting the bones which almost crust the ground. On inquiry I learnt that the cargoes with which the camels were laden would be sent down to Alexandria and thence be shipped to English manure manufacturers. They make excellent manure, I am told, particularly for swedes and other turnips. The trade is brisk, and has been going on for years, and may go on for many more. It is a strange fate--to preserve one's skeleton for thousands of years in order that there may be fine Southdowns and Cheviots [breeds of sheep] in a distant land! But Egypt is always a place of wonders!' (91)

Here, Simmonds describes what was apparently a common and lucrative trade in excavating ancient bones from tombs in other countries and shipping them to England, where they were used for fertilizer. The shocking nature of this revelation is only underscored by what the writer takes pains to highlight, that the British are essentially eating these ancient bodies since the turnips and swedes the bones fertilize are used to feed the sheep that are in turn used to feed the people. As Haggard's fiction never fails to remind us, cannibalism was a practice most commonly associated in the British imagination with so-called "uncivilized" indigenous tribes in Africa and South America. But in Simmonds's anecdote, though they are the butt of the *Times* writer's callous "humor," it is not the Egyptians who are consuming the sheep that feed on the crops the bones are used to fertilize; it is the English who practice this not-too-distant cousin of cannibalism.

I have no evidence that Haggard read Simmonds's book, which consists mostly of very long lists of different kinds of trash, few of which are as sensational as what I have described above, but Haggard is definitely aware that Victorians sometimes recycled corpses in ways that were just as, if not more, grotesque than the ways the Amahagger do, and he draws attention to another of these practices in *She*. At one point, he mentions a seemingly alien barbaric recycling custom of the Amahagger by observing that a brazier Ayesha carries is fueled with human remains: "The tinder of this brazier was made of broken fragments of mummy carefully damped, and, if the admixture of moisture was/properly managed, this unholy compound would smoulder away for hours" (230-1). To this horrible description Haggard adds a footnote that reads: "After all we are not much in advance of the Amahagger in these matters. 'Mummy,' that is pounded ancient Egyptian, is, I believe, a pigment much used by artists, and especially by those of them who direct their talents to the reproduction of the works of the old masters" (231). Indeed, Kassia St. Clair confirms that mummies were harvested by the British for hundreds of years because of the bitumen they were thought to contain and were ground up and put to many different uses (253). The practice of using mummies for painting pigment continued until the 1960s (255).[46] So, as Haggard points out, the strange customs of the Amahagger are not in fact foreign to those of his Victorian British readers, but are in fact their fictional counterparts.

Haggard portrays this practice as horrible, and, doubtless, readers would have agreed. However, the fact that these practices occurred and that they persisted for so long, even with Haggard's and Simmonds writing about them, suggests that the feelings of horror such

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[46] St. Clair provides the following fascinating anecdote about Edward Burne-Jones: "The Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones hadn't realized the connection between 'mummy brown 'and real mummies until one Sunday lunch in 1881, when a friend related having just seen one ground up at a colorman's warehouse. Burne-Jones was so horrified he rushed to his studio to find his tube of mummy brown, and 'insisted on our giving it a decent burial then there and then'" (255).

revelations inspired were not enough to put a stop to the use of bodies in this manner. Feelings, after all, are only feelings. In light of this, Haggard suggests that the terrible cultural decline he depicts as having taken place for the Amahagger might lie in wait for the British too. If using dead bodies is both the cause and the symptom of the Amahaggers' degeneration, then the fact that the British were engaged in similar practices suggests that they might already be well on their way to the same destination.

So what exactly is it about using human bodies for other purposes that terrifies Haggard? For contemporary readers of Simmonds and of Haggard, probably the most horrifying things about this practice are the dehumanization and xenophobia inherent in using the embalmed great-grandparents of another culture for the same purpose for which gardeners use manure or matches. Haggard, however, sees a different type of horror in these descriptions, one that is more philosophical and that not only fails to challenge his society's colonial chauvinism, but even reinforces it.

First, though Haggard connects Amahagger customs with nineteenth-century British customs, the group to whom Holly most closely relates is actually the illustrious and extinct Kôr people, the people whose dead bodies the Amahagger are using for firelight. The Kôr people also have shocking rituals surrounding the dead that have historical counterparts in Victorian culture. Indeed, like the people of Kôr, the Victorians are known to have treated pieces of the dead as treasures, keeping them as relics to remind themselves of deceased friends and relatives, as can be seen in their well-documented fondness for taxidermy and hair jewelry.[47] Therefore, in

[47] See "The Secret Lives of Dead Animals: Exploring Victorian Taxidermy" by Julia Courtney, from *Paraphernalia! Victorian Objects* for a helpful overview of the Victorian obsession with taxidermy. As for using pieces of the dead in mourning, Deborah Lutz's book *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* also provides extensive analysis of Victorian mourning culture, including the use of hair jewelry. Additionally, thousands of pieces of Victorian hair jewelry and mourning wreaths are still intact, and can be seen at museums all

the realm of the Amahagger, as well as in Victorian Britain, human remains occupy the uneasy position of being both treasure and trash at the same time, a tension that is reflected in *She* by Holly's awe and admiration of the artistry and scientific advancement demonstrated by the Kôr people's embalming techniques juxtaposed with his horror at the Amahaggers' use of these embalmed bodies as worthless leftovers to be recycled.

One of Deborah Lutz's observations about relics reveals the theoretical underpinnings of how mortal remains can occupy such contradictory territory—precious and horrible, living and dead, thing and person at the same time:

> To pore over the relic is to fall into the reverie of memory, to call to mind the absent being. The object disappears and becomes pure symbol, pointing only outside of itself. Yet the texture, its somewhat shocking substantiality as a thing, as an actual piece of that person, can call one back from reverie to feel its bluntness , its weighty, obstinate 'thingnesss,' its non-symbolic quality which refers to nothing but its own presence. It reminds one that 'the body is a thing among things,' or even, as Susan Stewart puts it, a container for things. ("The Dead Still Among Us" 135)

Because relics stand in for the people they used to be parts of, they cause us a certain amount of cognitive dissonance as we try to reconcile their "thingness" with the living breathing human beings they used to be. The relic holder experiences the tension of knowing that the relic is a part of the person's body, but also that the person is gone from that body. Consequently, the relic reminds the relic holder of the living person and the corpse at the same time. Lutz writes that "death bring[s] the tragedy of turning people into things" ("The Dead Still Among Us" 128). A relic *is* a person who has been turned into a thing, and a thing can be discarded, a theme that is

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over the world, including the Victoria and Albert, as well as an unassuming but truly enormous collection (2600 pieces and counting) that I had the privilege of seeing at Leila's Hair Museum in Missouri.

at the heart of Haggard's story. With this in mind, we can pin down just what it is about recycling corpses that so unsettles Holly: since relics and dead bodies remind those who see them both of the people they used to be and the vacant corpses they are now, Holly is vexed by the questions of how much of what a person used to be in life remains in their bodies after they are dead.

Holly's many meditations on the topic demonstrate how Haggard was trying to work out this question. Take, for example, the pile of bones in the kingdom of Kôr that terrifies Holly with the prospect of his own inevitable decay:

> Anything more appalling than this jumbled mass of the remains of a departed race I cannot imagine, and what made it even more dreadful was that in this dry air a considerable number of the bodies had simply become desiccated with the skin still on them, and now, fixed in every conceivable position, stared at us out of the mountain of white bones, grotesquely horrible caricatures of humanity. In my astonishment I uttered an ejaculation, and the echoes of my voice ringing in the vaulted space disturbed a skull that had been accurately balanced for many thousands of years near the apex of the pile. Down it came with a run, bounding along merrily towards us, and of course bringing an avalanche of other bones after it, till at last the whole pit rattled with their movement, even as though the skeletons were getting up to greet us. (166)

By pointing out the bodies' desiccation, the fact that they are splayed about every which way, and the fact that they are "jumbled" together, Holly expresses his dread of rotting and of being intermingled with others' remains. **B**ut when he accidentally triggers the avalanche, Holly then is terrified with another horror as the bones charge at him, threatening to engulf his living body prematurely as if it were one of the dead bodies contained inside it, and also terrifying him with

its sheer size and volume, enough to be compared to an "avalanche" and to rattle "the whole pit." This scene makes such an impression on Holly that he tells us it "haunted my dreams," giving him a nightmare about skeletons marching and "one by one [flinging] themselves in unending files through the hole into the pit of bones" (192, 188). However, it is not just the prospect of decay that terrifies Holly, but also the prospect that his dead self might somehow be conscious of its transformation into trash—he is concerned that some essence of the living being he used to be will remain after he dies.

Earlier, a "piece of wreckage" facilitates his musings on these fears when it crashes into and ruins the boat he and his companions were sailing in, causing them all to fall into the hands of the Amahagger (55). This piece of wreckage turns the boat into trash and kills many of the crew, leading Holly's half-waking mind to ruminate on the prospect that human beings and broken down boats share a similar fate:

> I thought, I remember, as I slowly sank into a doze, of what the appearance of the boat and her unhappy crew would be in two or three months' time from that night. There she would lie, with gaping seams and half filled with fœtid water, which, when the mist-laden wind stirred her, would wash backwards and forwards through our mouldering bones, and that would be the end of her, and of those in her who would follow after myths and seek out the secrets of nature. Already I seemed to hear the water rippling against the desiccated bones and rattling them together, rolling my skull against Mahomed's, and his against mine, till at last Mahomed's stood straight up on its vertebræ and glared at me through its empty eyeholes, and cursed me with its grinning jaws, because I, a dog of a Christian, disturbed the last sleep of a true believer. (73)

Here, Holly sees himself reduced down to the parts of his body that need to be discarded, and mingled together with other discarded things--the disintegrating boat, mouldering bones, and Mahomed's skull. This is another nightmare of his own mortality, of being mixed together with people and objects who are fundamentally different from, and, as his racism leads him to believe, fundamentally inferior to himself. With this in mind, it is also a nightmare of being conscious while part of a rubbish heap. He is terrified that enough of his essence might linger in his body that he could be aware of the horrible transformations that happen in death. In fact, he would not be so disgusted by Mahomed's head calling him "a dog of a Christian" if he did not fear that some degree of his white Englishness would linger on in his dead body to facilitate such racialized conflicts. Holly's fears about just exactly how much of him remains after his death lay the groundwork for Haggard's depiction of the Gothic horrors of trash. Holly is not sure how much of a human being's essence remains in them after they die, a fear that raises questions about just how much of any discarded object's essence remains in it after it has been thrown away.

Holly's nightmares also raise questions about how much of a thing or person's essence remains after they have been recycled, and this is the thing that most troubles him about treating human bodies like trash. One of the most vivid portrayals of the dead as waste takes place when the Amahagger come together to perform a dance, and Leo notices that the "enormous flaming torch[es]" they are using to light the hall "are corpses on fire!" (195). This spectacle, which Holly describes as "awful and hideous" and likens to Nero persecuting ancient Christians, causes him such distress because of his consciousness of whom the dead used to be. He tells us:

> There was something very terrible, and yet very fascinating, about the employment of the remote dead to illumine the orgies of the living; in itself the thing was a satire, both on

> the living and the dead. Cæsar's dust--or is it Alexander's?--may stop a bunghole,[48] but the functions of these dead Cæsars of the past was to light up a savage fetish dance. To such base uses may we come, of so little account may we be in the minds of the eager multitudes that we shall breed, many of whom, so far from revering our memory, will live to curse us for begetting them into such a world of woe. (195)

In other words, Holly feels the horror of this scenario because to him, these dead bodies are still in some sense the Caesars and Alexanders they used to be, and that is what makes their being put to "base uses" inappropriate. When trying to convince Ayesha that he does not want to live forever, he begins by explaining what it is about death that fills him with fear: "Hard is it to die, because our delicate flesh doth shrink back from the worm it will not feel, and from that unknown which the winding-sheet doth curtain from our view" (221). However, Holly's visions and nightmares show that he fears that his delicate flesh *will* feel the worm, or at least that the flesh upon which the worm feeds will still be Holly's in some significant way; he doesn't concede that a person's essence is gone after they die, which is the foundation for his horror on behalf of the corpses at the indignity of being used to "light up a savage fetish dance." Indeed, that is also the source of *our* horror at Simmonds's description of the practice in *Waste Products*, since we feel that the respect that was due to the living human beings those bodies used to be should have prevented anyone from using them as fertilizer. Holly, however, must justify his horror of misusing the dead by envisioning the bodies—and by extension himself—as "Caesars" and "Alexanders," heroes from the classics featured in the plays of England's most English playwright, in contrast to the so-called "savages" whose dance he envisions these bodies illuminating.

[48] This phrase is a reference to *Hamlet*.

Ayesha's interpretation of the same dance demonstrates how Gothic trash brings about its degenerative effect on the "savages" by offering a slightly different emphasis on the spectacle. While Holly empathizes with the people of Kôr who are being recycled, Ayesha stresses the inferiority of the Amahagger who are doing the recycling. She says that the spectacle of the burning corpse candles

> hath its lesson. Trust not to the future, for who knows what the future may bring! Therefore, live for the day, and endeavour not to escape the dust which seems to be man's end. What thinkest thou those long-forgotten nobles and ladies would have felt had they known that they should one day flare to light the dance or boil the pot of savages? (196)

Both Holly and Ayesha highlight the fact that the Kôr people have degenerated over time. Recycling, or making use of trash, is not thrifty, natural, or virtuous in *She*: it's a sign that the next generation is worse off than the first. They have failed to live up to their forebears--or perhaps their forebears have failed to pave the way for their improvement--and because the descendants can't come up with anything new of their own, they subsist on their ancestors' trash. By envisioning both the people of Kôr and the Amahagger as parallels for different facets of the British misuse of the dead (both over-venerating bodies and disrespecting them), Haggard forecasts a decline in the quality of British culture that could eventually cause his countrymen to wind up at the same level as the Amahagger.

Ayesha, Queen of Trash

Haggard explores the phenomenon of Gothic trash in *She*, and I have shown how the fear of becoming trash in death and the fear of the degenerative effect trash could have on people who live too close to it are the sources of Gothic trash's power to terrify. But the Gothic is

characterized not just by the ways it inspires fear but also by a tension between fear and desire,[49] and we can see Haggard's desire for trash--and also the Victorian desire for trash--embodied in Ayesha, or She-who-must-be-obeyed. Arata writes, "If, as many recent critics have argued, this novel is central to an understanding of the Victorian fin de siècle, that is because Haggard managed to channel so many of the period's anxieties through the figure of Ayesha" (95). Ayesha was without a doubt one of the most important contributors to the novel's success. Despite her dying at the end of the novel, Haggard resurrected her for several sequels to appeal to readers who were clamoring for more. She is also an example of another theme that this dissertation has explored: that trash is often gendered female. As I have shown in my chapter on *Ruth*, women were usually given authority over housekeeping, and by extension, authority over trash. *She* represents Ayesha as not just being in charge of trash, but also as being trash herself. Specifically, she is Gothic trash: a femme fatale from a distant foreign land, an evil scientist, and a walking corpse, as well as something that is used up and discarded. Haggard uses this characterization to explore the transgressive territory of desiring the discarded and the departed.

Ayesha has a complex and troubled relationship with Victorian femininity. Many scholars have written about the gendered conflicts at the center of *She*. Ayesha has often been described, in Terrence Rodgers's words, as "the femme fatale, a magnetic figure of male longing, but also fear, who threatens the integrity of empire, manliness and brotherhood" (36). Elaine Showalter adds that manliness and brotherhood are the true center of *She*, which, she argues, despite its title, is really a book about male romance, written for men to the exclusion of women, with She herself being one of the most powerful forces of that exclusion by serving as the

[49] See Freud's "The Uncanny, which explores the ways conflicting feelings can lead to terror. He writes, "the 'uncanny' is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (85).

antagonist against whom the male characters can join forces.[50] Showalter writes about "how powerfully [*She*] spoke to a male community," and observes that "It is not coincidental that the year when this quest begins, 1881, is also the year when women were first admitted to the Cambridge examinations, and when, symbolically, the strongholds of male knowledge begin to fall" (87, 85). Similarly, Ann Ardis points out how Ayesha's claims to knowledge and power played on Victorian fears about the New Woman. Though *She* was published before the the genre of "New Woman Fiction" was so-named, Ardis argues that it "anticipates all the questions to be asked of the New Woman once she makes her appearance on the socioliterary scene," including questions about a woman's right to hold positions of authority, her right to express sexual desire, and her right to decline the role of motherhood (140). And yet, though Ayesha is such a threatening figure whose ultimate conquering the story virtually demands, Nina Auerbach has discussed how characters like Ayesha contributed to what she calls the Victorian "myth of womanhood," a mindset that figured the Victorian woman as both victimized and powerful at the same time. Auerbach writes, "Like Haggard's She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed, [Ruskin's] queen has the power not merely to create the walls of home, but to dissolve them along with all the boundaries masculine civilization calls immutable" (61).[51] All these scholars agree that Ayesha is a figure who flouts her society's expectations, whether that is in the service of providing a face and a name to men's fears or a fantasy about an ideal woman and the things women might be capable of. In her education, her intelligence, her great age, her beauty, and her uninhibited expression of sexual desire, Ayesha breaks many of the traditional rules, both spoken and

[50] See also Barri Gold, who analyzes ways that women characters are erased in the text, and Patricia Murphy who asserts that the way Haggard portrays Ayesha's relationship to history is sexist.
[51] See also Matthew Fike who provides a counterargument to Murphy and argues that Ayesha transcends history rather being excluded from it.

unspoken, to which women of her day usually adhered, and it is difficult to disentangle Haggard's admiration for her from the way his text ultimately decides to put her in her place.

An important site of Ayesha's tendency to both exceed and threaten traditional feminine roles is her handling of waste. Cleere and Alison Bashford have observed that domestic sanitation was often designated as the natural territory of Victorian women, and an important part of domestic sanitation is seeing to the trash. Ayesha provides her own spin on this duty by coopting masculine power even as she fulfills her feminine role of seeing to the trash. Rather than occupying the role of housekeeper, as most fictional women caretakers of trash do, Ayesha is more closely related to the male recycling entrepreneurs Simmonds describes, who used the miracle of chemistry to eliminate harmful waste and turn it into something else. In addition to connecting her to recycling entrepreneurs, this description also connects her to the mad scientist narrative from Gothic fiction. Holly tells us that "Ayesha was a great chemist, indeed chemistry appears to have been her only amusement and occupation. She had one of the caves fitted up as a laboratory, and, although her appliances were necessarily rude, the results that she attained were, as will become clear in the course of this narrative, sufficiently surprising" (176). She gives a demonstration of her powers by using a powerful acid to dispose of the body of Kallikrates after she has met Leo, whom she believes to be the newest incarnation of Kallikrates:

> "Behold! I have prepared against this happy hour!" [she said,] and going to the other shelf, or stone ledge, which...had served her for a bed she took from it a large vitrified double-handed [sic] vase, the mouth of which was tied up with a bladder. This she loosed, and then, having bent down and gently kissed the white forehead of the dead man, she undid the vase, and sprinkled its contents carefully over the form....Instantly a dense vapour arose, and the cave was filled with choking fumes that prevented us from

seeing anything while the deadly acid (for I presume it was some tremendous preparation of that sort) did its work. From the spot where the body lay came a fierce fizzing and cracking sound, which ceased, however, before the fumes had cleared away....[W]onderful as it may seem, it is a fact that on the stone bench that had supported the mortal remains of the ancient Kallikrates for so many centuries there was now nothing to be seen but a few handfuls of smoking white powder....Ayesha stooped down, and, taking a handful of this powder in her grasp, threw it into the air, saying at the same time...

> "Dust to dust!--the past to the past!--the dead to the dead!--Kallikrates is dead, and is born again!" (212-213)

Here, Haggard depicts Ayesha wielding the powers of chemistry, with all the Gothic special effects of fizzing, smoking, and dramatic declarations that one might find in a Hawthorne short story included, in order to dispose of a superfluous dead body. Like Victorian chemists, she transmutes a waste substance into something more innocuous. Though, unlike the recyclers, she does not turn the thing she has disposed of into something new, her act of disposal is still connected with rebirth because a new living Kallikrates comes to take the place of the deceased one.

In this instance, Ayesha fulfills her feminine role of disposing of something that has outlived its usefulness, but her usage of science to do so is presented as horrifying. Haggard tells us that the spectacle reduces our heroes to "awed silence" and that they are "too overcome for words" (213). The Gothic always brings to light something that readers fear, and we can understand how this Gothic incident might have been shocking to its readers by turning to Lyon Playfair's statement that the very chemical processes used to recycle waste products were

feminine. He writes, "Chemistry, like a prudent housewife, economises every scrap" (qtd in Simmonds vol. 1, 3). Chemistry itself is a housewife, and the Victorian housewife's joint duties were to wisely use and dispose of waste and also to be subordinate to a husband. By commanding the housewife rather than being the housewife, Ayesha has stepped outside of the echelons of power to which she as a woman should be confined and has instead coopted the traditionally male role of miraculous chemist, a move that Haggard depicts as Gothic by making the preserved corpse of her beloved the object of her experiments.

Ayesha's relationship with Gothic trash has interesting parallels with texts by Victorian sanitation reformers, which first feminize trash by depicting it as a practical joke on women, and then take that feminization a step further by portraying women themselves as trash. First, in Victorian writings on recycling, there is a recurring pattern of singing the praises of British recycling by portraying it as a practical joke at women's expense. Consider the following excerpt from a tract by Playfair:

> The clippings of the travelling tinker are mixed with the pairings of horses' hoofs from the smithy, or the cast-off woollen [sic] garments of the poorest inhabitants of a sister isle, and soon afterwards, in the form of dyes of brightest blue, grace the dress of courtly dames.../The offal of the streets, and the washings of coal-gas, reappear carefully preserved in the lady's smelling bottle, or are used by her to flavour blancmanges for her friends. (qtd in Simmonds vol. 1, 3-4)

This passage describes the miracle of recycling, but the result of this miracle is not particularly desirable for its women beneficiaries, who are depicted as wearing trash on their person and eating it, much to their dismay when they discover the truth. The reality of women's relationship with trash, from these men's perspectives, is not just that women care for trash and tidy it away;

it is also an invisible adversary, subjecting them to indignities without their knowledge. Playfair chuckles at a similar incident in another [pamphlet]: "'Many a fair forehead,' he added, was 'damped with eau de millefleurs, without knowing that its essential ingredient is derived from the drainage of cowhouses'" (Simmonds vol. 2, 708). Simmonds highlights these quotes of Playfair's in *Waste Products and Undeveloped Substances*, later going on to add his own example of a "gotcha" moment in recycling by describing a hypothetical woman's horrified reaction to the uses of rat skins in apparel: "Even the fine lady of the present day, who piques herself on her exquisitely fitting gloves, would give one of those little shrieks, which she thinks so sweetly feminine, if told that the thumb of her glove was made of ratskin, as more elastic yet tougher than kid" (123).

The reason these little asides have any bite to them springs from the fact that, despite the marvelous transformations that Victorian sanitation reformers believed recycling was capable of bringing about, sufficient "trashiness" remains in recycled things for them to provoke a horrified reaction from people who learn about their origins. The rhetorical purpose of the practical joke anecdotes is to provide a testament to the effectiveness of the recycling methods that Playfair and Simmonds were so proud of by showing that the products of recycling blend in indistinguishably with beautiful, feminine women. However, the very beauty and femininity that the anecdotes depend on to make their point also highlight by contrast the disgustingness of the trash that clings to the women, thereby bringing to light the sublimated uneasiness that lies beneath the surface of making use of trash—uneasiness about whether something that has been discarded can ever actually be made new again, and uneasiness about the resemblance between human beings and the things they throw away—the very things about which Holly expresses the most anxiety in *She*. More examples of similar incidents crop up throughout the literature on recycling,

demonstrating that the Victorian writers who were most closely involved with managing Britain's trash, though enchanted by the recent chemical discoveries that promised trash could be cleansed and made into gold, nevertheless couldn't quite let go of the notion that some measure of trash's previous life still clung to it, even after recycling—just like Holly cringing at the Amahagger torches. Victorian sanitary reformers deal with this uncomfortable notion by characterizing it as a harmless prank on finery-loving women.

The satirical descriptions of women wearing trash that I have highlighted hint of the Gothic possibilities contained in recycling trash, but Simmonds stumbles straight into the Gothic in *Waste Products and Undeveloped Substances* in a passage where he reflects on the definition of dirt. He begins:

> What is dirt? Why, nothing at all offensive, when chemically viewed. Rub a little alkali upon the dirty grease-spot on your coat, and it undergoes a chemical change and becomes soap; now rub it with a little water and it disappears. It is neither grease, soap, water, nor dirt. That is not a very odorous pile of dirt which we often meet with in a dust-heap; well, scatter a little gypsum over it and it is no longer dirty. Everything like dirt is worthy our notice as students of chemistry. Analyse it; it will separate into very clean elements. (440)

So far so good. Simmonds again describes the miracle of chemistry. But then, the passage takes a turn:

> Dirt makes corn, corn makes bread and meat, and that makes a very sweet young lady, that we sometimes kiss. So after all, we may kiss dirt, particularly if she whiten her face with chalk or fuller's earth; though I may say that rubbing such stuff upon the beautiful skin of a young lady is a dirty practice. Pearl powder, I think, is made of bismuth--

> nothing but dirt. Lord Palmerston's fine definition of dirt is 'matter in the wrong place.' Put it in the right place, and we will cease to think of it as dirt. (440)

In this description, Simmonds, now a recycling Pygmalion, fancifully narrates the creation of a desirable woman from the filth of the rubbish heap using the same wonders of chemistry that he believed could transmute London's trash into wealth. Merely add a little gypsum or alkali to the trash that comprises the rubbish heap, and it may be used for fertilizer to grow corn! The corn then feeds the cows or the mill to be turned into food! And the food then transforms into the lady, whom the reader and the author are both invited to kiss—after she has adorned her face with yet more dirt.

Simmonds uses this bizarre image as a way to assert that there is something worthwhile about dirt (by which he means the leftovers of consumption that wind up in the rubbish bin). However, in the process, he ends up escalating his association of women and trash into transgressive territory. Previously, he has characterized women as caretakers of rubbish and as wearers of rubbish. Now, with this description, which echoes the practical jokes from before, he declares that women are made of rubbish, a statement that allows him to express his desire to kiss the trash by expressing his desire to kiss his imaginary garbage Galatea. It seems the logical conclusion of his wildly optimistic vision for London's future, and after reading him wax eloquent about trash for hundreds of pages, it's not entirely surprising when he finally confesses his love for it. At the same time, the description has strong Gothic resonances, as a female body rises up from the dirt to kiss the narrator. This depiction of a woman as trash is Simmonds's attempt to show that trash is benevolent and even kissable, but it also brings to light a darker desire for the dead and for the discarded, and additionally, a misogynist attempt to bring women to the level of trash as it raises trash to the level of women. In this description, Simmonds helps

us to see (even if he doesn't necessarily seem to be completely aware of these implications himself) the horror that inheres in making use of the discarded--or, put another way, making use of the departed. Simmonds smudges the division between living and dead, clean and dirty, and trash and not-trash. In addition, he takes the usage of trash as a practical joke on women to its logical end point: women are in charge of trash, they wear trash unwittingly, and they *are* trash.

These themes of garbage as practical joke and of women as garbage are important underpinnings to *She*. The Garbage Galatea passage presents a different answer to the prophetic, riddle-like poems that appear in *She*. During one of Holly's dreams, he hears the following lines: "*That which is alive hath known death, and that which is dead yet can never die, for in the Circle of the Spirit life is nought and death is nought. Yea, all things live for ever, though at times they sleep and are forgotten*" (115, italics Haggard's). And later, Ayesha touches on similar themes in a song to Leo: "*And now, lo! It hath sprung up, and borne fruit. Lo! Out of the grave hath it sprung. Yea, from among the dry bones and ashes of the dead*" (214, italics Haggard's). Holly and Ayesha are describing the process of reincarnation on which the mythology of the novel is based. This is the reincarnation that enables Kallikrates to return in the form of Leo. However, these passages could just as easily be describing Simmonds's Garbage Galatea, the embodiment of the way things and people may be consumed and repurposed after they die.

The ultimate manifestation of the Garbage Galatea in *She* takes place at Ayesha's death when she steps into the pillar of flame expecting eternal life, but instead meets her grisly end. Ayesha's final transformation at the end has been carefully analyzed by many scholars, and Ardis describes it in terms of its misogyny against the New Woman, writing that "Witch-burning would not be too strong a term for Haggard's ritualistic destruction of both She's desire to 'change the order of the world' and her physical being" (141). However, in addition to being a

punishment for stepping too far outside her designated role as a woman, the transformation also establishes Ayesha as, like the Garbage Galatea, a fantasy about the fusion of a perfect woman and the trash she is entrusted with taking care of. Additionally, it is the most extreme version of a trash "gotcha" moment, wherein she steps into the flame expecting eternal life, but is turned into trash instead. Holly tells us: "Her skin changed colour, and in place of the perfect whiteness of its lustre it turned dirty brown and yellow, like an old piece of withered parchment. She felt at her head: the delicate hand was nothing but a claw now, a human talon like that of a badly-preserved Egyptian mummy" (258). Here, Ayesha becomes dirty and crinkled like trash, specifically Amahagger trash, in the form of a poor-quality mummy. Furthermore, this trash fate is foreshadowed from the very beginning, as Ayesha, like the Victorian women described by Simmonds and Playfair, wears trash before becoming it. When we first meet her, she comes in a wrapper, "wrapped up in soft white, gauzy material," prefiguring her death, when she will become a "hideous little monkey frame, covered with crinkled yellow parchment, that once had been the glorious *She*" (132, 258). The word "wrapped" is significant, since "wrapper" suggests disposable packaging, much like the parchment crumpled around a frame that Ayesha's skin will become.[52] Even the Amahaggers' barbaric recycling rituals foreshadow that Ayesha will become like the repurposed trash of her realm: when she steps into the enchanted flame at the end of the novel, she turns into a corpse on fire.

All this time, Holly has been fretting about becoming trash and being conscious of his transformation, as well as of being reused and perhaps becoming an agent of degeneration to those who come after him. Ayesha's trash fate inflicts all of these things on her instead of on

[52] OED records that the usage of "wrapper" to mean "A covering to protect and compact a newspaper, magazine, etc., when sending by post or delivery" was common in the nineteenth century.

him. First, Ayesha is conscious of her decay. Holly tell us: “she seemed to realise what kind of change was passing over her, and she shrieked—ah, she shrieked!—she rolled upon the floor and shrieked!” (257).   Second, she gets reused. After she has finally been reduced to a “heap,” Holly and Leo “went to the pile of rippling hair that had fallen from her in the agony of that hideous change which was worse than a thousand natural deaths, and each of us drew from it a shining lock, and these locks we still have, the sole memento that is left to us of Ayesha as we knew her in the fulness of her grace and glory” (261). The two of them don’t leave her to rest and decay in peace; instead, they repurpose pieces of her body into nostalgic reminders. Lastly, Ayesha has a degenerative effect on them. “Leo,” we are told, “with his golden curls turned a snowy white...was a sufficiently alarming spectacle...and...I know that two days afterwards when I looked at my face in some water I scarcely recognised myself. I have never been famous for beauty, but there was something beside ugliness stamped upon my features that I have never got rid of until this day, something resembling that wild look with which a startled person wakes from a deep sleep” (268). They are prematurely aged and deformed by their encounter with Ayesha after her trash transformation.

Victorian recycling reformers used the rhetorical gesture of transforming women into trash in order to contain and dismiss its threat of contamination, displacing their anxieties by laughing them off as a joke on women. In *She*, Ayesha’s transformation and death provide the plot resolution that will allow Holly and Leo to leave her domain and return home, but they are permanently affected by witnessing it.

English Trash: Mixing the Gothic and the Homely

Using a Gothic aesthetic and Gothic themes, Haggard brings to light the frightful truth that the British and the Amahagger share a propensity to consume corpses, thus suggesting that

these two societies might also share the same barbaric nature. Then, by equating Ayesha with trash in the same way that sanitation writers equated women with trash, he brings about an uneasy resolution that puts the story's main conflicts to rest. Yet Haggard does more to emphasize that the English might still be subject to the horrors of Gothic trash even after the events of the story have concluded: Haggard has also been hinting the entire time that Gothic trash will follow the protagonists back to England. Holly and Leo silently carry Gothic trash home with them from the Amahagger realm at the end of the novel and leave behind English trash in Africa. This serves the purpose of terrifying the reader by turning the novel's implication that the English are like the Amahagger into a physical reality, establishing that material things from the Amahagger realm can be found in England, and that material things from England can be found in the realm of the Amahagger. In the introduction to the Oxford World Classics edition of *She,* Daniel Karlin observes that "the contrast between lurid Gothic fantasy and homely reminders of English life...is characteristic of *She*" (xv). Interestingly, many of the English things that Holly and his friends bring with them are disposable, meaning that throughout the novel, disposable packaging, cigarette butts, used matches, and broken crockery, the mundane English analogs of the lurid death-focused Amahagger trash, are scattered invisibly throughout the novel. As the protagonists make their way further and further into the Amahagger realm, the novel undergoes an interesting exchange process, wherein Holly gradually gathers Amahagger trash while gradually leaving behind English litter, thus swapping out the mundane English trash he leaves behind him for the nightmare Amahagger trash he takes with him over the course of the story.

Holly, Job, and Leo leave a trail of peaceful, non-troublesome trash behind them as they pass through the swamps and into the Amahagger civilization, the land of Kôr, and even the

terrible cave where the pillar of Life resides. Each time a disposable item from England is used up and thrown away, it leaves behind a puff of fresh British air in the stifling horror of the bleak foreign setting. These consumables are reassuring, reminding Holly, Job, and Leo of their peaceful homes during the most harrowing moments of their journey. For example, when traveling through the swamp toward the kingdom of the Amahagger, we are told that they "made a hearty breakfast off a 'Paysandu' potted tongue, of which we had brought a good quantity with us from the Army and Navy Stores" (62). Paysandu ox tongues came packaged in a cheerful, brightly-colored can with a red lid that would have stood out conspicuously if discarded in the drab swamp, but as far as Haggard is concerned, the can simply disappears after the characters are done eating, since he makes no further comment about it. Later, they "lighted a lantern, and made our evening meal off another potted tongue," and they smoke "tobacco smoke," which fails to ward off the mosquitoes (67). The butts, the used matches, and the second can, like the first can, all go unremarked, even though they must have been present. Later on, after being captured by the Amahagger, the Englishmen smoke some more, presumably producing more butts and matches that vanish without a trace: "Nothing about us created so great a sensation as our tobacco smoke," Holly states, but the detritus left behind by the smoking goes unnoticed (83).

Later, in the pitch dark caves of Kôr, right after having inched across a rickety plank from an impossibly narrow bridge of rock to a precariously balanced flat stone, all with a bottomless pit directly below them, English objects reassure Holly, Leo, and Job in this desperate moment and then are promptly changed into English trash. Once they have reached safety, Holly tells us, "I got out my box of Bryant and May's wax matches, and they struck as merrily, there, in that awful place, as they could have done in a London drawing-room" (244). The conspicuous mention of the brand name serves to emphasize the Englishness of this English trash. The wax

matches reappear again to comfort the protagonists after an even more horrible incident: the gruesome death of Ayesha. Holly tell us, “With a trembling hand I filled the lamps--luckily there was still some of the linen wick unburnt. Then I lit them with one of our wax matches” (260). These little glimpses of home seem like moments of comfort where Britain comes to rescue her subjects in their time of need. But in fact, as Karlin notes, many readers found it jarring for mundane British consumables to pop into the narrative without warning (xvi). Perhaps these readers were disturbed by the fact that though these homely reminders serve to reassure the heroes, they also allow the nightmarish trash of the Amahagger to intermingle with the British trash. Just as the remains of British homeliness are left behind in the gloomy, ominous setting, a little bit of gloom and ominousness rubs off onto these homely British things.

One of the most surreal examples of Amahagger horror rubbing off onto British commodities by means of trash takes place in the scene wherein Holly talks to Billali about one of the strangest pieces of trash in the book: a foot. Billali tells Holly that as a young man, he fell in love with a beautiful embalmed corpse, and his mother, disapproving, “took the lamp, and standing the dead woman up against the wall there, set fire to her hair, and she burnt fiercely, even down to the feet, for those who are thus kept burn excellently well” (104). Billali then reveals that he kept the feet, the Amahagger equivalent of a burned out match, and another example of this novel’s equating women with trash. Billali remembers that he had hidden the feet under a stone bench, and he kneels down to peer under it to see if the feet are still there. He comes up with “something...that was caked in dust; which he shook to the floor. It was covered with the remains of a rotting rag, which he undid, and revealed to my astonished gaze a beautifully shaped and almost white woman’s foot, looking as fresh and as firm as though it had but now been placed there” (105). Holly is bewildered by the foot, and he uses it as an

opportunity to meditate on mortality, as he has been wont to do throughout the story. However, directly after that, he does something quite strange: "I wrapped up this relic of the past in the remnants of the old linen rag which had evidently formed a portion of its owner's graveclothes, for it was partially burnt, and put it away in my Gladstone bag, which I had bought at the Army and Navy Stores--a strange combination, I thought" (105). In this sentence, Haggard juxtaposes the dismembered foot with not one but two British brand names, making sure the reader doesn't miss the fact that Holly is intentionally mixing together his English goods with this strange Amahagger relic. Up to this point, he has only been terrified and haunted by Amahagger trash, but in this instance, he chooses it for himself. What's more, this is the very Gladstone bag that comes with Holly and Leo into the kingdom of Kôr (227). They leave it with Billali as they go into the caves with Ayesha, and presumably pick it back up again when they return. Therefore, Gothic Amahagger trash doesn't just manifest itself to terrify the English protagonists: it also infiltrates their home comforts and comes with them when they leave. As we have already seen, the foot is not the only piece of a dead female body from the Amahagger realm that Holly decides to take with him when he goes, since both Holly and Leo collect "a shining lock" of Ayesha's hair after she has been reduced to waste paper (261).

Holly's attitudes towards trash change over the course of the novel from feeling horrified by it to choosing to take it home with him, a process that is complemented by his leaving English trash behind. This exchange of trash is also matched by a change of values as Holly grows to share the Amahaggers' propensity to blur eating and death. This exchange process suggests that the time spent in this realm changes Holly from a Cambridge Englishman into a "savage," and then he goes home, taking his new "savagery" with him. So, just as Holly subtly swaps out English trash for Amahagger trash, he also swaps out English values for Amahagger values,

thereby beginning the dreaded process of transforming into them—the degeneration Holly has been obsessing over this entire time. The most obvious example of this point is the fact that Holly and Leo both end up enthralled to Ayesha rather than killing her as they had intended to. But Holly even begins to adopt the Amahagger practice of viewing eating and embalming as activities that should happen in the same place. He enters one chamber, thinking that it is a dining hall, only to find that the tables "had evidently been used, not to eat upon, but for the purposes of embalming" (126). While in the room, he seems unable to shake his initial impression, taking note of an engraving depicting embalming techniques that involve using a tool that is "shaped exactly like a port wine strainer" (127). Later, he gets confused a second time, describing himself returning to this chamber with the words, "After I had dressed myself I passed into the eating, or rather embalming chamber" (156). Holly begins to internalize the Amahagger way of life, including the cycles of consumption that blend together embalming, eating, and recycling, and this exchange of values is mirrored by the exchange of English trash for Gothic Amahagger trash.

This trash-exchange process also connects the novel to a common convention in Gothic fiction: letting the Gothic elements of a story escape from the confines of the narrative at the end. For example, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1817), though Frankenstein's monster says that he will go off alone to die, the novel only depicts him floating out of sight on an "ice-raft," and never says for certain whether or not he actually keeps his promise. The story comes to a close with the monster out of the reader's sight, but not necessarily gone, thus injecting a hint of ominous doubt that perhaps he did not die after all and could possibly return to haunt the protagonists (and the reader) again. Haggard achieves a similar effect by exchanging English trash for Gothic trash. The English trash is discarded and then the Gothic trash replaces it.

Haggard does not depict the Gothic trash again after Holly claims it. The foot remains in his Gladstone bag, which Haggard suggests but does not depict that Holly will retrieve when he comes back out of the cave. Similarly, Haggard does not tell us what Holly and Leo do with the locks of hair they take from Ayesha. But since Haggard doesn't depict these things being thrown away either, the reader is left to wonder whether this Gothic trash makes it back to England with them, where it can continue to exert its evil influence.

Conclusion

Gothic trash is trash that has a Gothic aesthetic, that raises to light disturbing real-world problems, and that doesn't stay put when it's discarded, instead coming back to haunt those who would sweep it out of sight. In *She*, Gothic trash takes the form of the corpses that fill the realm of the Amahagger tribe, and Haggard goes into great detail about how the Amahagger use and reuse these bodies for everyday domestic life.

The most important Gothic quality of Gothic trash is that it embodies the worst fears of both readers and characters. In *She*, Haggard appeals to the racist and classist prejudices of his readers by hinting that the Gothic trash of the Amahagger realm causes degeneration, degeneration that he suggests may already be taking place back in England as much as it takes place in this strange nightmare land. Additionally, Gothic trash in *She* poses a more philosophical fear by causing Holly to fret about what remains of him after he dies, and by extension, what remains of any trash after it has been discarded and recycled. Haggard puts all these fears uneasily to rest by discarding Ayesha, the embodiment of Gothic trash. But the resolution is not complete. She has a degenerative effect on the protagonists, and they take Gothic trash with them when they leave and leave English trash behind them, thus suggesting

that when all the characters finally return to where they belong, English trash will stay in the Amahagger realm, and Gothic trash will come to England.

In fact, as Haggard has suggested throughout the novel, England is already haunted by Gothic trash. However, though Haggard seems more concerned about the philosophical implications and the threat to white Englishness that he fears Gothic trash might pose, his story also raises to light some strange and horrifying real-life English waste management practices. The usage of bodies for domestic purposes is paralleled by the ways that English people used the bodies of the dead, a practice I have shown was far more widespread and extreme than even Haggard seems to realize. Additionally, his convention of depicting women as trash also is a familiar representation perhaps borrowed from sanitary writing that made the same comparisons.

An exploration of Gothic trash reveals new facets of just how bizarre and nightmarish this important novel is. Perhaps Victorian readers loved it so much because they recognized their own image in its pages.

CONCLUSION

The Victorian period was an important moment in the development of waste management, a time when the regulation of sanitation was becoming more centralized and when the technologies for collecting, processing, recycling, and disposing of waste were becoming more advanced. Therefore, it is an ideal point in time to study the logic of trash, which the three influential novels I have examined feature centrally.

Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* gives insight into why and how novelists depict characters of whom they disapprove as trash. In this novel, Dickens uses his detailed knowledge of London's trash to punish men who neglect their families. Each of these characters is represented as a specific type of trash, either water pollution, litter, or rags in a paper mill, and Dickens narrates those stories as if his characters were the type of trash to which he compares them. When these characters are ultimately discarded—either by dying or having a near-death experience—Dickens follows the logic of trash and uses the narrative to think about death. At first, these contemplations of death focus on how human beings are united by their experience of death. However, by representing these deaths as punishments, Dickens liberates the reader from having to internalize that representation of mortality too closely, choosing instead to use that trash transformation to stand in judgement over these men and the crimes they have committed. Lastly, Dickens uses these stories about trash to talk about different problems that plagued London at the time, using the symbolism of trash to apply to the men's transgressions and to the transgressions of the city.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth Gaskell, when read in conjunction with eighteenth-century it-narratives, provides a more intimate and philosophical view into what the value of trash actually is and what trash narratives look like. Specifically, Gaskell focuses on the mistreatment of fallen

women during the Victorian period, using her novel to critique and retell the repetitive tragic stories that were told over and over again about them. She explores how every piece of trash has a beginning and an end, just as human beings all start out pristine and eventually wind up in the grave. Gaskell criticizes the way that fallen women were treated disproportionately like trash, showing that the people of her day tried to hasten them to their grave instead of valuing them for the good they could still do. However, Gaskell never quite manages to admit that fallen women are no more trash than anyone else. Instead, she believes that fallen women, though they can never regain their purity, should be treasured as trash keepsakes and put to whatever good use that can be found for them, rather than rushing them off to the end of their lives. One of her chief methods of making this point is to tell affectionate stories about pieces of material trash that her characters own and value in spite of their defectiveness, thus showing a close-up view of how Victorians handled and disposed of their possessions.

H. Rider Haggard doesn't do very much to advocate for marginalized groups that are treated like trash, but he does take the step Gaskell doesn't take: he shows that *all* human beings are trash, not just figuratively, but literally when we die and our corpses decay. Haggard also goes further to examine the connection between womanhood and trash, using his Gothic femme fatale to help expound upon the conflicting fears and desires human beings have for trash. In addition, when paired with Peter Lund Simmonds, Haggard's *She* provides exposition on some types of waste management systems that don't feature prominently in Mayhew, Chadwick, or Dickens: the systems that dealt with the dead. Using the conventions of Gothic fiction, Haggard explores the horror that is the human body's ultimate decay, and he questions what it means for something to be recycled and what, if anything, remains of us after we find our way to the ground.

Together, these three novels show us what the logic of trash really means. Namely, because of its resemblance to the human beings who discard it, trash causes us to draw an uncomfortable equivalence between ourselves and it, an equivalence that forces us to consider our mortality. Consequently, because it is so much like us, we are compelled both to pull it towards us and to push it away at the same time. However, we can resolve those conflicting desires by using trash as a metaphor for marginalized people. If the people whom we despise are trash, then we can recognize the human in trash and push it away at the same time, without having to internalize the reality of our own deaths too deeply. The logic of trash manifests in Victorian novels in the form of what I have termed trash stories, or stories wherein a human being follows the trajectory of a piece of trash, moving through the stages of discarding, recycling, decaying, etc. Trash stories always discuss the questions of mortality and marginalization, but authors also use them to discuss broader topics. For Dickens, the trash stories in *Our Mutual Friend* are also stories about sanitation, poor relief, and duty to family. For Gaskell, the trash stories in *Ruth* are about fallenness, forgiveness, time, and materialism. For Haggard, the trash stories in *She* are about what roles women have the right to occupy, about the British Empire, and about the present's relationship to the past. The logic of trash continues to have an influence on how we think today.

After the Victorian period, trash and the systems designed to manage it changed substantially, most notably because of the World Wars and the development of the environmentalist movement. As greater prosperity enabled human beings to produce more trash, and as expanding technologies created newer and more toxic forms of waste, humanity increasingly proved unwilling and unable to deal with the mess they were creating. Creation of environmental enforcement agencies in the 1970s changed the landscape of Britain's trash

systems to a certain degree, but Britain still depends largely on private enterprise to deal with waste to this day. Additionally, trash became significant on a global scale instead of just on a national, municipal, or parish level. Perhaps the most famous type of trash pollution in the present day is the Great Pacific Garbage patch, an amalgam of the world's waste that has accumulated in ocean gyres and is eight times larger than the entire British Isles. The United Kingdom's trash has become a problem for the rest of the world, just as the rest of the world's trash has become a problem for the United Kingdom.

Today, writing about trash has proliferated just as trash itself has proliferated. Trash has its own scientific journal, founded in 2007, called the *Journal of Material Cycles and Waste Management*, and the blog *Discard Studies*,[53] founded in 2010 by Robin Nagle, claims to be the hub for an emerging interdisciplinary field centered on trash. Not only has the topic of trash become more widely discussed, but its study has become more specialized and more rigorous as our present-day waste management crisis has caused increasing alarm. This year, the pandemic has dominated the scholarly discussion of waste management in the science and social science fields as cities struggled to protect their sanitation workers and a flood of disposable masks and gloves poured into the world's garbage cans.[54] The most significant change between writing about trash in the Victorian period and writing about trash today is the sense of urgency that is derived from our environmental crisis, and writers are much less likely to rhapsodize about trash's benefits than they were in the nineteenth century. Additionally, the notion that trash is feminine has receded as the modern household has changed. However, the ideas that articles of trash have a certain charm to them, that these pieces of trash have their own life story, and that

[53] Which can be accessed at https://discardstudies.com

[54] See "COVID-19 and Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Management: a Review" by Das et al.

trash can help us think about death, continue on. Even the most clinical of data-driven projects refer to the "life cycle" of trash, affirming that trash can, in some sense, live and die as we do.

Two books show how contemporary writers use a combination of memoir and archaeology to continue the Victorian tradition of holding up trash as a mirror to society: Lara Maiklem's *Mudlarking* (2019) elaborates on some of the questions about sentimental value that I raised in my chapter about Gaskell, and Alice Gorman's *Dr Space Junk vs the Universe* continues in Peter Lund Simmonds's footsteps cataloguing and finding new uses for trash (2019). In *Mudlarking*, Maiklem tells the story of her experience as a modern-day mudlark searching for treasures of the past in the silt of the Thames at low tide. In many ways, the book recalls *Nature Near London* as Maiklem uses a soft tone not unlike Richard Jeffries's to tell readers about her experience observing the Thames and the things that are buried in it. Similarly, like Gaskell, Maiklem wishes to show us the sentimental value behind every bit of precious trash, whether that is sentimental value that springs from her own personal affection for an object, or sentimental value that she can reveal to the reader by telling the story of the people who owned it before.

By contrast, in *Dr. Space Junk vs. the Universe*, Alice Gorman, an Australian archaeologist, is focused entirely on the trash of the mid-twentieth century and later, specifically, the broken bits, used-up fuel tanks, and defunct satellites left behind by human exploration of space. Her insights reveal how trash can teach us about death and how it can still serve a useful purpose. While the Victorians used trash to discuss the things about death that most concerned them—namely, the fact that we all will die and that our bodies decay—Gorman looks at death from a twenty-first-century perspective, a perspective informed by life-extending medical advances like heart monitors and defibrillators that have added new complexities to the question

of where exactly the line between death and life is located (141). She tells the story of a "supposedly dead" satellite that was discovered by an amateur radio astronomer and found to still be transmitting data, even though the satellite's NASA team had stopped listening to it years ago. Tilley's discovery leads Gorman to reflect: "A satellite that can be spoken to, listen or which has power left [sic], isn't technically junk....If a spacecraft is remembered, it is definitely not yet dead" (142-143). Gorman's words echo the phrases we use to comfort ourselves during loss, but her application of them to trash is interesting because they take on a refreshingly literal quality. Satellites that are ignored cease to function when no one sends them commands or receives the signals they transmit. Gorman concludes that they are "like the gods who don't die as long as people believe in them" (140). However, she shows that this sort of death, unlike ours, is not permanent, and many seemingly dead satellites can in fact be revived (140).

Gorman also provides an environmentally conscious update on writing in appreciation of trash. The environmental problem with so-called "space junk" (a term used by NASA scientists as a synonym for space debris) is that it orbits the earth at very high speeds and collides with functioning satellites and space stations, causing damage and creating more space junk. Some pieces will stay in orbit indefinitely, while others will crash back to Earth. In the worst-case scenario, called the Kessler Syndrome, so much space junk could accumulate that it would become impossible for humans to continue our exploration of space or to use satellites. However, Gorman, a modern-day Simmonds, still sees value in trash despite its danger. While Simmonds envisioned the economic benefits of trash, Gorman identifies its archaeological benefits. Indeed, the bulk of Gorman's book is devoted to telling the reader the stories that space junk can reveal about our own history and culture. She argues that satellites such as Sputnik and Vanguard, or even the red luxury sports car Elon Musk sent into space, are chock full of

information about our way of life that future generations may need to understand us. These things may be space junk, she writes, but they are also crucial artifacts of our history, and removing them would erase the evidence of how space travel developed. Gorman concludes that our efforts to clean up Earth's orbit should try to preserve cultural markers and should not sweep away our history when it sweeps up the debris of space. So Gorman continues to seek value in trash, to pay attention to the stories it tells, and to view it as a way of understanding death.

Fiction writers, too, continue to explore how trash can tell us stories about death, marginalized people, and our own inner conflicts, particularly in film. As with the nonfiction, present-day fiction is haunted by impending environmental disaster, and many fictional depictions of trash seem specifically designed to articulate our anxieties about what our trash may one day do to us. Several of Terry Gilliam's films, including *12 Monkeys* (1995) and *Brazil* (1985), depict dark, cramped visions of the future in which virtually every shot is stuffed to bursting with pieces of trash. In these films, the trash doesn't take center stage, but instead serves as set dressing for these stories' more central themes about humanity's inability to solve the lethal problems we have created for ourselves. A few years later in 1999, Matt Groening's *Futurama* features trash in an episode entitled "A Big Piece of Garbage," in which a gigantic ball of garbage fired into space by twenty-first-century humans returns to crash into Earth generations later. The episode satirizes our bad habit of leaving our messes for the next generation and also provides an ironic counterpart to the sentimental value Gaskell and Maiklem esteem so highly.

Trash shows up in many fictional dystopias, but perhaps no fictional work has lavished more attention on it than Pixar's *Wall-E* (2008). In any discussion of trash, *Wall-E* deserves a mention, but a bit of an extended analysis of it is warranted for this dissertation because it is such

a good example of the twenty-first-century update of the logic of trash: specifically, the fact that trash tells a story, that we wish to pull it toward us and push it away at the same time, that it serves as a metaphor for marginalized people, and that it leads us to think about death. This melancholy children's film begins on a filthy, unpopulated Earth. The story reveals that in the not-too-distant future, trash pollution spirals out of control to the extent that human beings have left Earth on a giant cruise liner, leaving behind them a fleet of robots to clean up after them, and hoping one day to return once the mess is gone. However, there was so much trash that 700 years later, all the robots have broken down except Wall-E, the lovable trash compacting robot who gives the film its title, and the Earth has become a brown, dead planet plagued by violent dust storms, opaque black seas, towers of garbage between the skyscrapers, and mountains and mountains of refuse still remaining for the lonely little robot to compact into cubes all by itself. Yet Wall-E has fallen in love with the world Earth's humans left behind, and, like a Victorian mudlark, it has collected its own little stash of precious leftovers that caught its fancy, including Zippo lighters, egg beaters, and VHS tapes of Broadway musicals that have convinced Wall-E that what it wants most in the world is another robot hand to hold.

Later, a probe robot named Eve from the cruise liner returns to search for life on Earth and discovers a tiny green sprig that Wall-E has collected on one of its trash-compacting expeditions and planted in an old boot. This single seedling is enough to convince Eve's systems that Earth is ready for humanity to return. Wall-E, under the influence of the love stories it has taken to watching, develops a hopeless crush on Eve and follows the other robot back to the cruise liner, where viewers discover that humanity has devolved into helpless, interchangeable fools, so distracted by consumption and entertainment that they know nothing of their history, don't look out the windows of their spaceship at the stars, and haven't even explored their own

ship. Despite these deficiencies, the film prompts the audience to root for them as they, with the help of Eve and Wall-E, overcome an auto-pilot system convinced by its programming that Earth is not habitable.

In many ways, the film seems to agree with the auto-pilot. The future humans do not appear competent enough to fix the post-apocalyptic wasteland they are striving so hard to reach. Indeed, the fragile green shoot that is supposed to be evidence of Earth's potential as a habitat loses a leaf and begins to brown slightly after being tossed frantically back and forth during the various hijinks that ensue. Worse still, when the cruise liner eventually returns to Earth, the human beings totter out unsteadily on their unused legs into the dead landscape to plant the shoot, eager to grow a "pizza tree," since they are too ignorant to know where food comes from. In what feels a bit like the final nail in the coffin, at the end of the film, the camera zooms out to display a shot of a dim, brown Earth partially obscured by a cloud of space junk, suggesting that the Kessler Syndrome has in fact come to pass. Incredibly, that image of a bleak, dead planet is the end of this children's film except for a montage in the credits (which I will discuss in more detail below). *Wall-E* seems to be in conflict with its own storyline, cheering on the robots and humans as they return to Earth, but also making that Earth seem completely beyond their power to repair.

Wall-E, like the Victorian texts I have discussed, connects marginalized people with trash as a way to manage the conflicts at its heart, in this case through its portrayal of the future humans, who represent a group that many in the present day treat with disrespect: disabled people who are fat. The humans aboard the space cruise ship go about their daily lives in hover-chairs that are futuristic updates of the wheelchair, and they are depicted as lazy, simple, and gluttonous. At one point, when the captain decides to overpower the autopilot in order to take

back control of the ship, the soundtrack plays the "Mars" theme from Holst's *The Planets* as the captain stands upright for the first time in his life. The effect is intended to be humorous, playing a majestic orchestral score to accompany an insignificant feat, and exaggerating the captain's body size by likening it to that of a planet. However, this auditory joke is based on the implication that only laziness confines those who are disabled and fat to their wheelchairs. Surely, the film suggests, they could stand if they would just try a little harder.

Though it is not quite as vicious as Dickens's mockery of Mr. Dolls's delirium tremens, *Wall-E* doesn't display the awareness of injustice that Gaskell exhibits in *Ruth* when she depicts the relationship between trash and the people society pushes to the margins. Indeed, the narrative purpose of the future humans is closest to Haggard's punishment of Ayesha to free the male protagonists from the burden of Gothic trash: viewers are invited to chuckle at the plight of those who are fat and disabled as a way to give some relief from the anxieties caused by the film's dismal view of our planet's future. After that devastating final image of the brown Earth, the film attempts to inject a little optimism with a rather unconvincing final credits sequence that makes explicit the displacement of anxiety about trash onto the non-normate bodies of the future humans aboard the cruise liner. The credits sequence shows a montage of helpful robots teaching the humans to till the soil and to go angling in some surprisingly blue rivers for fish that apparently still swim there. In this sequence, every generation of human beings gradually grows thinner and fitter than the last as the Earth becomes cleaner and greener. So the film discards fatness and disability along with the trash and pollution. The credits sequence, which is animated in a very different style, feels like it is separating itself from the rest of the film, insisting on a sunny ending, even though *Wall-E* does not in any way set the protagonists up for success. As Scanlan writes, cleanliness is the result of separation, and the bright colors, fertile

natural scenery, and smiling, thin humans of the credits make conspicuous the fact that the film is attempting to tidy away all the things it brought out into the open that could have made the viewer uncomfortable. It justifies this with a sort of moral message at the expense of the fat and disabled future humans. Though the film ostensibly rewards them for their good stewardship of the Earth by giving them fitter, thinner descendants, the mechanism by which it confers this reward is to assert that, as they are, they are trash, and as such, they must be left behind.

Wall-E is not at its best when human characters are on-screen, and this is because the film *is* at its best when it is using trash for another of its most important narrative purposes: to think about death. I would argue that the real purpose of *Wall-E* is to use the stories its trash tells to allow viewers to mourn our own passing, and it is this mourning that the film attempts to protect us from by using digs at fat disabled people as a distraction. The little trash-compacting robot, like Maiklem, gathers up fascinating trinkets from the rubbish, and the viewer can see through its fascinated swivel-camera eyes just how interesting a light bulb or an egg beater really is. These scenes remind the viewer of the good things about humanity, such as our Broadway musicals, fuzzy, aged recordings of which accompany many of these scenes, and the very fuzziness of the sound, evidence of the obsolescence of the technology on which it was recorded, goes to reinforce the feeling that even the soundtrack is composed of the remains of our own thoroughly dead civilization. I have argued that trash tells stories in all the texts I've studied, but in *Wall-E*, trash literally tells stories because Wall-E harvests its VHS tapes from Earth's trash heaps, and watches it on an apparatus cobbled together from broken electronics. The more Wall-E watches the tapes, the more it connects with Earth's past and with the humans who are long gone.

These scenes of Wall-E gathering and appreciating trash are poignant because all those endearing fragments of twentieth- and twenty-first-century life about which both Wall-E and the

viewer can see the charm, have become corpses whose decay turns the blue marble brown. The only nonhuman life besides the green shoots that grow in the dump (excluding the credits sequence) is a single cockroach, to whom Wall-E feeds eternally fresh Twinkies. No other life remains, the film laments, and the frantic return to Earth that Eve's discovery of the green shoot provokes only seems more futile because the visuals of the film emphasize and reemphasize how vast the garbage is in contrast to the tiny, delicate seedling. The resurrection that the film's plot promises is dwarfed by its mourning for the lost past.

On the surface, Wall-E's affection for garbage, which the film seems to applaud, might appear to provide a suggested remedy to the trash problem: don't throw away things that are valuable. After all, couldn't humanity have avoided drowning the Earth in garbage if they had simply refused to throw perfectly good things away? However, in reality, it is a fondness for possessions that has produced the mounds of garbage. Out-of-control consumerism couldn't take place if the things humanity produces weren't appealing. The towers of garbage are the ominous shadow of Wall-E's collection, and its cute admiration for the treasures it finds there are a gentler portrait of the same greed at which the film raises its eyebrows when practiced by the future humans.

Wall-E tells viewers to care for the Earth, but it never really tells us to stop consuming. In fact, it forgives humanity for hoarding possessions, and this, perhaps is why the redemption it promises is less convincing than the trash wasteland upon which the story is based. *Wall-E* is an epitaph for twenty-first-century human beings: here lies humanity; they produced this magical junk that killed them—but weren't they spectacular while they lived? Though the film has plenty of advice for the humans of the future, *Wall-E* doesn't want the humans of the present to change, no matter how bad their habits.

In fact, Wall-E the lovable robot embodies the human desire to embrace the trash—our magpie tendency to fill our top drawers with uncategorizable junk and to hold onto bits of things that might come in handy at some unspecified future time. At the same time, the film also depicts the conflicting desire to discard trash since the very trash from which Wall-E gets its VHS tapes is the trash that has killed the planet. In this, we can see the twenty-first-century update to the Victorian logic of trash. Today, trash is an environmental crisis, and it stands in, not just for our death, but for the death of every other living thing on Earth. As in the Victorian period, trash may have an interesting story, it may teach us about death, and it may be related to marginalized identities, but twenty-first-century trash is different from Victorian trash because it can never be an unambiguously good thing. Indeed, our world is haunted by the optimistic ghosts of the nineteenth century, since it seems to be so hard to shake the Victorian idea that maybe trash can be rehabilitated, even though our trash is fundamentally different in composition from theirs. The solution to our problem is obvious—stop consuming so much—but *Wall-E* gives up on the idea that humans can or will ever do that, and so do the other fictional stories I have mentioned. Gilliam's future worlds are choked with trash, and in the *Futurama* episode, the only way to avoid the garbage ball crashing into Earth is to send a second ball of garbage to bounce it away.

My research into all genres of writing about trash has made it pretty clear to me that the remedy for environmental pollution will not come from the field of literary criticism. However, if there is anything I can contribute to the solution, I offer the logic of trash. The logic of trash teaches us that our lives and values are reflected in the things we throw away, and that we treat others like trash when we are struggling and failing to reconcile ourselves with our own mortality. If we can accept the finitude and fragility of our lives—and that includes the finitude

and fragility of the Earth—we can gain a much-needed perspective. Accepting our mortality frees us from the tyranny of anxiety about the far distant future because we know we will never see it; accepting mortality also spurs us to overcome whatever complacency may be keeping us idle. So, perhaps the logic of trash can at least help us do a better job of making use of the time that we have, and maybe that will give us gloomy residents of this twenty-first-century dystopia the ability to muster up some of Simmonds's energy to catalogue, sort, and recycle some trash.

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