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PROPHECY IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

The Ohio State University

Ph.D. 1982

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MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td></td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE</td>
<td>PROPHECY IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO</td>
<td>PROPHETIC ELEMENTS OF VICTORIAN CULTURE EMPLOYED IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FICTION.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE</td>
<td>PROPHECY AND CHOICE IN JANE EYRE</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
<td>MILLENNIAL PROPHECY IN LITTLE DORRIT</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE</td>
<td>THE RELATIVITY OF PROPHECY IN THE MOONSTONE</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SIX</td>
<td>PROPHECY AND DREAD IN DANIEL DERONDA</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN</td>
<td>PROPHECY AND IMAGINATION IN TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES, JUDE THE OBSCURE, AND THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER EIGHT</td>
<td>CATHARSIS AND PROPHECY</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iii
CHAPTER ONE: PROPHECY IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

I. The Purgation of Doubt and Fear

When Edward Rochester masquerades as a gypsy fortune-teller in *Jane Eyre*, he assumes a role which had great interest for the Victorian audience. He becomes a prophet, thereby joining a class of stock characters in nineteenth-century fiction that includes Daniel Deronda, Mr. Sludge, Alton Locke, Clym Yeobright, and the ghost of Jacob Marley. He becomes more than he intends; more is at stake than he understands. It is not just his own future, or even Jane's, that is at issue. What was at stake for the Victorian audience was prophecy itself: the possibility that the future could be known; that the present and past could be correctly interpreted, their signs and portents properly understood; that higher truth could be perceived by men endowed with prophetic insight; that the present and future could be reshaped by men of vision. There was doubt among the Victorians about whether the sources of inspiration were still accessible to man, a growing awareness that the sources of inspiration, if they existed at all, had been dramatically changed. And there was doubt about who to believe. How could a person know which prophet was the true one? Could
several different prophets be right? Was a true prophet infallible or could he be in part untrustworthy?

The answers to these questions were crucial. They determined whether one joined Newman in converting to Catholicism, whether one believed after the French Revolution that the Millennium was in progress, whether one agreed with Malthus that population growth would outstrip the food supply. They were integral to major controversies of the age: the argument over the infallibility of the Pope; the perennial debate over the need for social reform; the question of geological versus biblical time; and the confrontation between those who believed in the Genesis account of creation and those who were proponents of evolution.

The religious issues of the times led to a re-examination of prophecy because they called into question the truth of biblical revelation and the prophetic traditions of the early church. Proponents of doctrines which supplanted traditional revelation looked to prophecy as a means of establishing their own authority. Social reform and scientific prediction, because they dealt with new "visions" of the future, were recognized as alternatives to prophecy by some, as the modern forms of prophecy by others. It is important to realize that the parallels between science, reform, and prophecy went beyond their similar roles in predicting the future. Darwin's theory of the origin of the species was a direct contradiction of the manner in which the Bible--as...
revelation—accounts for the past. Evolution was revisionist history and a "re-vision" of man's place in nature. In proposing a scientific view of the differentiation and development of species Darwin was displacing what was regarded as a prophetically-received explanation of the past and present. Similarly reform implied not just prediction but also criticism of the present and research into the past in hopes of discovering a better model for society.

As Jerome Buckley and others have shown, the Victorians were afraid of change and uncertain that the attitudes and beliefs they had inherited were true. This fear and uncertainty were far from mild, resulting as they did from the example of the French Revolution, from chronic social unrest that threatened to erupt into violence, from the enormous changes in society and culture created by the industrial revolution, and from the ongoing re-evaluation of religious doctrine and religion itself. Those who proposed to lead England out of the wilderness of doubt and fear were welcomed literally and figuratively as prophets because they filled the need for guidance, supplied new principles to take the place of discredited ones, or reassured the country that the traditional ways were best.

Literature responded by dramatizing this situation. In many Victorian novels readers could recognize the reflection of their own uncertainty and fear and enjoy readings which resolved the doubts and dispelled the fear, or made the
unknowable future less frightening. Fiction has always fulfilled the purpose of helping people adjust to change, of helping them to cope with stress by depicting it as manageable. The Victorian novel answered the need for prophecy by making it a primary theme and making prophets major characters. Questions about which prophet to believe were resolved by the outcome of the story.

In a very real sense, the endings of these novels are representations of the future itself, symbols of everything the Victorians hoped for and feared, for progress realized or decadence confirmed, for predictability and the status quo or uncertainty and radical change. To the original readers of *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Jane Eyre*, *Romola* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the conclusions of such books provided a catharsis of uncertainty and fear. True prophecy was confirmed and false prophecy revealed with the simultaneous arrival of the predicted future and the climax or end of the action. There was relief that the future was, after all, predictable and benign, or relief that life could go on despite the worst that the future could bring. If values or beliefs were challenged, the resolution of the conflict --brought about with the intervention of prophecy--could show them reaffirmed, replaced by "better" beliefs and values, or adapted to fit the new circumstances of nineteenth-century England.
The Victorians were the Oliver Twists and Jane Eyres of their time, the orphans of Neoclassicism and eighteenth-century complacency, of eras when traditions and institutions were secure—the endangered dreamworlds of England and France before the French Revolution when, as Dickens describes it in *A Tale of Two Cities*, "it was clearer than crystal to the lords of the State preserves of loaves and fishes, that things in general were settled for ever."² If anything was clear in the nineteenth century, it was that nothing was settled. The result was a sense of vertigo in time, like that invoked by Carlyle in his image of "shooting Niagara" (used to imply the consequences of passing the second Reform Bill); by Matthew Arnold when he envisions himself "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born." The feeling strikes Jane Eyre as her friend, Helen Burns, is dying; Jane imagines herself on a precipice, her mind secure only in "the one point where it stood—the present; all the rest was formless cloud and vacant depth."³ Her personal confrontation with mortality and the unknowns of the past and future echoes what Brontë's audience felt or feared: the void of Carlyle's Everlasting No; the nameless dread experienced by Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda*.

Arnold, Jane Eyre, Teufelsdröckh, and Gwendolen are all either literally or figuratively disinherited, abandoned by history and tradition, forced to fend for themselves without
the guidance of precedent or family, with no clear knowledge of where they are heading or what to expect when they arrive. All of these people and characters turn to prophecy for guidance. Arnold and Carlyle become classic examples of the Victorian sage, the author-as-prophet. Teufelsdröckh becomes a seer. Gwendolen and Jane seek prophets to teach and direct them.

In response to the need for prophetic certainty, Victorian novels reach a variety of cathartic resolutions. Relief from uncertainty and fear could be achieved if in the course of a novel false prophets were unveiled and the true prophet revealed, as in the case in *Jane Eyre*—where the true prophet turns out to be Jane herself. In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens reasserts the validity of biblical prophecy. Another possibility was to demonstrate that various forms of prophecy, contemporary and traditional, could all be partly correct and together could elucidate an unknown "Truth." This resolution is demonstrated in *The Moonstone*, by Wilkie Collins. Less satisfactory, perhaps, is the uneasy synthesis maintained by George Eliot in *Daniel Deronda*, which both asserts the importance of prophecy as a vocation and expresses doubt about the certitude with which one can judge its accuracy. In *Deronda* the predicted future is moved back—outside the boundaries of the novel—and being a prophet becomes an end in itself. Catharsis is accomplished in two ways: by reasserting the traditional form
of prophecy, as suggested in Deronda's discovery of his heritage and acceptance of the prophet's role; and by showing his determination to live as a perpetual witness to the visionary truth he has inherited—the promise of a Jewish homeland.

Even later in the century, Thomas Hardy explores the validity of prophecy in *The Return of the Native* and other novels, concluding that prophecy is an inevitable part of human nature, whether or not it is possible. The relief from uncertainty and fear is painfully simple to see but difficult to accept. As Hardy envisions the world, we bring the doubt and fear upon ourselves by attempting to create change. In practice no substantive change is possible, therefore the fear of change and uncertainty about beliefs are illusory. Those who suffer from them bring it on themselves.

II. The Nature of Prophecy

The catharsis of doubt and fear in Victorian fiction relies on what to us is an unfamiliar definition of prophecy, different in significant ways from the accepted critical view of prophecy in nineteenth-century literature, from our contemporary understanding of the term, and from the traditional definition. Criticism has for the most part restricted itself to one point: that Victorian authors regarded themselves as prophets. It has, in fact, become difficult to find a major writer of the period—except perhaps
Trollope—who has not been described as a prophet. The limitations of this view are that it diverts attention from other forms of prophecy and from elements of prophecy within an author's work—in characterization, structure, and incident. Focusing on the author as prophet—and therefore on prophetic style, vision, and persona—has led to a neglect of prophetic content.

There has been very little understanding of what prophecy meant to the Victorians, beyond the general agreement that it was, after all, very important. But what is prophecy? How does the Victorians' definition of it differ from ours? When an author thought of himself as a prophet, what were the special attributes of the role and how were they embodied in his work? In the twentieth century the term prophecy refers primarily to prediction accomplished with supernatural aid, to foreknowledge arrived at with divine or occult assistance. Very often the usage is restricted even further—to religious prophecy alone. In this narrow sense, the modern definition of prophecy includes only foretelling of the future by a person who proclaims himself the spokesman for a god. When the term is applied to other forms of prediction—to scientific prediction or political promises, for instance—it functions mainly as a metaphor.

We limit the denotation of the word "prophecy" to predictions of the future. It is never used to refer to the
process of envisioning the past or to an ability to perceive the present state of affairs clearly. It has lost much of the connotation of moral judgment: whereas the biblical prophet was a social critic, his modern counterpart merely forecasts change. We maintain fine technical distinctions between prophecy and related phenomena. Clairvoyance, for example, is the medium's ability to contact a spirit world or sense the nature of events hidden from view--either by passage of time or mysterious circumstances. It is not generally regarded as a kind of prophecy. Divination is the interpretation of signs and omens--which are sometimes simply observed in nature, or are caused by a supernatural agent, or are elicited through magic. They serve as warnings and guide one's actions. Foreboding is the sense that something evil is about to happen. Prescience is the condition where one knows ahead of time what will take place. It might arise from intuition, reasoning, or perceptiveness.

In present usage, none of these phenomena are regarded as "prophecy." We might casually say that a fortune-teller "prophesies" the future, but would be hesitant to call her a "prophet." Instead the term "folk-prophet" is used. Foreboding and prescience are psychological states which can exist entirely apart from supernatural inspiration; therefore, the tendency has been to distinguish them from formal prophecy. The modern emphasis on the predictive element of prophecy has led to further distinctions between prophecy
and visionary experiences, and between prophecy and mysticism. Since a visionary experience might have nothing to do with the future, visions have not necessarily been considered prophetic. One can have, after all, a vision of the past, or a vision that transcends reality, or an hallucination. The mystical interpretation of events, dreams, or texts has been separated from our sense of what prophecy is because it is a search for meaning rather than a predictive act.

None of these modern distinctions are regularly observed in Victorian novels. The opposite tendency prevails; distinctions collapse. Prophecy is identified or associated with a wide range of phenomena and behaviors that foretell, envision, judge, guide, or interpret. In part this synthesizing movement may result from the natural associativeness of literature—which allows expansion of a motif along the guidelines of an archetypal system. In part it results from the Victorians' awareness of the traditional scope of the prophet role. And in part it represents the age's idiosyncratic vision of prophecy and its place in society.

Traditionally prophets have done more than just predict the future. In classical literature the prophet is often a priest or priestess, responsible for conducting ritual as well as making forecasts. The prophet is the moral and spiritual guide of the community—the person who,
like Moses, receives and interprets rules of conduct. There is a strong element of social criticism and reform-mindedness in prophecy. Old Testament prophets, for instance, denounce the conduct and impiety of their countrymen. Warnings of future calamity in the Bible are incidental to criticism of present behavior.

In the traditional view the prophet can be a visionary or a diviner, the interpreter of dreams (like Daniel) or explicator of moral codes. He may speak in riddles, parables, or sermons, in rhapsodic or pedagogical style. Far from being limited to predictions of the future, his scope includes "reading" the lessons of the past and evaluating the present. What is it, then, that distinguishes the prophet from a common priest or an historian? In more "primitive" societies, often nothing. The vocation implies prophetic authority. But otherwise the distinguishing features of the prophet would seem to be his claim to speak for a higher authority, his claim to have special knowledge unavailable to other people, and his ability to adapt past laws to new situations or to prescribe new principles. Technically the priest is the conservator of the past and the prophet the arbiter of change.

Victorian novels take the traditional view of prophecy and expand it further, both as a metaphor for all prescience and transcendent thinking and as an explanation for the similarities between different kinds of prediction and between
different kinds of moral guidance. The authors generally assume that in their culture the poet, scientist, philosopher, reformer, or folk-prophet may fulfill the same social role that religious prophets had filled in previous societies.

III. Prophecy and Structure in the Novel

Most discussion of prophecy within nineteenth-century fiction has treated it as foreshadowing. One critic points out, for instance, that the surreal paintings in Jane Eyre seem to prefigure later events and locations. Another (Barbara Hardy) describes the use of prophecy in George Eliot's novels as a device for letting the reader know ahead of time what will happen. K. J. Fielding says much the same thing about visionary scenes in David Copperfield. The most sophisticated analysis of the stylistic and structural effects of prophecy in the novel results from Barbara Hardy's recognition that the use of prophecy in the nineteenth century grows out of the tradition of serial publication, providing a means of bridging the gap between numbers. This convention, she explains, is developed by George Eliot into a structure of forward-looking expectations and backward-looking comparisons generated in the reader's mind by the influence of prophecies.

While it is clear that prophecy can be used to foreshadow and also clear that Hardy's analysis of its structural consequences is valid, there is more to be said about
the effect of prophecy on form in the Victorian novel. First, there has to be a distinction made between foreshadowing and prophecy. Foreshadowing is done from the author's point of view, with his certain knowledge of what will happen later in the story. A reader can assume that anything foreshadowed will take place. Prophecy, on the other hand, comes from the restricted point of view of characters within the story. The writer can manipulate the validity of a character's prescience by varying the extent to which the prescience corresponds to his own omniscient awareness of the plot. Unlike foreshadowing, a prophecy made is not necessarily true. Whether or not we accept it depends on our estimation of the character's trustworthiness, the reliability of his sources of information, and the degree to which he is a spokesman for the author.

Although prophecy is used to channel our expectations in Victorian literature, there is no longer the unspoken assumption (common to earlier fiction) that the story will fulfill the predictions made. On the contrary, points of view regarding the future tend to diverge. It is not just an ironic difference between what we know with the author's help--as through foreshadowing--and the ignorance of all or some of the characters. Instead, we may find ourselves as ignorant about the future as the characters themselves, even in the presence of prophecy. If that is the case, then obviously nothing has been foreshadowed. In Jude the Obscure
and Great Expectations, for instance; we very much wish that Jude and Pip's visions of the future would come true. But what has been "foreshadowed" in their hopes for a better life is contradicted in each novel by the actual outcome.

An even better example is Armadale, where the pattern of events might lead us to agree with Ozias Midwinter that the literal fulfillment of his father's prophecies is inevitable; somehow he will find himself the cause of his friend's death. But other characters within the story interpret the same chain of events as coincidence. Which point of view the author agrees with is, if anything, withheld, even after the end of the novel demonstrates that the predictions were wrong. All that is foreshadowed by the prophecies does not take place.

The novels about prophecy test different views of pre­science against each other and against the outcome of the story. If there are multiple prophet-figures, the one whose predictions most nearly match what ultimately happens is proven to be the true prophet. The formula is simple, but variations of it are complex. In a book like Romola, for example, the prophecies of Savonarola are matched against the self-serving machinations of Tito Melema, his dread, Romola's own interest in fulfilling her father's trust, Baldasarre's compulsion for revenge, and the painter Piero's acute perception of character. All of these reflect
possible relationships between the present and the future, or between appearance and reality. Tito's death is more a moral judgment than proof that he has been an inaccurate prophet. The fact is that his schemes have been quite effective in bringing about the kind of future he envisions. He falls short only through the intercession of poetic justice. Savonarola, by contrast, is proven wrong by events, but Romola's continuing admiration for him is a clear sign that he should not be categorically dismissed as a false prophet.

Prophecy is a device for closure in Victorian fiction. In simplest terms, a story is regarded as finished or ended when the thing predicted at the beginning of the action either occurs or does not occur at the prescribed time. What is unique about the nineteenth century's use of this device is the last part, that a plot can achieve closure when a prediction is proven wrong.

Nor is it absolute closure. The conventional pattern in literature had been the simplest one—where the fulfillment of a prophecy appears at the end of the story. The Victorians extend the convention without abandoning it. In Jane Eyre, for instance, there are intermediate prophecies and closures—when Rochester and St. John are recognized as false prophets. Other books with multiple closures are The Moonstone, Armadale, Daniel Deronda, and Tess of the D'Urbervilles. While it is certainly true that serial publication contributes to the popularity of this technique—as
a means of holding the reader's interest and providing cli-
mactic moments at the end of each number--in the novels
about prophecy the technique and theme reflect each other.

IV. Prophecy and Theme

The novels discussed in this study provide a much more
complex view of prophecy than the author-as-prophet conven-
tion can give--more varied and dynamic, and at once more
self-conscious and self-doubting. These are not so much
novels written by prophets as novels written about prophets
and prophecy by authors who are interested in the subject
and know that their audiences are too. All seem aware that
the writer, according to the contemporary definition, is
supposed to be a prophet, but their novels are not often in
any strict sense prophetic. Instead, prophecy appears in
these books as a major theme, as an attribute of certain
characters (who are seldom authors), as a literary device
for shaping out expectations and defining the end of a
story, and as one manifestation among many of man's desire
to know the future, to influence the course of events, and
to penetrate the mysteries of science, philosophy, and hu-
man nature.

Novels about prophecy are a peculiarly Victorian genre
of fiction. What sets these works apart from previous lit-
erature with prophecy in it--Oedipus and Macbeth, for in-
stance--is that they shift their attention from the nature
of fate to the nature of foreknowledge of prophetic insight. Prophecies made are not inevitably fulfilled. Truth perceived is not necessarily true, even though it appears to be a revelation. Characters have to live with doubt about the future as well as dread of it. We begin to see prophecy through the eyes of the prophets themselves, to see their own uncertainty, their human motives, and the limitations of their vision. A Victorian Shakespeare would make the witches the main characters in *Macbeth*, and we would watch them, as we watch Daniel Deronda, doubting whether prophecy was worthwhile or possible.

The process of living with or doing without prophecy becomes more important than the fulfillment of predictions or confirmation of revealed truth. A Victorian Oedipus might well undergo the same psychological stress as his greek counterpart, only to discover that he was not, after all, the person for whom the prophecy was intended. That is precisely what happens to Ozias Midwinter in *Armadale*. It is the fate of Pip in *Great Expectations*. The Victorian Oedipus may be like Tess Durbeyfield the victim of prophets rather than the pawn of fate.
NOTES


4 The history of this convention is described by Houghton, pp. 151-54.

Public interest in prophecy was high throughout the nineteenth century. The underlying causes for this interest were uncertainty about the future and doubt about the validity of inherited beliefs. People turned to prophecy for answers because it was a traditional source of guidance in religious belief and a traditional mode of prediction. Writers employed the analogy of prophecy to explain, to increase or attack the credibility of, and to dramatize other forms of guidance and prescience. Prophecy had been used in the late eighteenth century and the Romantic period in Gothic romances and historical novels, and also in the Newgate novels of the 1820's and 30's, but almost exclusively for the purposes of generating suspense and implying the operation of fate in ensuing incidents. What the Victorian novel does with prophecy is different. Fate is de-emphasized and prophecy becomes a theme in its own right.

Nineteenth-century authors draw upon a number of sources when writing about prophecy, notably: the poet-as-prophet convention inherited from the Romantic period; Millennialism; the Bible and biblical criticism; Carlyle's
views on history, philosophy, reform, and prophecy; the
gypsy fad of the 1840's and 50's; mesmerism; and the Oxford
Movement, along with the general religious seriousness of
the times.

The Poet-as-Prophet Convention

From the Romantic period the Victorians inherited the
view that a poet was, by virtue of his transcendent imagina-
tion, a prophet.¹ This convention was embraced by Victorian
poets and essayists alike, though some took it more serious-
ly than others. What John Holloway calls "the Victorian
sage" is essentially the character of the poet-prophet
adapted to the spirit of a new age: more learned, more
serious, far less revolutionary, but still oracular and
visionary in its own way.²

In nineteenth-century fiction, the poet-prophet is not
as common as one might expect. For the most part authors
seem to have shied away from the self-referential implica-
tions of writing about writers--though the topic is relative-
ly frequent in Victorian poetry. Works like Gissing's New
Grub Street and Trollope's The Way We Live Now demythologize
the author's role, showing writers as people making a living
rather than as prophets. The major exception is Alton
Locke, in which Charles Kingsley portrays as a prophet the
young tailor and poet about whom the novel is written. One
might also make a case for David Copperfield as a modest sort of
prophet-author, since the omens surrounding his birth are interpreted to mean that he is gifted with second sight. But if anything the allusion to clairvoyance is ironic, considering how little Copperfield really knows about himself and what is going on around him.

In place of prophet-authors a number of novels substitute prophet-artists or prophetic paintings and prefigurative dramatic scenes—the tableaux vivants of Jane Eyre, Daniel Deronda, and Vanity Fair, for example. The theory seems to be that if the poet could be a prophet then any artist could as well, or any production of the artistic imagination. The musician, Herr Klesmer, in Daniel Deronda serves as a prophet to foretell Gwendolen's chances of success as a singer. Prefigurative drawings or paintings play a significant role in Jane Eyre, Deronda, and Romola.

Millennialism and Prophecy in the Novel

It was quite commonplace in the first half of the nineteenth century to associate the French Revolution with Armageddon, and a number of religious sects arose at the time which were based on the belief that the Millennium was at hand. Their prophets were often widely known if not widely believed. But the imminence of the Millennium was a topic of general discussion, as is evident from the following remark made by a friend of Newman's at Oxford:

Prophecy was much preached and written upon in those days. For years before it had been debated all over the land whether Napoleon or the Pope were the Anti-christ, for one of them it must be, and the downfall
of the former had decided the question for, that is against, the latter. It was everywhere held to be of vital importance to have a right understanding on this question.4

This pressing interest in millennial events and related prophecy was carried into contemporary fiction.

Dickens and Eliot, in particular, make extensive use of apocalyptic imagery and millennial themes. In *Barnaby Rudge* Dickens describes revolutionary destruction so great that it appeared "as though the last day had come and the whole universe were burning."5 The connection between social upheaval and Armageddon appears again in *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Romola*, both of which share with *Little Dorrit* and *Daniel Deronda* the premise that throughout the novel a millennium is in progress before our eyes. Another consequence of Victorian millennialism was the tendency to incorporate into the story an image of a New Jerusalem or Promised Land, as is the case in *Alton Locke*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Little Dorrit*. It is on this point that millennial and Utopian imagery overlap. Jude Fawley's vision of Christminster might be either a vision of the New Jerusalem or of a Utopia, for instance. Carlyle saw little difference between the two when comparing Utilitarian dreams with Millennialism in 1829, when the country was, in his view, "fast falling to pieces":

At such a period, it [is] to be expected that the rage of prophecy should be more than usually excited. Accordingly, the Millenniumarians have come forth on the right hand, and the Millites on the left. The Fifth-monarchy men prophesy from the Bible, and the
Utilitarianism from Bentham. The one announces that the last of the seals is to be opened, positively, in the year 1860; and the other assures us that 'the greatest-happiness principle' is to make a heaven of earth, in a still shorter time.®

The Bible and Biblical Criticism

The extent of biblical typology in Victorian fiction has been described by George P. Landow. Most relevant to this study is his observation that scenes modeled after the "Pisgah view" of Canaan are important in the literature of the period. One of the most striking examples cited by Landow is the conclusion of Alton Locke, where Alton, as a modern-day Moses, is permitted to see the shores of America, the "Promised Land," then dies. In Alton Locke, Kingsley combines the image of the prophet as guide (Moses), as poet, and a reformer, since Locke seeks to reform working conditions for tailors.

Two biblical passages related to the nature of prophecy seem to have had a special attraction for the Victorians. They were fond of allusions to I Corinthians 13: 12: "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face." This famous verse is part of an extended discussion of the nature and relative importance of prophetic gifts in the ancient church, an attempt to resolve a conflict over which of the gifts was more important, which would receive greater credit. The entire discussion must have seemed especially relevant in the nineteenth century as competing "prophets" sought to win public acceptance and to reform the
church and society, especially since the discussion concludes what the most desirable form of prophetic gift is preaching, rather than prophecy through supernatural means.

The attitude towards prophecy in I Corinthians 13: 12 is very close to the Victorian belief—that prophecy is impaired in man's fallen state. Carlyle expresses this view in *Past and Present*:

Straining our eyes [to the Future], the utmost effort of intelligence sheds but some most glimmering dawn, a little way into its dark enormous Deeps: only huge outlines loom uncertain on the sight; and the ray of prophecy, at a short distance, expires.9

Flawed prophecy is characteristic of nineteenth-century fiction. When prophecy is used to evoke suspense or express a sense of fate (as in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century novels), the predictions it makes must inevitably come true. In Victorian novels, or by contrast, even the true prophet may be only partly right, or may have his vision limited by circumstance and human nature. Rochester, for example, is absolutely right that he and Jane Eyre are destined for each other, but his passion leads him to misperceive the means of achieving that destiny.

The other biblical passage that was frequently alluded to was the "writing on the wall" episode of the book of Daniel, where the prophet interprets a vision in which a supernatural hand appears and writes seemingly unintelligible words on the palace wall. In Victorian novels references to the handwriting on the wall are used to suggest the
existence of a higher moral authority, more societal than
divine, whose judgment upon a character's actions can be
"read" on the edifices society has built. Charlotte Bronte,
for example, has Rochester imagine his destiny, in the shape
of a hag, challenging him: "'You like Thornfield?' she said,
lifting her finger; and then she wrote in the air a memento,
which ran in lurid hieroglyphics all along the house-front,
between the upper and lower row of windows, 'Like it if you
can!' 'Like it if you dare!'" *10 Hardy shows us Tess running
a gauntlet of biblical texts that imply judgment of her
painted on the walls of barns past which she must walk. He
portrays Jude Fawley incising the Ten Commandments upon the
wall of a church.

George Eliot uses the same allusion to refer to the
mystical heritage of the past, either in learned knowledge
on an innate sense of culture, as when Baldassare momentar­
ily regains his ability to read and remember in Romola--the
chapter is titled "The Black Marks Become Magical"--or when
Mordecai Cohen in Daniel Deronda describes the heritage of
Israel as "the inborn half of memory, moving as in a dream
among writings on the walls, which it sees dimly but cannot
divide into speech."11

The influence of Millennialism led to interest in the
book of Revelation. Victorian novelists play on the double
meaning of the word, combining plot revelations with scenes
that bear typological resemblances to Revelation. Alton
Locke experiences a hallucinatory and visionary sickness which leads to his discovery of truths about himself, reform, and Christianity. Similarly the book of Daniel Deronda in which Daniel discovers that his mother is still living, in which the survival of his sister is revealed to Mordecai, and in which Mordecai delivers his prophecies of a Jewish homeland is titled "Revelations." The same play on words is implied in Jane Eyre when St. John reveals his own opinion as he reads from Revelation, and in the typological Revelation scene of Little Dorrit (discussed in Chapter IV of this study). Naturally all of these scenes appear near the end of novels in which they occur.

Two aspects of biblical criticism influenced the form which prophecy took in Victorian fiction. The first was the idea popularized by Carlyle but available in Spinoza and elsewhere that the manner in which prophecy is expressed reflects the nature of the man and age from which it arises. The herdsman's prophecies, for instance, are stated in the vocabulary of his occupation and suited to his historical context. By logical extension, in an age of science one might expect the scientist to be the prophet. A businessman will express his prophecies in economic terms. The same man who today is a social reformer, or a man of letters, or a man of action like Napoleon might, had he lived in biblical times, have been recognizably a biblical prophet. This message is inherent in Carlyle's Heroes and
Hero-Worship. It contributes greatly to the extension of the definition of prophecy in the nineteenth century to include any form of guidance or prediction. According to this view the reformer was quite literally a prophet—the only difference being that he was preaching not about a New Jerusalem but about a Utopian state.

The second aspect of biblical criticism that influenced Victorian fiction appeared in the methods used in such works as David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*, which attempted to revivify the Gospel by retelling it almost as biography, humanizing the figure of Christ. The result in Victorian fiction was a view of prophecy which brought it down to earth, made it something accessible to anyone, virtually a part of everyday life. It is from that perspective that Daniel Deronda can be seen as a "real" biblical prophet, despite his all-too-human doubts about his calling and despite the lack of unequivocal supernatural inspiration.

Carlyle and Prophecy

Thomas Carlyle's enormous influence upon Victorian ideas about prophecy took four forms. He was, as I have already pointed out, the popularizer of a view of prophecy which suggested that the prophet appeared in the guise most suitable to his age—whether or not that guise fit closely the conventional stereotype of a prophet. Carlyle was also the quintessential example of the Victorian sage as prophet, expressing himself in oracular style with seemingly inspired
self-confidence (even when speaking nonsense), entirely conscious that he was playing the prophet role and entirely unembarrassed by the pretentiousness of it. His style is not imitated in novels of the period. Of the better-known works only Kingsley's Yeast and Alton Locke include lengthy passages which might safely be called prophetic in tone and diction, and in neither case does Carlyle appear to be the model. But his example made the author-as-prophet role familiar. In his repertoire he displays a wide understanding of the varieties and purposes of biblical and sermonic prophecy. He parodies Millennialist rhetoric in "Signs of the Times," and in the jeremiad, "Shooting Niagara--And After."

In Past and Present he functions as the prophet criticizing the morals of his age and envisioning a better world, recalling his listeners to the simpler faith and lifestyle of their past. In Sartor Resartus he is the visionary.

Quite aside from what Carlyle might have meant when he spoke of or as a prophet was the influence of his associative patterns of thought. He was highly metaphorical in his writing, and the habit leads of its own accord to the blurring of distinctions between prophecy and reform, or prophecy and science. From Carlyle an author could extract a wealth of metaphors for prophecy--or what comes to the same thing, a wealth of prophetic metaphors for science, reform, hero-worship, or whatever else Carlyle chose to discuss. His precedent lent credence to such imagery. It
has that effect, for instance, on Alton Locke, where the fact that Alton is a Tailor combines the very real economic plight of Victorian tailors with an allusion to Carlyle's clothes metaphor for the unsubstantial world ofAppearances.

Finally, Carlyle was a proponent of the view that perception itself was inherently prophetic. In Sartor Resartus he complains that habit has blinded us to the miraculous in nature. Escaping habit and perceiving the reality beyond it is like Daniel reading the handwriting on the wall:

[Nature] is a Volume written in celestial hieroglyphs, in the true Sacred-writing; of which even Prophets are happy that they can read here a line and there a line. As for your institutes, and Academies of Science, they strive bravely; and, from amid the thick-crowded, inextricably intertwined hieroglyphic writing, pick out, by dextrous combination, some Letters in the vulgar Character.12

The origin of the concept of perception-as-prophecy lies in the Romantic period, when it was assumed that ultimate Truth could be apprehended through observation of nature. Carlyle carries on the tradition. In Victorian fiction the consequence of this view is that a character who is unusually perceptive may be intended as a prophet—hence the association of Detective Sergeant Cuff with prophecy in The Moonstone and the prophetic "dreams" of Affery in Little Dorrit, which are actually perceptions so strange that she cannot bring herself to acknowledge them.

Gypsies, Mesmerism, and Prophecy

Two popular interests of the Victorian period had indirect but important influences on prophecy: fascination
with gypsies in the 1840's and 50's; and with mesmerism from the 1840's through the 1860's. Each provided a different "model" for prophetic insight and prediction, with its own special characteristics.

The gypsy fad was started and perpetuated by the semi-autobiographical "novels" of George Borrow: *The Bible in Spain*, *Lavergro*, and *The Romany Rye*, in particular. These works, as part of their first-person, travel-book accounts of strange places and peoples, offered realistic descriptions of gypsy superstitions and fortune-telling, of folk-prophecy, with its emphasis on "reading" individual character traits and predicting personal rather than national fate (biblical prophecy is essentially national in scope). Folk-prophecy was nothing new in fiction, of course; Gothic and historical romances had used it extensively. But Borrow made folk-prophecy "real" and contemporary, something to be described, not simply invoked to create suspense.

The advantage of folk-prophecy to the writer of fiction was that it allowed him to tie the theme of prophecy to personal guidance and fate. It also freed the prophet figure from the necessity of being learned, from being another Victorian sage. The result is a tendency to contrast folk-prophecy with "national" prophecy, as in *Jane Eyre* and *The Return of the Native*. Rochester as fortune-teller is contrasted with St. John the religious and social reformer. Clym Yeobright the social reformer is contrasted with the
folk-prophets of the heath.

Mesmerism was associated with prophecy as a means of controlling its subjects, as a means of attaining insight, and as a means of prediction. The function of prophecy in guidance was equated with the control hypnosis could exert over behavior. The mesmerist's ability to elicit seemingly confidential or subconscious information from a subject provided a link between hypnosis and prophetic insight. And in early, widely-reported experiments with mesmerism in England, "patients" in hypnotic trances made predictions that came true. Novelists therefore attributed mesmeric qualities to characters depicted as prophets—to Rochester, for instance, and to Ezra Jennings in The Moonstone (who also happens to look like a gypsy). Because mesmerism was represented to the public as a medical science, it was also associated with scientific prediction, as in Wilkie Collins's short story "Mr. Percy and the Prophet," where fortune-telling is practiced by a man who is both a doctor and a mesmerist—who refers to his trade as "a great science."

The Oxford Movement

Among the premises of the Oxford Movement was a re-examination of church doctrine and practice. Inevitably the prophetic authority of new and old doctrines or practices had to be examined as well. It was a touchy business. To claim to be a prophet oneself would have been unseemly, though it is likely that Newman, for example was consciously
working within the conventions of the role of Victorian sage and prophet. Hence the authority of new doctrine had to be established or questioned on basis of historical prophecy, and "old" doctrine had to be established or challenged on the same grounds. Newman applies this method in his Lectures on the Prophetic Office of the Church (1837), arguing that religious practices observed in the early church have a prophetic warrant and message. He argues against Papal Infallibility on the grounds that it is not embodied (i.e., prophesied) in the traditions of the church:

Following the great Anglican divines, he notes that the historic Church possessed, in varying degrees, a true authority, trustworthy and supreme on the most fundamental points of religion, clear and weighty on many other questions, but inadequate to decide everything. Hence the Church is, not "infallible," but prophetic in her office.\(^5\)

This view has significant implications. For one thing, it suggests that prophecy is not totally reliable in all cases--another instance of the Victorian belief that in man's fallen condition prophecy is flawed. Newman's argument also implies that the church and its ministers do have prophetic authority. To speak in behalf of church doctrine, if the church possesses "a true authority, trustworthy and supreme on the most fundamental points of religion," is to speak as a prophet. Finding prophetic warrant in traditional practices, as Newman does, suggests that modern behavior should be guided by historical precedents--selected by the sage who looks into the past and distills from it
the prophetic truth it contains. This sage, of course, is a backward-looking prophet or seer. The method Newman uses is the same as that employed by Carlyle in *Past and Present*, and by Ruskin and Morris in their visions of medieval Utopias.

The Oxford Movement was simply one part of the major reassessment of religion that took place in the nineteenth century. Its effects upon Victorian fiction are closely allied with the effects of Methodism, Evangelicalism, and even Latitudinarianism—after the representatives of the Broad Church viewpoint sought to defend it from Catholicism on the one hand and Methodism on the other. As Margaret Maison has shown, each school of thought produced fiction to inculcate its own beliefs. The new religious seriousness contributed two elements to the depiction of prophecy in the novel, namely: the character of a priest or other cleric who is a true or false prophet; and the notion that portraying doctrinal views was in itself a kind of prophecy, since doctrine had its source in revelation. Notable examples of the prophet-priest in fiction include St. John Rivers, Savonarola, and Alec D'Urberville. Even where a "priest" is not explicitly associated with prophecy, the underlying question is often "where does the warrant for his beliefs come from?" The priest who speaks from revealed truth is himself a prophet. The priest who speaks from self-interest is a false prophet.
The author who portrays doctrinal beliefs can be considered a prophet from three points of view: like the priest he is the medium for conveying received prophecy; he is the sage who discovers and distills the truth embodied in the past; and he is the Romantic poet-prophet at work. Ironically, he is also like the Continental higher critics of the Bible, bringing to life and humanizing doctrine--with the intent not of destroying belief, as many Victorians thought the higher critics were doing, but of spreading it.

The elements of Victorian culture which have been discussed in this chapter are causes of and reactions to the era's uncertainty about traditional beliefs and about the future. In order to dramatize and resolve this uncertainty, contemporary novels drew upon these sources to evoke, explain, or represent it and to show the possible means of escaping uncertainty. The five novels discussed in the ensuing chapters reach different conclusions about how one might overcome doubt and fear or learn to live with them.
NOTES

1 The history of this convention is discussed by Walter E. Houghton in *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 151-54.


Examples occur in *Sartor Resartus*, Book Third, Ch. VIII; *The Moonstone*, Ch. 13; *Daniel Deronda*, Ch. 42; and *The Return of the Native*, Ch. IV and Ch. VI.


CHAPTER THREE: PROPHECY AND CHOICE
IN JANE EYRE

The catharsis of doubt and fear in Jane Eyre results from a synthesis of prophecy and choice. Jane has to decide whether to follow the plans that others make for her or to independently determine her own future. The characters who seek to control her—Edward Rochester and St. John Rivers, in particular—are represented as prophets. Rochester is the prophet of willfulness, self-gratification, and pleasure, a pagan priest who usurps the place of reason, morality, and the Christian religion in Jane Eyre's life.

In her own words:

My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol.1

St. John is the prophet of self-denial, altruism, and social welfare at the expense of individual pleasure. He claims "to speak Heaven's message" in the ear of those like Jane who are strong but faint-hearted, and "to offer them, direct from God, a place in the ranks of His chosen." When he commanded Jane to accompany him to India, it was, she says, as if I had heard a summons from Heaven—as if a visionary messenger, like him of Macedonia, had enounced,
"Come over and help us!" But I was not apostle,--I could not behold the herald,--I could not receive his call.

(JE 381-82)

Other forms of prophecy also affect Jane and our perceptions of the choices she makes. A series of minor characters contribute alternative visions of the future against which we can measure her own. Omens, visions, and premonitory dreams--some perhaps supernatural, some with rational explanations--are a continuing source of trustworthy information about the future, though occasionally Jane ignores them. Their presence strongly suggests the workings of an unspecified force in nature that guides people towards the moral and ultimately beneficial course of action, if properly interpreted or received. The key word is "guides," because prophecy in Jane Eyre does not reflect an unavoidable fate; it leads or directs a person, provides a signpost to the future instead of an itinerary.

Patterns of imagery underscore this view of prophecy--most notably the motif of aimless wandering, followed by the intervention of some form of guidance. But ultimately Jane must find direction for herself. External prophecy cannot be dispensed with. It becomes a means through which Jane discovers and tests her own inclinations, until finally she knows what she wants. It teaches her, refining and shaping her character without changing its essential features. Yet so long as it comes from someone else, however useful or attractive it may be, external prophecy is shown to be flawed
by self-interest. To best serve her own wishes, Jane must become, in effect, her own prophet. This interpretation is supported by the prophetic abilities she displays, and by the parallels that Brontë makes between guidance that comes from without and from within. The book's consistent preference is for making one's own decisions about the future, so long as they are based on a complete and informed knowledge of human nature, morality, and oneself.

* * * * * * * * * *

Rochester's credentials as a prophet derive from his manner of envisioning the future, from his heightened perception of Jane's character and worth, from occasions when he plays the role of prophet, and from the fact that Jane comes to regard him as her guide to future happiness. Like others in Jane Eyre who influence or seek to control her course of action, he is both a true and false prophet. Part of his message is true and good, reflecting Jane's own best wishes for herself and projecting some qualities of the future that is ideal for her. The ideal she achieves—marriage to a reformed and chastened Rochester—is a composite of all that is true in the multiple visions of the future she encounters, including her own.

Rochester is most obviously a prophet when he appears at Thornfield disguised as a gypsy fortune-teller and reads the future of each of the single women gathered there, including Jane. She reports that as she entered the library
to take her turn,

the Sybil—if Sybil she were, was seated snugly enough in an easy-chair at the chimney-corner. She had on a red cloak and a black bonnet; or rather, broad-brimmed gipsy hat.

(JE 186)

The disguise is more a revelation of Rochester's character than a masquerade. A gypsy is a pagan prophet, free from the morals of religion and society that the master of Thornfield wishes to circumvent.

The prophecies made by the "gypsy" are threefold. First, he contradicts Jane's assertion that she is neither so cold, sick or silly as to be affected by or interested in having her fortune told:

The old crone "nichered" a laugh under her bonnet . . . [She] raised her bent body, took the pipe from her lips, and while gazing steadily at the fire, said very deliberately:—

"You are cold; you are sick; and you are silly."

"You are cold, because you are alone; no contact strikes the fire from you that is in you. You are sick: because the best of feelings, the highest and sweetest given to man, keeps far away from you. You are silly, because suffer as you may, you will not beckon it to approach; nor will you stir one step to meet it where it waits you."

(JE 186-87)

What is most true in Rochester's vision is summed up in this speech. It warns Jane of her need for love and companionship, and teaches her to actively pursue what she desires, rather than suffer passively.

The second phase of the reading begins when the gypsy examines Jane's palm, concludes it is too fine to read, and
turns to an examination of her face, because, she says, destiny is written "on the forehead, about the eyes, in the eyes themselves, in the lines of the mouth" (JE 187). Brontë's assumption here is that the face reveals one's character. Also involved are possible allusions to phrenology and mesmerism, both of which had connotations of prescience for the Victorians.  

Before he actually reads the message of Jane's face, Rochester simultaneously questions her about her hopes and desires, reports facts and events from the Thornfield household as though they were prophetic insights, and conjectures -- accurately, as it turns out--about how she has felt during the visit of Blanche Ingram. Jane finds herself

Wrapped . . . in a strange kind of dream. One unexpected sentence came from [the gypsy's] lips after another, till I got involved in a web of mystification; and wondered what unseen spirit had been sitting for weeks by my heart watching its workings, and taking record of every pulse.

(JE 189)

Rochester's intent is to discover whether Jane loves him, and if so, how great a love it is. The testing of her love, which has gone on for weeks during the mock courtship of Miss Ingram, is represented as prophecy in the fortune-telling episode; that is its true nature rather than its temporary form. To know someone else's mind is literally an act of clairvoyance in Jane Eyre, of prophetically heightened or acute perception.
Rochester's perceptiveness is equated with prophecy when, in the third phase of the gypsy's fortunetelling, he reads Jane's character and her prospects—and his own prospect of success with her—in her face. Throughout her stay at Thornfield, Rochester repeatedly demonstrates his ability to read Jane's unexpressed thoughts through her eye; at one point he warns her to "beware what you express with that organ, I am quick at interpreting its language" (JE 130). When Jane insists that the gypsy tell her her fortune, Rochester in disguise responds,

Your fortune is yet doubtful: when I examined your face one trait contradicted another. Chance has meted you a measure of happiness: that I know. I knew it before I came here this evening. She has laid it carefully on one side for you. I saw her do it. It depends on yourself to stretch out your hand, and take it up: but whether you will do so, is the problem I study.

(JE 190)

In other words, from the alternatives circumstance has provided for her, Jane can choose at least a part of her future.

Rochester re-examines her face, and from a study of her character there concludes that both the eye and mouth portend success for his plans: the eye is favorable because it shows Jane's susceptibility and pleasure in company, the mouth because "it is a mouth which should speak much and smile often, and have human affection for its interlocutor" (JE 191). The forehead, by contrast, is not propitious. The gypsy tells Jane,

I see no enemy to a fortunate issue but in the brow; and that brow professes to say,--'I can live alone, if
self-respect and circumstances require me so to do. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss. I have an inward treasure, born with me, which can keep me alive if all extraneous delights should be withheld; or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give. The forehead declares, 'Reason sits firm and holds the reins, and she will not let the feelings burst away and hurry her to wild chasms. The passions may rage furiously, like true heathens, as they are; and the desires may imagine all sorts of vain things: but judgment shall still have the last word in every argument, and the casting vote in every decision.'

(JE 191)

These insights are, of course, stunningly accurate. Not only do they reflect clear knowledge of Jane's personality, they foretell events and discoveries yet to come in the novel: her refusal of Rochester and her growing self-reliance thereafter. Misled by his own passion and bitterness with the world, Rochester overlooks the implications of his own prophetic vision, and continues to pursue a course of action which must bring him into conflict with Jane's self-respect and reason, and with her power to choose for herself.

Rochester's acute perception of Jane's character is prophetic because in it are the seeds of the future; what she will do, how she will act, and what she expects of the future; are all based on who she is. While that might be said of any character in any book, Brontë's use of character to foretell the future is unique. Furthermore, Jane's personality is crucial to the prophetic vision of the novel because it provides the criteria upon which the future can be judged. The ideal future must suit her character. For
that reason, all that St. John Rivers, her second suitor, would require of Jane—submission, dedication to his cause, and the denial of love—cannot be true prophecy. Nor can Rochester's insistence that she live with him as his mistress, in defiance of conventional morality. Rochester's vision may appeal to her inherent rebelliousness and her need for passion, but it is not in accord with other, equally important aspects of her nature: her need for self-respect and the approval of society, her need to devote herself to something productive, her need for family ties, and the strength of her better judgment, in opposition to her passion. These contradictory features of her character are synthesized in her relationship to Rochester at the end of the novel.

The masquerade as a gypsy is not the only episode in which Rochester is overtly prophetic. Shortly after he has met Jane, he delivers her an oracle:

Know, that in the course of your future life you will often find yourself elected the involuntary confidant of your acquaintances' secrets: people will instinctively find out, as I have done, that it is not your forte to tell of yourself, but to listen while others talk of themselves; they will feel, too, that you listen with no malevolent scorn of their indiscretion, but with a kind of innate sympathy; not the less comforting and encouraging because it is very unobtrusive in its manifestations.

(JE 130-31)

The same elements are present here as in the gypsy's prophecies: acute perception, emphasis on Jane's character, and prediction based on character. And once again, the
prediction proves accurate. Jane has already served as the confidant to Helen Burns; she later fulfills the same role for Mrs. Reed and for her stepsisters, and for St. John Rivers. As a stylistic device, Rochester's clairvoyance this early in his acquaintance with Jane permits Brontë to explain the ease with which he admits the governess into his confidence.

Two visions interrupt Rochester's account of his love for Céline Varens. The first comes just as he reports to Jane his discovery that Céline was deceiving him with another man. He stops and asks Jane whether she has ever felt jealousy, but answers the question for her: she cannot have, because she has not felt love. He tells her,

> You think all existence lapses in as quiet a flow as that in which your youth has hitherto slid away. Floating on with closed eyes and muffled ears, you neither see the rocks bristling not far off in the bed of the flood, nor hear the breakers boil at their base. But I tell you—and you may mark my words—you will come someday to a craggy pass of the channel, where the whole of life's stream will be broken up into whirl and tumult, foam and noise: either you will be dashed to atoms on crag points, or lifted up and borne on by some master wave into a calmer current—as I am now.

(JE 136)

As Jane begins to gradually uncover the secrets of Thornfield her closed eyes and muffled ears are opened. The process is marked by development of the water motif. The same night it is Rochester, not Jane, who is asleep when fate threatens—in the form of a fire set in his bedroom by his mad wife, who has for a moment escaped from the care and custody of Grace Poole. Jane douses the bed and its
occupant with water from a basin; the bed is "deluged" and "baptized." Rochester awakens, cursing, and asks first whether there has been a flood, then whether Jane has plotted to drown him (JE 142-43). The imagery belies his own confidence that he has been borne into "a calmer current."

After she returns to her room, Jane has a waking dream, a vision of her own:

Till morning dawned I was tossed on a buoyant but unquiet sea, where billows of trouble rolled under surges of joy. I thought sometimes I saw beyond its wild waters a shore, sweet as the hills of Beulah; and now and then a freshening gale, wakened by hope, bore my spirit, triumphantly towards the bourne: but I could not reach it, even in fancy,--a counteracting breeze blew off land, and continually drove me back. Sense would resist delirium: judgment would warn passion.

(JE 145)

Much later, as she leaves Thornfield, Jane sees the future as "an awful blank: something like the world when the deluge was gone by" (JE 304). Several things are clear from Jane's dream. She has already emerged from the "quiet flow" of her youth. She has begun to imagine an ideal future. But the "master wave" that Rochester foretold is counteracted by reason. We also receive a warning that Rochester is a false prophet, in the implied sacrilege that he is the means through which Jane might reach the promised land.

The second of Rochester's visions occurs after a moment of silence, just before he resumes, at Jane's prompting, the story of Céline:
During the moment I was silent, Miss Eyre, I was arranging a point with my destiny. She stood there, by that beech-trunk—a hag like one of those who appeared to Macbeth on the heath of Forres. 'You like Thornfield?' she said, lifting her finger; and then she wrote in the air a memento, which ran in lurid hieroglyphics all along the house-front, between the upper and lower row of windows. 'Like it if you can!' 'Like it if you dare!'

(JE 137)

At that moment, Rochester is fixing his resolution to break with convention, to encourage Jane's love in spite of the fact that he is already married. In response to the hag's challenge he asserts

'I will like it,' . . . 'I dare like it'; and . . . I will keep my word: I will break obstacles to happiness, to goodness—yes, goodness; I wish to be a better man than I have been; than I am—as Job's leviathan broke the spear, the dart and the habergeon, hindrances which others count as iron and brass, I will esteem but straw and rotten wood.

(JE 137)

Like St. John Rivers, Rochester makes plans for the future that include Jane. As St. John's missionary dreams of service in India are the substance of his prophecy, so Rochester's dream of a happy future with Jane is the substance of his.

But neither makes a fair offer to Jane. Rochester withholds information, St. John love. Each has an incomplete view of life, and promises a less than ideal future. In the words of Robert Martin, "Rochester has been the ultimate temptation to Jane to live by passion alone, . . . St. John Rivers [provides] the final temptation to renounce the flesh entirely." The falseness of Rochester's vision
is revealed by the images of sacrilege and idolatry associated with it, and the contradictions it receives from omens and dreams. Immediately after he proposes to Jane and is accepted, she exults at being "called to the paradise of union"—while he in turn presumes to know the will of God: "I know my Maker sanctions what I do. For the world's judgment—I wash my hands thereof. For man's opinion—I defy it" (JE 243). After the allusion to Pilate's words and defiance of society, a series of omens strike suddenly: the moon is darkened, the chestnut tree groans, and a bolt of lightning splits it.

* * * * * * * * *

St. John Rivers is identified as a prophet by his name, his perceptiveness, his visionary plans for missionary work in India, and the predictions he makes about Jane's future. Like Rochester he claims to know what is best for her; the pagan prophet is her guide to paradise on earth, St. John is her spiritual guide.

The contrast is illustrated through parallels between Rose Oliver—St. John's passionate love—and Jane. She stands in the same relationship to him as Jane does to Rochester, but St. John rejects her:

he would not give one chance of Heaven; nor relinquish, for the elysium of her love, one hope of the true, eternal Paradise. Besides, he could not bound all that he had in his nature—the rover, the aspirant, the poet, the priest—in the limits of a single passion.

(JE 349)
This echoes Jane's "concealed and racking regrets for [her] broken idol and lost elysium" (JE 334) in her early days at Moor House. For St. John, passion is too confining, too much tainted with worldly sins.

He takes his name, of course, from St. John the Divine of the book of Revelation, the book from which he reads in his last effort to compel Jane to follow him on his mission. His text is the twenty-first chapter, describing "the vision of the new heaven and the new earth" (JE 396). Brontë does not quote this passage directly, but its relevance is obvious:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.
And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

(Revelation 21: 1-2)

It would have sounded as though Rivers were talking in the first person as St. John himself, delivering an oracle from God. Under the circumstances, it can hardly have been intended as anything but an implied command--a calling--to marry Rivers and take up his quest.

Verse eight is quoted directly, and Jane sees that it is meant as a prophecy for her:

The succeeding words thrilled me strangely as he spoke them: especially as I felt, by the slight, indescribable alteration in sound, that in uttering them his eye had turned on me.
"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But," was slowly, distinctly read, "the fearful, the unbelieving,
etc., shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Henceforward, I knew what fate St. John feared for me.

(JE 396)

In the prayer with which he follows the reading from Scripture, St. John asks for "strength for the weak-hearted" and "guidance for wanderers from the fold" (JE 396)--the guidance he wishes to provide for Jane, who throughout the book has been characterized as a wanderer.

What happens next--just prior to the mystical cry from Rochester that calls Jane to his side--is a visionary experience, repeating the water imagery of Rochester's earlier vision, and culminating in an explicit, seemingly prophetic calling:

I felt veneration for St. John--veneration so strong that its impetus thrust me at once to the point I had so long shunned. I was tempted to cease struggling with him--to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose my own.

I stood motionless under my hierophant's touch . . . . All was changing utterly, with a sudden sweep. Religion called--Angels beckoned--God commanded--life rolled together like a scroll-death's gates opening, showed eternity beyond: it seemed, that for safety and bliss there, all here might be sacrificed in a second. The dim room was full of visions.

(JE 397)

What saves Jane is her prayer for guidance direct from heaven, not filtered through the medium of another human being: "Show me, show me the path!" she entreats (JE 398). It is a plea for personal revelation, and it is answered.

In retrospect, Jane analyzes the difference between her two
temptations: to have yielded to Rochester, she says, would have been "an error of principle"; to yield to St. John would be "an error of judgment" (JE 397). The true guides for action are internal: personal revelation, a sense of morality, and reason.

Like Rochester, part of St. John's prophetic nature is shown through the way he makes plans for the future. "God has given us, in a measure, the power to make our own fate," he says,

and when our energies seem to demand a sustenance they cannot get--when our will strains after a path we may not follow--we need neither starve from inanition, nor stand still in despair: we have but to seek another nourishment for the mind, as strong as the forbidden food it longed to taste--and perhaps surer; and to hew out for the adventurous foot a road as direct and broad and the one Fortune has blocked up against us, if rougher than it.

(JE 343)

His metaphors parallel Jane's actual experiences on the moor after feeling Thornfield--when she was literally starving and lost--but St. John's solution is different from hers. Rather than trusting to God and fate, he takes action; he plans his future, and seeks to fulfill it through the exercise of will. When he performs his pastoral duties in spite of adverse weather, he explains himself with reference to his mission: "if I let a gust of wind or a sprinkling of rain turn me aside from these early tasks, what preparation would such sloth be for the future I propose to myself?" (JE 333). The mission is prophetic because it comes, or he perceives it as, "a call from heaven" (JE 343)--a personal
Like Rochester, St. John is acutely perceptive of Jane's thoughts and feelings. He reads them in her eyes and face just as the gypsy fortuneteller does, and makes predictions based on what he sees. Before he offers Jane a position as teacher in a school for girls, he looked at her, she says, and seemed leisurely to read my face, as if its features and lines were characters on a page. The conclusions drawn from this scrutiny he partially expressed in his succeeding observations.

"I believe you will accept the post I offer you," said he; "and hold it for a while: not permanently, though: any more than I could permanently keep the narrow and narrowing—the tranquil, hidden office of English country incumbent: for in your nature is an alloy as detrimental to repose as that in mine; though of a different kind."

(JE 336)

What he sees in her, and bases his prediction on, is her passion. As in the gypsy scene, Jane's character holds the key to the future, but here we are shown the opposite side of it. Rochester saw the strength of reason and judgment in Jane; St. John is disturbed by her capacity for feeling, for emotion. He predicts that she will not stay very long at the school. Jane asks how he knows:

"I read it in your eye; it is not of that description which promises the maintenance of an even tenor in life."

"... you are----" He paused.

"What?"

"I was going to say, impassioned: but perhaps you would have misunderstood the word, and been displeased. I mean that human affections and sympathies have a most powerful hold on you."

(JE 337-38)
Like Rochester, St. John is both a true and false prophet. His perception of Jane is accurate; his predictions come true. Brontë does not turn him into a totally false prophet like the scheming Jesuits of Victorian religious novels, who seduced people into becoming Catholics, and traveled to Rome, rather than India. His self-sacrificing mission is accepted as true, despite the human frailties—ambition, sternness, and repression—that occasion it, and despite the fact that he suffers from an imbalance of vision which is the opposite of Rochester's. "Reason, and not Feeling, is my guide," he tells Jane (JE 356). But he is a false prophet when he attempts to impose his vision of the future on someone else. For himself, it is perfect; it suits his character. For Jane it is wrong.

* * * * * * *

The minor prophets of Jane Eyre are Bessie Leaven, Helen Burns, and, to a limited extent, Maria Temple. For that matter, Bertha Mason has her part in prophecy, as well—she is the hag that Rochester imagines challenging him to like Thornfield, and the real-life vision who appears to Jane and rends in half her marriage veil, a portent of the failed wedding. Rochester's dog is named Pilot, in keeping with the book's imagery of wandering and guidance. Even Grace Poole fits the pattern; like the names Leaven and Maria Temple, her name reflects the religious tenor of the
book. Ironically, the doctrine of "grace" is a reason for not fearing the future—but Jane fears Grace Poole.

A number of critics have pointed out that Bessie, Helen, and Maria prefigure or influence Jane's future. Bessie, for instance, sings to young Jane a ballad about an orphan child which foreshadows, if not foretells, what happens to Jane later in the novel:

My feet they are sore, and my limbs they are weary;  
Long is the way, and the mountains are wild;  
Soon will the twilight close moonless and dreary  
Over the path of the poor orphan child.

Why did they send me so far and so lonely,  
Up where the moors spread and grey rocks are piled?  
Men are hard-hearted, and kind angels only  
Watch'd over the steps of a poor orphan child.

Yet distant and soft the night-breeze is blowing,  
Clouds there are none, and clear stars beam mild.  
God, in his mercy, protection is showing,  
Comfort and hope to the poor orphan child.

Ev'n should I fall o'er the broken bridge passing,  
Or stray in the marshes, by false lights beguiled,  
Still will my Father, with promise and blessing,  
Take to His bosom the poor orphan child.

There is a thought that for strength should avail me,  
Though both of shelter and kindred despoiled;  
Heaven is a home, and a rest will not fail me;  
God is a friend to the poor orphan child.

(JE 22-23)

Later in the novel, of course, Jane experiences the hard-heartedness of men and wanders on the moors (stanza two); the "false prophets like Rochester and St. John, and ignes fatui that are alluded to or actually appear, notably in Jane's trek to Marsh End. The ballad promises a happy ending for her, a home in Heaven if not on earth,
foreshadowing the home and rest from wandering that Jane does find at the end of the book.

The attitude implicit in the ballad is that of faith. Bessie represents an outlook towards the future which does not need prophecy, a lilies-of-the-field trust in the Lord. Her surname, appropriately enough, alludes to Matthew 13:33: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

Another view of faith is portrayed in the character of Helen Burns, Jane Eyre's consumptive friend at Lowood Institution. Bessie's faith responds to adversity with hope; Helen meets it with resignation. She is a fatalist and stoic who follows doctrine at the expense of human will and nature, accepting injustice as if it were just punishment of her sinful, fallen state. The reason: because "the Bible bids us return good for evil" (JE 54). Confronted with injustice, she says, "it would be your duty to bear it, if you could not avoid it: it is weak and silly to say you cannot bear what it is your fate to be required to bear" (JE 54). This "doctrine of endurance" Jane does not comprehend, but she recognizes that Helen is a kind of visionary: "I felt that Helen Burns considered things by a light invisible to my eyes" (JE 54).

To follow one's own wishes is, if not positively sinful in Helen's philosophy, at least in no way positively
good. Jane asks her whether she is "good" when Miss Temple is teaching, able to keep her mind from wandering. "Yes," answers Helen, "in a passive way: I make no effort; I follow as inclination guides me. There is no merit in such goodness" (JE 56). Her fatalism, as a means of guiding one's choices and as an attitude towards the future, contrasts with Rochester's insistence on following his inclinations and St. John's determination to make his own fate. Like Rochester and St. John, Helen has her own vision of paradise and the means of getting there:

We are, and must be, one and all, burdened with faults in this world: but the time will soon come when, I trust, we shall put them off in putting off our corruptible bodies; . . . and only the spark of the spirit will remain . . . ; perhaps to pass through gradations of glory, from the pale human soul to brighten the seraph! Surely it will never, on the contrary, be suffered to degenerate from man to fiend? No; I cannot believe that: I hold another creed; which no one ever taught me, and which I seldom mention; but in which I delight, and to which I cling: for it extends hope to all: it makes Eternity a rest—a mighty home, not a terror and an abyss.

(JE 57)

Convinced as she is of her own sinfulness, Helen must have faith that even she can be forgiven. Her path to heaven is faith; Bessie relies more on the grace of God; St. John, with his "stern allusions to Calvinistic doctrines—election, predestination, reprobation" (JE 334), both considers himself one of the chosen people and seeks to earn his way into heaven through good works.

There is no real foreknowledge in Helen's vision. What she envisions is not the future but the position of
mankind in creation. Jane asks Helen on her deathbed, "where are you going to, Helen? Can you see? Do you know?" And Helen answers, "I believe; I have faith: I am going to God" (JE 79).

Maria Temple is not so much a prophet as an intercessor, in keeping with the implications of her name. It is she who intercedes for the children of Lowood when they have been served a meal unfit to eat, and for Jane to clear her of the charge that she has been ungrateful and a liar.

* * * * * * * *

At one point, Helen Burns reproves Jane for her impulsiveness, and reminds her that

the sovereign hand that created your frame, and put life into it, has provided you with other resources than your feeble self, or than creatures feeble as you. Besides this earth, and besides the race of men, there is an invisible world and a kingdom of spirits: that world is round us, for it is everywhere; and those spirits watch us, for they are commissioned to guard us.

(JE 68)

The signs and omens that appear to Jane throughout the remainder of the novel illustrate the existence of such a benevolent force. For the most part these are familiar to readers of the novel: the riven oak, the lightning bolt, the "marsh light" that leads Jane to her cousins, her portentous dreams, and the cry from Rochester that calls her away from St. John. All prove to be true prophecies. They warn of imminent danger or hidden immorality, they lead
Jane towards her ideal future, and they imply psychic communication between Jane and her relatives, and with the man she loves.

For that reason, the often-cited first paragraph of Chapter 21 has special significance:

Presentiments are strange things! and so are sympathies; and so are signs: and the three combined make one mystery to which humanity has not yet found the key. I never laughed at presentiments in my life; because I have had strange ones of my own. Sympathies, I believe, exist: (for instance, between far-distant, long-absent, wholly estranged relatives; asserting, notwithstanding their alienation, the unity of the source to which each traces his origin) whose workings baffle mortal comprehension. And signs, for aught we know, may be but the sympathies of Nature with man.

(JE 209)

Presentiments, sympathies, and signs are unalloyed prophecy in Jane Eyre, not subject to errors of passion or judgment. They can be ignored, defied, or explained away—as Rochester openly defies omens (JE 258) and explains away the significance of Jane's dreams (JE 270-71)—but they are not wrong.

Brontë extends the role of signs and omens into the novel's imagery. Metaphors and allusions not recognized as portents by the characters themselves are nevertheless portentous—style and setting, or style and incident, overlap. It is distinctly symbolic that Jane should be set down by the coach that carried her away from Thornfield at an intersection called Whitcross, with its implications of crucifixion and salvation. It is more distinctly a sign
from heaven when Jane near Whitcross looks up at the night sky, in which, she says, "we read clearest [God's] infin­itude," and sees the Milky Way (JE 308). If nature is in­herently a revelation of God, as it seems to be in Jane Eyre, then symbolic location and signs can be interchange­able. The difference between them is not in their signifi­cance but in whom they are directed towards: the symbol is for the reader; the omen for the character.

A different synthesis of metaphor and portent occurs when Jane helps Rochester treat the wounds of Richard Mason in the secret room upstairs at Thornfield, in the presence of a tapestry "whose front, divided into twelve panels, bore, in grim design, the heads of the twelve apostles, each inclosed in its separate panel as in a frame; while above them at the top rose an ebon crucifix and a dying Christ" (JE 199). Jane's perceptions of the tapestry are reported as her metaphorical interpretations of it, but to us they are ominous, with implications beyond those that she perceives:

According as the shifting obscurity and flickering gleam hovered here or glanced there, it was now the bearded physician, Luke, that bent his brow; now St. John's long hair that waved; and anon the devilish face of Judas, that grew out of the panel, and seemed gathering life and threatening a revelation of the arch-traitor--of Satan himself--in his subordinate's form.

(JE 199)

Foreshadowing, omen, and imagery have merged.
What is at one point in the book a sign may appear elsewhere as a metaphor. The motif of *ignes fatui* occurs as a foreshadowing image in Bessie's song, as a visible sign on the moor--where in fact it is not a "false light" but the "kindly light" of Newman's poem. Elsewhere Jane characterizes secret love as a madness which "must lead, *ignis-fatuus*-like, into miry wilds whence there is no extrication" (JE 153). Rochester playfully tells her, upon her return from Mrs. Reed's funeral--a metaphorical return "from the other world": "If I dared I'd touch you to see if you are substance or shadow, you elf!—but I'd as soon offer to take hold of a blue *ignis fatuus* light in a marsh" (JE 232). He describes himself after his wife went mad as "a Will-o'-'the-wisp" pursuing "wanderings as wild as those of the March-spirit" (JE 294). The image of the marsh light is used to refer to that which is false prophecy in nature: the misguided or unrestrained indulgence of passion.

There are good reasons to consider Jane Eyre herself a prophet. More clearly than any other character in the book she actually sees visions, and her visions either reflect hidden reality or prefigure the future accurately. Where Rochester and St. John have the prophetic ability to perceive things beyond the reach of normal eyesight, Jane has the special ability to sympathize with others, to share their feelings. She is also granted personal revelations,
attributed to God and nature. She is, if anything, a better prophet than her two suitors, because she recognizes the limitations of her unaided vision, and ultimately calls on God for guidance.

The conflict between prophecy and choice in *Jane Eyre* arises from the attempts by Rochester and St. John to impose their images of the future upon Jane, to deprive her of the right to choose her future independently. That conflict is resolved when the center of prophecy becomes the individual, who is then able to make the proper choices about the future with trustworthy guidance, assuming that the internal guides—self-awareness, principle, passion, and judgment—are well-informed and in equilibrium with each other.

The dream sequences of the book are as familiar as the omens. An early sequence of dreams at Thornfield foretells the death of Mrs. Reed. A little child appears in them, and Jane recalls hearing Bessie Leaven say that "to dream of children was a sure sign of trouble, either to one's self or to one's kin" (JE 209). The imminent wedding to Rochester occasions a pair of dreams and the portentous visit from Bertha Mason, when the wedding veil is torn in half. In the first Jane finds herself, she tells Rochester, following the windings of an unknown road; total obscurity environed me; rain pelted me; I was burdened with the charge of a little child . . . . I thought, sir, that you were on the road a long way before me; and I strained every nerve to overtake you, and made
effort on effort to utter you name and entreat you to stop--but my movements were fettered; and my voice still died away inarticulate; while you, I felt, withdrew farther and farther every moment.

(JE 267)

In the second dream she envisions Thornfield Hall "a dreary ruin, the retreat of bats and owls" (JE 268). To quote Cynthia Linder, "That both dreams are prophetic is proved by subsequent events,"12 namely the discovery that Rochester is already married, and the consequent separation of Jane from him, which sends her wandering in real life on "an unknown road." The vision of Thornfield in ruins is confirmed when it is destroyed by fire.

These are more than just Gothic nightmares. They are, combined with the dream of an unreachable land of Beulah, with other dreams like it, and the omens that appear to Jane, evidence of her prophetic gifts. Her "innate sympathy" with others, the quality which Rochester predicts will make her "the involuntary confidant" of her acquaintances' secrets (JE 130-31), is further evidence, representing prophecy or clairvoyance which derives from hyper-acute perception. It is this kind of sympathy that Brontë discusses in Chapter 21 when she speaks of sympathies between "far-distant, long-absent, wholly estranged relatives."

Such sympathy inspires the dreams which foretell Mrs. Reed's death; it is the only explanation given for the otherwise incredible coincidence that Jane should find her way to her "far-distant" and previously unknown relatives,
the Rivers. The "natural sympathies" between Rochester and Jane, which he recognizes almost as soon as he meets her (JE 145), are the eventual basis for the hyper-acute perception which enables them to hear each other—for Rochester hears Jane as well as she him—on the evening when Jane is almost swept away by the force of St. John's all-encompassing will.

An interesting consequence of the fact that Jane has prophetic gifts is that she becomes, as a result, a prophet-author, since the book is written as a first-person reminiscence. We know that Brontë was familiar with the author-as-prophet convention because in the Preface to the Second Edition (1847) she praises Thackeray as a prophet (JE 4). Jane's prefigurative paintings show that Brontë thought of the artist's imagination as prescient. Her fantasies—themselves stories—are represented as visions. In her first days at Thornfield, Jane says, she would sometimes allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it—and, certainly they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement, which, while it swelled it in trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously.

(JE 105)

The qualities that make her an author-prophet are there from the beginning. Rochester describes Jane's reveries in the same way; they are "day visions" in which her spirit "follows on willing wings the flight of Hope, up and on to an ideal heaven" (JE 297).
Revelation comes to Jane through dreams and prayer. It is in a dream that her mother appears to her and warns her to leave Thornfield. In "this vision," we are told, a gleam of light mounts up to the ceiling, and

the roof resolved to clouds, high and dim; the gleam was such as the moon imparts to vapours she is about to sever. I watched her come--watched with the strangest anticipation; as though some word of doom were to be written on her disk. She broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: a hand first penetrated the sable folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart--

"My daughter, flee temptation!"

(JE 303)

The dream is both prophecy and another instance where the spirit world intervenes to guide Jane's actions.

Four times Jane prays; four times her prayers are answered with revelations. Tired of her position at Lowood school, in the first instance, she reacts at first with rebellious impatience, then prays as best she knows how:

I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space: "Then, I cried, half desperate, "grant me at least a new servitude!"

(JE 83)

Because she is still little more than a child (barely eighteen at this time) and her religious understanding is still incomplete, flawed by her desperation and rebelliousness, the prayer is answered not by God but by a "kind fairy," she
tells us, who as she lay down in bed put the suggestion into her mind to advertise for a new situation.

On the heath after fleeing Thornfield, she rises to her knees "to pray for Mr. Rochester," but on looking up, sees the Milky Way—a symbol of the path to heaven—and felt, she says,

the might and strength of God. Sure I was of His efficiency to save what He had made: convinced I grew that neither earth should perish, nor one of the souls it treasured. I turned my prayer to thanksgiving: the Source of Life was also the Saviour of spirits. Mr. Rochester was safe.

(JE 308)

With that confidence, she submits to her fate and God's will, conscious that "The burden must be carried; the want provided for; the suffering endured; the responsibility fulfilled" (JE 308). She returns to the intersection at Whitcross, and decides which direction to take without apparent guidance: "I followed a road which led from the sun, now fervent and high. By no other circumstance had I will to decide my choice" (JE 308). As she is nearly overpowered by fatigue, it is a church bell that rings and leads her to a village. The second stage in Jane's spiritual quest has been to learn submission.

From the village she is turned away, to wander on the moor till night, when human nature—the counterpoise to spiritual submission—asserts itself. She speaks out loud: "Why struggle to retain a valueless life? Because I know, or believe, Mr. Rochester is still living: and then, to die
of want and cold, is a fate to which nature cannot submit passively." She prays, "Oh, Providence! sustain me a little longer! Aid--direct me!" (JE 313). Guidance comes in the form of a distant light that seems at first "an ignis fatuus," but leads her surely to the home of her yet-unrecognized cousins.

The last prayer comes as St. John presses her for her final decision to come with him to India. While he is confident of the truth of his vision, Jane is less certain of hers:

I contend with my inward dimness of vision, before which clouds yet rolled. I sincerely, deeply, fervently longed to do what was right; and only that. "Show me, show me the path!" I entreated of Heaven.

(JE 398)

The answer that comes is the preternatural call, not from God, but from Edward Rochester. Jane describes it as "the work of nature. She was roused, and did--no miracle--but her best" (JE 399). Jane's calling is to work in this world, not to strive for the next. For that personal revelation, nature is God's spokesman.

* * * * * * * * *

Jane Eyre does not deny the possibility of prophecy. On the contrary, it shows a world where personal revelation is accessible to anyone. Yet in that world the final responsibility for making proper choices about the future belongs to the individual. The resources on which one might draw include self-awareness--of one's strengths and desires--
knowledge of principles and morality, and judgment. Human foresight consists of these, and is itself prophetic. But it is a limited vision, with truth as it is applied to oneself—false when imposed on someone else; false when judgment, knowledge, or self-awareness is flawed. True prophecy guides Jane into the ideal future; false prophecy leads her astray. As she looks back on her decision to leave Rochester, Jane summarizes the interrelationship of divine and human understanding, and their effects on her choice of the proper future. They have saved her, she says, from living as "a slave in a fool's paradise at Marseilles":

Yes; I feel now that I was right when I adhered to principle and law, and scorned and crushed the insane promptings of a frenzied moment. God directed me to a correct choice: I thank His providence for the guidance!

(JE 341)
NOTES

1Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), p. 260. All further citations will be made in the text.


3In the critical tradition, this scene is regarded as an implausibility, a weakness. See Mark Schorer, Introduction to the edition of Jane Eyre cited above, pp. x-xi. It is, however, absolutely logical in the context of the prophetic themes and imagery in the book.

4Robert Keefe says that Rochester cannot prove his accusation that Jane is cold, sick, and silly. In fact, Rochester is quite right about her, and she, to some extent, is fooling herself into thinking she is not affected by the situation. Charlotte Brontë's World of Death (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), p. 124.


11. A complete summary and discussion of the dream passages appears in Linder, pp. 53-58.
Little Dorrit reaffirms the prophetic authority of the Bible; from that reaffirmation it derived its potential for relieving doubt and fear among its Victorian readers. Doubt of religion is impossible if the Bible is true prophecy. Fear of the future is irrelevant if the promise of a New Jerusalem can be believed. Dickens shows us in Little Dorrit a world where people's lives are continuous revelations of the truth of the Bible because they fulfill its prophecies. His premises are that the Millennium is in progress and that in the course of the Millennium Old and New Testament history are recapitulated. Mrs. Merdle is unaware of the significance of her words when, as she dismisses the Dorrit sisters, she remarks, "If we could only come to a Millennium, or something of that sort, I for one might have the pleasure of knowing a number of charming and talented persons from whom I am at present excluded." As far as Little Dorrit is concerned, the final age is already at hand—or one should live as though it were.

One consequence if that Little Dorrit has, among its characters, a number of latter-day prophets. Rigaud in presented as an Antichrist. Christopher Casby (the
"Patriarch") and Jeremiah Flintwinch are perverse parallels to Moses and Jeremiah of the Old Testament. Prefiguring or representing New Testament prophecy are John Baptist Cavalletto, Daniel Doyce, and the doctor who is referred to only as "the Physician." Mr. Merdle is a false Christ. These are all de-mythicized prophets, without supernatural powers of foresight, identifiable as prophets because of Dickens' allusions to the Bible, because other characters regard them as prophets, or because their lives embody biblical precepts. Two contrasting attitudes towards prophecy exist in Dorrit. The first follows the doctrinal view that prophecy and miracles ceased with the death of Christ. The ultimate prophecy in Little Dorrit is the Gospel itself; it becomes therefore a fulfillment of prophecy to pattern one's life after Christ's. The second attitude towards prophecy is Carlyle's: "The voice of Prophecy has gone dumb? This is even what I dispute." For Carlyle nature itself is a revelation; to perceive it clearly is an act of prophecy. On that basis, Affery's dreams are prophetic, as is Doyce's common sense.

Ronald J. Fortune has suggested that there are structural correspondences between Book I of Little Dorrit and the Old Testament, and between Book II and the New Testament. Dickens' use of prophet-figures supports this contention. The dominance of the Old Testament prophets in Book I gives way to the New Testament vision of Book II,
following a pattern of development that critics have described in a number of Dickens' novels: movement from an Old to New Testament ethos. His self-consciousness about the pattern is evident in the plans for the monthly numbers of Dorrit, where Dickens reminds himself that in Chapter XXXI he intends to "Set the darkness and vengeance against the New Testament."

Little Dorrit is very much a prophetic book, a vision of a Millennium that only Dickens, as the prophet-author of Victorian convention, can see. It begins with the freeing of an Antichrist to rule on earth, and ends with a vision of the New Jerusalem. Four distinct kinds of prophecy are depicted: the false prophecy of a Millennium; Old Testament prophecy; pagan prophecy; and the "fulfillment" of biblical prophecy implied in emulation of the life of Christ.

Rigaud is both Satan and Antichrist in Dickens' version of the Millennium. His expected arrival, dominion on earth, and eventual destruction in the collapse of Mrs. Clennam's house parallel the account of the Antichrist in the book of Revelation combined with ironic distortions of the Gospel. He is by definition a false prophet.

At the beginning of Little Dorrit Rigaud is released from prison. The parallel between this release and Satan's release from captivity prior to Armageddon is suggested by a conversation about Rigaud that occurs at a village inn.
While discussing the fact that he has been freed, three times characters repeat virtually the same phrase: "the devil was let loose" (LD 168-69). The figurative association of Rigaud with Satan occurs again when Flintwinch refers to him as "Mr Rigaud, Mr Blandois, and Mr Beelzebub" (LD 843), which has the additional connotation of a perverse Trinity, like the dragon, beast, and false prophet of the Apocalypse. Rigaud, in fact, is given three aliases.

Rigaud's imprisonment is a parody of the captivity of Christ, with allusions to events of Holy Week. He is being held for suspicion of murder in the death of his wife at an inn named, significantly enough, the Cross of Gold (LD 48-49). We may infer that she is the one who has been "crucified." The scars on Rigaud's hand from the struggle with her are the visible sign of his guilt, perverse stigmata. When he leaves prison, it is to face, like Christ, an angry crowd and probable death. But Rigaud does not die. The prison is also identified with the tomb of Christ, making Rigaud's imprisonment--he has been in jail for "nine weeks and three days" (LD 47)--a parallel to the three days spent in the tomb, and his release a figurative return from the dead.

John Baptist Cavalletto is Rigaud's John the Baptist, the prophet who goes before Christ to foretell his coming. Cavalletto precedes Rigaud to the Break of Day Inn, whose name alludes to the dawn when Mary Magdalene and others found the tomb empty. Since he has been quite sure that the
murderer was executed, it seems to Cavalletto that Rigaud is a ghost when he appears at the Inn in the middle of the night, that he has risen from the dead (LD 172-73). Later Cavalletto precedes Rigaud to England.

When he recognizes his former cellmate from a handbill Arthur Clennam shows him, Cavalletto's exclamation is "It is the man! Behold him!" (LD 740), a combined allusion to Pontius Pilate's words to the crowd--"Behold the man" (John 19: 5)--and John the Baptist's own words, "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1: 29 and 36). What follows in *Dorrit* is an intricate reworking of the biblical account. Cavalletto as Pilate announces the presence not of Christ but of Barabbas, a criminal. Instead of washing his hands of him, Cavalletto chooses to take responsibility for Rigaud. Instead of releasing his Barabbas from prison, Cavalletto returns him there--by forcing Rigaud to visit Arthur in the Marshalsea.

As Antichrist and Satan Rigaud is the force that creates the climactic scene of *Little Dorrit*, where his own secrets and those of Mrs. Clennam and Jeremiah Flintwinch are revealed in the course of an extended system of allusions to the book of Revelation. Affery threatens to "make shrieks enough to wake the dead!" (LD 835). Flintwinch calls her a "Jezebel" (LD 852)--the false "Prophetess" identified in Revelation 2: 20. And when Mrs. Clennam struggles to her feet to thwart Rigaud's villainy, it appears to all present "almost as if a dead woman had risen" (LD 853), alluding to the resurrection of the dead forecast
in Revelation 20: 12-13. The collapse of the house fulfills the prediction in Revelations of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the reign of the Antichrist, as well as the prediction in Matthew 24: 2 of the destruction of the temple.

The implication of these allusions is that the events to which they pertain have more than just local significance. For Dickens Armageddon is not some hypothetical war in the future, but the ongoing war between good and evil, fought in skirmishes like that at Mrs. Clennam's house, rather than in open battle. The Bible is a continuing revelation in the personal lives of his characters. The disclosures made by Rigaud, Mrs. Clennam, and Flintwinch are more than metaphorical "revelations"--they are true oracles. The result is the same as that in the Bible. Dickens' Apocalypse, like the original, is an account of the destruction of the old order, represented in this case by Mrs. Clennam, Jeremiah, and Casby.

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The representatives of Old Testament prophecy are these same characters. Evidence which has been cited by critics to show that Mrs. Clennam is part of the Old Testament ethos also implies that she is a priestess of her dark religion--one of those who claim the right to interpret scripture and doctrine, to interpret the prophecies received in the Bible. As he returns home, Arthur is
reminded of

the interminable Sunday of his nonage; when his mother, stern of face and unrelenting of heart, would sit all day behind a Bible—bound, like her own construction of it, in the hardest, barest, and straitest boards, with one dinted ornament on the cover like the drag of a chain, and a wrathful sprinkling of red upon the edges of the leaves—as if it, of all books! were a fortification against sweetness of temper, natural affection, and gentle intercourse.

(LD 69)

From his upbringing Arthur has derived "no more real knowledge of the beneficent history of the New Testament than if he had been bred among idolaters" (LD 69).

Mrs. Clennam is shown reading "certain passages aloud from a book—sternly, fiercely, wrathfully—praying that her enemies (she made them by her tone and manner expressly hers) might be put to the edge of the sword, consumed by fire, smitten by plagues and leprosy" (LD 75). Dickens will not call this book the Bible; it is something else—Mrs. Clennam's own creation:

Great need had the rigid woman of her mystical religion, veiled in gloom and darkness, with lightnings of cursing, vengeance, and destruction, flashing through the sable clouds. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, was a prayer too poor in spirit for her. Smite Thou my debtors, Lord, wither them, crush them; do Thou as I would do, and Thou shall have my worship: this was the impious tower of stone she built up to scale Heaven.

(LD 86)

Her sacrilege extends even to a revision of the Lord's Prayer—which lends the Marshalsea, as a debtors' prison, special significance. It is the hell to which her personal vengeance consigns her enemies.
Mrs. Clennam takes out "that book" one more time and conducts a ritual threatening Arthur with disinheritance if he ever again mentions that there might be need for reparation for something she or her husband might have done. Holding the book in her hands, she proclaims,

In the days of old, Arthur, threatened of in this commentary, there were pious men, beloved of the Lord, who would have cursed their sons for less than this: who would have sent them forth, and sent whole nations forth, if such had supported them, to be avoided of God and man, and perish, down to the baby at the breast. But I only tell you that if you ever renew that theme with me, I will renounce you; I will so dismiss you through that doorway, that you had better have been motherless from your cradle.

(LD 90)

Having said all this and more, Mrs. Clennam derives relief from "a general impression that it was in some sort a religious proceeding" (LD 90).

There are resemblances between Jeremiah Flintwinch and the biblical Jeremiah, who railed against the depravity of the age, and foretold the fall of Jerusalem, the captivity in Babylon, and establishment of a new covenant. These are all events that are re-enacted in the course of the Millennium in *Little Dorrit*. The destruction of the Clennam house, which Jeremiah lives in, is a personal equivalent to the fall of Jerusalem. Dickens compresses into a single allusion the biblical captivities in Babylon and Egypt. The quarantine in Marseilles at the beginning of *Dorrit*, the debtors' prison, and the impoverished district at Bleeding Heart Yard are all associated with the two Old Testament
accounts. Arthur and the Meagles are held captive at Mar­seilles because they have come from "the East," from "the country of the plague" (LD 53-54). Mr. Meagles talks of Arthur finding them "staring at the Nile, and the Pyramids, and the Sphinxes, and the Desert" (LD 58). Like the tribes of Israel, these travelers have left behind a country stricken with plagues.

There are other oblique references that suggest parallels between the Marshalsea and Babylon. Old Dorrit rules there as a kind of patriarch in captivity. His fellow inmates are an "elect" people, the Collegians. When Mr. Dorrit is freed from the prison, his manner of saying his farewells is made an ironic parody of Moses and Christ:

Mr. Dorrit, yielding to the vast speculation how the [other prisoners] were to get on without him, was great, and sad, but not absorbed. He patted children on the head like Sir Roger de Coverley going to church, he spoke to people in the background by their Christian names, he condescended to all present, and seemed for their consolation to walk encircled by the legend in golden characters, 'Be comforted, my people! Bear it!' (LD 480)

Identifying the Marshalsea with Babylon is tempting because the Millennium of Revelation includes the destruction of Babylon, and Dickens' intent in Little Dorrit was in part to seal the doom of debtors' prisons.

The clearest association with the biblical captivities occurs in the case of Bleeding Heart Yard, which Dickens reports to be "inhabited by poor people, who set up their tents among the fallen stones of the Pyramids" (LD 176).
Theirs is a modern day return to Egypt, after the pyramids have begun to crumble. Like the Israelites, they are led by a Patriarch. But he, ironically, is Christopher Casby, their landlord, "The Last of the Patriarchs" (LD 187), and the very person who holds them "captive."

The symbol of the covenant in Dorrit is the "D. N. F." inscription on the watch-paper, which was so significant to Arthur's father. It is a covenant with him that Arthur fulfills in his efforts to discover the meaning of the inscription ("Do Not Forget"), and to make reparation to whoever his father felt had been wronged. The new covenant is the unrevealed codicil that would have rewarded Little Dorrit for the kindness her uncle once showed to Arthur's true mother, thereby breaking the cycle of vengeance which Mrs. Clennam has perpetuated. The best reason for identifying the codicil as the new covenant is that it marks the boundary between the Old Testament vengeance of Mrs. Clennam and the mercy and forgiveness of the New Testament ethos in Dorrit.

A few other similarities between Flintwinch and the biblical Jeremiah are worth mentioning. The biblical Jeremiah reasserts at length the inviolability of the Sabbath (Jeremiah 17: 21-27), just as Flintwinch and Mrs. Clennam preach strict observance of it, as Sabbatarians. Jane Vogel has noted that the collapse of Mrs. Clennam's house parallels the destruction of Jerusalem foretold in Jeremiah, and
that Dickens has Flintwinch visit "the Jerusalem Coffee House" (LD 388).

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"Pagan" prophecy in Little Dorrit is represented through imagery, and through the characters of Miss Wade, Maggy, Affery, Pancks, and Daniel Doyce. Miss Wade's attitude towards the future is fatalistic; Affery and Maggy are "wise fools" who know better than anyone else what is happening or what will happen; Pancks is shown as a "fortune-teller" who helps, through his detective work, to unravel the mysteries of the past and thereby create a better future; Daniel Doyce is, in effect, a "virtuous pagan"--his Old Testament name suggests that he is somehow separate from those characters who reflect in their actions a knowledge of Christ, but he is closely identified with them, just as the biblical Daniel was seen as a harbinger of the Gospel. Doyce is a "scientific" prophet, whose inventions demonstrate an ability to perceive nature more clearly than others. His imagination is prescient.

Miss Wade's fatalism, while not literally prophetic, implies a resignation to the worst that the future can bring. It is a dark vision of man's destiny, the opposite of a Christian faith in a better, but also technically unknown future--the attitude represented in Amy Dorrit. Miss Wade's resignation is shown in early conversations with Mr. Meagles and his daughter. To Mr. Meagles she remarks, "In
our course through life we shall meet the people who are coming to meet us, from many strange places and by many strange roads, . . . and what it is set to us to do to them, and what it is set to them to do to us, will all be done" (LD 63). Her comment to Pet Meagles has almost the force of a prophecy, and does, in fact, prefigure Rigaud's appearance later—the convergence of his life with the lives of the Meagles and Arthur—and reveal his presence nearby:

. . . you may be sure that there are men and women already on their road, who have their business to do with you, and who will do it. Of a certainty they will do it. They may be coming hundreds, thousands, of miles over the sea there; they may be close at hand now; they may be coming, for anything you know or anything you can do to prevent it, from the vilest sweepings of this very town.

(LD 64)

Miss Wade has no foreknowledge; her speech merely catalogues the possible alternatives. But she clearly expects the result to be predestined, and sees man as helpless to affect his own future.

Maggy and Affery are two examples of Carlylean prophecy. Both are strongly associated with the Christian attitudes and characters in the book, but their prescience is seen in terms of wishes and "dreams"—non-Christian, folkloric relationships of present experiences and feelings to future events. Maggy has, nevertheless, a vision of "heaven." Her great wish is to be in a hospital like the one she remembers, "a Ev'nly place" with "Such d'licious broth and wine! Such Chicking!" (LD 143). It is Maggy who
innocently foretells that Arthur and Amy will live happily ever after. When she and Amy are visiting Arthur during his illness, she exclaims,

Oh get him into a hospital; do get him into a hospital, Mother! He'll never look like hisself again, if he an't got into a hospital. And then the little woman as was always spinning at her wheel, she can go to the cupboard with the Princess, and say, what do you keep the Chicking there for? and then they can take it out and give it to him, and then all be happy!

(LD 830)

The hospital is Maggy's idea of a heaven-on-earth. She combines it in the passage above with elements from a "fairy tale" Little Dorrit had told her earlier--a fairy tale which embodies Amy's own wishes for the future.

Affery is referred to by Flintwinch as a "Jezebel" (LD 852)--the name of the false "Prophetess" identified in Revelation 2: 20. In the course of the novel she experiences repeated dream-visions, which are actually perceptions of reality. For example, she sees Flintwinch with his twin brother and overhears the scheming of Jeremiah and Mrs. Clennam. Unable or unwilling to credit her senses, she presumes these must be nothing more than dreams. In the Revelations scene she tells her dreams, and Rigaud mockingly identifies her to Jeremiah and Mrs. Clennam as a true prophet: "Assuredly, Madame Flintwinch is an oracle! How shall we interpret the oracle, you and I and the old intriguer?" (LD 842). She has, he says, "such a genius for dreaming! . . . All that she dreams comes true" (LD 850).
As he does his detective work, Pancks calls himself, playfully, a gypsy and a fortune-teller (LD 392). On one occasion he tells Amy's fortune from her palm:

"Years of toil, eh?" said Pancks, softly, touching [her hand] with his blunt forefinger. "But what else are we made for? Nothing. Hallo!" looking into the lines. "What's this with bars? It's a College! And what's this with a grey gown and a black velvet cap? It's a father! And what's this with a clarinet? It's an uncle! And what's this in dancing-shoes? It's a sister! And what's this straggling about in an idle sort of a way? It's a brother! And what's this thinking for 'em all? Why, this is you, Miss Dorrit!"

(LD 335)

Similar imagery is used later when Pancks is making detective assignments to his helpers and deals "his cards" out like a fortune-teller reading a Tarot deck:

"There's a Church in London; I may as well take that. And a Family Bible; I may as well take that, too. That's two to me. Two to me," repeated Pancks, breathing hard over his cards. "Here's a Clerk at Durham for you, John, and an old seafaring gentleman at Dunstable for you, Mr. Rugg. Two to me, was it? Yes, two to me. Here's a Stone; three to me. And a Stillborn Baby; four to me. And all, for the present, told."

(LD 348-49)

The kind of prophecy that Pancks represents is hopeful; it suggests that man has some control over his future—-is able to escape the confining "guilt" of his past and make for himself a better future. Pancks' research into the past frees Dorrit from the Marshalsea and changes his destiny.

Imagery related to fortune-telling and to prophecy in general appears elsewhere in Little Dorrit. The house of Clennam and Company is described as having ceilings "so
fantastically clouded by smoke and dust, that old women might have told fortunes in them better than in grouts of tea" (LD 94). Mrs. F's Aunt is shown in one scene "Bending over a steaming vessel of tea, and looking through the steam, and breathing forth the steam, like a malignant Chinese enchantress engaged in the performance of unholy rites" (LD 589). Her inarticulate exclamations are described as "Sibylic apostrophe" (LD 889). And when Maggy first appears, her bonnet has fallen part way off her head, so that it seems to hang around her neck "like a gipsy's baby." Her dress "had a strong general resemblance to seaweed, with here and there a gigantic tea-leaf. Her shawl looked particularly like a tea-leaf after long infusion" (LD 142).

Daniel Doyce is a transitional figure. His place is with those characters who represent New Testament prophecy, and he is on at least one occasion shown to have a regard for nature that approaches faith, but his "vision" is more scientific than religious. Like the biblical Daniel he has his "lion's den"--the Circumlocution Office. Just as Daniel was recruited by Nebuchadnezzar in a foreign country, Doyce's help is sought after by "a certain barbaric Power with valuable possessions on the map of the world (LD 735). There is an allusion to Matthew 13: 57--"A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country"--when Dickens has Doyce remark that most inventors in England are treated
with as little respect as he has been, but "When they take their inventions into foreign countries, that's quite different" (LD.163-64).

Unlike the biblical Daniel, Doyce is not a visionary. His vision consists only in seeing nature clearly:

[Doyce] had the power, often to be found in union with such a character, of explaining what he himself perceived, and meant, with the direct force and distinctness with which it struck his own mind. His manner of demonstration was so orderly and neat and simple, that it was not easy to mistake him. There was something almost ludicrous in the complete irreconcilability of a vague conventional notion that he must be a visionary man, with the precise, sagacious travelling of his eye and thumb over the plans.

(LD 570)

Instead of a visionary experience, with the finger of God tracing "the handwriting on the wall" of the biblical Daniel, Dickens shows us Doyce's own thumb tracing across his blueprints. Doyce's faith is in nature; he regards his inventions as nothing more than the discovery--the revelation--of truths inherent in it:

He never said, I discovered this adaptation invented that combination; but showed the whole thing as if the Divine artificer had made it, and he had happened to find it; so modest he was about it, . . . and so calmly convinced he was that it was established on irrefragible laws.

(LD 570)

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The transition to a New Testament ethic does not begin with Book II of *Little Dorrit*. There are signs of change much earlier, when, for instance, Arthur declines to enter
the family business and forms a partnership, a "new covenant," with Doyce. But it is in Book II that the Old Testament ethos begins to lose control of events. The arrival of a new covenant is signalled immediately; Dickens envisions the convent of Saint Bernard floating "as if that weather-beaten structure were another Ark" on the shadows of the night rising up the mountainside beneath it (LD 483), alluding to the deluge which destroyed one generation of man in the Bible and to the covenant God made with those permitted to survive.

It is at the convent that the last supper of Dickens' New Testament takes place. Thirteen people gather to eat, including a party of four who have nothing to do with the story, brought in to raise the total number of guests to the number present at the original Last Supper. Phiz's illustration of the retinue shows them in a parlor, arrayed like the Apostles and Christ in DaVinci's painting, with Tip at the center, standing beneath a portrait of Christ, and the rest seated in descending ranks on either side of him. Because of the apocalyptic slant of all biblical parallels in the novel, the Christ-figure is perhaps the most insignificant person present. Rigaud, the Antichrist, dominates the action as Judas. In John 13: 26, after Christ has been asked who will betray him, he responds, "He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it." The sop goes to Judas. At the convent of Saint Bernard,
Rigaud wipes "some drops of wine from his moustache with a piece of bread," and is later identified as "the traveller who has wiped the wine-drops from his moustache with the piece of bread" (LD 491 and 497).

To fulfill the prophecies of Revelations there must be false Messiahs on earth before Armageddon can arrive. Rigaud is just one of the false prophets. Christopher Casby is in some ways another, worshipped by the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard, who do not suspect his true nature. But the main character in Little Dorrit's reversal of the Gospel is Mr. Merdle, worshipped by the multitude for his supposed skill in business speculations. As the false Christ he makes his triumphant entry into the city in Chapter 16, accompanied by Mr. Dorrit. They stop at a hotel and are shown, of course, to an upper room. Dickens is sarcastic in his own comments on the parallels between Merdle and Christ:

Merdle! Oh ye sun, moon, and stars, the great man! The rich man who had entered into the kingdom of Heaven. The man who could have any one he chose to dine with him, and who had made the money! As he went up the stairs, people were already posted on the lower stairs, that his shadow might fall upon them when he came down. So were the sick brought out and laid in the track of the Apostle--who had not got into the good society, and had not made the money.

(LD 673)

As they leave the hotel there are "worshippers on the steps" (p. 677). They enter the carriage for "the ride into the City" (LD 677), and the crowd along the route worships Merdle. Not long after, he is dead, "he, the shining
wonder, the new constellation to be followed by the wise men bringing gifts, until it stopped over a certain carrion at the bottom of a bath and disappeared" (LD 777).

Though revered as a Messiah, Merdle is a creature of the old dispensation in *Little Dorrit*, collecting adulation and investments as Mr. Dorrit collected alms in the Marshalsea Prison. He is a creature of form only, having neither the substance nor spirit attributed to him by the "true believers" (LD 626) of the Circumlocution Office and Merdle-worship. With his own and Doyce's money lost in speculation, Arthur realizes that these Merdle-worshippers have been "Blind leaders of the blind" (LD 779), quoting directly Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees in Matthew 15:14. Dickens tells us that "every servile worshipper of riches who had helped to set [Merdle] on his pedestal, would have done better to worship the Devil pointblank" (p. 776). The chapter in which Arthur's grief at the loss is described, and in which he is conducted to the Marshalsea, is titled, "Reaping the whirlwind," quoting a prophecy made in Hosea that promises such fruits to those who have transgressed the covenant between God and Israel (Hosea 8:1 and 7).

In addition to a false prophet, there is a false resurrection in Book II: Flintwinch's reported entombment in the Clennam house. As in the Gospel account, there are reports that Flintwinch is still alive, that like Christ he is not to be found in his supposed tomb; the diggers work
more than two days to clear the ruins, but discover nothing. Still, despite the manifest fact that he has "risen," there are many doubters. The possibility that he is alive "was taken in ill part by a great many people, who persisted in believing that Flintwinch was lying somewhere among the London geological formation" (LD 864).

The fulfillment of the New Testament vision of a New Jerusalem occurs in the lives of those individuals in Little Dorrit who take Christ as the model for their actions. Chief among these are the Physician, Amy, and Arthur. The Physician's similarity to Christ has been noted by Jane Vogel. "Physician was a composed man," Dickens says, "who performed neither on his own trumpet, nor on the trumpets of other people. Many wonderful things did he see and hear, and much irreconcilable moral contradiction did he pass his life among; yet his equality of compassion was not more disturbed than the Divine Master's of all healing was. He went, like the rain, among the just and unjust, doing all the good he could, and neither proclaiming it in the synagogues nor at the corner of streets" (LD 768). Dickens, as Vogel explains, is borrowing from three verses of the Sermon on the Mount:

"[He] maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

Matthew 5: 45

"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in Heaven."

Matthew 6: 1
"Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men."

Matthew 6: 2

Dickens' Physician quite literally lives according to the Gospel. Unlike the members of the Old Testament dispensation he knows no distinctions of class or rank. Unlike William Dorrit, Mrs. Dlennam, and the Barnacles, he does good deeds, not relying on Providence in the form of "Testimonials," self-justification, or sinecure.

But the lead in establishing the new generation is taken by Little Dorrit and Arthur. Little Dorrit is throughout the novel associated with the New Testament and enlightened Christianity. At one point she is used as a living illustration of the parable of the Good Samaritan (LD 289). Dickens also associates Amy with the contemporary prophet-priest and prophet-author conventions when he writes:

It was enough that she was inspired to be something which was not what the rest were, and to be that something different and laborious, for the sake of the rest. Inspired? Yes. Shall we speak of the inspiration of a poet or a priest, and not of the heart impelled by love and self-devotion to the lowliest of works in the lowliest of way of life!

(LD 111)

In other words, Amy's self-sacrifice is a living revelation of Christian precepts.

With Merdle dead, Arthur becomes the scapegoat for the novel's false Christ, accepting guilt not only for his own sins, but also for those of others. He makes a declaration
of his guilt in venturing his partner's funds. Though Dickens tries very hard to explain why the populace should transfer their hatred to Arthur, it remains essentially illogical:

The disclosure was made, and the story raged fearfully. Thousands of people were wildly staring about for somebody alive to heap reproaches on; and this notable case, courting publicity, set the living somebody so much wanted, on a scaffold.

(LD 783)

Arthur is crucified for Merdle's crimes. Like Christ, he is cast into prison. From his sickness and imprisonment he is, like the dead in Revelations, resurrected after a time. For Mrs. Clennam, Arthur becomes a figure to fear like her own God. She makes her last desperate effort to keep him from discovering her secret because, she tells Little Dorrit, she wishes to "never feel, while I am still alive, that I die before his face, and utterly perish away from him, like one consumed by lightning and swallowed by an earthquake" (LD 860). She entreats Little Dorrit to return with her to see Rigaud "in Arthur's name, though I dare not ask it for Arthur's sake!" (LD 861), phrases that echo biblical injunctions to act in God's name or for the sake of Christ.

Little Dorrit is absolutely doctrinal in her advice to Mrs. Clennam:

Be guided only by the healer of the sick, the raiser of the dead, the friend of all who were afflicted and forlorn, the patient Master who shed tears of compassion for our infirmities. We cannot but be right if
we put all the rest away, and do everything in remembrance of Him. There is no vengeance and infliction of suffering in His life, I am sure.

(LD 861)

But Mrs. Clennam is beyond the reach of such advice. Dickens places her in the shadow next to Amy in the light from a window. Little Dorrit, he says, "was not in stronger opposition to the black figure in the shade than the life and doctrine on which she rested were to that figure's history" (LD 861). As the two return to speak with Rigaud, the sky brightens, the sunset sends out "shoots of light . . . like signs of the blessed later covenant of peace and hope that changed the crown of thorns into a glory" (LD 862). Then the house collapses. The tableau of Mrs. Clennam and Amy and the two passages that follow it sum up the Old and New Testament history of Little Dorrit.

Three "Registers" have been associated with Little Dorrit's life in the course of the novel: the one that records her birth (LD 219); the Burial Register, "that sealed book of Fate" (LD 220) upon which she once lay her head to sleep; and the Marriage Register (LD 894) she and Arthur sign at the end of the book. These are the images of the modern Bible Dickens has created. The Old Testament past is Amy's past; the death of Christ is her present; her marriage is, quite literally, a new covenant for the future -- the realization within her life of the New Jerusalem, though elsewhere life goes on as it always has.
The marriage scene fulfills the prophecy of Revelations 21: 1-2:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.
And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride for her husband.

Arthur and Amy together walk down the steps from the church, into what Dickens describes as a useful and happy future. All the uncertainty of Amy's life is resolved. And in the course of that resolution, the value of biblical revelation as a guide for contemporary living is illustrated.
NOTES


3 The parallels between Books I and II of *Little Dorrit* and the Old and New Testament, respectively, were suggested by Dr. Ronald J. Fortune of Illinois State University.

4 The fact that Dickens habitually moves in the course of his novels from an Old Testament to a New Testament ethos has been described by Jane Vogel in *Allegory in Dickens*, Studies in the Humanities No. 17 (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1977), pp. vii, 93, 317, and 327. Despite Vogel’s excesses of style and interpretation, many of her observations are worth regarding.


6 Vogel, p. xi.
Dickens reports seeing DaVinci's painting in *Pictures from Italy*, in *The Works of Charles Dickens* (New York: P. F. Collier, Publisher, undated), V, 246.

Vogel, pp. 32-33.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE RELATIVITY OF PROPHECY IN THE MOONSTONE

Like Jane Eyre, The Moonstone implies that prophecy is accessible to anyone and is a contemporary, rather than an historical phenomenon. But Jane Eyre reaches the comforting conclusion that personal revelation and choice can guide a person to a happy future. The Moonstone, by contrast, leaves the impression that such prophecy as is available to the individual is inadequate to discover the truth and to lead the individual to happiness. Six kinds of prophecy are shown—supernatural prophecy, divination, clairvoyance, deductive "prophecy," scientific "prophecy," and Carlylean clearsightedness—and not one proves adequate by itself to explain the events of the novel or to bring about a resolution. The resolution is equivocal: discovery of the truth and the restoration of happiness depend on the uncoordinated efforts of a variety of prophets. Each kind of prophecy reveals a part of the truth from its narrow perspective, but each also fails as the limitations of its method are reached. Even false prophecy fails, though throughout the novel the false prophet is the one character who knows all the facts about the disappearance of the diamond referred to as the Moonstone.
Framing the novel and defining the end of the story is supernatural prophecy, as embodied in the curse attached to the diamond by Vishnu the Preserver, predicting "certain disaster to the presumptuous mortal who laid hands on the sacred gem." This prophecy could be regarded as fulfilled by the ensuing action, since misfortune does follow the various owners of the precious stone.

But the misfortunes can be and are attributed to other causes as well. The cousin of John Herncastle who reports the original theft of the diamond conjectures that fatality will lead to Herncastle's punishment:

Although I attach no sort of credit to the fantastic Indian legend of the gem, I must acknowledge, before I conclude, that I am influenced by a certain superstition of my own in this matter. It is my conviction, or my delusion, no matter which, that crime brings its own fatality with it. I am not only persuaded of Herncastle's guilt; I am even fanciful enough to believe that he will live to regret it, if he keeps the Diamond; and that others will live to regret taking it from him, if he gives the Diamond away.

Collins satirizes prophecy, and therefore his own theme, in the character of Gabriel Betteredge, the Verinder family steward. Betteredge divines the future by opening his copy of Robinson Crusoe as if it were a Bible, and reading as prophecy the first lines that catch his eye. The importance of this satire and of prophecy in general in The Moonstone can be gauged from the fact that Chapter 1 begins with Betteredge citing Defoe:

In the first part of Robinson Crusoe, at page one hundred and twenty-nine, you will find it thus written:
'Now I saw, though too late, the Folly of beginning a Work before we count the Cost, and before we judge rightly of our own Strength to go through with it.'

Only yesterday, I opened my Robinson Crusoe at that place.

(TM 39)

Gabriel considers that this "prophecy" has been fulfilled because Franklin Blake has lately come to ask him to record his account of the loss of the diamond:

Two hours have passed since Mr Franklin left me. As soon as his back was turned, I went to my writing-desk to start the story. There I have sat helpless... ever since; seeing what Robinson Crusoe saw, as quoted above--namely, the folly of beginning a work before we count the cost, and before we judge rightly of our own strength to go through with it. Please to remember, I opened the book by accident, at that bit, only the day before I rashly undertook the business now in hand; and, allow me to ask if that isn't prophecy, what is?

(TM 40)

Later in the novel Betteredge uses Crusoe to foretell Franklin's return to England from abroad (TM 344) and to foretell his marriage (TM 518-19).

Betteredge is named after the angel of the last judgment--foreshadowing the judgment which ends the novel, and suggesting that his vision of the truth behind the mystery is in some way credible. Less trustworthy prophets in The Moonstone are given names that warn us of their limitations: Godfrey ("God-free") Ablewhite, for instance, and Sergeant Seegrave. The family steward belongs to the category of wise fools--those characters who perceive things more clearly than others because their outlook is simple. What is "better" in Betteredge's outlook is that he notices first
the good in people, and maintains his faith in their goodness despite imputations to the contrary. This character trait is demonstrated by his continuing faith in Rosanna Spearman, Rachel Verinder, and Franklin Blake, when each in turn comes under suspicion.

Turning Robinson Crusoe into a sacred book has significance for two reasons. First, it is an allusion to the author-as-prophet convention of Victorian literature, here mildly satirized. In making fun of Betteredge's belief in the prophetic virtues of fiction, Collins is indirectly making fun of himself, and the role that Victorian writers found themselves cast in. Second, Robinson Crusoe is a metaphor for the Bible—an actual prophetic book. There are a number of parallels between characters in The Moonstone and biblical characters. Gabriel Betteredge is the angel of judgment. Godfrey Ablewhite is an ironic "Abel" who would make his "brother" Franklin (actually a cousin) seem guilty for a crime he himself had committed.

Folk prophecy combined with mesmerism and spiritualism appears in the "clairvoyance" practiced by the three Brahmins in their disguise as Indian jugglers. They pour a substance like ink into a boy's hand, induce a trance in him, and ask him questions as he looks into the ink:

the chief Indian said these words to the boy: 'See the English gentleman from foreign parts.' The boy said, 'I see him.' The Indian said, 'Is it on the road to this house, and on no other, that the English gentleman will travel today?'
The Indian put a second question--after waiting a little first. He said: 'Has the English gentleman got it about him?'

The boy answered--also, after waiting a little first--'Yes.'

The Indian put a third and last question: 'Will the English gentleman come here, as he has promised to come, at the close of day?'

The boy said, 'I can't tell.'

The Indian asked why.

The boy said, 'I am tired. The mist rises in my head, and puzzles me. I can see no more to-day.'

It is Franklin Blake's view, as reported by Betteredge, that the Indians' clairvoyance is worthless:

His opinion was . . . that they were actually foolish enough to believe in their own magic--meaning thereby the making of signs on a boy's head, and the pouring of ink into a boy's hand, and then expecting him to see persons and things beyond the reach of human vision.

But the fact is that the boy answers two of the three questions accurately.

The connection between mesmerism, clairvoyance, and prophecy is underscored when Mr. Murthwaite, who has traveled in India, discusses the jugglers' ritual with Matthew Bruff:

Their boy is unquestionably a sensitive subject to the mesmeric influence--and, under that influence, he has no doubt reflected what was already in the mind of the person mesmerising him. I have tested the theory of clairvoyance--and I have never found the manifestations get beyond that point. The Indians don't investigate the matter in this way; the Indians look upon their boy as a Seer of things invisible to their eyes . . . . We have nothing to do with clairvoyance, or with mesmerism, or with anything else that is hard of belief to a practical man, in the inquiry that we are now pursuing.
Murthwaite gives the rational explanation for what otherwise might seem to be supernatural prophecy.

Contrasted with the Indians and Betteredge as prophets is Detective Sergeant Cuff, whose insight into the mystery is based on his greater-than-normal activity of perception and his reasoning powers. These are, of course, standard features of the detective character in fiction. In the context of *The Moonstone*, with its multiple images of prescience, they must be regarded as prophetic. Such skills are portrayed as prophecy in other Victorian novels (for example, in the deductions of Pancks in *Little Dorrit*, or the perceptiveness of Rochester and St. John Rivers in *Jane Eyre*). Cuff makes oracular pronouncements about the solution to the mystery—of a kind which has since become conventional in detective fiction without prophetic connotations attached to it. And he makes a series of predictions about developments in the mystery which are partially fulfilled.

His perceptiveness is evident. Responding to Superintendent Seegrave's opinion that the paint smear at the scene of the crime is "a mere trifle—a mere trifle," Cuff declares, "In all my experience along the dirtiest ways of this dirty little world, I have never met with such a thing as a trifle yet" (TM 136). "His eyes," Betteredge reports, "had a very disconcerting trick, when they encountered your eyes, of looking as if they expected something more from
you than you were aware of yourself" (TM 133). Cuff is a keen observer of facts and people. As if on the advice of Carlyle, he sees great significance in seemingly commonplace occurrences—the paint smear, for instance.

On a number of occasions Cuff makes predictions. Twice these take forms which associate them with the other instances of prophecy in The Moonstone. The similarity between detective work and prophecy has been suggested previously by Betteredge, when making excuses for not having realized that Cuff's investigations were leading him to suspect Rachel Verinder:

Cleverer heads than mine might have seen his drift. Or a person less fond of Miss Rachel than I was, might have seen his drift. My lady's horror of him might (as I have since thought) have meant that she saw his drift (as the scripture says) 'in a glass darkly.'

(TM 149)

He is citing I Corinthians 13, from an extended discussion of prophecy in the early church.

Cuff's suspicion of Rachel makes Mrs. Verinder decide to dismiss him from the case. As he prepares to leave, he offers Betteredge his opinion of what is likely to happen next in the form of metaphorical "prophecies":

I won't say a word more about her ladyship, or about Miss Verinder—I'll only turn prophet, for once in a way, and for your sake. I have warned you already that you haven't done with the Moonstone yet. Very well. Now I'll tell you, at parting, of three things which will happen in the future, and which, I believe, will force themselves on your attention, whether you like it or not.

(TM 220)
All three predictions—that Betteredge will hear something concerning Rosanna Spearman from her friends, that the Indian jugglers will reappear, and that a moneylender in London will enter the story—are proven true, and so quickly that Gabriel remarks,

We have gone on, in this matter of the Moonstone, from one marvel to another; and here we end with the greatest marvel of all—namely, the accomplishment of Sergeant Cuff's three predictions in less than a week from the time when he had made them.

(TM 232)

As the mystery is winding to a close, Cuff returns and makes one last prediction. He seals the name of the true thief in an envelope, which is later opened at the Wheel of Fortune Inn. Once again, Cuff is correct, but there is an important difference. His earlier "prophecies" were accurate with regard to specifics of the case, but he had been totally wrong in his suspicions of Rachel. He admits,

I completely mistook my case. How any man living was to have seen things in their true light, in such a situation as mine was at the time, I don't profess to know.

(TM 491)

Cuff's deductions do not provide a completely reliable vision of the truth; his prophecies are flawed because they are based entirely on reason, to the exclusion of emotion, and because his past experience with crime has led him to form the preconception that we live in "a dirty world."

Having previously encountered thefts where seemingly virtuous daughters have stolen family property, he assumes that Rachel Verinder must fit the pattern. His vision of the
truth is contrasted with that of Betteredge, who trusts Rachel, and responds to all the evidence against her by denying the validity of reason:

> It was downright frightful to hear [Cuff] piling up proof after proof against Miss Rachel, and to know, while one was longing to defend her, that there was no disputing the truth of what he said. I am (thank God!) constitutionally superior to reason . . . . Cultivate a superiority to reason, and see how you pare the claws of all the sensible people when they try to scratch you for your own good!

(TM 208)

Superintendent Seegrave, Cuff's predecessor in the investigation, lacks both perceptiveness and greater-than-normal reasoning abilities. His name is a double pun: an ironic comment on his failure to see beyond simple appearances, to transcend reality; and a foreshadowing of the death of Rosanna (in a "sea grave").

Ezra Jennings, the doctor's assistant, is a prophet of "science"—in the sense that he performs experiments to discover the truth. Collins names his after a prophet of the Old Testament, and gives him characteristics and abilities which the Victorians associated with prophecy. He has a "gipsy darkness" of complexion, and mesmeric eyes "of the softest brown--eyes dreamy and mournful, and deeply sunk in their orbits--[eyes which] looked out at you, and . . . took your attention captive at their will" (TM 371).

Jennings is able to see into the past and recreate it, in much the same sense that Carlyle prophetically envisions the past in Past and Present, or Browning in The Ring and
the Book. Jennings is able to fill in the gaps in Dr. Candy's feverish and incoherent account of what happened the night the Moonstone was stolen. Elsewhere in Victorian literature—in *Alton Locke* and *Little Dorrit*, for instance—the trance-like state is itself equated with prophecy. Locke's "visions" occur during a severe illness, like Candy's. The interpreter of a vision is also potentially a prophet, a Daniel.

The re-enactment of the crime that Jennings stages is an opium induced variation on the dream-vision conventions of the nineteenth century, with the difference that instead of envisioning a Xanadu or dreaming a prophetic dream, Franklin Blake under the influence of the drug recreates past events. Similar unveilings of a mysterious past are associated with spiritual "revelations" in *Little Dorrit* (Chapters 30 and 31) and *Daniel Deronda* (Book Six, "Revelations"). Jennings' experiment is characterized as both scientific and prophetic. To Franklin he says,

> Read my notes, if you can. Familiarise your mind with what has happened in the past. I have something very bold and very startling to propose to you, which relates to the future.

(TM 436)

Science sanctions my proposal, fanciful as it may seem.

(TM 440)

But to Matthew Bruff the experiment looks "like a piece of trickery, akin to the trickery of mesmerism, clairvoyance, and the like" (TM 452).
As with Cuff's deductions, the re-enactment provides only a partial truth. Though it demonstrates that Franklin could have removed the gem from Rachel's outer room under the influence of opium, it does not show what happened to it afterwards. As the drugged Blake begins to sink from his semi-unconscious sleep-walking condition into a state of sleep, Jennings experiences "The prevision of a coming disappointment" (TM 479). His methods have not completely solved the mystery.

Godfrey Ablewhite is the false prophet of The Moonstone, a hypocritical Christian hero, whose charities conceal his avarice. He is, as his name suggests, "God-free" or godless. To be a false prophet is not an insignificant alternative. In Ablewhite's case his "falseness" reflects his choice of greed and self-interest as principles to guide his actions and thereby to determine his future.

The mystery is solved in stages. Each prophet-figure contributes his perception of the truth; not one of them is sufficient by himself to envision the whole truth. Collins portrays prophecy as a cumulative endeavor. There is also relativism in prophecy as he sees it—like the relativism of perception in The Ring and the Book, as Robert Langbaum has described it. Each "prophet" interprets events differently, each perceives a different part of the solution to the mystery. What they see depends upon their character and viewpoint.
The final resolution to the mystery is contributed by a child-prophet, the street-boy Gooseberry, who derives his nickname from "the extraordinary prominence of his eyes--" which "projected so far, and . . . rolled about so loosely, that you wondered uneasily why they remained in their sockets" (TM 485). This physical trait marks Gooseberry as a character with heightened abilities of perception, just as Cuff and Jennings are identified as seers by their way of looking at things, by their eyes. The street-boy is also a parallel to the clairvoyant boy consulted by the Indians; he is the only person sharp-sighted enough to pick out and follow the man to whom Septimus Luker, the moneylender, transfers the diamond. In the end, it takes a child to see things clearly. As in Carlyle, perception is prophecy.
NOTES

1 Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 34. All further citations will be made in the text.

CHAPTER SIX:
PROPHECY AND DREAD IN DANIEL DERONDA

Three issues have preoccupied critics of Daniel Deronda. The first is summarized by Laurence Lerner in his review of critical responses to the novel: "The book was well-received by most, and enthusiastically by many; but from the first they tended to claim, as critics have continued to claim, that Daniel Deronda was two novels, one very good, the other disappointing, even bad." Principal advocates of this view include Henry James and F. R. Leavis. The second, and related criticism has been that the characterization of Deronda is unsatisfactory. One early commentator felt that the title character was in danger of becoming "little more than a wreath of moral mist,--a mere tentative, or rather group of tentatives, in character-conceiving." Jerome Thale calls him "nearly a flat failure." The third point of contention has been the Zionist themes in the book, with Leavis, for instance, dismissing them as Eliot's unfulfilled fantasy of a transcendent sexual and religious experience--the St. Theresa syndrome of Middlemarch restated as fervent Jewish nationalism." Taken together, these three arguments have been used to uphold the charge that Deronda lacks unity: there are two separate plots, the argument
contends, one major character is extraneous, and a significant theme is not adequately or believably incorporated into the story.

Tempting as it is to dismiss these criticisms as consequences of prejudice against Zionism, against characters who are indecisive, or against characters who do not act as we wish they would—for example, a character like Deronda who chooses Mirah and Judaism instead of Gwendolen and the life of an English gentleman—they are nevertheless responses to features of the book which are undeniably problematic, risks that Eliot took which she may or may not have been able to compensate for or successfully follow through on.

Some readers have proposed alternative views of form which allow us to accept Deronda more on its own terms. Barbara Hardy defines its form as the cumulative effect of overlapping formal devices, including tragic vision, voice, character, plot, and imagery, as well as the use of prophecies as foreshadowing devices to create expectations and connect incidents to each other. Felicia Bonaparte finds a unity in Eliot's novels that derives from a new kind of tragic vision, where the narrowly defined, symbolic unities of conventional tragedy could "disintegrate into their endless, repetitive parts which are the fragments of our daily lives." But the central unity of Daniel Deronda is its prophetic vision, not tragedy or interconnected formal devices. Tragedy accounts only for Gwendolen. Prophecy in Deronda is more than just the art of foreshadowing that
Hardy suggests it is.

**Daniel Deronda** has thematic unity. The key issue for Eliot was not Zionism, tragedy, or even St. Theresa, but the relationship between the present and future, and the role of prophecy, clear-sightedness, and personality as mediators between them. What matters is not that Deronda turns to Judaism but that he becomes a prophet. It is a theme that Eliot returned to often in her work. Savonarola is a prophet-reformer in *Romola*; whether to believe or doubt his vision is one of the major decisions Romola must make. In *The Spanish Gipsy* the heroine elects to follow the cause of her father, who is intended, in one critic's words, to be "the Moses or Mahomet of a gypsy nation." Silas Marner's involuntary trances are perceived by others as visitations from Satan—like the spiritual possession described by the St. Theresa image in *Middlemarch*. Eliot devoted an entire chapter of *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such* to "Shadows of the Coming Race," to speculation about the future.

Most interesting for an understanding of Deronda is a compelling, Hawthornesque short story, "The Lifted Veil," written just prior to Eliot's final novel. Its main character, Latimer, has been cursed with an ability to overhear the thoughts of others, and to apprehend in part the future events of his own life. In hyperbolic form, this is the character and fate of Daniel Deronda himself, whose sensibility for the feelings of others is so acute that we fear he will sacrifice his future to Mordecai's prophetic schemes.
for no better reason than an inability to hurt the old man by saying no. In describing the "theme of second sight" in Deronda and "The Lifted Veil," Gillian Beer compares the plight of the main character in the latter story to that of an author:

Latimer's situation hideously figures forth and parallels the trials of the novelist: his powers express the determinism and solipsism latent in the act of writing fiction. The single self of the writer can see within and beyond the characters. He contains their future; they exist only within his own creativity unless a relation can be engendered between writer and reader.

The comparison is particularly apt for Victorian authors, already burdened with the conscious role of prophet and sage.

There is one other prophetic element in "The Lifted Veil." Latimer is subject to a combined sense of resignation and foreboding, arising from the fact that he knows the general outcome of events, but not the means through which the future he has foreseen will be accomplished. He is consumed with self-pity, unable to enjoy the present because "the idea of a future evil robbed the present of its joy, and . . . the idea of a future good did not still the uneasiness of a present yearning or a present dread." In this one character Eliot combines the prophetic sensibility of Daniel Deronda with the prophetic dread that Gwendolen Harleth endures. Her story is not separate from Deronda's but companion to it.

The thematic and visionary unity of Daniel Deronda is demonstrated not only by parallels between the three major
prophets of the book--Gwendolen, Daniel, and Mordecai--but also by the cumulative effect of predictions made by minor characters, incidents which foreshadow events or fulfill prophecies, the systematic use of allusions to prophecy, and the deliberate exploitation of interactions of time and knowledge in the novel form to illustrate prophetic themes.

The three major prophet-figures have contrasting prophetic gifts. Throughout most of the novel Mordecai is the only self-conscious prophet, a visionary whose religious and nationalistic dreams are not far removed from feverish hallucinations or irrational enthusiasm--to which they are, indeed, compared. Deronda's first reaction to one of Mordecai's impassioned outbursts is to suspect that he "might be liable to hallucinations of thought--might have become a monomaniac on some subject which had given too severe a strain to his diseased organism." The Cohen family accept Mordecai as something of an "inspired idiot" (DD 431). Even the narrator describes Mordecai's vision of a kindred spirit to carry on his mission as a sincere self-delusion:

For many winters, while he had been conscious of an ebbing physical life, and a widening spiritual loneliness, all his passionate desire had concentrated itself in the yearning for some young ear into which he could pour his mind as a testament . . . . It was remarkable that the hopefulness which is often the beneficent illusion of consumptive patients, was in Mordecai wholly diverted from the prospect of bodily recovery and carried into the current of this yearning for transmission. The yearning, which had panted upward from out of overwhelming discouragements, had grown into a hope--the hope into a confident belief, which, instead of being checked by the clear conception he had of his hastening decline, took rather the intensity of expectant faith in a prophecy which has only brief space to
Nevertheless the vision is fulfilled.

The reader's estimate of Mordecai must balance the narrator's opinion against those of Deronda and Mordecai himself, and weigh the depreciations of prophecy against the extraordinary coincidences which fulfill them, such as the encounter at the river in Chapter 40, or the prediction that Daniel is Jewish. These coincidences satisfy the first criterion of "original and direct proof of prophetic inspiration" proposed by John Davison in his Discourses on Prophecy, delivered as part of the Warburton lecture series in the chapel of Lincoln's Inn in the early 1820's (and cited by Arnold in Literature and Dogma in 1873):

it is necessarily required that the event foretold be such as man could not foresee at the time when the prediction of it was delivered: that it should have been therefore remote from the subsisting state of things, so as to exclude the supposition of the event having been virtually contained in that previous state of things, or the prediction of it having been suggested by Experience, Probability, or other ordinary means of rational foresight. In a word, the prophecy must have been independent of the calculations of human knowledge.

Normally an omniscient narrator would have the last word about whether or not a character like Mordecai should be believed or doubted. In Deronda the facts of the case contradict the narrator's rational explanations of prophecy.

There is almost a dialogue between Eliot and her Jewish prophet, a dialectic of objective and subjective views of visionary experience, with neither given clear supremacy.
To us the narrator says that vision is a combination of wishes and wish-fulfillment in a person with special abilities to image forth his hopes and fears, to fulfill that image through his actions, or to garner from wide experience the impressions which confirm his expectations:

"Second-sight" is a flag over disputed ground. But it is matter of knowledge that there are persons whose yearnings, conceptions--nay, travelled conclusions--continually take the form of images which have a fore-shadowing power: the deed they would do starts up before them in complete shape, making a coercive type; the event they hunger for or dread rises into vision with a seed-like growth, feeding itself fast on unnumbered impressions. They are not always the less capable of the argumentative process, nor less sane than the commonplace calculators of the market: sometimes it may be that their natures have manifold openings, like the hundred-gated Thebes, where there may naturally be a greater and more miscellaneous inrush than through a narrow beadie-watched portal.

(DD 427)

In contrast to the narrator's psychological analysis of vision is Mordecai's impassioned defense of it to Deronda, who might, he fears, be a skeptical audience:

you may misunderstand me. I speak not as an ignorant dreamer--as one bred up in the inland valleys, thinking ancient thoughts anew and not knowing them ancient, never having stood by the great waters where the world's knowledge passes to and fro.

I said, let my body dwell in poverty, and my hands be as the hands of the toiler; but let my soul be as a temple of remembrance where the treasures of knowledge enter and the inner sanctuary is hope. I knew what I chose. They said, "He feeds himself on visions," and I denied not; for visions are the creators and feeders of the world. I see, I measure the world as it is, which the vision will create anew. You are not listening to one who raves aloof from the lives of his fellows.

(DD 451)

In Daniel Deronda the narrator is one of those who say that
Mordecai feeds himself on visions. Between them stands Deronda, who answers, "I listen that I may know, without pre-judgment" (DD 451).

Deronda, Gwendolen, and Mordecai are characterized by different attitudes towards the future. Daniel is paralyzed by doubt; Gwendolen by dread. Mordecai faces the future with sublime confidence, despite his consumption. He knows that Deronda is the man he has expected. He is positive that when Daniel discovers his heritage, he will discover that he is Jewish. Yet Mordecai shares with Gwendolen and Deronda circumstances which should generate uncertainty like theirs. All three characters are figuratively orphaned, deprived of their inherited place in time and society. Gwendolen’s family has lost its income in a bank failure, and with it their social standing. She can no longer rely on her "implicit confidence that her destiny must be one of luxurious ease" (DD 11). Like Daniel and Mordecai, she occupies a place in a family not her own, exiled from her natural home as Daniel is from Judaism and Mordecai from Israel. She has lost her past and her expected future.

Deronda, by contrast, has never had a past, since his mother wished Sir Hugo to raise him in ignorance of his heritage. But, like Gwendolen, his actions and thoughts are directed towards discovering a future for himself, an occupation which will satisfy his sense of social responsibility and suit his talents. As Gwendolen is uncertain of what she ought to do, or what she might be able to do to gratify
her wishes--gamble, sing professionally, be a governess, or marry--so Deronda is uncertain about his career, and about whether to attach himself to Mordecai. When Gwendolen marries Grandcourt, whose name itself alludes to aristocratic traditions, she weds also his past, in the form of Mrs. Glasher and her four children. And she weds herself to a future he determines, while he lives. Deronda's choice is made with more awareness, more commitment, better motives. His marriage to Mirah is the symbol of his covenant with Mordecai and his acceptance of the past and future Mordecai represents. These parallels between the lives of Dronda, Gwendolen, and Mordecai are integral to the prophetic themes of the book. Deronda and Gwendolen seek knowledge of the past and future to govern their choices. At the same time, the parallels suggest an elaborately conceived unity of design based not on unity of action or tragic conflicts between fate and will, but on the paradigmatic illustration of an idea.

Mordecai is not beset with uncertainty, despite his orphaned state and exile, because he is so completely imbued with the traditions and expectations of his faith, which provide him with all he needs--family, a heritage, and future hope. To be rational about change, he says, is not to abandon tradition, but:

to see more and more of the hidden bonds that bind and consecrate change as a dependent growth--yea, consecrate it with kinship: the past becomes my parent, and the future stretches towards me the appealing arms of children. . . . When it is rational to say, "I know not
my father or my mother, let my children be aliens to me,
that no prayer of mine may touch them," then it will be
rational for the Jew to say, "I will seek to know no
difference between me and the Gentile, I will not
cherish the prophetic consciousness of our nationality
--let the Hebrew cease to be, and let all his memorials
be antiquarian trifles, dead as the wall-paintings of a
conjectured race."

(DD 481)

Though the values he expresses are conservative, Mordecai is
not one who passively waits for the future to arrive, or
denies the value of that which is modern. Making choices
within the context of tradition is as important to his pro-
phetic vision as choosing one's fate or direction in life is
to Gwendolen and Daniel.

The necessary relationship between choice and prophecy
is asserted in the peroration of Mordecai's dispute with his
more worldly companions in the club known as The Philosophers:

I say that the strongest principle of growth lies in
human choice. The sons of Judah have to choose that
God may again choose them. The Messianic time is the
time when Israel shall will the planting of the nation-
al ensign. . . . Shall man, whose soul is set in the
royalty of discernment and resolve, deny his rank and
say, I am an onlooker, ask no choice or purpose of me?
That is the blasphemy of this time. The divine princi-
pal of our race is action, choice, resolved memory.
Let us contradict the blasphemy, and help to will our
own better future and the better future of the world--
not renounce our higher gift and say, "Let us be as if
we were not among the populations:" but choose our full
heritage, claim the brotherhood with the nations of the
Gentiles. The vision is there; it will be fulfilled.

(DD 489-90)

Among the onlookers to whom he speaks is Deronda, the char-
acter who epitomizes vacillation and the need for making
choices.
Deronda's prophetic gifts also cripple him. Critics who complain that he is nearly a nonentity, and conclude that he is either unrealistic or insufficiently realized, are missing the point. Being a nonentity is the danger that Deronda faces: if we perceive him as such, it is largely a measure of how real that danger is. Like Latimer in "The Lifted Veil," Dronda is capable of a kind of prophetic penetration into the minds of others. It is his dominant characteristic. Eliot calls it "The more exquisite quality of Deronda's nature--that keenly perceptive sympathetic emotiveness which ran along with his speculative tendency," "A profound sensibility to a cry from the depths of another soul" (DD 449, 450). It is this "affinity of feeling" which enables him to intuitively understand Mirah's mixed feelings about his friendship with Mordecai (DD 592). But it also permits him to understand both sides of an issue so well that he is unable to form an opinion:

His early-wakened sensibility and reflectiveness had developed into a many-sided sympathy, which threatened to hinder any persistent course of action: as soon as she took up any antagonism, though only in thought, he seemed to himself like the Sabine warriors in the memorable story--with nothing to meet his spear but flesh of his flesh, and objects that he loved. His imagination had so wrought itself to the habit of seeing things as they probably appeared to others, that a strong partisanship, unless it were against an immediate oppression, had become an insincerity for him.

(DD 328)

Deronda's powers of sympathy keep him from asserting himself. But they provide the self-effacement necessary if he is to be, on the novel's terms, a "good" person, the antithesis to
Grandcourt's monumental, self-serving tyranny. They make him peculiarly suited to the prophetic mission Mordecai envisions for him—sacrificing his life and personal ambition for the sake of his people and in the interest of establishing a Jewish homeland. It is, of course, the task of Moses or Christ.

Deronda and Ezra Cohen (Mordecai's true name) are identified with the biblical characters from whom they take their names. Eliot is obviously conscious of the parallels between their situation and the captivity of Israel in Egypt and in Babylon, alluded to by Mordecai when he exhorts his uninterested Jewish friends to "unite in a labor hard but glorious like that of Moses and Ezra" (DD 486). Mordecai is described as having "such a physiognomy as . . . might possibly have been seen in a prophet of the Exile" (DD 348). The biblical Ezra was charged with rebuilding the temple of Jerusalem, as Mordecai wishes to rebuild the Jewish nation. Deronda's counterpart, the prophet Daniel, envisions a millennial New Jerusalem. His ability to interpret the dreams and visions of King Nebuchadnezzar may be reflected in Deronda's psychological insight, which allows him to understand Mordecai's dreams, Gwendolen's fears, and Mirah's hope for the recovery of her brother. It is through an allusion to the book of Daniel that Mordecai suggests the existence among his people of inborn, half-prophetic sympathies, compounded of instinct and insight:
The heritage of Israel is beating in the pulses of millions, it lives in their veins as a power without understanding, like the morning exultation of herds; it is the inborn half of memory, moving as in a dream among writings on the walls, which it sees dimly but cannot divide into speech.

(DD 488)

It is Daniel Deronda's mission, like the prophet Daniel's, to read the handwriting on the wall (Daniel 5: 5-29), in this case writing etched in a collective unconscious which needs a prophet to articulate it.

Deronda's credentials as a prophet are reinforced by two things: the extraordinary coincidences that govern his life and the fact that he becomes the agent for saving Mirah's life and Gwendolen's soul. The coincidences are extreme even for a Victorian novel. Almost the first time Daniel makes any effort to locate Mirah's brother--and then only a wandering through Jewish districts of London looking for a face that resembles hers and reading names on shop signs--he chances upon the shop of an Ezra Cohen. The proprietor is not the man who Daniel is looking for, but coincidentally he turns out to be the man with whose family Mordecai lives. It is a coincidence that Mordecai should himself be looking for a person like Daniel, and a coincidence that Daniel should prove to be Jewish. Even if we accept Daniel's rescue of Mirah from suicide by drowning as a fortuitous, but not improbable accident, it is a signal coincidence that he should be in Genoa when the Grandcourts dock there, and consequently be present to rescue Gwendolen
from feelings of guilt about her husband's drowning. Much as Grandcourt, seeing Deronda in Genoa, wishes to believe that he and Gwendolen have conspired to meet, he realizes that the requisite plans and communications would have "implied a miraculous foreknowledge in her, and in Deronda a bird-like facility in flying about and perching idly" (DD 618).

What renders these coincidences acceptable is the aura of fulfilled prophecy that surrounds them, either through allusions, as in the Genoa scene, or through the actual prefiguring of events by Modrecai and Gwendolen. A predicted event becomes an expected event, and we are not therefore surprised by the coincidence that occasions it. Prefaced to the discovery of the shop owned by Ezra Cohen are three paragraphs that discuss vision and prescience from different perspectives. The first suggests that it is truer prophecy to see the miraculous in everyday events than to envision transcendent ones:

To glory in a prophetic vision of knowledge covering the earth, is an easier exercise of believing imagination than to see its beginning in newspaper placards, staring at you from a bridge beyond the cornfields; and it might well happen to most of us dainty people that we were in the thick of the battle of Armageddon without being aware of anything more than the annoyance of a little explosive smoke and struggling on the ground immediately about us.

(DD 344)

The second paragraph begins to focus our attention on the miraculous but commonplace event about to occur, by describing Daniel's prefigurations of it:
he . . . had a presentiment of the collision between her idea of the unknown mother and brother and the discovered fact—a presentiment all the keener in him because of a suppressed consciousness that a not unlikely possibility of collision might lie hidden in his own lot.

In this mood he rambled, without expectation of a more pregnant result than a little preparation of his own mind, perhaps for future theorising as well as practice.

(The third narrows our expectations even further, almost explaining the specific event before it happens:

[Deronda] particularly desired that Ezra Cohen should not keep a shop. Wishes are held to be ominous; according to which belief the order of the world is so arranged that if you have an impious objection to a squint, your offspring is the more likely to be born with one; also, that if you happened to desire a squint, you would not get it. This desponding view of probability the hopeful entirely reject, taking their wishes as good and sufficient security for all kinds of fulfillment. Who is absolutely neutral?

(The narrator does not endorse any one mode of prescience exclusively, or even admit that it is possible. All that is asserted is that people are susceptible to these feelings. Probability itself varies according to the outlook with which it is perceived. Nevertheless Deronda might be credited with unrealized prophetic abilities on the basis of what follows—finding the shop kept by Ezra Cohen, who
represents his fears about what Mirah's brother might be like, and at the same time discovering Moredecai tending shop in a bookstore. Eliot builds up a context within which we may judge the validity of prophecy, but reserves judgment herself. The one certain fact is that for all three of the major prophet figures, events fulfill their expectations. The appearance of Mordecai and Mirah answers Daniel's conscious longing for "some external event, or some inward light, that would urge him into a definite line of action" (DD 328). Daniel fulfills Mordecai's vision of a successor. Grandcourt's death is the realization of Gwendolen's dread.

Daniel is literally the savior of Gwendolen and Mirah. His role is foreshadowed in the opening scene of the novel when he redeems for Gwendolen the heirloom necklace she has pawned in order to continue gambling. Gems have special significance in Deronda and elsewhere in Eliot's writing. In Middlemarch Dorothea remarks that jewels are represented as "spiritual emblems" in the book of Revelations. In Latimer's wife in "The Lifted Veil" wears a serpent-shaped rooch that reflects both her evil nature and the threat she poses to him. It is upon the delivery of Grandcourt's heirloom jewelry to Gwendolen that Mrs. Glasher curses her, and she is stricken again with debilitating fear of something unknown in the future. Gwendolen's pawned necklace is a symbol of her heritage. The literal act of redeeming it from pawn is the figurative redemption of her soul. The parallels with Deronda's later rescue of Mirah are
reinforced by imagery and parallel circumstances. At one
point when Gwendolen asks for and receives advice from
Daniel, the effect of which is diminished before his eyes by
an attack of "her habitual emotion," it seems to him "as if
he saw her drowning while his limbs were bound" (DD 412).
For her the drowning is internal, not a suicide but a self-
torment. The parallels with Mirah's attempt on her own life
are completed by Grandcourt's death at sea and the coinci-
dental presence of Deronda on shore to hear Gwendolen's con-
fession and witness the beginning of Christ-like rebirth in
her:

her remorse was the precious sign of a recoverable
nature; it was the culmination of that self-disapproval
which had been the awakening of a new life within her;
it marked her off from the criminals whose only regret
is failure in securing their evil wish. Deronda could
not utter one word to diminish that sacred aversion to
her worst self--that thorn-pressure which must come
with the crowning of the sorrowful Better, suffering
because of the Worse.

(DD 636)

Gwendolen's relationship to the future is more complex
than either Daniel's or Mordecai's. The represent the anti-
theses of doubt and faith. She is a blend of contradictions
--sanguine, self-deceiving hope and irrational fear. Both
moods are described in terms of prophecy. Even before
meeting Grandcourt Gwendolen has envisioned the course of
their romance:

My arrow will pierce him before he has time for thought.
He will declare himself my slave--I shall send him
round the world to bring me back the wedding-ring of a
happy woman--in the meantime all the men who are be-
tween him and the title will die of different diseases
--he will come back Lord Grandcourt--but without the
ring--and fall at my feet. I shall laugh at him--he
will rise in resentment—I shall laugh no more—he will call for a steed and ride to Quetcham, where he will find Miss Arrowpoint just married to a needy musician.

Was there ever any young witch like this? You thought of hiding things from her—sat upon your secret and looked innocent and all the while she knew by the corner of your eye that it was exactly five pounds ten you were sitting on! . . . It was probable that by dint of divination she already knew more than any one else did of Mr. Grandcourt.

(DD 82-3)

Playful though she is in this speech, its courtly love fantasies are not far removed from her unrealistic expectations of life. She has been raised with an "implicit confidence that her destiny must be one of luxurious ease" (DD 11), and with no understanding that there could exist an "unmanageable world which was independent of her wishes" (DD 226).

She expects her wishes to come true—in the romance with Grandcourt as elsewhere when she expects to retrieve the family fortunes by gambling and to make an easy and glorious career in singing.

The accommodations with reality she has to make never entirely force her to abandon her belief in the prefiguring and predetermining power of her desires; when Grandcourt dies, therefore, she regards his death as something she has brought about through hoping for it. She tells Daniel that her "evil wishes were too strong. . . . [The] evil longings, the evil prayers came again and blotted out everything else dim, till, in the midst of them—I don't know how it was—he was turning the sail—there was a gust—he was struck—I know nothing—I only know that I saw my wish outside me" (DD 635). In his death her wishes and dread coincide.
In the authorial comment that follows Gwendolen's vision of courtly love the references to her as a "witch" and to her skills of divination are metaphors for her vivacity, imagination, and sharp perception. Nevertheless the vision has the elements of an ironic prophecy; the events it foretells come true, but not felicitously. Gwendolen becomes the slave, not Grandcourt. The jewels he presents to her upon her marriage are not "the wedding ring of a happy woman" but the tainted family heirlooms once bestowed on the unmarried and bitter Mrs. Glasher. Miss Arrowpoint does marry the musician, but it proves to be a marriage that Gwendolen should envy rather than scorn.

As she is a creature of contradictions, it is appropriate that Gwendolen's prophecies should mix foreknowledge with elements of the unknown and unpredictable. Her characteristic seizures of dread are compounded of her fear of the unforeseeable and her horror of what she does perceive, both in herself and in the future, to be possible. At least in part, she has dreaded her own potential for evil. To Deronda after Grandcourt's death she says, "Am I worse than I was when you found me and wanted to make me better? All the wrong I have done was in me then--and more" (DD 630). The future was contained in her character. At the same time Gwendolen's wishes are contradicted by her own desire to be unpredictable, as illustrated in a conversation she has with Rex Gascoigne after he comments that his sister had predicted her wish to ride to the hounds:
"Did she?" said Gwendolen laughingly. "What a little clairvoyante she is!"

"Shall you?" said Rex, who had not believed in her intending to do it if the elders objected, but confided in her having good reasons.

"I don't know. I can't tell what I shall do till I get there. Clairvoyantes are often wrong: they foresee what is likely; it is always dull. I do what is unlikely."

"Ah, there you tell me a secret. When once I knew what people in general would be likely to do, I should know you would do the opposite. So you would have come round to a likelihood of your own sort. I shall be able to calculate on you. You couldn't surprise me."

"Yes, I could. I should turn round and do what was likely for people in general," said Gwendolen, with a musical laugh.

"You see you can't escape some sort of likelihood. And contradictoriness makes the strongest likelihood of all. You must give up a plan."

"No, I shall not. My plan is to do what pleases me."

Predictability is fate, and Gwendolen rebels against it as she regularly does against any constraint.

There is a hint of perverse Utilitarianism in her resolution to do what pleases her. It is the principle that guides her early choices about the future, flawed because it does not consider the conflicting wishes of others or the necessity of making short-term sacrifices for deferred gains. Gwendolen does not wish to work or sacrifice dignity for the career in music she desires, so she abandons the plan. She is confronted with the conflicting wishes of another person when Lydia Glasher reveals her prior claims upon Grandcourt. But even before Mrs. Glasher's revelation, Gwendolen is beginning to recognize the oversimplifications of her method for coping with the future. She sees Grandcourt's expected proposal as one of two likelihoods that presented themselves
alternately . . . , one of two decisions towards which she was being precipitated, as if they were two sides of a boundary-line, and she did not know on which she should fall. This subjection to a possible self, a self not to be absolutely predicted about, caused her some astonishment and terror: her favourite key of life—doing as she liked—seemed to fail her, and she could not foresee what at a given moment she might like to do.

(DD 121)

The decision is precipitated by the collapse of Grapnell and Company, taking with it the income that has permitted Gwendolen the luxury of indulging her wishes without reference to family and personal needs. Rationalizing away the injustice to Mrs. Glasher and the drawbacks of Mr. Grandcourt is easier when she is faced with the alternative of being a governess; Gwendolen convinces herself that marriage is what she wants, and announces the decision to her mother with the assurance that "everything is to be as I like" (DD 273). This choice of Gwendolen's is parallel to the one Deronda makes later; her indecision about what to do with herself and her future is comparable to his, and counterpoint to Mordecai's assertion "that the strongest principle of growth lies in human choice" (DD 489).

Gwendolen's dread is more than just foreshadowing to create suspense in the reader. From the outset it is associated with revelation. When the hidden panel springs open during a tableau vivant from The Winter's Tale, revealing "the picture of an upturned dead face, from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with outstretched arms" (DD 21), Gwendolen is so affected that she looks "like a
statue into which a soul of Fear had entered" (DD 52)--becoming more like Hermione than she had intended. In the aftermath, Mr. Gascoigne inquires:

"Was the door locked? It is very mysterious. It must be the spirits."
"But there is no medium present."
"How do you know that? We must conclude that there is, when such things happen."

(DD 52)

Eliot takes the opportunity to satirize a minister so ready to credit superstition, and offers the rational explanation of the event—that young Isabel Harleth had previously unlocked the panel out of curiosity. But a revelation has taken place, whichever source of inspiration we assign to it—intercession of the spirit world, psychological susceptibility, or accident. As with Mordecai, the reader is left surprisingly free to choose his own interpretation. The rational explanation of the opening of the hidden panel does not preclude the supernatural. Dread, revelation and coincidence are presented as related phenomena.

While it would be tempting to say that Grandcourt's death fulfills the prophecy implicit in the painting, the facts of the case are more equivocal. To Gwendolen it seems a fulfillment; she announces the drowning to Deronda as something long expected: "It is come, it is come! He is dead!" (DD 626). The circumstances of the death, as reported by her, parallel the attempted escape and death's-head of the picture: "I was leaping from my crime, and there it was--close to me as I fell--there was the dead face--
dead, dead. It can never be altered" (DD 636). The parallels, however, are not exact. The original image behind the hidden panel does not contain the synthesis of attraction and repulsion with which Gwendolen has invested the actual event by the time it happens, when it has become to her "my wish outside me" (DD 635). It does combine the similar sense of the inescapability of fate with the desire to avoid it, also present in the painting, but that is not the same thing. Moreover, Gwendolen has had the opportunity to imagine correspondences between the painting and her situation; like Mordecai she may be one of those persons for whom "the deed they hunger for or dread rises into a vision with a seed-like growth, feeding itself fast on innumerable impressions" (DD 427).

Gwendolen's dread evolves, becoming more and more specific as it approaches the catastrophe of her life and assimilates further "impressions" into itself. The "prophetic doom" of Mrs. Glasher's curse upon her is just one step in the evolutionary process; on the simplest level representing something like a recognition in Gwendolen that she is capable of injustice and immorality, though it is not reducible to rational explanation (DD 385). Other contributing forms of dread emerge: "Side by side with the dread of her husband had grown the self-dread which urged her to flee from the pursuing images wrought by her pent-up impulse. The vision of her past wrong-doing, and what it had brought on her, came with a ghastly illumination over every imagined
deed that was a rash effort at freedom, such as she had made in her marriage" (DD 614). When the prophetic painting is alluded to in Chapter 54 it has added these and other connotations:

her vision of what she had to dread took more decidedly than ever the form of some fiercely impulsive deed, committed as in a dream that she would instantaneously wake from to find the effects real though the images had been false: to find death under her hands, but instead of darkness, daylight: instead of satisfied hatred, the dismay of guilt; instead of freedom, the palsy of a new terror--a white dead face from which she was for ever trying to flee and for ever held back.

In Gwendolen's consciousness Temptation and Dread met and stared like two pale phantoms, each seeing itself in the other--each obstructed by its own image; and all the while her fuller self beheld the apparitions and sobbed for deliverance from them.

(DD 615)

The prophecy has evolved to include the idea of an active but impulsive participation on Gwendolen's part in the events she fears, and the mirroring of dread and desire. There is even the paradox that what she dreads is the failure of prophecy or the ironic fulfillment of it--which her vision nevertheless foretells.

For Gwendolen, as for Deronda, the validity of prophecy is part of an internal conflict. He must decide whether to believe Mordecai; she whether to act upon her own vision and thereby fulfill it. In neither case is the choice left free of constraint. His own character and the revelation of his past in a sense force Deronda's decision upon him. One is left to wonder whether Gwendolen could have escaped her fate; whether choice had anything at all to do with Grandcourt's
death. The reader is left to ponder the relationship of prescience to fate, freewill, chance, or any combination of the three, and to consider whether foreknowledge is possible, whether or not it is achieved through rational means, and how the future is affected by choices based upon foreknowledge or the lack of it. The possibilities are sketched out, not the conclusions.

Both Gwendolen and Deronda are torn between alternate futures: ones they are capable of foreseeing but not fulfilling. Barbara Hardy notes that there are at times conflicting predictions in Deronda, which serve to "contradict the characters' premonitions and hopes, and put the reader in a position of curious and disturbing expectation." They also serve to represent the possibility and nature of false prophecy, the misuses of visionary thinking, and the similarities between prophecy and imagination. Gwendolen's idyllic vision of Grandcourt as a knight-errant is a composite of true and false prophecy, a triumph of her imagination but emblematic of its excesses and her inability to perceive and evaluate others accurately, just as she is unable to clearly estimate her own power and worth. Gwendolen makes two predictions that are controverted by events when she and Grandcourt are setting out from Genoa on the fateful curise. First she remarks out loud, "Perhaps we shall be drowned" (DD 620). Just before putting about to return to Genoa, she exclaims, "I think we shall go on always like the Flying Dutchman" (DD 622). Quite disparate interpretations
are possible. It can be said that these predictions represent the failure of vision in Gwendolen, that they are no more than wild speculations which are as coincidentally false as the prophetic painting was coincidentally true. Or perhaps they represent an almost unconscious last-minute attempt to divert fate by imagining alternatives to it, what is called in the same chapter "visionary relief on a par with the fancy of a prisoner that the night wind may blow down the wall of his prison and save him from desperate devices" (DD 617).

The most important unifying connection between Deronda and Gwendolen's stories is the manner in which each character perceives the other as central to an alternative future, a road not taken, perhaps not even possible, but present in the imagination. In Deronda Gwendolen sees "a possible life which she had sinned herself away from" (DD 626). Daniel in turn has a premonitory feeling that Gwendolen and Mordecai have conflicting claims upon him. Eliot describes the foreboding as a vision which parallels in form the painting that so affected Gwendolen:

There was a foreshadowing of some painful collision: on the one side the grasp of Mordecai's dying hand on him, with all the ideals and prospects it aroused; on the other this fair creature in silk and gems, with her hidden wound and her self-dread, making a trustful effort to lean and find herself sustained. It was as if he had a vision of himself besought with outstretched arms and cries, while he was caught by the waves and compelled to mount the vessel bound for a far-off coast.

(DD 513-14)
Of the minor prophets in *Daniel Deronda*, Isabel Harleth and Anna Gascoigne have already been mentioned—the former as a "medium," the latter as a "clairvoyante." Mrs. Glasher pronounces her prophetic curse. Others who are associated with prophecy include Herr Klesmer, Lush, and Mab Meyrick. Kelsmer half-seriously refers to himself as "Elijah" and "the Wandering Jew" (DD 216). To Mrs. Arrow-point he is "a gypsy, a Jew, a mere bubble of the earth" (DD 221). Gwendolen calls upon him to have her fortune told, to find out if a career in music is open to her, only to be disappointed by "the panorama of her own immediate future that Klesmer's words seemed to have unfolded" (DD 234). Eliot's epigraph to the chapter is a preface to the musician's diagnosis:

> Among the heirs of Art, as at the division of the promised land, each has to win his portion by hard fighting: the bestowal is after the manner of prophecy, and is a title without possession.

(DD 224)

Lush's predictions about the future, in keeping with his character, are expressed as gambling odds. Of Gwendolen's prospects with Grandcourt he says to himself, "I will take odds that the marriage will never happen" (DD 128). Later the odds change: "her becoming Grandcourt's wife was so far from being an extravagant notion of possibility, that even Lush had entertained it, and said that he would as soon bet on it as on any other likelihood with regard to his familiar companion" (DD 307). Regarding Grandcourt's
willingness to compromise about family estates, he writes to Sir Hugo, "Ten to one he will not close for some time to come; . . . though at present he has a great notion of hunting here, I see a likelihood, under the circumstances, that he will get a distaste for the neighborhood" (DD 288). These are more than just figures of speech in a novel that begins at a gambling resort and ends with the temporary reappearance of Mirah's father, an inveterate gambler. Lush's brand of foreknowledge is without true vision; it comes through the calculation of probabilities.

Like Anna and Isabel, Mab Meyrick is a child-seer. Through her Eliot seems interested in making a fairly simple statement about charity, and a fairly complex assertion about the nature of the miraculous and the supernatural (owing much to Carlyle). Just prior to the moment when Deronda brings Mirah to the Meyrick's house to be cared for, the Meyrick sisters are discussing Erckmann-Chatrian's Historie d'un Conscriit, which Mab likens to "a chapter in Revelations" (DD 177)–an allusion to Carlyle's view of history in Sartor Resartus. Kind-hearted Mab wishes for three wounded conscripts to take care of herself, then exclaims:

"I wish that something wonderful would happen. I feel like the deluge. The waters of the great deep are broken up and the windows of heaven are opened. I must sit down and play the scales."

Mab was opening the piano while the others were laughing at this climax, when a cab stopped before the house, and there forthwith came a quick rap on the knocker. . . .
"Mr. Deronda!" The girls could hear this exclamation from their mama. Mab clasped her hands, saying in a loud whisper, "There now! something is going to happen."

The fulfillment of Mab's prophetic wish is immediate. Upon hearing of Mirah's situation and needs, Mab looks "awe-stricken, as if this answer to her wish were something preternatural" (DD 179). And in fact it is.

In Daniel Deronda, as in other Victorian novels about prophecy, nature itself can be miraculous. The fulfillment of the wish is not coincidence but a true miracle, brought about by Deronda's active willingness to help another human being—his intervention in the lives of Mirah and the Meyricks. While Eliot does not deny the possibility that the supernatural exists, her last novel demonstrates that nature is sufficient by itself for mankind. What we think of as prophecy is actually another dimension of human fear and hope for the future. The true prophet is like Deronda, able to commit himself to helping others create a better future. There is nothing certain about it—no sure foreknowledge of success, and even doubt that one is doing the right thing. But commitment is shown as preferable to Gwendolyn's course of action—her self-serving attempts to improve her own future at the expense of others. Her vision is too limited, and consequently fails to achieve its end. Nevertheless, despite doubt about foreknowledge and despite the limitations of vision, prophecy is still to be sought
after and believed. In the words of Felix Holt, another of Eliot's prophet-figures:

I am a man who am warned by visions. Those old stories of visions and dreams guiding men have their truth: we are saved by making the future present to ourselves.
NOTES


2 R. H. Hutton, "The Hero of 'Daniel Deronda,'" in The Spectator (10 June 1876). Quoted in Lerner, p. 133.


7 Leslie Stephens, quoted by F. R. Leavis in The Great Tradition, p. 80.
8Gillian Beer, "Myth and the Single Consciousness: Middlemarch and The Lifted Veil," in This Particular Web: Essays on Middlemarch, ed. Ian Adam (Toronto; Buffalo: Published in Association with the Faculty of Arts and Science of the University of Calgary by the University of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. 96-97.


10George Eliot, Daniel Deronda (New York: New American Library, 1979), p. 448. All further citations will be made in the text.


13Deronda's search for an occupation, and his choice be a prophet, are discussed by Alan Mintz in George Eliot & the Novel of Vocation (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).


15Eliot, Veil, pp. 283 and 305.

16Hardy, p. 168.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
PROPHECY AND IMAGINATION IN TESS OF THE D'URBERBILLES,
JUDE THE OBSCURE AND THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

There is in Hardy's created world a continual conflict between what man hopes will happen and what does occur. In his cosmogony, the human mind "brings into the universe a desire that events should be logical or reasonable, a desire that people should get what they deserve. But of course the world does not correspond to this desire."1 Opposed to desire is the natural course of events, determined by what Hardy calls the Immanent Will. As J. Hillis Miller describes it, this power is a version of the inherent energy of the physical world as seen by nineteenth-century science: unconscious power working by regular laws of matter in motion. Though what happens is ordained by no divine law-giver, the state of the universe at any one moment leads inevitably to its state at the next moment. Existence is made up of an enormous number of simultaneous energies each doing its bit to make the whole mechanism move. If a man had enough knowledge he could predict exactly what will be the state of the universe ten years from now or ten thousand. All things have been fated from all time.2

The problem is that no man has enough knowledge to make even day to day predictions with certitude. Yet everyone in Hardy's universe has enough understanding to speculate about the future, and enough imagination to wish for better
things than fate has granted them. The most tragic figures are those like Jude and Eustancia Vye, gifted with a greater degree of imagination than most, who cannot be content with the world as it is, and attempt to intervene in fate. These characters are the true prophets of Wessex.

The most extensive study of prophecy in Hardy has been Ruth Firor, whose *Folkways in Thomas Hardy* traces the folk heritage of omens, divination, and prophecy in his poetry and novels. Valuable though this is, it leaves unexplored examples of prescience which are not related to folk practices. And Firor reaches no systematic conclusions about the purposes or effects of Hardy's use of prophecy. The basic shortcoming of examining the subject from the point of view of folklore is that it reduces this aspect of Hardy's artistry to a collection of allusions with no further purpose than to ornament the story. The understanding of prophecy in Hardy has also been obscured by his critics' tendency to emphasize fate or determinism. Classical tragedy, which Hardy intended to emulate in his Wessex novels, used prophecy to foreshadow and reveal fate. If one looks no further, it is possible to assume that Hardy's use of prophecy can be adequately described as imitation of the Greek models. Focusing on determinism subordinates the act of prophecy to an inevitable evolution of circumstances, to which it is either pathetically irrelevant or ironically true. Such characterizations may be accurate,
but they keep us from seeing the extent to which some of Hardy's novels are also about prophecy. It is worthwhile to reverse the emphasis, to consider not the defeat of prophecy by determinism but the scope, variety, and limitations of prophecy within Hardy's mechanistic worldview.

Three of Hardy's novels—*Jude the Obscure*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and *The Return of the Native*—make extensive use of prophecy. In *Jude* and *The Return* the plot focuses on central characters who are visionaries, but cannot help themselves. *Tess* is about a girl misled by a series of false prophets. The former two novels are based on the prototype established by Charles Kingsley in *Alton Locke*, where the eponymous hero is a social and moral reformer whose prophecies are misunderstood, even as he misunderstands his audience, himself, and his proper objectives. George Eliot takes the same approach in *Felix Holt, The Radical*. *Tess* shows the other side of the coin—the same story inverted. Like *Jane Eyre* it emphasizes not the plight of the prophet but the quandary of a single individual confronted by alternative visions of the future—embodied in those characters who seek to counsel her about the future or to merge her future with their own, through marriage, liaison, or partnership in some social or religious mission. These novels are indebted to Victorian religious novels, where it was commonplace for a susceptible female character to be seduced into a false religion—whichever one the
author was against—through the machinations of a minister or priest. They differ from the religious novels in two ways: they are not intended as religious propaganda, and they incorporate other kinds of prophets and false prophets—sensualists like Rochester and Alec D'Urberville, social reformers like Angel Clare.

With the shift towards secularism come other changes. In all of these novels, there is interest in the psychological, moral, and social consequences of prophecy for those who profess the gift or aspire to it, and those who are the immediate subjects of prophecies. All examine prophecy closely, illustrating its viability, its characteristics, and the potential for abuse present in it. Hardy's own view, as I would like to demonstrate, is a mixture of rationalism and mysticism. He de-mythologizes prophecy, representing it as simple foresight, imaginative vision, acute perception, superstitious fear, and wish-fulfillment. He makes it a psychological state, with no necessary relationship to the future other than that which the prophet can bring about through his own efforts. But he does not take the additional step that rationalism suggests, and conclude that prophecy is not possible, or that it ceases to exist once you can offer a scientific explanation for it. Foresight is prophecy. Imagination is prophecy. A self-deluding wish for a better future is prophetic, even if the hoped-for event does not take place, or occurs in a form
which falls short of expectations, or only through the agency of a character pursuing his or her dream.

Consider the case of Eustacia Vye. She came to love Yeobright partly because he was exceptional in this scene, partly because she had determined to love him, chiefly because she was in desperate need of loving somebody after wearing of Wildeve. Believing that she must love him in spite of herself, she had been influenced after the fashion of the second Lord Lyttleton and other persons, who have dreamed that they were to die on a certain day, and by stress of a morbid imagination have actually brought about that event. Once let a maiden admit the possibility of her being stricken with love for some one at a certain hour and place, and the thing is as good as done.6

It is not that the veil of prophecy is rent, that modern man no longer has access to sources of inspiration which provide the more transcendent forms of prophecy. The inspiration was never there. The only difference between contemporary and historical prophecy is that formerly people believed that their foresight, dreams, wishes, and fears were inspired supernaturally. Eustacia's dream of loving Clym is not qualitatively different from the folk divination practiced by Bathsheba Everdene in Far from the Madding Crowd--who tries the superstition that one can find out whether a certain man will be one's husband by placing a key on the proper verse in the Bible, tossing the book in the air, and seeing if it comes down closed or open.7 Both women are engaging in prefigurative self-deceptions. You could call one an instance of prophecy and the other not, but it is largely a matter of using different words for the
Consequently when Hardy alludes to prophecy, he suggests that the action depicted is a modern example of what might in former times have been described as actual prophecy, and considered, through ignorance for imagination, to have been supernaturally inspired. The view is antithetical to Carlyle's Natural Supernaturalism, which similarly maintains that true perception of nature is prophetic, but insists that that perception is miraculous. Hardy would say that it is only acute perception, which can be called miraculous, but is not. Even so, there is a deep-seated contradiction in Hardy's representations of prophecy. It is as though he wants to believe it is possible, but reason will not let him. This psychological conflict is the subject of "The Darkling Thrush." The poet is looking out on a winter landscape at the turn of the century, contemplating seasonal changes and attendant death, when

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
of joy illimited:
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around.
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

(LL. 17-32)
In the novels this ambivalence about prophecy is reflected in various ways. Though Hardy does not subscribe to Carlyle's view of perception, he nevertheless portrays nature as inherently a revelation. This is an unresolved and fundamental contradiction. Furthermore, the very frequency with which Hardy alludes to or depicts prophecy implies its importance, whether or not it has authority. And the events of the novels do not invalidate prophecy. More often than not, the prophecies come true, though not in the manner expected. Even in an extreme case like *Jude the Obscure* there are reasons for doubting the standard ironic readings of the novel—that Jude's vision is futile. On the contrary, his prophecies are partially fulfilled in the course of the novel, and there is recognition in it that prophecies are not necessarily—or even probably—to be fulfilled in the course of a single lifetime. Jude and Sue's problem is not that their vision is false or self-deceiving, but that "the time was not ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us" (JO 318). Prophets, after all, can be Cassandras—absolutely right but unheard.

As an extended illustration of the mixed rationalism and mysticism of prophecy in Hardy, I would like to discuss the prophetic aspects of the scene, allusions, characterization, and action in *The Return of the Native*. 
Nature and time are virtually identical in Hardy's universe. Past, present, and future are represented in the landscape. At the beginning of *The Return of the Native* the author's first concern is to establish that the heath plays tricks with time:

> the heath wore the appearance of an instalment of night which had taken up its place before its astronomical hour was come: darkness had to a great extent arrived hereon, while day stood distinct in the sky. Looking upwards, a furzecutter would have been inclined to continue work; looking down, he would have decided to finish his faggot and go home. The distant rims of the world and of the firmament seemed to be a division in time no less than a division in matter. The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half an hour to evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread.

(RN 53)

And yet so changeless is the heath that "it could only be imagined to await one last crisis--the final overthrow" (RN 54). The past is represented--as it is throughout the book, of course--by the still-enduring presence of monuments built by the former inhabitants, specifically "an old vicinal way, which branched from the great Western road of the Romans, the Via Iceniana, or Ikenild Street, hard by" (RN 56-57). The highway upon which we find Diggory Venn overlays the old road, its prototype and prophetic type. Man's future is embodied in the present because human life, like the road, follows predictable patterns. The "final overthrow"--the end of time--is all that can break the pattern. What these opening passages do is to provide a
pseudo-scientific explanation for making the heath a microcosm of time—a rationale for the metaphor. Events within this microcosm, though literally part of the ongoing present, are nevertheless revelations of the past and future. Apprehending them is a mystical and visionary experience with a rational explanation behind it. When Eustacia first appears at the summit of Rainbarrow, Hardy remarks, "The first instinct of an imaginative stranger might have been to suppose it the person of one of the Celts who built the barrow, so far had all of modern date withdrawn from the scene" (RN 62). When Clym Yeobright would walk the heath alone, "His imagination would then people the spot with its ancient inhabitants: forgotten Celtic tribes trod their tracks about him, and he could almost live among them, look in their faces, and see them standing beside the barrows which swelled around" (RN 449).

The future is literally present. As Grandfather Cantle, Susan Nunsuch, and the rest are living relics of the past, Clym Yeobright is a visitant from the future, a John the Baptist who took ennoblement rather than repentance for his text. Mentally he was in a provincial future, that is, he was in many points abreast with the central town thinkers of his date. Much of this development he may have owed to his studious life in Paris, where he had become acquainted with ethical systems popular at the time.

In consequence of this relatively advanced position, Yeobright might have been called unfortunate. The rural world was not ripe for him. A man should be only partially before his time: to be completely to the vanward in aspirations is fatal to fame.

(RN 230)
Geographical space, as Hardy announced in the second paragraph of the book, is "a division in time no less than a division in matter." Paris is the future made flesh; Eustacia's dream of living there is a prophetic vision brought down to earth.

Moving from one place to another on the heath itself moves one backwards and forwards in time. The Yeobright house, the church, and Wildeve's inn are chronologically separated from the rustic past, representing different stages in history and culture as well as social class. Consequently it is more than a casual detail when Hardy tells us that

On Egdon there was no absolute hour of the day. The time at any moment was a number of varying doctrines professed by the different hamlets, some of them having originally grown up from a common root, and then become divided by secession, some having been alien from the beginning. West Egdon believed in Blooms-End time, East Egdon in the time of the Quiet Woman Inn. Grandfer Cantle's watch had numbered many followers in years gone by, but since he had grown older faiths were shaken.

(RN 186)

Prophecy on the heath can occur through perception, imagination, or a combination of both. If the past and future are visible in the present surroundings, clear-sightedness is all it takes to make a prophet. The heightened, prophetic perceptions of Eustacia are symbolized by the telescope she carries, used to gaze longingly towards Budmouth and the greater social life it represents, and to watch for Wildeve. Both Budmouth and Wildeve are part of
the future she imagines for herself, and both are associated with a condition of life more advanced historically than what the heath generally has to offer. Of the four different "doctrines" about the time of day on the heath, the hour according to Wildeve's Quiet Woman Inn is the most forward. There it is "Twenty minutes after eight," when according to the most backward standard, Grandfer Cantle's watch, the time is still ten minutes before the hour (RN 186).

Imagination and perception combine in the chapter titled "Tidings of the Comer," where Eustacia first hears of the Christlike advent of Clym Yeobright. The announcement, and it is an Annunciation, comes to her not from heaven, but nevertheless from "above." Hardy contrives to have her overhear through a chimney a conversation between workers outside:

The subject of their discourse [was] keenly interesting to her. A young and clever man was coming into that lonely heath from, of all contrasting places in the world, Paris. It was like a man coming from heaven.

(RN 164)

From their conversation Eustacia is inspired with an afternoon of day-dreaming "visions," prophecies of her imagination:

[Eustacia] could never have believed in the morning that her colourless inner world would before night become as animated as water under a microscope, and that without the arrival of a single visitor. The words of Sam and Humphrey on the harmony between the unknown and herself had on her mind the effect of the invading Bard's prelude in the "Castle of Indolence,"
at which myriads of imprisoned shapes arose where had previously appeared the stillness of a void.

(RN 164)

Hardy uses different forms of vision interchangeably as metaphors for each other. Here the heightened perception of a microscope and the poetic prophecy of "The Castle of Indolence" become vehicles for wishful thinking—the tenor of the metaphor. Shortly after this Eustacia is inspired with a prophetic dream by a chance encounter with Clym, and "few human beings, from Nebuchadnezzar to the Swaffham tinker, ever dreamt a more remarkable one," says Hardy (RN 173). In it she dances with a man in silver armor, until the two of them dive together into a magic pool in the heath, and come up in a secret cavern, where he begins to remove his casque to reveal his identity, only to fall "into fragments like a pack of cards" (RN 174).

Eustacia's immediate reaction is that the dream is a true prophecy, but "when she became cooler she perceived that many of the phases of the dream had naturally arisen out of the images and fancies of the day before (RN 174), notably the occasion of overhearing Clym talk to his mother, which Hardy describes as an instance of imaginatively heightened perception:

She strained her eyes to see them, but was unable. Such was her intentness, however, that it seemed as if her ears were performing the functions of seeing as well as hearing. This extension of power can almost be believed in at such moments. The deaf Dr. Kitto was probably under the influence of a parallel fancy when he described his body as having become, by long endeavour, so sensitive to vibrations that he had
gained the power of perceiving by it as by ears.

(RN 171-72)

Inspiration through eavesdropping is a recurring motif in the book: Eustacia's plan to dress as the Turkish Knight for the mummer's show is conceived after she observes rehearsals in the linhay through a knothole; Diggory Venn is "inspired" with his inside knowledge of the relationship between Eustacia and Wildeve by creeping up close, concealed under peat turfs, to their assignation on Rainbarrow mound. The action itself becomes the vehicle for a metaphor for prophecy.

Several elements of Eustacia's dream are fulfilled. The unknown lover arrives, Eustacia dresses as a knight to see him, she reencounters Wildeve at a country dance late in the book, and the two of them drown in the race below the weir. Explanations of these coincidences are largely irrelevant. Of course it is possible that the dream subliminally suggests to Eustancia the ploy of disguising herself as a knight, once she has the opportunity to do so. The unknown lover can be explained by her previous interest in Clym. One could say that her disappointment in marriage leads her to substitute Wildeve for the unknown lover of the dream—who could as easily be anyone she chose to fulfill the prophecy. Her interest in the dance might have a subconscious relationship to her memories of the dream. Though we have no way of knowing whether Eustacia's drowning is a suicide or an accident, the dream might have suggested
to her the means of her death. But all that matters is that events have shaped themselves so as to give the dream the appearance of foreknowledge. None of the interpretations cited above, in fact, has much better authority in the text than the alternative—which is that actual prescience is at work. Whether supernatural inspiration is involved, or coincidence, or wish-fulfillment, the emergence of events which confirm the vision mark it as true prophecy, or what passes for prophecy in Hardy's world.

It is a limited vision. In his Preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912, Hardy defends his so-called "pessimistic" outlook as merely representative of what he sees; his critics' assertion that optimism or meliorism is a better representation of life, he points out, is based on the assumption that they know the future will confirm their beliefs and not his. This argument, he remarks, "postulates a prescience denied to humanity." Though an author is under no obligation to make his story fit his beliefs, The Return of the Native does not contradict Hardy's statements in the Preface. While his prophets are denied absolute foreknowledge, they are permitted to see shadows of the future—the hazy outlines of coming events, but not the exact form they will take. It is, of course, ironic that Eustacia should have to play the knight in shining armor herself, but the irony does not invalidate the prophecy, which is shown to be at least partially true.
The same mixed relationship between prophecy and fulfillment is apparent in Tess and Jude. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Mrs. Durbeyfield divines that Tess will marry a gentleman. One cannot fault the prophecy that all three of Tess's encounters with men are false or ironic marriages -- a rape, an unconsummated marriage, and the time she spends living with Alec D'Urberville. Jude's vision of learning at Christminster is half-fulfilled in his own self-education and his pilgrimage to the city. He errs primarily in his expectation that learning should have "a local habitation and a name." His "standing desire to become a prophet, however humble, to his struggling fellow-creatures" (JO 172) is fulfilled in the example of his own life—he dies quoting Job—in the disregarded sermon he preaches to a crowd before the gates of the Colleges (JO 257-59), and in his work. Judge is hired to refurbish an engraving of the Ten Commandments—an occupation that marks him as the symbolic successor to Moses. Though Jude's moral prophecy may not convince the society he lives in, it leaves Hardy's audience persuaded that Jude the man was largely in the right, a prophet unheard.

The major prophets in *The Return of the Native* are Eustacia and Clym. Eustacia is described as a "Sphinx" and goddess; she knows "by prevision what most women learn only by experience: she had mentally walked round love, told the towers thereof, considered its palaces; and concluded
that love was but a doleful joy" (RN 122). She can "utter oracles of Delphian ambiguity" (RN 124). Unwittingly Eustacia is the pagan prophetess--antithesis to the Christian prophet, Clym, who is alternately identified with John the Baptist, Christ, and the Apostle Paul.

Both suffer with Jude the fate of imaginative people. Of Clym, Eustacia remarks, "He's an enthusiast about ideas, and careless about outward things. He often reminds me of the Apostle Paul... [But] the worst of it is that though Paul was excellent as a man in the Bible he would hardly have done in real life" (RN 344). His temporary blindness is more than physical. As well as symbolizing his inability to perceive present circumstances, it is the blindness of Tiresias. Clym fails as an educator and social reformer not just because he is before his time, but also because he has attempted to impose new directions upon the changelessness of the heath--as if he were building a road which did not parallel the old Roman way. The heath can only accept him as a prophet when, at the end of the novel, he accommodates his message to the rituals familiar to his audience, preaching his "moral lectures or Sermons on the Mount" from Rainbarrow, the site of ancient rituals (RN 473). He becomes "an itinerant open-air preacher" (RN 474). It is a defeat for his expectations, but not inconsistent with the vision he had. The prophecy has been fulfilled in part.
A third prophet-figure is Diggory Venn, as portentous in the eyes of others as in any virtue of his own character. As a reddleman he is regarded with perennial superstition:

A child's first sight of a reddleman was an epoch in his life. That blood-coloured figure was a sublimation of all the horrid dreams which had afflicted the juvenile spirit since imagination began. "The reddleman is coming for you!" had been the formulated threat of Wessex mothers for many generations.

(RN 131)

Hardy calls reddlemen "Mephistophelian visitants," and describes the effect of reddle on his appearance as unmistakable as "the mark of Cain" (RN 131). And Christian Cantle reports that Venn once glared at him "like Famine and Sword," two of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse (RN 380). But for all his supernatural reputation, Diggory is anything but otherworldly. He is no visionary, lacking the imagination of either Eustacia or Clym. At the same time, however, he stands midway between them in his intended effect upon the future. Clym wishes to sacrifice himself for the eventual good of society in the abstract. Eustacia seeks to gratify her own wishes in order to make a happy future for herself. Diggory sacrifices himself for the sake of the woman he loves--without real hope of finding happiness for himself apart from hers.

It is Venn's gift to be able to see what happens near at hand. He is the seer who penetrates the secrets of the present: first to know that Thomasin is not married; first to understand the relationship between Eustacia and
Wildeve; the one person who sees Christian Cantle gambling away money that belongs to Thomasin and Clym; the one person who knows why Mrs. Yeobright was on her way to see Clym the day she died. He is nearby when Wildeve is escorting Eustacia home from the country dance, and Thomasin stumbles upon him when seeking her husband on the night of the planned elopement. These coincidences cannot all be explained by Diggory's attempts to spy on Wildeve, but they make sense as a whole if viewed as displaced revelations, in keeping with the other portraits of prophecy in _The Return of the Native_.

Mrs. Yeobright also takes her turn as a prophet. She forecasts dire consequences from the marriage of Clym and Eustacia, which her son comes to regard as fulfilled:

> Whatever [Mrs. Yeobright] was in other people's memories, in his she was the sublime saint whose radiance even his tenderness for Eustacia could not obscure. But his heart was heavy; that mother had not crowned him in the day of his espousals and in the day of the gladness of his heart. And events had borne out the accuracy of her judgment.

(RN 473)

Her bitter conclusion that "Sons must be blind if they will" is carried out in the physical blindness that afflicts Clym (RN 273). "Why is it," she asks, "that a woman can see from a distance what a man cannot see close?" (RN 273).

The answer is that everyone's vision of the present and future has its own limitations. Diggory Venn's special knowledge of events does not enable him to prevent the catastrophe; if anything, he helps precipitate it, since his
understanding falls short of telling him that half of the money he has won back from Wildeve belongs to Clym. Mrs. Yeobright's maternal foresight does not guarantee that her son will follow her advice. And yet, from our perspective outside the story we can see that Clym's retrospective appreciation of her guidance is greater than it deserves. She too has contributed to the disaster--withholding her complete blessing of the marriage and nourishing an antipathy to Eustancia. No one is blameless. Everyone acts according to his own vision. Everyone is somewhat blind.

This state of being is signified in the novel by Hardy's allusions to 1 Corinthians 13: 12: "For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face." The line is from the most famous and extensive discussion of prophecy and prophetic gifts in the New Testament, a three-chapter passage in which Paul advises the members of the church at Corinth to value prophecy above speaking in tongues, but to value in each person the spiritual gifts allotted to them. The primary references to this verse are made in the chapter titled, "The Two Stand Face to Face," in which Eustacia first confronts Clym, by this time established as a Christ-figure. The occasion, naturally, is the Christmas and homecoming party for Clym at the Yeobright's. As a result of her single-minded efforts to meet a new lover, Eustacia forgets the old, and misses a tryst with Wildeve. Hardy describes him as having for her now "the
rayless outline of the sun through smoked glass" (RN 203) -- Wildeve is eclipsed, seen through a glass darkly; Clym is seen face to face.

This imagery, and the allusion to 1 Corinthians 13, is continued later when an eclipse of the moon--portentous in its own right--presides over the engagement of Clym to the ill-starred Eustacia. Both characters are shown to be blind to each other's dreams for the future. Eustancia does go so far as to predict that "we shall not love like this always" and "I shall ruin you" (RN 255, 256), but the omens, dreams, and predictions are unheeded. Ultimately Clym's blindness dooms him "to behold the world through smoked glass" (RN 310). He becomes a blind prophet like Tiresias.

The dim understanding people have of each other is treated as a matter for prophecy and the limitations of it are embodied in the same biblical allusion. At the instant when Clym confronts his wife with the knowledge that she contributed to his mother's death, Eustacia looks at him not face to face, but sees him in the mirror, standing behind her. Direct vision is denied them. Mrs. Yeobright's conclusion that her daughter-in-law has denied her entrance to her son's cottage is derived from the sight of "a woman's face looking at me through a window-pane" (RN 348). The window-pane and mirror symbolize the misunderstanding between Mrs. Yeobright and Eustacia, between Clym and his wife. There is no complete revelation of character,
motives, and extenuating circumstances. Clym and his
mother judge Eustacia on the basis of incomplete knowledge,
with disastrous consequences. As 1 Corinthians 13: 8-9
says, "whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; . . .
whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we
know in part, and we prophecy in part."

Hardy's prophets are isolated from society--which they
see, like the future, through a glass darkly. Jude cannot
see Christminster as it really is; Angel Clare cannot see
Tess:

With all his attempted independence of judgment this
advanced and well-meaning young man, a sample product
of the last five-and-twenty years, was yet the slave
to custom and conventionality when surprised back into
his early teachings. No prophet had told him, and he
was not prophet enough to tell himself, that essen­
tially this young wife of his was as deserving of the
praise of King Lemuel as any other woman endowed with
the same dislike of evil.

(CU 286)

Clym eventually suffers a similar fate, deprived of the
woman he might have loved. He views the wedding feast of
Thomasin and Diggory through a window, able to see all that
is going on "except in so far as vision was hindered by the
green antiquity of the panes" (RN 471).

Hardy's prophets are like those of other Victorian
novelists. The truth they have to offer is relative; mul­
tiple valid prophecies are possible. No prophet is granted
an unobscured view of the future. Vision has as much to do
with the past and present as with the future. It has as
much to do with perception as with inspiration. And most
important, prophecy is made a part of normal human existence, brought down from the level of mysticism, brought forward from the past into the present, and attributed to familiar-seeming people. Our attention is focused on how the prophetic gift affects them, how it shapes the future or falls short of preparing as for the future, how it affects the lives of those about whom prophecies are made. There is an element of self-description in these novels for the Victorian author. Trained to see himself as a seer, he could sympathize with and represent better the quandaries of a Deronda or a St. John Rivers, the faith of Gabriel Betteredge, or the social vision of Clym Yeobright. His own self-doubts are reflected in the foreshortened vision of his prophet-figures. And yet these are prophetic books; not just novels about prophecy. They end in millenniums, New Jerusalems, Armageddons, and Last Judgments. If their prophets are flawed, it is because they are human, not because their prophecy is false.
NOTES


2 Miller, 14.


6 Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978), 198-199. All further citations will be made in the text.

7 Firor, 43-5.

8 Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 258. Jude remarks in his "sermon" to the crowd at Christminster that "It takes two or three generations to do what I tried to do in one." All further citations will be made in the text.
9 Hardy, Native, 479.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CATHARSIS AND PROPHECY

The five novels discussed in detail in the preceding chapters are representative of an entire class of fiction in the nineteenth century characterized by an emphasis on prophecy as a theme. Examples of the genre appear throughout the Victorian period. There is nothing comparable in British fiction before or after. What these novels and stories provide, as I have shown, is reassurance; they reassured their audience that the future was knowable and manageable, or that its unknowns were not as terrifying as they seemed; they reassured their audience that traditional values and beliefs would not be abandoned, even after the advent of new prophets and new kinds of prophecy. The sense of reassurance was a cathartic response evoked through that representation of prophecy in plots that "test" it against the future predicted or show the effects of a prophet's ideals in action. It was reassuring, for instance, for the Victorians to see radical prophets like Alton Locke and Felix Holt converted to more conventional beliefs after the failure of their attempts to act upon their radical principles. And it was comforting to see in Romola the example of Savonarola, a religious prophet whose teaching led to radical changes in society and eventually to violence, and to see traditional
values restored at the end of the novel.

Conventions, Themes, and Catharsis

A number of common features emerges from an examination of the entire range of Victorian fiction about prophecy. It is typical of these works, for instance, to have multiple and contrasting prophet figures, as is the case in each of the principal examples described in this study, and in other novels like Romola, Dombey and Son, and Armadale. At the simplest level, the contrast made is between true and false prophets, but often the situation is more complicated. "A Christmas Carol" has four prophets: Marley as the harbinger who predicts the coming of the others, and the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come. Dombey has Bunsby the Oracle, the fortune-telling Mrs. Brown, and Captain Cuttle, with his ingenuous predictions of Walter's future—a false prophet, an evil prophet, and a prophet of good. The catharsis of doubt and fear is created as false prophets are revealed and true ones confirmed or believed.

It is characteristic of nineteenth-century fiction that the fulfillment of prophecy should be sought through the efforts of the prophet himself or through the conscious efforts of others, as in Jane Eyre and Alton Locke, for instance. Rochester seeks to create by force of will the future he envisions for Jane. Alton Locke tries to change society to suit his vision of social justice. A late, ironic example occurs in a short story by Oscar Wilde,
"Lord Arthur Savile's Crime," where the hero, told by a palm reader that he is going to murder someone, decides to do so at once—to get the potential embarrassment out of the way. When positive change or moral improvement happened as the result of human efforts guided by prophecy, it was reassuring to the Victorians, because such an outcome suggested that man could control his own destiny, that man was not a blind agent in the process of social change.

Prophecy itself is an active influence upon the future and upon character in nineteenth-century fiction. It changes the course of events rather than simply predicting them. It changes behavior instead of simply criticizing it, thereby freeing characters from narrow predestination. Scrooge asks whether the vision of the future he has been granted must inevitably come true. The reassuring answer is embodied in the ending of the story: both character and the future can be changed by prophecy.

Very often prophecy is depicted as an intrinsic part of human nature. Instead of being supernatural in Victorian literature, prophecy is a normal skill. Certain characters may be more perceptive, intuitive, sensitive, or imaginative than others, and that is what makes them prophets, not inspiration or a divine gift. Or prophecy may be commonplace, a human potential that anyone can exercise—though with varying degrees of success. Or prophecy may be no more than a state of mind, the condition where one desires, expects, or dreads something, or feels that change is needed. The
prophet may be Mr. Dick of David Copperfield, a simpleton from the long tradition of wise fools who is able to see the right answers when others cannot; or Jane Eyre, a seemingly unexceptional person; or Pip of Great Expectations, who is confident of a future that exists more in his own mind than in the realm of possibility. Right or wrong, prophecy centered in human nature increases the dignity and potential of man, suggests that people are self-sufficient, able to cope with doubt and the unknown by themselves.

Nineteenth-century fiction explores alternatives to prophecy. One of them is faith, resulting in essentially a Christian view of fate—a "lilies-of-the-field" indifference to what might happen. The return to faith is by definition a release from doubt and fear. This alternative to prophecy is most explicitly described in Armadale, which contrasts the gypsy, and therefore pagan terror of fate that pursues Ozias Midwinter with the Christian acceptance of fate he learns, eventually, from the Reverend Mr. Brock. When Armadale conjectures about what might happen in the future, the newly converted Midwinter is able to respond "Who need know? . . . Happen what may, God is all-merciful, God is all-wise. . . . In that faith, I can look back without murmuring at the years that are past, and can look on without doubting to the years that are to come."1

There is an undercurrent of feeling in the Victorian novel that ignorance might be bliss, that one would be better off without prophecy and some of its effects--
self-awareness, reform, dread, and expectation. Prophecy is portrayed as a curse to Latimer in Eliot's short story, "The Lifted Veil." Attempting to foresee the future or to act in accordance with their ideals only makes things worse for Tess, Pip, Felix Holt, and Jude Fawley. Without prophecy they might be happy, content with the world as they find it.

The Evolution of Prophetic Catharsis

The manner in which doubt and fear are resolved changes in the course of the nineteenth century. Relatively early novels like Jane Eyre and Alton Locke attempt to combine self-determination and reform with the reassertion of traditional social and religious values. They synthesize personal choice about the future and morality with conventional norms of possibility and behavior. Dombey and Son, also fairly early, opts for the sanguine view that fairy tales can come true. By the time Little Dorrit was written (1855-57), Dickens had taken a more serious turn. In Dorrit he reasserts the pre-eminent authority of religious prophecy as conveyed in the Bible. Reform is incorporated into the religious vision as part of the millennial restructuring of society. The route to the New Jerusalem is not personal choice but submission to the example of the life of Christ. Two years later, in A Tale of Two Cities, Dickens takes the logical next step: submission to the example of Christ must include self-sacrifice, which is depicted as a prophetic
action. *Armadale* (1864-66) also advocates a return to faith.

*The Moonstone* (1868) makes prophecy necessary but limited in its worth and by nature fragmented. It is reassuring that the truth about the loss of the diamond is ultimately revealed, but the unqualified authority of prophecy in any form is questioned. Faith is not an option. One must actively seek the truth, despite the limitations of the available methods. The same attitude pervades the novels of George Eliot. Though she expresses doubt about the divine inspiration of Savonarola's prophecies in *Romola* (1862-63), and even doubts the worth of his social reforms, she admires him nevertheless as a man of vision with the courage to act upon his beliefs. Prophecy must be attempted despite its limitations, despite the fact that its wisdom arises from no greater source than human imagination, knowledge, and zeal. *Felix Holt* (1866) and *Daniel Deronda* (1874-76) reach nearly the same conclusion.

Hardy's novels achieve the catharsis of doubt and fear through recourse to irony. He makes prophecy an essentially human trait and questions its efficacy, much as Eliot does. But more than any other Victorian author he emphasizes that prophecy can cause misfortune as well as cure it, create unhappiness and misunderstanding through the very act of envisioning a better future. The ultimate irony is that Hardy shows that Victorian doubt and fear was unfounded. Despite all that Jude and Clym attempt to do to change society and behavior, society and behavior remain unchanged.
With the end of the Victorian period came the end of prophecy as an important element of fiction, for a variety of reasons. Foremost among these was the fact that society had lost its fear of change. A new complacency had evolved--deep-seated enough that the impetus of much literature shifted from reinforcing the status quo to shaking it. Instead of reassuring the audience conventional beliefs and hopes would prevail, literature became iconoclastic, and began to threaten conventional beliefs. This iconoclasm, evident in the works of Wilde, Shaw, Lawrence, Joyce, and Woolf, had no use for the catharsis of doubt and fear that prophecy in the nineteenth-century novel provided. It was more important to shake up an audience than reassure them. At the same time, fiction had become less thematic and more realistic--both trends that ran counter to the manner in which prophecy had been depicted by Victorian writers. Focusing on the representation of reality rather than on the illustration of a theme meant that prophecy could be portrayed in fiction only as it occurred in fact. Unless your subject was prophecy or the life of a prophet, it was not likely that you would consider or even allude to prophecy in your writing. *Jane Eyre* in such a literary climate would simply be the story of a governess and the two men who courted her--not the story of a governess and the two false prophets who, as the court her, attempt to lead her astray. But the final blow that ended use of prophecy in the novel was the loss of faith in prophets, evident in Hardy's
writing. The Victorians had outlived prophets of doom and bliss alike, and nothing much had changed. Industrialization and reform had come and gone without precipitating the end of the world. Higher criticism and Darwinism had not suddenly swept away religious beliefs. Medieval and socialist Utopian schemes had been tried and forgotten. The Millennium had not come. Prophecy was discredited.
NOTES

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