

Research Repository UCD

Title	Melodrama and the Affective Arts of the Nineteenth Century
Authors(s)	Daly, Nicholas
Publication date	2011
Publication information	Daly, Nicholas. “Melodrama and the Affective Arts of the Nineteenth Century.” Spartacus, 2011.
Publisher	Spartacus
Item record/more information	http://hdl.handle.net/10197/6491

Downloaded 2026-11-21 21:57:51

The UCD community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters! (@ucd_oa)



© Some rights reserved. For more information

Hagen, Koppen and Vibe Skagen eds., The Human and its Limits (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press/Spartacus, 2011)

Melodrama and the Affective Arts of the Nineteenth Century

Nicholas Daly, University College Dublin

In this essay I want to consider some of the ways in which nineteenth-century art, drama, and literature emotionally engaged their audience through melodrama, an affective form that aimed at a physical response in the subject as much, or more, than a cerebral one. Effects were harnessed to produce affects: sometimes tears, sometimes suspense. I want to approach this topic through the melodramatic representation of the city. As the emergent social sciences attempted to map the Victorian city and the bodies it contained, Victorian artists made of it an emotional landscape, and made the urban poor into powerful affective agents. This aesthetic can now appear manipulative, or saccharine. Although we have by no means dispensed with such tropes as part of our own popular culture, our critical inheritance warns us to meet emotion in art and literature with scepticism. Here I want to examine nineteenth-century theoretical assumptions about emotion, as well as to look at some particularly potent examples of visual melodrama by the minor Victorian artist Augustus Mulready (1844-1904), who made the urban poor his principal subjects. Like Boucicault's plays, and Dickens's novels, Mulready's canvases combine feelings and ideas to produce powerful effects, effects that our own hermeneutics of suspicion often find uncongenial.

Melodrama and Sentiment

Thanks in no small part to the work of scholars of early cinema as well as theatre historians, our understanding of melodrama has shifted considerably in recent years. Where earlier approaches to melodrama were consonant with the popular

understanding of it on stage, screen or page as a mode animated by strong ethical colouring ("virtue in distress") and by sentiment, or "excessive" emotion – as in the term "weepie", or "tearjerker" -- the focus of more recent scholarship has been on melodrama as a mode aligned with modernity, and characterized by suspense, spectacle, action, and sudden reversals of fortune, as much as by emotional overflows (e.g. Singer, Daly). Thus the legitimate offspring of 19th-century melodrama have been seen to include the action movie as much as the films of Douglas Sirk. This focus on melodrama and modernity has, perhaps, served to turn attention towards one set of bodily effects (suspense, the excitement generated by action and spectacle) at the expense of others (the sentimental). Here, then, I want to return to the teary dimension of melodrama, and its preoccupation with good and evil, which is also to say its imbrication with the sentimental.

Away from the study of stage and film melodrama, a good deal of scholarship has been devoted to the sentimental. In particular, U.S. scholars have homed in on it, to the extent that one can talk of the "sentiment wars", or at least debates represented by the clash of views of Ann Douglas and Jane Tompkins (Dobson; Howard): the former suggesting in *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977) that the sentimental turn in nineteenth-century American fiction was the start of a cultural slide into emotionalism; the latter arguing in *Sensational Designs* (1985) that the sentimental novel of the early nineteenth century represented an important anti-patriarchal political form. Thus for Tompkins one of the bestsellers of mid-century, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851-1852), was politically effective precisely because of its emotional effects on the reader, and not despite them. The death of Eva, or the savage beating of Uncle Tom are episodes that work on our emotions the better to attack Stowe's main target: chattel slavery. On the other side of the Atlantic, the death of the ignorant but good-hearted crossing-sweeper, Jo, in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-3) might be seen to extract our tears in order to open our eyes to the suffering of the urban poor. But of course it can be argued that such powerful emotional tools can also be used to close down debate and thought. Lauren Berlant, for example, has suggested that in the U.S. the sentimental has worked to cement social solidarities, binding imaginary communities in a web of shared feelings rather than ideas, and that sentimental politics are at work whenever "putatively suprapolitical affects or affect-saturated institutions (like the nation and

the family) are proposed as universalist solutions to structural racial, sexual or intercultural antagonism" (2007, 638).

Perhaps the most useful thing to have come out of those debates for my purposes here is the light they shed on the origins of the sentimental, and on the post-Cartesian scepticism they generate regarding the emotion/thought opposition. Not only can we aspire to a sociology of emotion, and explore the extent to which emotion is "embodied thought", but we can trace a history of emotions (Howard 66, citing Michelle Z. Rosaldo). As June Howard points out, there is little point starting a discussion of the sentimental in the nineteenth century, as many of its key ideas derive from eighteenth-century debates around the nature of the self, in particular Benevolist arguments that the softer emotions show virtue, that compassion is a manifestation of goodness, and that it is God's goodness that equipped us with such faculties, ideas that appear in different forms in the work of writers as various as Lord Shaftesbury, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Adam Smith. Emotional responses to the sufferings of others thus show our own innate goodness, as well as signalling our connectedness to our fellow human beings (Taylor 211-65). The imagination is the faculty that allows us to see ourselves in the shoes of others, and the imaginative arts play a key part in training us in such projection. The theorization of such links acquired a greater urgency as capitalism began to place pressure on earlier forms of kinship and association, and their regimes of value.

It is then no coincidence that melodrama can also be tracked back to the late eighteenth century. As Peter Brooks has shown in *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976), melodrama takes shape in France as a form that provides transcendent meanings in a rapidly-changing world cut free of its old sacred moorings – God and Monarchy; for Brooks, the melodramas of Pixérècourt and others resacralize a modern, secular world, its vivid contrasts of good and evil providing a form of moral compass to those cast adrift on the storm-tossed seas of modernity. In the hands of the nineteenth-century novelist, it becomes a mode in which the simplest of actions become heavily freighted with moral meaning.

The Industrial Revolution shaped the new form as much as the French: what is it to be good, indeed to be human, in a world where urban anonymity and the cash-nexus seem to have replaced more intimate forms of social connectedness, and where the rhythms of industry have replaced older forms of temporality? In this respect sentimental melodrama, with its formula of "virtue in distress" is as much a machine

aesthetic as is modernism, forged just as much out of the experience of industrial modernity and the human/machine collisions and collaborations of that experience. But where modernism, or at least one form of it, seeks to model itself on the machine, subordinating form to function, melodrama places itself on the side of the human, imagined as distinct from the machine/market: woman or man always beats machine; love turns out to be a more powerful force than steam; tears appear a more effective currency than gold; the human heart is a throbbing motor of change; and the little guy beats the system. These are the morals of some of the most successful dramas of the nineteenth century, from Douglas Jerrold's *Black-Ey'd Susan* (1829) to Dion Boucicault's *The Poor of New York* (1857) to Adolphe d'Ennery and Eugène Cormon's *Les Deux Orphelines* (1874); and similar ideas underwrite the fiction of such writers as Dickens (e.g., *A Christmas Carol* [1843]), and Elizabeth Gaskell (e.g. *North and South* [1854-5]). There is, in effect, a disavowal of its own modernity at the heart of melodrama, which generally assumes that a better world lies somewhere outside of the industrial and commercial present. Modernism, of course, is equally inclined to protest too much, and its strictures against the emotional manipulations of sentimental literature cannot always be taken at face value. Montage techniques, and other shock effects can, after all, be seen to provoke somatic as well as cerebral responses, even if they are not aiming at tears.

And yet, even knowing all of this, it can be difficult to avoid the stock modernist and post-modernist reaction to the sentimental effects of nineteenth-century culture. It is a long time since the New Critics held sway, but their suspicion of "excess" emotion lingers still in our quotidian reading and viewing practices. When bound up with idées recus about the moral hypocrisy of the nineteenth century, such attitudes can be fatal to any real engagement with the art and literature of that period, that is to say an engagement that does not begin with condescension. We read with some surprise of the copious quantities of tears that Charles Dickens seems to have shed over the writing of his works, tears that anticipated the expected reaction of his readership. Modern revivals of stage melodrama often play for laughs, as the emotional contract of the original scripts seem to be unenforceable with contemporary audiences; in the cinema, the comedies of Keaton, Lloyd, and Chaplin tend to enjoy considerably more popularity than such melodramas as D.W. Griffith's 1921 film, *Orphans of the Storm* (itself based on one of the great nineteenth-century melodramas, Adolphe d'Ennery and Eugène Cormon's *Les Deux Orphelines* [1874]):

the story of a blind heroine astray in the big city has come to seem more mawkish than uplifting.

Winfried Menninghaus has argued that disgust 'short-circuits' the aesthetic, and thus becomes a key tool in the modernist workshop, but the sentimental also attempts to annihilate the distance on which the aesthetic depend. Such adjectives as 'cloying' aim to capture this: our senses are sickened – etymologically speaking stopped up, or choked -- not so much by excessive sweetness, but by the intimacy of the sentimental – it refuses aesthetic distance. As Lauren Berlant points out, mawkish comes from the Old Norse word for maggot (2007, 409) – there is something not just rotten, but deathly about sentiment from this point of view. I want to argue, though, that we need to be cloyed a little longer, not to get past or get over our discomfort with the emotional mechanisms of Victorian art and literature, but rather to linger on that very discomfort, and to imagine how it may have worked for its intended audience.

The City of Augustus Mulready

I want to take as a case study the work of Augustus Mulready (1844-1904), a minor Victorian painter who specialized in scenes of the urban poor, specifically poor children – newsboys, flower-girls, and street-performers. He is, in other words, a painter of genre, which develops another eighteenth-century idea that we see at work also in the rise of the novel, that ordinary life is important and worthy of representation. Mulready is not a well-known figure, though a handful of his paintings appear in major collections. He was the grandson of the celebrated Irish-born artist, William Mulready (1786-1863), whose best-known paintings include such genre pieces as *Choosing the Wedding Gown* (1846), and the *Toy Seller* (1862). His Mulready uncles, John and Michael Mulready exhibited at the Royal Academy, as did his father William Mulready junior, who exhibited a series of still lifes of game there between 1835 and 1842. Augustus Mulready also had a painterly pedigree through his grandmother, Elizabeth, who exhibited rural landscapes at the Academy between 1811 and 1819. Her brothers had also achieved some distinction in the visual arts: John Varley was a distinguished watercolourist, William Fleetwood Varley exhibited at the RA from 1804-18, and Cornelius Varley, also a gifted watercolourist, achieved distinction in the design of optical instruments, including a graphic telescope (a variety of camera lucida) that won a gold medal a the 1851 Great Exhibition.

Elizabeth Varley's nephews – Augustus Mulready's uncles -- included two other RA exhibitors, Albert Fleetwood Varley and Charles Smith Varley.

Against this bright family background, Augustus himself is a shadowy figure, and little is known of his biography. Born in Chelsea in 1844, the 1861 Census finds him in the house of his grandmother, Elizabeth, by then living apart from her famous husband.[1] In the census form, Mulready, then 17, is described as a figure artist, his grandmother as a landscape artist. He was recommended as a pupil at the Royal Academy Schools in December of that year by John Callcott Horsley, later an academician, and Rector of the Royal Academy from 1875-90. Mulready was a member for a period of the Cranbrook Colony of artists in Kent with Horsley and others – Frederick D. and George Hardy, George Bernard O'Neill, and Thomas Webster – though he does not seem to have spent much time there, and would have been very much a junior member. Like the more experienced colony-members he practiced a form of genre painting that ultimately derives from the Dutch realists of the 17th century (Greg 10), and like Thomas Webster and F.D. Hardy in particular he was a prolific painter of children. But there is a significant difference in accent: his children are the urban poor -- flower girls, match-girls, newspaper boys and other young street characters of the kind catalogued earlier by Henry Mayhew in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). There are only a few exceptions, such as the rural genre pieces, *Keeping an Appointment*, *The Snow Ball* [1871], *Hard Times* [1877], *In Spring Time* [1881], and *The Fallen Bird* [1901].)[2]

Between 1863 and 1880 he exhibited 12 paintings at the Royal Academy (Graves 322). These were *An Aged Lady* (1863); *Miss Graham* (1868); *Uncared For* (1871); *Our Good-Natured Cousin*; *Uninvited*, and *Wild Flowers* (1872); *A Passing Cloud* and *Remembering Joys that have Passed Away* (1873); "*Stop my Hat!*" and *A Little Creditor* (1875); *Left to Herself* (1877); and *A Recess on a London Bridge* (1880). He gave various addresses in these years, 11 Fitzroy Street, 8 Ordnance Road, St John's Wood; Cranbrook, Kent (in 1871 and 1872); 22 Newman Street; and 62, Blenheim Crescent. With the exception of *Miss Graham* (1868), which is presumably a portrait, all of these, would seem to be genre pieces, and all of those that are traceable are street scenes, including *Wild Flowers*. There are a handful of reviews that suggest that his work was respected, if not enormously popular, though one of his paintings, *Our Good-Natured Cousin*, was reproduced by a popular magazine, the *Graphic*. [3]

While Mulready does not seem to have exhibited at the Royal Academy after 1880, he continued to show work at other galleries, includng Hollender and Cremetti's Hanover Gallery in New Bond Street. Mulready's paintings also appeared at some of the regional galleries, especially in Liverpool, where his emotionally-freighted paintings of everyday city life perhaps appealed to the affluent merchant elite. In 1887 one of his pictures, *After Rain*, representing a flower-girl and a newspaper boy, also appeared at the Basnett Street Gallery, alongside works by such contemporary artists as William Muller and Frederick Goodall: the reviewer for the Liverpool Mercury described Mulready's canvas as a "characteristic example" of his work, suggesting that his style had become reasonably familiar by then to reviewers.[4] He married in 1874 in Marylebone; he died on March 15, 1904, and was buried at Finchley Cemetery.[5] The last we see of him is a letter of condolence dated November 8, 1903 to J.C Horsley's widow, Rosamund, in which he gives his address as 9 Alderney Street in Pimlico, and describes himself as working on "two very cheap quickly to be executed portraits", which suggests that he continued to make a living as a painter, though at the lower end of the scale of prestige (Greg 32).

Whatever reputation Mulready has is for his paintings of the young poor of London – flower girls, match-girls, newspaper boys and other young street characters. This was not by any means unique territory: William Powell Frith's *Crossing Sweeper* (1858) is a fairly well-known example, and such paintings as Jules Bastien Lepage's *Flower-Seller in London* (1882) and Emily Merrick's *Primrose Day* (1884), which represents a crossing-sweeper and a flower-seller, show that other artists were using the same social palette. Nonetheless, Mulready's single-minded devotion to the representation of the urban poor has earned him a minor but respected place in Victorian art history. Thus Jeremy Maas's *Victorian Painters* (1969) praises Mulready as a "sentimental social realist", and reproduces *A London Crossing-Sweeper and A Flower Girl* (1884), which juxtaposes that pair in a recess of London Bridge by night (234, 255).[6] Christopher Wood's 1995 edition of *Victorian Painters* includes a later version of *Our Good Natured Cousin*, entitled *Our Good Natured Cousins* (sic), which closely resembles that offered for sale at Christie's in 2005, and which interpolates a flower-seller leaning against a pillar-box, ignored by the swell and his female companions. Lionel Lambourne's *Victorian Painting* (1999) features Mulready's *Remembering Joys that are Passed Away* (Royal Academy, 1873), which

depicts a crossing sweeper and a match-girl on a snowy evening, contemplating the colourful but tattered posters for a Drury-Lane pantomime.

Indeed, posters, and other printed matter, as we shall see, are as much his trademark as are the urban poor. They are not always used to any obvious effect, as we see in such paintings as *Picardie*; *After Rain, Chelsea*; and *Street Scene in Chelsea*, where the print on the posters is illegible, and where they seem to function as aspects of authentic local colour, or simply as Mulready's trademark motif.[7] But consider, for example, the more striking use of posters in the painting *Uncared For* (1871), which Mulready exhibited at the Royal Academy in that year, and which appears to be his first painting to put the street sellers and the textual backgrounds of the London streets to pictorial use.[8] Here Mulready's sentimental art combines feelings with ideas to achieve its moral purpose, rather as Charles Dickens does in *A Christmas Carol* (1843). The uncared for of the title are two young barefoot children, a girl selling flowers, and a boy, hunched in an almost foetal position, sitting on an upturned basket at her feet. The girl looks out of the painting at us, placing us uncomfortably in the position of passer-by, or customer. We can imagine some of the complex reaction of its original viewers, for whom the urban poor were a source of anxiety and even fear, as well as charitable concern. In this light, the choice of children rather than adult street-sellers is clearly a deliberate ploy to minimize fearful and hostile affects. As in stage melodrama, we see a simplified moral picture of the innocent in distress, allowing us a less complicated reaction to their plight. These paintings are little emotion-machines that attempt to force the viewer to some pangs of feeling for his or her fellow human beings, children that might be our own.

Like Dickens, Mulready also generates sympathy through identification effects -- by making us realize that we too were once children. The Spirit of Christmas Past in Dickens's seasonal novel softens Ebenezer Scrooge in one of the visions he shows him by making him see his younger self as a victim, a lonely child, starved of love; when he learns to feel sorry for this other, earlier Scrooge, it is less of a leap for him to understand the plight of others who resemble his younger self, like the carol-singer that he has earlier shooed away from his office window. In this light we might remember how much Victorian literature asks its readers to identify with vulnerable orphans: Jane in *Jane Eyre* (1847); Esther Summerson, among others, in *Bleak House* (1852-3); Pip, in *Great Expectations* (1860-1).

Mulready's *Uncared For* balances this direct emotional assault with the visual irony it creates through the use of background detail. On the right of the composition, we catch a glimpse of the affluent classes strolling past shop windows, oblivious or indifferent to the misery of their fellow Londoners. More pointed still is the representation of a poster-covered wall immediately behind the children. One poster-fragment advertises glasses "To Suit all Sights", another promotes Gustave Doré's painting, *The Triumph of Christianity*, which drew crowds to the newly opened Doré Gallery in New Bond Street in 1868. The Doré reference highlights the failure of a supposedly Christian nation, delighting in lofty religious subjects, to protect its most vulnerable citizens; the ad for spectacles flags a pervasive social rather than physical myopia. (There is a historical irony in the fact that the following year Doré would create his own striking images of London poverty in *London, A Pilgrimage* [1872].) The fragment of a poster for the Foreign Aid Society marks the fact that, like Dickens in chapter 4 of *Bleak House*, Mulready is skeptical of "telescopic philanthropy" at the expense of the poor at home.[9] *Uncared For* appears to be the first canvas in a vein that Mulready would return to again and again.

The posters we see in Mulready's work are never pristine; they vary from being slightly distressed around the edges to being nothing but scraps: a word, or a word-fragment. At one level this adds to the verisimilitude of the pieces, simply documenting the effects of weather and the work of rival posterers on the original advertisements. At a more metaphorical level, one presumes, it reminds us that the 'writing on the wall' is not always so easy to read, though it is there for anyone who is willing to look. Anyone who believes in the 'triumph of Christianity' should consider that perhaps they have been weighed and found unsatisfactory, like Belshazzar in the Book of Daniel. But it is also possible to read these torn and faded posters as commenting more generally on the nature of time. In this light they serve as mise-en-abyme equivalents of the genre painting itself as a limited, time-bound form – Mulready seems to hint that his affective art too may be tied to its own historical moment, and bound for oblivion after its work of witnessing.

This self-conscious aspect of his emotive canvasses is more obvious in one of Mulready's few well-known paintings, *Remembering Joys that have Passed Away* (now in the collection of the City of London at the Guildhall Art Gallery), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1873, and later reworked as a smaller piece, *Outsiders*.[10] Two children stand in the snow, gazing wistfully at a colourful but fading poster for a

pantomime at Drury Lane, *Princess Beauty and the Demon Dwarf*. This is the shorter title of an actual Christmas pantomime, *Prince Happy-Go-Lucky; or, Princess Beauty and the Demon Dwarf*, a lavish balletic spectacle staged at the Royal Alhambra Palace in December of 1871. It featured 150 coryphées and five principal dancers from La Scala, and was a light piece structured around a number of elaborate transformation scenes, as well as comic topical songs.[11] The Prince, aided by a good fairy or two, rescues Princess Beauty from the Enchanted Castle of the Dwarf King, and they go off to live in the Prismatic Palace of Peaceful Pleasures. In the painting, the show is evidently over, though the posters remain, as does bitter winter weather. A closer look suggests that the two children are not simply nostalgic for Christmas treats past. Though the girl is quite well dressed, the clothes of the boy are beginning to fall apart – they have evidently come down in the world. The broom and box of pipe-lights in the background suggest that they now both work for a living, one as a crossing-sweeper; the other as a match-girl.[12] Where once, perhaps, they were part of the audience for the theatre's seasonal pleasures, with their magical transformations, now they hope to survive by selling matches and their physical labour to other theatre-goers. The background reinforces this idea: one of the other posters advertises Dion Boucicault's melodrama *The Streets of London* (first performed at the Princess's Theatre, Oxford Street [1863]), which is centered on the fate of a middle-class family that loses all its money and endures many hardships before being ultimately restored to fortune. Derived by Boucicault from a French play, *Les Pauvres de Paris* (1856) by Edouard Brisebarre and Eugène Nus, as *The Poor of New York* (1857), and in many subsequent "localized" versions, it was one of the most successful international urban melodramas of 19th century. Further temporal commentary is by two of the other fragmentary phrases we can make out: "Last Night", and "Day by Day" connote on the one hand an absolute break between present and future; and on the other the idea of hand-to-mouth survival. The painting is, then, a snapshot of a moment that gestures towards a bleak future rather than the magical transformations of Princess Beauty: this pair remain trapped in the enchanted castle of London itself, and no Prismatic Palace awaits; even the happy ending of the Streets of London seems unlikely.

Ephemera

The recurring figures of vulnerability in Mulready's paintings include two of the child-labourers of the Victorian streetscape, the newsboy and the flower girl. His newsboy paintings include *London News Boys* (1884), *A London Newsboy*, *London Newsboy* (1893), and *Luck in a Moment* (1893). The general theme of these paintings appears to be that while these child workers sell news, they themselves are invisible to the media – the grinding poverty in which they live is simply not newsworthy. Mulready also appears to be making a parallel between the ephemeral commodities they sell – newspapers are almost worthless by the end of the day – and the lives of the sellers. A similar parallel is made in the other category of paintings, with which I want to finish, his many paintings of flower girls.

Mulready's flower-seller paintings include *Wild Flowers* (1872), *The Flower Girl* (1872), *Street Flower Seller* (1882), *Day is Done* (1884), *London Street Scene*, *Flower Girls – A Summer's Night*, and several paintings with the ambiguous title *Selling Out*. It is not a subject unique to Mulready, as we have seen, but it is one that Mulready pursues with peculiar persistence. As elsewhere he includes textual details – fragments of posters -- to add point to the lives of these ephemeral sellers of ephemeral beauty. In *Selling Out* and *Selling Out* (1901) we see two flower-sellers, older than Mulready's street-children, but perhaps not quite young women either. As elsewhere there are fragmented posters as commentary, but here there is very little textual detail, in keeping with the way in which Mulready's later paintings become themselves more stylized and poster-like. *Selling Out* features the poster-fragment 'Day by Day' (which also appears in other Mulready poster-backgrounds, as we have seen), perhaps meant to stress again the precarious as well as the difficult life of the seller. In the other, the seller is evidently a 'Bouquet girl', one of those who in the evenings sold flowers to theatre-goers – the flowers are wrapped in wire because the stifling heat of the theatre would otherwise make them wilt. Her target audience of well-to-do theatre-goers is represented impressionistically in the background. Unlike the figure in the other painting of the same name, this young woman meets the eye of the viewer with a 'come-hither' glance. The single advertising fragment on the pillar behind her is for "comedy … *Money,"* a reference to the 1840 comedy of that name by Edward Lytton Bulwer in which the life of a poor relation, Alfred Evelyn, is transformed by an unexpected inheritance. It is a play that casts a cold eye on the power of wealth in society, and the cant of liberals and tories alike on the subject of poverty. Evelyn muses that Poverty can transform an individual as much as wealth

can: "there is many a man in [the] streets honest as you are, who moves thinks, feels, and reasons as well as we do; excellent in form – imperishable in soul; who, if his pockets were three days empty, would sell thought, reason, body, and soul too, for that little coin [sc. of gold]." (Act 2.i)[13] In this context it is difficult to ignore the other implications of "selling out", and young women selling their flowers. Women who sold flowers in Covent Garden in the evenings shared the streets with prostitutes, amid some speculation that the two professions overlapped. In *Pygmalion* (1912), George Bernard Shaw draws on the familiarity of this idea by setting the opening of the play in Covent Garden, long associated with the sex industry as well as the theatre; Eliza, a flower seller, fears that she will end up on the streets if Higgins makes a complaint against her (Roach 189-90). Is the young woman who meets the eye of the viewer in Mulready's 1901 painting issuing an invitation to sexual commerce? If so, the viewer, is placed as her client: we are both seduced and shamed.

I want to turn finally to a late painting, *Close of Day – Selling Out*. Notwithstanding the possible sexual resonance of the title, this is quite a different composition. Wearing a blue dress and white apron, the subject of the painting sits in a recess on the bridge, her basket of flowers next to her. These flowers have begun to lose their petals, some of which lie on the pavement in front of her. As in many of Mulready's paintings, there are also discarded newspapers on the pavement, which like the flowers are in symbolic relation to the young woman in the foreground, who is beautiful and delicate and flowerlike, and possibly for sale, though her life is decidedly not news.[14] Her white apron is torn in places, but she lifts one end of her scarf above her head as if posing for the artist. One of the stars above her is bright enough to be Venus, but there is also a hint of religious imagery. We are reminded of Stella Maris, one of the Virgin Mary's titles, and also of the many paintings of Mary that show her with a halo of stars, a spiritual crown befitting one of her other titles, Queen of Heaven, e.g. Carlo Dolci's *Madonna in Glory* (1670), or the many church statues of Mary beneath a canopy of stars set in azure. But the patch of blue starlit sky that appears through the clouds also picks up the blue of her dress. As Michel Pastoureau has shown, the association of Mary with blue begins in the 12th century, and accompanies a more general rise in prestige of that colour in that period: the stained-glass Virgin of Chartres, Notre Dame de la Belle Verrière, with her dress of bright blue, is an early example; the Wilton Diptych a later and even more vivid

instance of the association (50-55).[15] The commentary of the walls, then, has given way to some more eternal commentary that suggests the apotheosis of the earth-bound girl of the streets (cf. the transformation of Eliza from Covent-Garden flower-seller to Society Beauty in *Pygmalion*). The light of heaven shines not just on her, but from her.

We might also see this painting as Mulready's attempt to highlight the nature of modern art. For Baudelaire art has to capture the modern -- the fleeting, the contingent, the transient -- but also the eternal and immoveable. Mulready's art clearly focuses most intensely on the fleeting, the short lives of street people who make a precarious living by selling ephemera, and who are surrounded by the torn posters and scraps of newspaper, fragmented and rapidly-fading texts that almost tell us something –the Biblical writing on the wall rendered secular and opaque. But here he seems to gesture towards something else – a hint of utopia, or the magical light that shines from other, distant worlds – or perhaps a glimpse of something eternal, a permanence that his own work aspires to while everywhere noting its impossibility.

Conclusion

To achieve his effects Mulready does not go beyond the sentimental and melodramatic, I would argue. On the contrary, his work depends on the moral world they connote, one where some essential human kinship is taken for granted, and where feeling is taken to be a stronger force than capital itself. His most successful paintings are emotion-machines that force his original viewers into acts of sympathy, as well as estranged and partial self-recognition. It is probably impossible for us now to see these pictures as their original viewers did, separated as we are from their emotional world by the chasm of years. But if we cannot bridge that gulf, we can occasionally get glimpses of the other side, and catch occasional phrases from the language of feeling spoken there.

Nicholas Daly is Professor of Modern English and American Literature at University College Dublin. His publications include *Modernism, Romance, and the Fin de Siècle* (1999), *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (2004), and *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* (2009). He is currently working on a study of the transatlantic circulation of urban narratives and images in the nineteenth century.

[1] The 1861 census his birthplace appears to be Kensal Green, the 1851 census records Chelsea. The latter seems more likely insofar as the family were then living at 4 Sussex Place, Chelsea, and other members of the family lived in Chelsea.

[2] *Keeping an Appointment* sold at Bonham's, Edinburgh, on December 4, 2009. It shows a rather pert-looking country girl posed at a style, presumably waiting for her sweetheart. *The Snow Ball* (1871), which shows children at play in a rural landscape, appeared for sale at Christie's on March 15, 2006. It is signed with a monogram rather than Mulready's usual signature of A.E. Mulready. *Hard Times* (offered for sale at Brightwells on November 9, 2005, shows a young woman at a desk, following a text with her finger. She carries a bundle on her arm – perhaps it is an attempt to illustrate Dickens's novel. It is also signed with a monogram. *In Spring Time* is quite a detailed study of a young girl gathering flowers; it sold at auction at Bonhams on March 16, 2000. In *The Fallen Bird*, which is signed in the usual way, a girl walking in a snowy wood, comes across a frozen bird.

[3] "The Royal Academy", *The Graphic*, Saturday, June 29, 1872. See also "Fine Arts: The Winter Exhibitions – the French Gallery", *Daily News*, Thursday, October 31, 1872; "The Hanover Gallery", *The Era*, Saturday, December 4, 1886, p. 22; "Fine Art Exhibition", *Liverpool Mercury*, May 15, 1879; "Spring Exhibition at the Basnett Street Gallery", *Liverpool Mercury*, May 4, 1887, p.5; "The Southport Exhibition", *Liverpool Mercury*, February 27, 1892.

[5] London Metropolitan Archives, St. Pancras Parish Church, *Register of Burials* at Finchley Cemetery, accessed through ancestry.co.uk April 30, 2010.

[6] Maas notes that the back of the painting has an inscription by the artist: "London Flower Girl and Street Arab – mutually giving and receiving aid – they set each other off like light and shade" (254).

[7] *After Rain, Chelsea*, is inscribed simply "Chelsea" in the picture, above Mulready's signature. This picture appeared for sale at Bonhams on November 18, 2008.

[8] This painting was sold at Bonhams on September 29, 2010. At 39 3/4 x 29 15/16 inches, it is a one of his larger canvases. On June 13, 1996 Bonhams sold another painting under this title, a smaller copy of the original.

[9] "The work at home must be completed thoroughly, or there is no hope abroad", is how Dickens put it in a non-fiction article on the Niger Expedition. Cited in Bruce Robbins, "Telescopic Philanthropy": Professionalism and Responsibility in *Bleak House*", in Bhabha 213-30 (215).

[10] In *Victorian Painting*, Lambourne gives the title of this painting as *Remembering Joys that are Passed Away*, but Algernon Graves records it as *Remembering Joys that have Passed Away* in *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Exhibitors* 322.

[11] For a contemporary review see "Royal Alhambra Palace" in "Christmas Entertainments", *Times*, December 27, 1871, p. 3.

[12] On the crossing-sweeper as a signifier of London see Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians* 122.

[13] *Money* was first performed at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, on December 8, 1840.

[14] Mulready also uses the recesses of London Bridge for the background of a number of other pictures, including *Sympathy* (1881), and *Mutually Giving* (1884)

[15]As he notes, the 1854 Papal doctrine of the Immaculate Conception led to an association of Mary with white.