

A Dramatic Reading of Augustus Leopold Egg's Untitled Triptych

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Fig. 1
Augustus Leopold Egg
Past and Present, No. 1 1858
Oil on canvas
support: 635 x 762 mm frame: 801 x 925 x 85 mm
painting
Presented by Sir Alex and Lady Martin in memory of their daughter
Nora 1918
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Augustus Leopold Egg's painting, known as *Past and Present Nos. 1–3*, (1858), is a triptych in the genre of narrative painting. The subject is the 'fallen woman' and together the three paintings depict an entire scenario from discovery and outcast to the moments before the woman's final demise. When these paintings were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858, they had no listed title and, indeed, remained without title at Egg's premature death in 1863.¹ Instead, the following subtitle was affixed: 'August 4th-Have just heard that B-has been dead more than a fortnight, so his poor children have now lost both parents. I hear she was seen on Friday last near the Strand, evidently without a place to lay her head. What a fall hers has been.' At the exhibition, the drawing-room scene was positioned in the centre (fig. 1), with the painting of the two children to the right (fig. 2) and that of the mother to the left (fig. 3). Egg was one of several artists who, along with poets, playwrights, and novelists during the 1840s and 1850s, dared to depict a 'fallen woman', who, in time, became almost a symbol of the Victorian era.²



Fig. 2
Augustus Leopold Egg
Past and Present, No. 2 1858
Oil on canvas
support: 635 x 762 mm frame: 801 x 925 x 85 mm
painting
Presented by Sir Alex and Lady Martin in memory of their daughter
Nora 1918
© Tate
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Fig.3
 Augustus Leopold Egg
[Past and Present, No.3](#) 1858
 Oil on canvas
 support: 635 x 762 mm frame: 802 x 926 x 90 mm
 painting
 Presented by Sir Alex and Lady Martin in memory of their daughter
 Nora 1918
 © Tate
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Although Egg's anonymous biographer, believed to be [William Holman Hunt](#), comments that the painting 'attracted an extraordinary degree of attention at the Royal Academy Exhibition', such a subject was not well received by contemporary critics.³ The anonymous critic for the *Art-Journal* believed 'the subject too poignant for a series of paintings', while the critic for the *Athenaeum* proclaimed '[t]here must be a line drawn as to where the horrors that should be painted for public and innocent sight begin, and we think Mr. Egg has put one foot at least beyond this line'.⁴ Even Egg's friend Holman Hunt had to admit that it 'was not a favourite picture with the public', and can only assume that Egg must have been drawn to the subject 'on a moral ground'.⁵ In his *Academy Notes* (1858), Ruskin publicly attempted to rectify any 'mistakes in the interpretation' by giving his 'true reading of it':

In the central piece the husband discovers his wife's infidelity; he dies five years afterwards. The two lateral pictures represent the same moment of night a fortnight after his death. The same little cloud is under the moon. The two children see it from the chamber in which they are praying for their mother; and their mother, from behind a boat under a vault on the river-shore.⁶

Thus, the triptych came to be understood as representing an adulteress with the consequences of her actions, as prescribed by Victorian social morality, depicted in the paintings either side. Clearly, such a theme upset the critics. Indeed, the critic for the *Athenaeum*, summarised the problem by describing the work as 'an impure thing that seems out of place in a gallery of laughing brightness, where young happy faces come to chat and trifle'.⁷

Given the flurry of activity *Past and Present* created among critics, it is perhaps surprising that the amiable Egg remained silent. When Egg was not busy in his studio, he occupied much of his time with his great passion in life: the theatre. He began acting in Dickens' amateur company with Wilkie Collins, John Forster, and Frank Stone during the late 1840s.⁸ Besides acting, his theatrical activities encompassed stage management and prop and costume design. While his triptych as a whole has a strong sense of the dramatic, it is the third painting (fig.3) that is most strikingly theatrical.⁹ Emphasising this point, Egg includes in the picture a poster advertising two contemporary plays to be performed at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket: *Victims* (1857) by Tom Taylor and *A Cure for Love* (1842) by Tom Parry.¹⁰ Although both appear on the same playbill, in reality the two plays were performed several years apart. So, what did the plays share? What significance do they have to the painting? They are two of three literary symbols in the triptych, the other being an unidentified book by Honoré de Balzac in the central picture (fig.1). An analysis of the two plays reveals a triangular link between these three literary allusions which, when seen together, presents an alternative reading of *Past and Present*. Rather than the painting being a morally didactic work, warning against the perils of adultery, as several contemporary and modern scholars have assumed, *Past and Present* may be seen as Egg's protest against the folly of Victorian marriage.¹¹

One of the greatest embarrassments to the Victorians was the huge number of prostitutes roaming the British city streets. According to William Acton, as early as 1841, there were 9,409 prostitutes in London

alone.¹² By 1846, when the situation had reached epidemic proportions, attempts were made to quell prostitution by the Reverend Spooner. However, the Spooner Bill was swiftly suppressed by the House of Commons once it was revealed that certain men, whose names were 'some of the highest and noblest of the land', were identified as 'customers' of prostitutes.¹³ As writers Acton, William Greg, and Henry Mayhew reveal, prostitution was a heavily layered and highly complex issue in the major cities.¹⁴ In his four-volume sociological study, *London Labour and London Poor* (1861), Mayhew explores and exposes the vast underworld of London prostitutes and categorises them in their many guises from brothel dwellers to ladies of intrigue. However, one category of women barely acknowledged in this lengthy study is that of the fallen wife and mother, the adulteress, cast out of her home and forced into prostitution for survival. Indeed, Mayhew all but dismisses these women in his claim that adultery reveals 'a state of immorality amongst the upper and middle classes that is deplorable'.¹⁵ In Egg's triptych, the fallen woman represents the outcast adulteress who, abandoned with illegitimate child, is left destitute, wandering the streets.

Adultery was considered far more serious for a woman than a man. During the many debates over the passing of the bill of divorce (Matrimonial Causes Act) in 1857, the Lord Chancellor testified that a 'wife might, without any loss of caste, and possibly with reference to the interests of her children, or even of her husband, condone an act of adultery on the part of the husband; but a husband could not condone a similar act on the part of a wife'.¹⁶ Victorian physician George Drysdale observed: 'for a man to indulge his sexual appetites illegitimately, either before or after the marriage vow, is thought venial, but for a woman to do so is the most heinous crime'.¹⁷ If adultery was such a major issue – and, obviously, it was – was something wrong with the institution of marriage in Victorian times?

Patriarchal law and social practice made many Victorian women seek early marriage. If a woman had no suitor by the age of twenty-five, then her chances of marriage diminished rapidly. However, in 1843, *The Magazine of Domestic Economy* warns young women that selling 'one's independence for gold... is too often done' and can only result in 'secret' unhappiness. Nonetheless, the writer continues, '[I]ove in a cottage is very delightful, but it must be a cottage ornée, and if with a double coach house the love will be the more enduring'.¹⁸ Over the next decade, numerous pamphlets and tracts were published on the subject of prudent marriages. For the most part, social class and wealth dictated marriage. If a substantial amount of money was at hand, it was possible for a man or woman to marry into a higher class but before the wedding bells, dowries and settlements had to be negotiated between father and suitor.¹⁹ Once the business transactions were completed the woman lost any civil and property rights she may have had and became the sole property of her husband. Such a fate for women was conceivably more bearable, given the times, if love were the foundation of the relationship. But, in 1854, Drysdale observed:

A great proportion of the marriages we see around us, did not take place from love at all, but from some interested motive, such as wealth, social position, or other advantages; and in fact it is rare to see a marriage in which true love has been the predominating feeling on both sides ... we see matches everyday in which a young girl marries an old man, or where the fear of remaining an old maid, or the wish to obtain the social advantages of marriage, is the real motive that influences the woman. Such marriages are in reality cases of *legalised prostitution*.²⁰

And as Drysdale concludes, such unions are 'the source of years of future grief' with the inevitable result – adultery.²¹

As several scholars note, the scene in the central picture of Egg's triptych appears to represent the moment of adulterous discovery.²² The top hat on the table and the luggage in the lower left of the picture suggest that the husband has just returned home. In his hand is a crumpled letter which, presumably, is an intercepted love letter intended for his wife. Particularly telling are the two halves of an apple: one half lies on the table with a knife pierced through its core, or its broken heart, and the other half lies discarded on the floor. The fallen apple is symbolic of both the wife's fall to the floor as she begs her husband for mercy, and her fall in society. It also emphasises the commentary in the subtitle: 'What a fall hers has been'. The two pictures hanging either side of the mirror are equally revealing. Above the miniature portrait of the wife is a

painting which appears to depict Adam and Eve being cast out of Eden. And above the miniature portrait of the husband is the painting of a shipwreck identified as *The Abandoned* by Clarkson Stanfield (exhibited in 1856). The abandoned ship at sea foreshadows the fate of the husband as explained in the subtitle: 'Have just heard that B- has been dead for a fortnight'. The open door, reflected through the mirror, signifies both the husband's recent arrival and the wife's imminent departure – as she is shortly to be banished from her home. The collapse of the home is reflected in the toppling house of cards built by the children which, like their mother, has fallen to the floor. But it is a book on the chair beside the children that piques the viewer's interest. For, while Egg omits its title, he is quite deliberate about identifying the author – Balzac. Given Egg's meticulous attention to detail, the omission of the book's title is a little puzzling, particularly when early editions of Balzac's works appeared with only the title on the spine and not the name of the author.²³ So what was it that Egg wished to signify through this literary symbol?

Many of Balzac's novels were recognised for their risqué plots on the subject of adultery.²⁴ Of course, there were other French authors writing on a similar theme, notably Alexandre Dumas *fils*, but at the time of Egg's painting, Balzac was arguably one of the most prolific writers on the subject.²⁵ The topic of marital discontent fascinated Balzac. In 1829 his anonymous work, *Physiologie du mariage*, satirised the institution of marriage and caused a minor scandal. In his introduction to this two-volume work, the author observes that 'the number of unhappy homes was larger than that of happy marriages' and goes on to suggest reasons why many marriages should never have occurred in the first place.²⁶ As a symbol, then, the Balzac book may represent any one of his fictional or non-fictional works focusing on bourgeois marital dissatisfaction and a possible outcome, adultery. While the painting may depict an immoral adulterous wife, it may also reflect a miserable Victorian marriage embarked upon for the wrong reasons. Indeed, Egg's inclusion of this literary allusion prompts the viewer to reflect upon Balzac's writings in general and consider why adultery was such a major issue.

If the critics were already outraged at what they perceived as the theme of the triptych, they may have called for the work's withdrawal had they considered the possibility that this woman could be seen as a victim of an unhappy marriage – a marriage that perhaps should never have taken place. Paintings depicting the Victorian family at home were supposed to extol the joys of domestic bliss, not expose hidden truths. But Egg was not alone in presenting a fallen woman in an unhappy Victorian family home. In 1851, Richard Redgrave completed his painting *The Outcast* in which a young unmarried mother is ordered out of her home by an older man, presumably her father. Another young woman, possibly a sister, is on her knees, her arms outstretched to the father, begging for compassion. Despair and grief are expressed by four other members of the family as they look on. Interestingly, both pictures share compositional elements such as the wide-open door through which each woman is about to be cast out; pictures, or a picture, on the wall – while the picture is unknown in Redgrave's work, it is likely that, as in Egg's work, it reflects or comments upon the main scenario; and an incriminating letter, the apparent cause of discovery. Nonetheless, despite these similarities, both Redgrave and Egg depict a different type of fallen woman in their work and, thus, a different narrative.

The theme of the Victorian fallen woman can be seen in the work of several artists in the 1840s and 1850s. In 1853 Holman Hunt completed his painting *The Awakening Conscience*, and a year later Dante Gabriel Rossetti, another friend of Egg, began work on his painting *Found*.²⁷ But it is a slightly earlier painting, executed around 1848 by G. F. Watts, which reveals striking similarities to Egg's third picture. The title of the work, *Found Drowned*, is taken from a daily column in the *Times* newspaper which published lists of women, mostly prostitutes, found drowned in London.²⁸ Shockingly stark, the painting depicts a solitary woman lying dead beneath a bridge. The positioning of her body, with her arms outstretched, suggests that she has recently been washed up by the tide. Particularly striking about this work is the strong, almost theatrical, illumination of the body as it lies framed by a proscenium-like arch of the bridge. Beyond the arch, a lone star twinkles. It is the theatrical quality of Watt's painting that makes the similarities between this work and Egg's third picture so apparent. And, as if in acknowledgment of Watts, Egg positions his small twinkling gas light in an almost identical position to the lone star. But while Watts' dramatic painting lacks narrative detail, Egg's picture has an abundance of information.

The theatrical theme in Egg's third painting is immediately apparent through the playbill displayed under the arches of the bridge. Indeed, particularly interesting about this poster is the detail. Not only is the place,

date, and time provided for each play, but also the names of the playwrights. In the 1840s and 1850s it was unusual to include playwrights' names on a playbill.²⁹ In supplying us with this information, then, Egg establishes the authenticity of both plays and emphasises their relevance to the painting. And, as if to prompt the viewer to 'read' them, he has created a highly theatrical setting for the overall compositional layout. Indeed, the bridge arch is much like a stage proscenium in that it frames the entire scene and dramatises the woman's pathetic plight. In contrast to the bright moonlight soaking into the Thames, gaslight, by this time installed in all London theatres, sheds its limelight haze across the woman and child. Above her head, two posters are spotlighted: the playbill for the Theatre Royal, Haymarket and an advertisement for 'pleasure excursions to Paris' – possibly a reminder of Balzac.³⁰

In a narrative painting whose theme is tragic, it is surprising that the two plays selected by Egg, *A Cure for Love and Victims*, are both comedies.³¹ But while both contain the structural components of that genre – complicated, almost farcical, plot; unexpected encounters; jilted lovers; misconstrued actions; mixed-up packages; and happy resolution - the subject matter they share is serious not comic. Each play depicts people trapped in unhappy marriages and comments upon the possible reasons and consequences of such mismatched unions. This pairing of opposites – sad in theme, comic in tone – was not unusual in Victorian dramas. As Michael R. Booth observes, 'such a blend followed established patterns of comedy' to such an extent that 'it is often difficult to know what *was* a comedy'.³² Furthermore, he claims, any 'treatment of marital problems' in plays demanded a happy ending.³³

Although little is known about Parry, *A Cure for Love* appears to have met with some success. Its opening run at the Haymarket on 29 November 1842, lasted for nineteen performances and was revived there under John Buckstone's management eleven years later (1853).³⁴ This short two-act play must have enjoyed certain popularity as it was included as one of four plays in an 1856 Benefit Performance at the Royal Surrey Theatre.³⁵ While Parry wrote at least ten plays, few are known today, and he has seemingly been forgotten. That he was not a predominant playwright during the 1840s and 1850s only adds to the curiosity as to why Egg included reference to his play in the painting.

A Cure for Love tells a woeful tale of a good-natured man caught in the miseries of a loveless marriage. Indeed, so bad is the situation between husband, Trimmer, and wife, Laura, (and his resident mother-in-law) that he leaves home and contemplates suicide. 'Matrimony! How that one word reminds me of all my misery,' he exclaims, musing 'how delightfully cool the river looks' compared to 'the constant boiling torments' he endures at home.³⁶ On the banks of the Serpentine, 'synonymous with woman's sting', he encounters Sadgrove, a fellow would-be suicide.³⁷ For Sadgrove, the problem is reversed: his distress is caused by the loneliness of having been jilted by his true love nine years earlier. Being a comedy, the two talk each other out of suicide and eventually retire to their club for drinks and dinner.

The most interesting feature of this play is the cameo scene between Sadgrove, Trimmer's confidante, and a waiter. In this briefest of scenes embedded within a scene, Parry summarises his play's theme:

Sadgrove: Were you ever in love? Waiter: No, sir, I'm not such a fool!

Sadgrove: Oh. Waiter: Yet, sir, I'm going to be married next week because there's a little money. Sadgrove: Interested motives!

Indeed, money, not love, as Trimmer discovers, was Laura's sole motive for marriage. And in a bizarre twist, a pattern emerges as it is discovered that it was she who, 'yielding to the sordid entreaties of her mother', jilted Sadgrove nine years earlier for a 'wealthier suitor' from East India.³⁸ Thus, in a nutshell, Parry identifies a common reason for unhappy homes – marriage for the wrong reasons.

Laura's motives become apparent to Trimmer through a plan he devises with Sadgrove to reinstate himself as master of his own home. Laura is informed that her husband has been involved in an accident. Concealed behind the sofa, Trimmer then listens to the reaction. Always first to speak, the mother-in-law immediately informs her daughter 'should Trimmer be returned killed', the marriage-settlement 'would be nothing like what you would have a right to expect'.³⁹ But for Laura, far more perplexing is the timing of this accident. As she explains, it would be 'hideous to have to go into mourning just at the very commencement of the London season'.⁴⁰ An angry and horrified Trimmer emerges from behind the sofa, and Laura and her mother have little choice but to submit to his wishes and permit him back as master of the house.

The primary resolution in the play is more in keeping with a tragicomedy in that the reconciliation is unsettling. There is nothing to suggest any potential for future happiness in Trimmer's marriage. Even at reconciliation, Laura displays not so much as a glimmer of affection toward her husband. Instead, it is Trimmer who initiates an embrace and puts her arm 'within his own kissing her hand', while she remains coolly aloof.⁴¹ And Laura's announcement of her intention to 'avoid future discord' is far more suggestive of a last ditch effort to attend the season and keep up appearances than to bring happiness to the marriage.⁴² So, the hapless Trimmer is once again duped into believing that his marriage will bring him the happiness for which he yearns.

Adhering to conventional structure, Parry does send the audience home smiling. But even the secondary resolution is slightly unusual in that it, too, attempts to defy tradition. Upon discovering Laura to be his long lost love, Sadgrove is now jubilant at his narrow escape by having been jilted all those years earlier and announces his desire to 'remain a bachelor'.⁴³ But, being comedy, he grudgingly concedes he 'may take a wife after all' and, as the curtain falls, proposes to various women in the audience.⁴⁴ While Sadgrove's direct address to the audience is guaranteed to please, it is also a distraction from the unhappy prospect that awaits Trimmer. Through comedy, then, Parry depicts a truly mismatched and, thus, miserable marriage – a marriage that should never have taken place – and makes a serious statement about the cause of such unhappiness.

Written fifteen years after *A Cure for Love*, Taylor's three-act comedy *Victims* is more blatant in its depiction of marital problems. The plot is more complex and the comic and farcical elements more pronounced. Produced as a 'Haymarket Comedy', under Buckstone's management, where Taylor was the leading dramatist from 1853 to 1870, the play met with 'more than moderate popularity'.⁴⁵ The theme of domestic relations was not new for Taylor. His problem play *Still Waters Run Deep* (1855), adapted from the French novel *Le Gendre* by Charles Bernard and staged at the Olympic Theatre, was hugely successful and surprisingly candid considering that the plot focuses on adultery. Nonetheless, the adulterer does meet his demise in a dual. Given its theme, it is most revealing that Egg did not select this play. Clearly, the adulterous act was not his focal interest. So what was the message in *Victims* that Egg wished to impart?

The plot of *Victims* revolves around three couples: two married, one betrothed. Predictably, perhaps, the wife in one marriage is attracted to the husband in the other, an attraction that is reciprocated. Through a complicated set of circumstances, both married couples come to recognise their own worth and reconciliation occurs with possible promise for a happier marital future. However, the apparent incompatibility of the third couple, Joshua Butterby and Minerva Crane, does not auger well for future harmony. With only a week before their wedding, the antics of the dull-witted Butterby and the strong-minded Crane provide comic relief to an otherwise dull plot. Each is an exaggerated caricature of the type each represents and only through satire could Taylor be at liberty to make his serious point.

Few couples anticipating marriage could be as mismatched as Crane and Butterby. The bumbling Butterby ignorantly assumes that once married, he will be master of his home and 'By Jove! I'll let Minerva see what's what then', but Crane, it seems, is of a different opinion.⁴⁶ As she explains: 'in the present unnatural state of society – it may be our duty to bow the knee, to stoop the neck, and even to bridle the tongue – but it shall not be so always; when I marry, I will shew a different example'. Furthermore, she assumes that Butterby is in accord: 'I've taught him the rudiments of the question, and after we are married, I'll complete the lesson'.⁴⁷ Particularly amusing is Crane's announcement that she has completed the 'last volume' of her work 'The Wrongs of Women' in which the topic of the third chapter focuses upon 'ill-assorted marriages'.⁴⁸ What makes this comical is that in her over zealous passion for 'the cause', Crane has totally neglected her own relationship and is completely oblivious of the true reason behind Butterby's desire for her hand in marriage. Butterby, as it transpires, is most certainly not marrying Crane for her 'masculine mind' but for her 'twenty-seven thousand in three per cents', which translates as 'eight hundred a year'.⁴⁹ In other words, his sole attraction to Crane is financial. Not only does this predict doom and gloom for the imminent marriage, it may also necessitate a revisal of chapter three. But even if Crane's zest for 'the cause' is so extreme that the double standard would merely flip sides, Taylor, albeit satirically, does hint that possible change is in the air.

While both plays explore the consequences of ill conceived marriages, each offers a variation on a theme: *A Cure for Love* depicts true domestic misery with little chance of future happiness, but *Victims*

suggests that there is a possibility that some mismatched marriages might eventually be worked out; however, as Crane explains, some serious progressive thinking is in order to revamp the current state of marriage. Each play begins with the marriage of discord and it is this theme that links each of the three literary allusions in Egg's triptych. Concealed within these allusions, one comes to recognise a statement concerning a major cause of adultery: too many marriages are being made for the wrong reasons. If a marriage is made for financial or social gain, as opposed to genuine love, it can only result in misery, with the likely result of adultery by one or other partner, as depicted in the central picture. The poignant scenario of the two 'orphaned' children in the second painting strongly suggests that if there is any hope for future happiness, these erroneous marriages must cease and the Victorian attitude towards marriage change. While tragic, the third scenario does offer a glimmer of hope for the future through the suggestion of change, as Crane advocates in *Victims*; a move toward equality would, surely, bring about a touch of equilibrium which might result in fewer business transactions to secure marriages. If this is correct then for Egg, only a partnership bound by love has any hope of some future happiness.

Those who were well acquainted with Egg would have recognised the importance of the three theatrical and literary symbols in what is, after all, a narrative painting. Egg's great love was the theatre and his closest friends were novelists, like Balzac. Thus, it is hardly surprising that he chose allusions from theatre and literature through which to express his silent protest. While the subtitle to the triptych allows for a surface reading, a safe reading, the theatrical and literary references prompt an alternate reading that provides a possible deeper understanding of Egg's painting.

Notes

1. There is no record of exactly when the title *Past and Present* was given to this triptych. However, the first time the title appears in print is 5 May 1863 in an advertisement in the *Times* for the auction of 'The Works and Collection of the Late Augustus L. Egg R.A.' by Christie's. The advertisement states that 'among the finished pictures are "Past and Present", the well known picture exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858,' *Times* 5 May 1863, p.18. As T. J. Edelstein assumes, I think it most likely that the title was attached by Christie's for the convenience of identification. Edelstein also notes that there were four other paintings under this name during that decade. See T. J. Edelstein, 'Augustus Egg's Triptych: A Narrative of Victorian Adultery', *Burlington Magazine*, vol.125, no.961, 1983, pp.202–12.
2. The work acknowledged as having triggered this eventual outpouring of social realist art is Thomas Hood's poem 'The Bridge of Sighs'. Written in 1844, the poem was inspired by the pathetic plight of Mary Furley, a fallen woman, who, just weeks before the poem's publication, was sentenced to be hanged in London for the murder of her young child. Art historians Christopher Wood and Julian Treuherz express the possibility that *Past and Present* was inspired by Hood's poem. Certainly, Egg's intimate circle of friends (including Charles Dickens, Douglas Jerrold, and the editor of *Punch*, Mark Lemon) had been prominently involved in protesting the Furley case and were well aware of Hood's poetic response. See Christopher Wood, *Victorian Panorama*, London 1976, p.141 and Julian Treuherz, *Hard Times: Social Realism in Victorian Art*, London 1987, p.28.
3. 'Notes on the Life of Augustus L. Egg', *Reader*, vol.54, 9 Jan. 1864, p.57. After his death, Egg's life was serialised in essay form in *The Reader*. Although anonymous, it is generally accepted that Holman Hunt is the author. This being the case, his comments on *Past and Present* are curious in that his own famous work on the subject of adultery, *The Awakening Conscience*, (1853-4) had also caused a flurry of activity amongst the critics. (Of course, in this instance, the imminent fall is caught in time.) When Holman Hunt began to express anxiety about the subject matter of *The Awakening Conscience*, it was Egg who encouraged him to complete it and found a sponsor to make that possible. See Leslie Parris, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, London 1994, p.121.
4. 'Royal Academy,' *Art-Journal*, 1 June 1858, p.167. 'Fine Arts Royal Academy', *Athenaeum*, vol.31, 1 May 1858, p.566.
5. Holman Hunt, vol.54, 1864, p.57.
6. John Ruskin, *Works of John Ruskin*, E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn eds., vol.14, London 1904, p.166. However, in an undated letter to his friend Mrs. John Simon, believed to have been written two months later, (undiscovered and unpublished until 1958) Ruskin considerably embellishes his interpretation describing the triptych as:

a piece of commonplace vice – an ordinary husband – employed at some house in the city – an ordinary wife – who can't read French well enough to understand the least bit of de Balzac's subtlety or Sand's nobleness but who reads Bulwer, or James, and Harrison Ainsworth, who has been seduced by a sham count, with a moustache – and who has mixed his lost letter with unexpected Christmas bills. Of course that is all the picture ever was meant to represent, and I don't believe much of the world's vice is far above that standard - but when it really comes to its own wretched and appropriate catastrophe, and is finally stoned or crushed into putrescence – it becomes – for all its commonness, 'impressive'. See John Lewis Bradley, 'An Unpublished Ruskin Letter', *Burlington Magazine*, vol.100, no.658, 1958, pp.25 –6.

7. *Athenaeum*, vol.31, 1 May 1858, p.566.

8. The company raised funds for the Guild of Literature and Art, a philanthropic organisation established by Dickens and Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1850 to aid authors and artists in need. Bulwer-Lytton wrote a comedy especially for the company: *Not So Bad as We Seem; Or, Many Sides to a Character* whose gala opening was attended by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert on 16 May 1851 at Devonshire House. Egg played the hero David Fallen, a Grub Street author, whose demise is brought about through lack of patronage. A painting exists by Egg of himself in this role *Self Portrait as a Poor Author*, which now hangs in Hospitalfield House, Arbroath. Hilarie Faberman provides an excellent and thorough study of this painting and its background in 'Augustus Egg's *Self-Portrait as a Poor Author*', *Burlington Magazine*, vol.125, no.961, 1983, pp.222 –7. Holman Hunt also pays tribute to Egg the actor in the anonymous 'Notes on the Life of Augustus L. Egg'. He claims that Egg appeared in the above mentioned play at the Haymarket in 1852 and toured with Dickens in Collins' play *Frozen Deep* in which he played the comical character, Job Want. In an attempt to learn more about Egg's theatrical career, Holman Hunt received the following gracious reply from Dickens:

I really have nothing to tell which the public has any claim to know. The dear fellow was always one of the most popular of the party – always sweet-tempered, humorous, conscientious, thoroughly good, and thoroughly beloved.. I look back upon his ways and words in that half-gipsy life of our theatricals as sanctified by his death, and not belonging to the public at all (*Reader*, vol.44, 31 Oct. 1863, p.516).

However, Egg's colleague William Powell Frith recalls that in his time, Egg 'played many parts; but never successfully enough to cause regret that he had devoted himself to the art of painting'. See William Powell Frith, *Further Reminiscences*, vol.3, London 1888, p.218.

9. As Ruskin describes, the moon beyond the second arch structurally links pictures two (fig.2) and three (fig.3), uniting the two scenes as if in one act.

10. In the *Royal Academy Review*, 'The Council of Four' expresses outrage at the inclusion of these posters, stating:

we most decidedly object to placarding the walls of the dark arch scene with bills of the play, announcing 'The Victims', 'The Cure for Love', and such-like titles. In the first place, no bill-stickers would venture into such a locality to stick theatrical placards; and in the next place, all such forced and unnecessary adjuncts vulgarise the situation which they are presumably dragged in to assist (p.22, 1858. Qtd. in Edelstein, 1983, p.207).

11. A discussion of this triptych, including contemporary criticism, appears in works by several scholars, notably: Susan Casteras, *The Substance or the Shadow: Images of Victorian Womanhood*, New Haven 1982; Martin Meisel, *Realization: Narrative Painting and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*, Princeton 1983; Edelstein, 1983; Treuherz, 1987; Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*,

New York 1988; Malcolm Warner, *The Victorians: British Painting 1837–1901*, Washington DC 1996; Wood, 1976, and *Victorian Painting*, London 1999; and Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting*, London 1999. All these scholars consider the painting to be a warning against adultery, but Edelstein also believes it to reflect the Infants' Custody Act and the bill of divorce (Matrimonial Causes Act) – both heated debates during the 1850s. While these issues may have influenced Egg, the literary symbols in his work suggest that rather than reflecting them, the artist was more interested in commenting upon the source of the problem necessitating these Acts to be passed.

12. William Acton, *Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects*, London 1870, p.3. These statistics vary enormously depending upon the contemporary source, but Acton's data is generally accepted as reliable.

13. Sally Mitchell, *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading, 1835–1880*, Bowling Green 1981, p.340.

14. See Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and London Poor*, vol.4, London 1861; William Greg, "Prostitution," *Westminster Review*, vol.53, 1850, pp.448–506.

15. Mayhew, 1861, p.82.

16. Quoted in O. R. McGreggor, *Divorce in England*, London 1957, p.20.

17. George Drysdale, *Elements of Social Science*, London 1887, p.356.

18. 'The Marriage of Domestic Economy,' 1843. Quoted in Liza Picard, *Victorian London*, London 2005, p.321.

19. For further discussion on this subject, see Picard 2005, pp.320–3 and A. N. Wilson, *Victorians*, London 2002, pp.260–1.

20. Drysdale, 1887, p.357.

21. The divorce law was passed in 1857 and came into effect in January 1858 during the time Egg must have been contemplating his triptych. The law allowed women to keep certain belongings that were deemed to be their own property, but it was rare that they were granted custody of their children. Divorces were not easy to obtain and records show that by 1872, there were only approximately two hundred decrees granted annually. See Picard 2005, p.324.

22. Several of the aforementioned modern scholars have interpreted these symbols. For example, see Warner 1996, pp.106–7.

23. The Joseph Sablé Centre for 19th Century French Studies in the Kelly Library at the University of St. Michael's College, in the University of Toronto has original and early editions of many books by Balzac. The binding on most of these books is believed to be original and shows the title and, where appropriate, volume number only on the spine. The earliest English translations of these works housed in the British Library are dated after Egg's painting was exhibited (1858).

24. Most scholars are in accord that the inclusion of the Balzac work is representative of his many stories on the theme of adultery. For examples see Edelstein 1983, p.207, Wood 1976, p.141, and Warner 1996, pp.106–7.

25. In 1847, Dumas fils published his scandalous novel *La Dame aux Camélias* which was adapted into a play in 1852. In 1855, on the same theme, he published *Le Demi-monde*. Dumas fils was much younger than Balzac (who died in 1850) and the bulk of his work appeared after Egg's triptych.

26. Honoré De Balzac, *Physiology of Marriage*, 1829: 2, 2003-6 Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, producers Dagny and John Bickers, 4 July 2003. p.2.

http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=189007

27. Rossetti never managed to complete this painting that he began in 1854 and continued until his death in 1882. The various stages of the work in progress may be seen through an assortment of drawings. See Parris 1994, p.126.

28. Lindsay Errington, *Social and Religious Themes in English Art 1840-1860*, New York 1984, p.207.

29. In the Theatre Museum's Core Collection Haymarket Theatre October–December 1842 file, Parry's name does not appear until a poster advertising the sixth performance of this play. According to Victorian theatre historian James Davis, it was quite usual for playwrights' names to be missing (personal e-mail).

30. In 1843 the Theatre Royal, Haymarket was the last of the London theatres to install gaslight.

31. It is the genre of these plays that has caused several scholars to dismiss them as having no apparent relevance to the triptych.
32. Michael R. Booth, 'Comedy and Farce', *Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. Kerry Powell, Cambridge 2004, p.130.
33. *Ibid.*, p.132.
34. See Theatre Museum Core Collection Haymarket Theatre October-December 1842. *A Cure for Love* had one further revival in June 1855 at Sadler's Wells. For more details on these productions see Donald Mullin, *Victorian Plays: A Record of Significant Productions on the London Stage 1832–1901*, Westport 1987, pp.42, 53, 187.
35. "Benefit performance to take place on Monday, July 21st," Advertisement, *Times* 19 July 1856, p.5.
36. Tom Parry, *A Cure for Love*, London n.d., p.15.
37. *Ibid.*, p.8.
38. *Ibid.*, p.6.
39. *Ibid.*, p.28.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*
45. See Winton Tolles, 'Haymarket Comedies', *Tom Taylor and the Victorian Drama*, New York 1966, p.187. *Victims* was revised by Taylor in 1878 when it was staged at the Court with Ellen Terry playing the female lead.
46. Tom Taylor, *Victims*, London n.d., p.16.
47. *Ibid.*, p.17.
48. *Ibid.*, p.18.
49. *Ibid.*, p.31.

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