

Impure Researches, or Literature, Marketing and Aesthesis

The Case of Ouida's «A Dog of Flanders» (1871-Today)

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Abstract ‘Impure researches’ are those that mix methodologies and types of data, and in particular remind readers that reading is an impure bodily as well as mental experience. The article argues that if we neglect how our perception of the material format of a text affects our understanding, we stand to risk being blind to how a text comprises the ever increasing sum of the history of its sensuous presentation and perception. It takes as a case study the publication history of Ouida's most popular short story, «A Dog of Flanders» (1871). The story has uniformly been defined as a children's story from the late twentieth century onwards, yet this labelling is a result of marketing decisions that arose in the 1890s which affected the material format the story appeared in and thereafter the interpretative choices of critics and readers in general. By polluting both literary and book history through my own corporeal encounters with various material forms of this text, I am seeking to exemplify, in an iterable, practical way, claims by feminist and queer critics whose «return to the body» risks at times appearing immaterial and generic.

Keywords «Dog of Flanders». Materiality of reading. Ouida. Print history.

Where does aesthetic literary impurity lie? Is it somehow ‘in’ the literary text, perhaps as a message or code that seeks to demarcate or query a boundary that determines the difference between good and bad taste, the disinterested and interested, commerce and art, dirty and clean? Might we regard impurity as the melding of distinct genres or discourses to various degrees, or the grafting of one onto another with various levels of ease or tension?

The answer is yes to all of these of course. But we can also think of aesthetic attention to impurity as a methodological procedure. In a good deal of literary studies, attention to our perception of the material signs which comprise a text – the *aesthesis* of a text – still remains a devalued or circumscribed mode of enquiry. In its interpretative procedures, words are treated by close reading, for instance, as insubstantial abstract units regardless of their physical format. «History of the Book», where we may expect attention to the materiality of textual objects, has largely split off from literature to become a separate discipline and has sought to carve itself out a distinct niche by focussing on quantitative business history

rather than textual interpretation. «History of the Book» may study reading but it does not often offer readings – certainly not close ones. Recently, perhaps unjustly, narratives such as book history tells have themselves been dismissed as merely «positivist» by the controversial V21 Collective (2015). A growing development in literary studies related to V21, Digital Humanities, is concerned in some of its research questions with how perception and understanding are related – one of its key texts emphasises «a move beyond a privileging of the textual, emphasizing graphical methods of knowledge production and organization, design as an integral component of research, transmedia crisscrossings, and an expanded concept of the sensorium of humanistic knowledge» (Burdick et al. 2012, p. 122). But again, like «History of the Book», its principal questions concern more how the underlying imperceptible determines the visible and interpretable, rather than the interpretation of sense data: in place of the ledgers and archives, printing presses and colporteurs that book history reveals as essential elements of the literary text before us on the desk, Digital Humanities offers bytes and code. At its most confident, the quantitative analysis of «Big Data» characteristic of the dominant trend in Digital Humanities makes claims to reality based on coverage vaster than any human body could hope to digest or even encounter in a lifetime. The reality it presents is supra-corporeal, swirling perhaps in chaotic flux (a chaos that mathematics can of course chart) but cleansed of the body's mess and its sensory limitations.

My procedure here, although by no means repudiating the electronic, seeks to offer a different reality from book history, V21, Digital Humanities and traditional literary studies. It is a bodily one that is alert not just to the corporeal but also to the temporally limited data I derive from tactile and visual encounters with volumes in my hands. I shall mix material history with sense data and the literary interpretative to arrive at conclusions that number crunching alone (at least at this stage of its development) could not do.

Such a procedure is hardly new: critics such as Karin Littau (2006) and Gillian Silverman (2012), inspired by feminist and queer attempts to render visible our blind spots, are telling us that reading is always an embodied experience (though the precise detail of what this means in the case of individual texts is sometimes lacking). Before them, Genette (1997) had mapped out a typology of the material paratexts and peritexts that help direct what, how, where and when communication takes place in print. And for centuries before Genette, typographers and publishers (and many authors) had been aware of the effects of the para and peritextual. More generally, I was reminded of the political importance of bodily senses less by printers' manuals than by Kant's conceptualisation of the aesthetic in his *Critique of Judgement*. For Kant, 'aesthetics' referred to the feeling of delight experienced by the individual subject when contemplating an object. His idea of the aesthetic did not refer to the object at

all, but rather, in a philological return to the original Greek *aesthesis*, to sensations arising from a human encounter with an object. As Elizabeth Prettejohn reminded us a decade ago, «In a favourite example of Kant's, the statement «The rose I see before me is beautiful» is a judgement of taste, but the statement «roses in general are beautiful» is no longer purely aesthetic» (Prettejohn 2005, p. 41). Indeed, wrote Kant, «I must present the object immediately to my feeling of pleasure or displeasure, and that, too, without the aid of concepts» (Dutton 1911, para. 8). Such a definition of the aesthetic does not easily lend itself to systematisation by experts, for systematisation necessarily involves concepts rather than immediate sensation. Indeed, that «all judgements of taste are singular judgements» appropriate for individuals rather than groups was Kant's radical point: the appreciation of beauty was to be available to all and not governed by established rules that distinguished the refined aristocrats who had knowledge of them from the vulgar populace who did not. Whereas now the cultural power of the refined aristocrat has diminished, one can regard, if only in this sense, Digital Humanities specialists who promote as more real the specialised quantitative concepts and rules underlying their discipline as one of the latest aspirants to inherit their coronets. Perhaps a partial return to *aesthesis* may allow us to ask questions that the hypostatization of on/off signals can not.

Like many of her contemporaries, the nineteenth-century popular author Ouida (1839-1908) took up Kant's valorisation of individual *aesthesis* and its political implications: from the 1870s onwards, the democratization of aesthetic pleasure was one of her major platforms (King 2013). It is certainly legible in Ouida's most popular work, the 1871 short story that provides the case study for this article, «A Dog of Flanders». But that is less important to the point of this article than the contention that if we neglect how our perception of the material format of a text – our *aesthesis* – affects our understanding, we stand to risk being trapped, whether by the reification of computer code or by received ideas. «A Dog of Flanders» has uniformly been defined as a children's story by late twentieth-century critics and used as such by national institutions and transnational companies for their own purposes, yet I shall show how this labelling is a result of marketing decisions that arose in the 1890s and intensified in the early twentieth century. These marketing decisions affected the material format the story appeared in and thereafter the interpretative choices of critics and readers in general. I am, in other words, concerned to pollute both literary and book history through my own corporeal encounters with various material forms of a specific text. I am thereby seeking to exemplify, in an iterable, practical way, claims by critics whose return to the body can seem at times rather immaterial and generic, as well as suggest a kind of engagement with texts applicable by diverse laypeople in a variety of circumstances.

«A Dog of Flanders» was originally published in December 1871, in the Christmas number of volume 9 of the American *Lippincott's Magazine* (pp. 79-98). The issue was dated January 1872, a month after it appeared for sale, as was (and remains) normal. The story was, apparently, an «outstanding success» for the magazine (Tebbell 1969, p. 135). The story was then issued in January 1872 by Lippincott in a 50-cent collection of four Ouida tales from *Lippincott's* with two illustrations that was called *A Leaf in the Storm, and Other Stories*. In August of the same year the same collection - though the four tales were arranged in a different order - was issued for 5 shillings by Ouida's British publishers Chapman & Hall (*A Dog of Flanders and Other Stories*). In December 1872 the collection was brought out by Tauchnitz in Leipzig for his standard price of 2 francs (*A Leaf in the Storm; A Dog of Flanders; and other stories; Collection of British Authors, number 1236*) after an unauthorised version of the Lippincott collection had been printed by the Berlin publisher Asher over the summer.

Ouida's tale has been continuously in print since it first appeared. It has been translated into many languages, including Yiddish, Chinese, Japanese and Korean. WorldCat lists 102 editions, including duplicates, with, in addition, variant titles on «Nello» and «Patrasche». That WorldCat is incomplete is a given, though the extent of its omissions is hard to judge. For example, of three Italian editions I have handled (Ouida 1878, 1880, 1921), only one is mentioned by WorldCat, and in a 1929 reprint; numerous American editions I have either seen myself or identified are not included by WorldCat at all. The story has, furthermore, generated at least ten cinema and TV adaptations (Manzoli 2009; Volckaert 2010). There is even a computer game by Minoto Studios. Because of several anim  versions, the first and most famous dating from 1975 (Nippon Animation), the story is so well known in Japan that the city of Antwerp (which figures largely in the story) has been obliged to commission and install a statue of the two protagonists to give Japanese tourists something to look at when they visit. Toyota has donated a bench in front of Antwerp Cathedral (see Benelux Guide). The story has a Facebook page dedicated to it (Anon. 2008), and a rather arch documentary about the story's appeal in Japan was made in 2008 by Didier Volckaert and An van Dienderen, with an accompanying website (*Patrasche. A Dog Of Flanders*).

The story concerns an orphan boy, Nello, brought up by his poor but hard-working grandfather, Jehan Daas, in a hovel on the edge of an unnamed village near Antwerp in Flanders. The time is indeterminate but the conclusion could well be contemporary to the publication of the story. Daas earns his pittance by taking milk in a cart to market for wealthier neighbours. One day on the road, when Nello is a small boy, the pair encounter a dog who has been beaten almost to death. Nello wants to take it home and look after it, which he does. The dog recovers and is named Patrasche. He learns to drag the milk cart. Time passes. Nello reaches 16

years old and since Daas has become too old and ill to work, Nello takes the milk to market with the now aged Patrasche. Nello has taught himself to draw, inspired partly by the Rubens he is at times able to see in Antwerp churches and the cathedral. Nello has also befriended Alois, the daughter of his wealthy neighbour Baas Cogez. But Cogez, despite his wife's protestations, dislikes the boy simply because he is poor. A fire breaks out in Cogez's mill and he blames Nello as an excuse to prevent him seeing Alois. As a result of Cogez's accusations, his neighbours no longer give Nello work. Hope is not yet dead, however, for Nello has entered a drawing competition with a substantial prize. Winter comes. Destitute, Daas dies of cold and hunger; Nello and Patrasche are evicted the day before the competition result is declared. Nello does not win. Now desperate, he finds in the snow a bag of money with Baas Cogez's name on it. He takes it to Alois' house where he leaves it and begs Alois to keep Patrasche. He drags himself to see the Rubens in the Cathedral one last time, knowing that death is near. Cogez returns home in despair at having lost his money. Alois and her mother tell him who returned it to them and Cogez decides to fetch Nello in the morning and welcome him into his home. Meanwhile Patrasche escapes and traces Nello to the Cathedral. There the pair die of cold and hunger in the night. Cogez and others find them locked in an embrace the next morning. They are buried together.

As was completely normal, «A Dog of Flanders» was only reviewed when it came out in volume form. On the whole the collection in which it appeared was very well received: only the British *Pall Mall Gazette* seems to have demurred, disliking the whole collection for its lack of realism. Of «The Dog of Flanders» in particular it questions «whether Ouida does justice to Belgian philanthropy in supposing that there would not have been, at least, a Flemish woman or two to assist Patrasche in bringing back the good-looking boy to life» (Anon. 1872a). Much more typical was the review in the *Examiner* which regarded it as «one of the saddest and best tales that have appeared for many a day» and the entire volume as an instance of an author who has «found her soul... in illustrating the great problems of life» (Anon. 1872b). The *Penny Illustrated Paper* was equally impressed (Anon. 1872c). Of even more interest is an amusing scene that probably took place in the 1880s described in a letter from the artist Burne-Jones to the society hostess Lady Frances Horner:

I remember Ruskin and Cardinal Manning routing [= rooting] on their knees amongst some books to find 'The Dog of Flanders' which they loved; getting covered with dust and searching with enthusiasm. (Horner 1933, pp. 183-184)

Whether apocryphal or not, the anecdote illustrates the desire that a text can generate. Important for my purposes here, it stresses the physicality

of the text. Ruskin's and Manning's desire is not indicated in immaterial, general, mental or spiritual forms. Rather they are grubbing about for a specific material object on a dirty floor. But that should not lead us to suspect that the child-like delight they exhibit is simple or pure, or that the text they want is for children. Unlike Ruskin's prioritisation of «the innocence of the eye» – perception «without consciousness of what [things] signify» (Ruskin 1907, p. 304) – and unlike its predecessor Kantian 'disinterested' aesthetics of immediate sensation, words (and thereby concepts) have incited a desire for a material object. Like any fan's enthusiasm for a physical copy, Ruskin's and Manning's desire for «The Dog of Flanders» [*sic*] is necessarily impure, mixing the meanings they attributed to it and sensory perception. That the volume they were looking for was almost certainly the plain Chapman and Hall edition (Figure 1) may not suggest that we should attend to the physicality of the book, but it is perhaps that very plainness that enabled them to find the story interesting: though they might well have appreciated the editions shown below in Figures 12, 13 and 14, would they – or we – have felt the same for a story with covers like Figures 5, 6 or 8?

After the initial appearances of «A Dog of Flanders» in generic middle-class publications (*Lippincott's Magazine* and the plain volumes), two distinct target markets emerge, most clearly towards the end of the nineteenth century: the children's as the primary, and, as the secondary, the «art-book» designed more as a gift and for display rather than for reading. As a subset of the initial generic market, there was also a third target audience limited to the nineteenth century but revived by some recent critics, that reads the story as an animal-rights protest (see Mangum 2002 and 2007; Pollock 2005). While I shall deal with each of these, the first is perhaps the most surprising, for even though the story has been repeatedly defined as a children's story by academics (e.g. by Mangum 2002, p. 35; Tebbell 1969, p. 124; Schroeder, Holt 2008, p. 18; Tribunella 2010, p. 29), such a target readership is not obvious. Not only is righteousness not rewarded and the story bitterly pessimistic, but the erotic implications of the relations between the post-pubescent Nello and Alois are clear (and typical of Ouida) and the references to geography and art history are all decidedly aimed at educated adults. That it fits only with difficulty into the category «children's story» is illustrated by an engaging anecdote from American writer and academic Charlotte Zoë Walker. «A Dog of Flanders», she explains, inspired her to become a short story writer when she was a child simply because it was not the kind of story she was used to: she was in fact outraged by it. Hers is no doubt a response Ouida would have appreciated. Yet she too assumes that Nello is a «child» rather than a 16-year-old, hormone-raddled adolescent. It is worth quoting the passage at some length. Speaking of herself in the third person Walker writes:

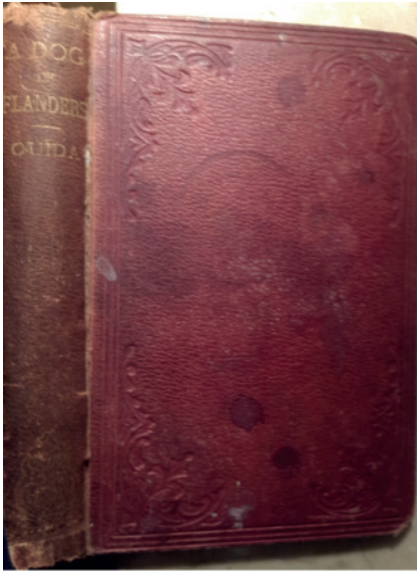


Figure 1. Chapman and Hall, New Edition, 1873

[...] it was the first story she ever read with a tragic ending. She was completely lost in the world of the boy and his dog, and the boy's passion for art, his longing to be a painter. Though there were no books about girls and their dogs in those days, she loved the dog especially - that brave and constant companion! She identified too with the boy's passion for art, his longing to be a painter. But what horror! - to come to the wintry end of the story and find them both dead of cold and hunger, in front of the painting by Rubens the outcast boy had struggled through freezing weather to see; cuddled together, yes - but dead! And no more words on the page to save them!

She wept with sadness and anger for her friends who had died at the end of the book.

It's only a story, her mother comforted. Don't worry, it's only a story, it's not real.

But why did they die in the story? The girl demanded.

Because that's the way the author wrote it, her mother said [...]

But what sort of author would kill a child and dog? Furious at the author of *A Dog of Flanders*, she made a promise to herself: When she grew up, she would be an author too, and she would not write stories whose endings were betrayals. She would not make children and dogs die, or readers cry. It was a sacred vow, a resolution. (Walker, 2005, p. 197)

The notion that «A Dog of Flanders» is a children's story dominates early twenty-first century thinking about it, from the computer game generated

by Minoto Studios in 2011 (see Figure 2) to the «official» versions presented on Belgium's limited edition 20 Euro coin (Figure 3) and the statue in Hoboken, Antwerp. In their different ways these are all based on what had long become the standard iconography on book covers for «A Dog of Flanders»: a pre-adolescent boy and a dog, clogs, baggy pants, tight jacket and cap, and a cart for the dog. They sum up and anchor its core meaning (cf. Figures 4, 5, and 6). One cannot imagine Manning or Ruskin taking a story seriously that was decorated like these.

On both book covers reproduced here (and Figures 5 and 6 are only two of very many similar) the weather is even fine and summery, the dog hardly straining with age at his task. The story seems as innocuous and joyful as the Minoto game, if aimed at an older pre-adolescent readership. The Jackie Coogan film from 1924 and its tie-in edition from Grosset and Dunlap (Figure 4) were unquestionably key in the solidification of this iconography, but the marketing of «A Dog of Flanders» as a 'safe' children's story goes back to the nineteenth century. It comprises two main aspects.

The first involved its definition as a story 'concerning children' - not adolescents - but not itself aimed at children. The first instance of this I have found dates from 1875 when it was packaged as the lead story by the editor Rossiter Johnson in volume 10 («Childhood») of his 18 volume «Little Classics» series. Included in the volume were eight other stories, the only ones likely to be recognised today being two stories published in 1850, Ruskin's «The King of the Golden River» which came second in the volume, and Dickens's «A Child's Dream of a Star» which concluded it. Now Johnson's series (despite its title) was not itself intended for children: «little» referred to the fact that each monthly volume was small in size and comprised short stories. Each cost a dollar and focussed on a single theme («Exile», «Intellect», «Tragedy», «Life», «Laughter», «Love», etc., and of course «Childhood»). Originally published by J.R. Osgood in Boston, the series sold very well indeed, and apparently proved that collections of short stories by diverse authors could indeed make a profit in the USA (Yost 1961; and see the paratextual information on the frontispiece to each volume).

In the same year of 1875 the second aspect, whereby «A Dog of Flanders» was marketed as a story about children 'for children', also appeared, if only temporarily: the Berlin publisher Engelman printed it as the second of a four-part series of «English Contemporary Authors Tales, Travels, Plays, selected from Asher's collection of English Authors». It comprised a version (in English) of the story rendered suitable for «the upper classes of schools», based on the unauthorised edition by the Berlin publisher Asher. But apart from this, sustained marketing of the story for children really began in the 1890s in the United States. It is difficult to give a precise year as dates are not always given on the imprints. The earliest children's edition I can identify is through a review in the *Journal of Education* in November 1893 - perhaps it refers to a small format volume issued by



Figure 2. Splash screen of *A Dog of Flanders*, <http://mac.rash.jp/games/dasyutu/a160/en/>



Figure 3. 20 Euro coin

the New York publisher H.M. Caldwell, though this is not entirely clear. In 1898 the Boston Educational Publishing Company brought out a version «for use in schools» edited by Sara D. Jenkins. In 1902, Houghton Mifflin similarly brought out an annotated version as one of its «Riverside Literature» series, with a pronouncing guide and a brief introduction which unequivocally directed the story to children. Indeed, it combined «A Dog of Flanders» with another tale which Ouida had most definitely written for children, «The Nürnberg Stove», from her 1882 collection *Bimbi*. This hallucinogenic story of a little boy so in love with the beauty of a stove that he hides within it only to be discovered by King Ludwig II of Bavaria (who promptly rewards his love with training to be an artist), becomes a regular companion to «A Dog of Flanders» in editions of the first half of the twentieth century. It is as if publishers felt that the unhappy end of «A Dog of Flanders» needed to be neutralised where children were concerned. This attitude is clearly visible in the happy endings of the Hollywood film versions and in their associated press. They found it so unacceptable they had to rewrite it (see Figure 7; the 1924 Grosset and Dunlap film tie-in edition of the Ouida original in Figure 4 adds both «The Nürnberg Stove» and Ruskin's «The King of the Golden River»).

At the same time in the 1890s, «A Dog of Flanders» was being packaged anew specifically for adults. Chatto and Windus, who had bought Ouida's copyrights from Chapman and Hall in 1877, issued a two-shilling yellow-back in 1889 with a rather «strong» cover illustrating a scene from one of the original companion stories to «A Dog of Flanders», «A Branch of Lilac» (see Figure 8). The choice is interesting as already by this time «A Dog of Flanders» was being cited as supporting animal rights, and those of dogs in particular (e.g. Anon. 1883 and later e.g. Vera 1894). Ouida's outspoken engagement in animal rights certainly encouraged this (Ouida's numerous

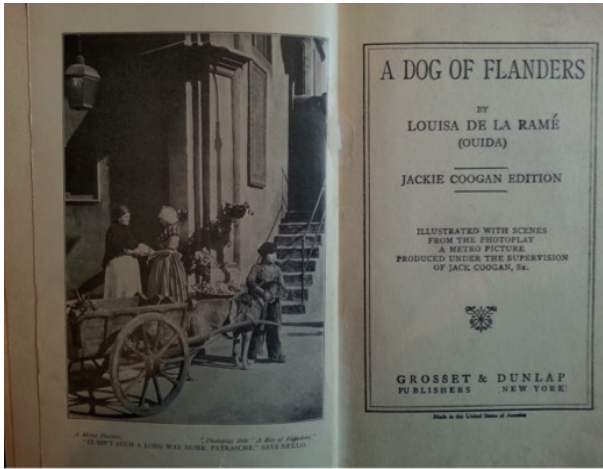


Figure 4. Grosset and Dunlap, 1924



Figure 5. Saalfield Publishing Co., New York, 1926



Figure 6. Rand MacNally, 1938



Figure 7. «Dell Movie Classic» no. 1088, Twentieth-Century Fox Film Corps, 1960



Figure 8. Chatto & Windus, 1889

Figure 9. Nims and Knight 1891

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A DOG OF FLANDERS.

him passionately. He had passed away from them in his sleep, and when in the gray dawn they learned their bereavement, unutterable solitude and desolation seemed



to close around them. He had long been only a poor, feeble, paralyzed old man, who could not raise a hand in their defence, but he had loved them well: his smile had always welcomed their return. They mourned for him unceasingly, refus-

Figure 10. Nims and Knight 1891

letters on this topic to the *Times* and other newspapers are discussed by Anon. 1885). Yet Chatto and Windus seem to have decided that allusions to Ouida's risqué and violent novels from the 1860s – to which this might well have been a cover – were preferable to anything that could encourage animal rights purchasers. Given that Ouida's earlier works were selling twice as much as her later novels, such a decision is hardly surprising (on the comparative sales figures, see Jordan 2009, p. 63, note 63). Presumably the animal rights market was simply too small to be worth targeting.

Chatto and Windus's hold on the story in British territories is certainly why the new marketing for children appeared first in the USA, and it was again in America that «A Dog of Flanders» began to be sold as a gift book for adults. The first of these seems to have been issued for Christmas 1891 by Nims and Knight, a small publisher specialising in fine editions (and globes) that operated between 1882 and 1892, when the firm was bought out by the partner Joseph Knight. Exploiting photogravure, they issued illustrated editions of selected poems by Tennyson and Jean Ingelow, for example, and also beautiful items of local and specialist interest (e.g. *Fishing with the Fly*, «beautifully illustrated with colored plates of 149 Standard Salmon, Bass and Trout Flies», \$2.50, 1895 – see Anon. 1895). Their 112-page «A Dog of Flanders» is no exception to their aesthetic ambitions. An advert for «Fine Art Gift-Books by Nims and Knight», which gathers it with *Rocky Mountain Wild Flowers*, *Byron's Childe Harold*, *Robert Browning: Selections*, refers to it as «a new edition of a beautiful Christmas story, already prized as a classic by all who know it. With over forty original illustrations. Printed with great care on fine paper, and bound in dainty and original style. \$.1.50» (Anon. 1891). The *Publisher's Weekly* noted that «fine editions of authors we have loved all our lives» were again the vogue for Christmas 1892 and we must assume that the Nims and Knight edition was catering to a fashion that had been established for some years (see Figures 9 and 10).

It is hard not to connect the appearance of the Nims and Knight towards the end of 1891 with the American International Copyright Act which had come into force on 1 July that year. The Act effectively liberated texts which American publishers had distributed but not previously themselves typeset. Yet that connection would be misleading. The original version of «A Dog of Flanders» had been typeset by Lippincott in 1872 which gave the firm copyright in the USA for 28 years, i.e., until 1900. I have found, however, no record of Lippincott pursuing any kind of prosecution for copyright infringement for this text. Instead, Lippincott seems to have responded in 1893 with its own version of a gift book, a small quarto at the same price of \$1.50. Graced with a beautiful cover, it offered a better word-price ratio than the Nims and Knight since it included all four stories in the original collection with six new illustrations, each on a separate plate. More modest was the Samuel E. Cassino edition that came out

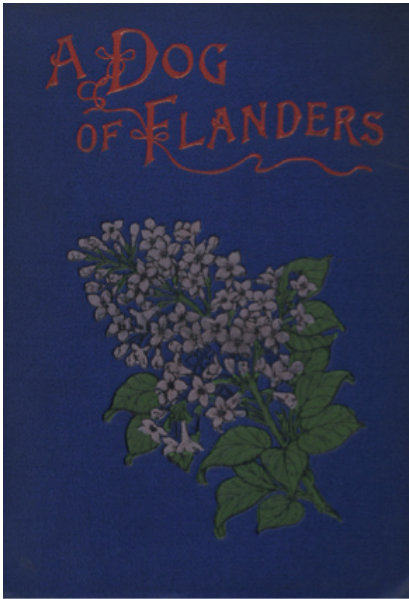


Figure 11. Chatto and Windus, 1893



Figure 12. Roycrofters, East Aurora, New York (1917)

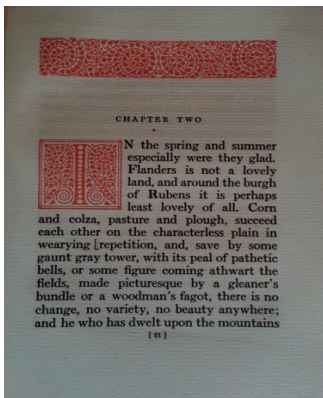


Figure 13. Roycrofters, East Aurora, New York (1917)

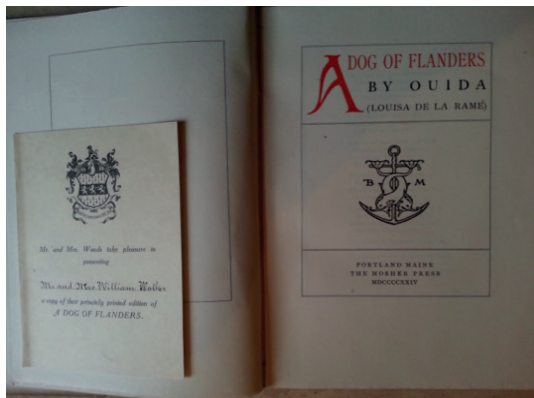


Figure 14. Mosher Press, Portland, Maine (1924)

again in 1893 in Boston, and issued simultaneously, with the exact same plates but a much daintier cover, by Donohue, Henneberry & Co in Chicago. This joint edition was a small octavo volume, the paper decidedly low grade, with 23 rather poor illustrations by Hiram P. Barnes which are at times clearly modelled on the Nims and Knight images but drawn and engraved with far less skill. Nonetheless, the cheap edition was still useful as a gift: an inscription in my copy of the Donohue shows it was given on St. Valentine's day in 1899. Unsurprisingly, in all the illustrations of all these volumes, Nello is depicted as unequivocally pre-adolescent and therefore 'safe'.

This is a marked contrast to Chatto and Windus's strategy when they too issued in 1893 a «dainty» octavo edition. This had a pretty branch of lilac on its cover which pointed, in a very different way, to the same story as on their earlier sensationalist yellowback, yet this time firmly directed towards women (see Figure 11). The volume kept the same illustrations as in the first Chapman and Hall edition in 1872: all that changed was the cover. This suggests that, alert to developments in the USA and fearful of imports, Chatto and Windus were determined to keep a strong hold on their copyrights in Britain and the Dominions by competing for the same new target market as their American rivals.

Despite the above, the labelling of «A Dog of Flanders» as a children's story was dominant by the early twentieth century. Yet the idea of its suitability as an adult gift book continued in isolated pockets, now imbued with Ruskinian ideas of how production method confers value. One of the earliest and finest of these adult editions was the 1917 hand-printed volume bound in tactile brown suede with green moiré silk endpapers, issued by the American followers of William Morris, the Roycrofters (see Figures 12 and 13). Another from 1924 was made in Portland Maine by the Mosher Press for a Mr. and Mrs. Woods specifically as a gift book to their friends (see Figure 14). My copy of this latter remains uncut: a clear sign of the volume's value as a gift rather than as something to be read. Even as late as 2005 the story was being published in New York by Starkey & Henricks as a luxurious limited-edition gift book.

There are several conclusions to be drawn from this ramification of «A Dog of Flanders» into children's book and gift. First we note its flourishing in the twentieth century rather than in the nineteenth. Key of course is how copyright controlled paratext and thus the market segment and meanings assigned. While Chatto & Windus owned the intellectual property in the British territories, Lippincott's copyright would have ended in 1900. Even if isolated American editions occur in violation of that, it is after 1900 that the explosion of editions – above all directed at children – takes place in the USA. The animal rights understanding of the story that letters to newspapers had suggested in the nineteenth century seems a problem to publishers everywhere, as if it were an embarrassment that paratexts seek to deflect.

What this exploration of the material history of a text demonstrates very clearly is that the publishing market of 1890s and the twentieth century has contaminated our readings of that text to such a degree that we have taken those readings for granted. Yet how far is it possible to cleanse the text of these accretions, and, importantly, how desirable?

First let us consider how, if it were not a children's tale or gift book, readers might have understood «A Dog of Flanders» when it first appeared. Of course it was a Christmas story and to that extent we can expect it to reflect the gift-giving of the season (Dickens's «A Christmas Carol» is the obvious archetype where the gift is the self-reflexive lesson about generosity). It is obvious that publishers were keen to place at the root of both main marketing branches of «A Dog of Flanders» the idea of the gift, not least because in neither the adult version nor the children's is the intended reader identical to the purchaser. But what exactly is the purchaser giving the reader? In both cases it seems to be the gift of tears: an ethics of sympathy overcome by a cruel capitalism that feels guilty for its violence, a melancholy vision of romantic aspiration regretfully destroyed by social calculation and then incompletely mourned. The gift comprises, curiously, an adulthood that can have it all – both capitalist calculation and a romantic idealism. The latter is at the end locked in the past through the deaths of the protagonists, true, but that doesn't mean that it hasn't existed and been celebrated. This comfortable adult mourning for the dead ideal is no doubt one reason why Manning and Ruskin liked the story so much: neither of them were really outside the hegemonic while both were rebels against it. The dead ideal easily becomes a subject of discourse that, like a gift, can be passed between readers to consolidate their social links (Hyde 1983, esp. ch. 5). In this regard, the story falls perfectly within the unchallenging sentimental tradition.

Another pleasure the story offers lies in its obvious rhetorical skill. Besides plot-driven narrative, set-piece descriptions such as the following evoke fleeting sensory impressions and invite relaxed, unfocused sensuousness.

In the spring and summer especially were they glad. Flanders is not a lovely land, and around the burgh of Rubens it is perhaps least lovely of all. Corn and colza, pasture and plough, succeed each other on the characterless plain in wearying repetition, and save by some gaunt gray tower, with its peal of pathetic bells, or some figure coming athwart the fields, made picturesque by a gleaner's bundle or a woodman's fagot, there is no change, no variety, no beauty anywhere; and he who has dwelt upon the mountains or amidst the forests feels oppressed as by imprisonment with the tedium and the endlessness of that vast and dreary level. But it is green and very fertile, and it has wide horizons that have a certain charm of their own even in their dullness and monotony; and

among the rushes by the water-side the flowers grow, and the trees rise tall and fresh where the barges glide with their great hulks black against the sun, and their little green barrels and varicoloured flags gay against the leaves. Anyway, there is greenery and breadth of space enough to be as good as beauty to a child and a dog; and these two asked no better, when their work was done, than to lie buried in the lush grasses on the side of the canal, and watch the cumbrous vessels drifting by and bring the crisp salt smell of the sea among the blossoming scents of the country summer. (Ouida 1872a, p. 83)

Here we are led from a dialectic concerning normative standards of beauty («Flanders is not a lovely land [...] But it is green and very fertile») to come to rest in what we are to understand, through focalisation, as the valorised aesthetic: basically a Kantian individual *aesthesis* («as good as beauty to a child and a dog»). Then again the very sound of the words conjures pleasure: agglutination of detail (there are no fewer than sixteen «and»), a proliferation of alternatives that both announce the inadequacy of language to capture beauty and stop the reader focussing too much on one detail, an abundance of alliteration, an elaborate patterning into pairs and threes (including a quite classical tricolon with anaphora), and an exquisite management of rhythm.

Yet descriptions such as these suggest not only the gift of Kantian disinterested pleasure. We can also read them as what Kant would have considered a 'dependent beauty' in which our response is influenced by considerations other than our individual reaction to it. For such gorgeous language is easy to interpret as a sign of poetic labour in the same way as the gorgeous details in, say, Alma-Tadema's or Millais' contemporary canvasses display the craftsmanship of their artists and therefore their value. Such emphasis on the sonic sensuousness and patterning of the communicative transaction between text and reader means that purchasers can rest assured they are giving a gift whose value is authenticated by signs of hard work.

The words of the story offer, then, a triple and very impure gift of tears, labour and *aesthesis*, a package which, in the gift books, is beribboned by the paratextual illustrations and covers. But the peritextual conditions the story originally appeared in, above all its relation to Ouida's other stories in *Lippincott's Magazine* of the time, suggest that we should be stimulated to protest rather than weep, value work, and halt in aesthetic enjoyment. Perhaps those who read the story as an animal rights protest were right. And yet there is something even more specific that the text is denouncing than the general treatment of dogs.

As I have already explained, «A Dog of Flanders» appeared in December 1871 and followed on immediately from «A Branch of Lilac», a two part tale that ran in October and November. «A Branch of Lilac» was

itself preceded by «A Provence Rose» in May and June, and by «A Leaf in the Storm» in February. Even though Ouida had had an agreement with Lippincott's since the mid-1860s, there are no previous stories by her in *Lippincott's Magazine*, and she was to publish no more there until «At Camaldoli» in 1883. «A Dog of Flanders» is thus the last of a clearly defined series. This helps establish its parameters of meaning for initial readers. When the Chapman and Hall edition of the four tales came out, for example, no reviewer noted anything other than unity: the *Examiner* even emphasised it, believing the unifying theme of the four stories was the «tone of bitter pain, a wail uttered over the apparent waste of all that is best in human feeling» (Anon. 1872b). All the preceding three tales are unequivocally adult: they break all the proprieties of children's stories with regard to violence and sex outside as well as within marriage in ways that no late Victorian or early twentieth-century publisher would have marketed to children. «A Branch of Lilac», for example, begins in a confrontational manner by linking the power to narrate with class-based patrilinearity:

You asked me my story. Why? To have a history is a luxury for the rich. What use can one be to the poor? If they tell it, who listens? And I have been very poor, always. Yet I was happy until that lilac blossomed one fair spring day.

I am a comedian. My mother was one before me. My father - oh, ta-ta-ta! That is another luxury for the wealthy. (Ouida 1871, p. 440)

All the first three tales also explicitly concern what *Lippincott's* in an article in July 1871 called «The Great War of 1870» (Scherer 1871) - the Prussian invasion of France in July 1870 and the ensuing Commune in Paris (to May 1871), events extensively reported by both the American and British newspapers (Knightley 2004, pp. 48-52). «A Leaf in the Storm» was so gory that Tauchnitz had asked Ouida if he could expurgate it, especially since it portrayed his fellow Prussians in so bad a light. Ouida refused. In a letter dated Florence 26 October 1872, she firmly allied herself to France, writing to Tauchnitz that «A Teuton like you and a Latin like me can never possibly view the war in the same light either in its causes or its effects» (Lee 1914, pp. 71-72). In its positive review, the radical *Reynolds's Newspaper* chose to quote precisely that passage of «A Leaf in the Storm» that Tauchnitz had asked to be removed (Anon. 1872e). In the context of both the American reception of the Franco-Prussian War (thoroughly mapped by Katz, 1998) and of the British, Ouida's was an oppositional stance: *Reynolds's Newspaper* was unusual in agreeing with her, as almost everyone else was on the side of the Prussians. It is not surprising then that Ouida might use all the weapons at her disposal, including destroyed aesthetic pleasure, to stimulate sympathy for the defeated.

When read as the climax of a polemical and topical series concerning the Prussian invasion of France and its effects, «A Dog of Flanders» assumes radically different meanings from anything suggested by paratexts and peritexts from later in the century and afterwards. Instead it becomes an angry political protest against Belgian self-interested inaction. For just as his neighbours, led by the bully Baas Cogez, refuse to help Nello, so Belgium had refused to intervene on behalf of its neighbour France in the face of what Ouida perceived to be the bullying Prussia. What Ouida presents as Belgium's glorious aesthetic past and its present failure to support artistic promise is used as stick to beat the country: Belgium, she is saying, is failing to live up to its past or its potential. The evident ethics of sympathy for the poor, the fetishisation of the artist and his perceptions, the valorisation of interspecies over human love, the specific denunciation of the maltreatment of Flemish dogs and even the gifts of tears and sensory pleasure are, in this reading, all put to work to denounce Belgian selfishness at a particular historical moment. Unconsciously for sure, the *Pall Mall Gazette* reviewer supported this notion when remarking the curious absence from the story of «Belgian philanthropy». But Belgian readers today are still very alert to such an interpretation, as suggested casually by an article in *Flanders Today*, where the story's lack of popularity in Belgium is attributed to its «social indictment» of the country (Anon. 2013).

That Ouida wanted us to read the story in this way is confirmed if one reads it alongside another of her texts from around the same time. Ouida had travelled to Belgium in the early autumn of 1871, visiting Antwerp and the Ardennes, Brussels and Spa, and her encounter with the paintings of the recently deceased Anton Wiertz resulted in an article in *London Society*, where she offered a portrait of Wiertz as «the ideal artist [... whose] life was consecrated to one passion, and that passion – Art» (Ouida 1872b, p. 24). She went on to detail how Belgian society had failed Wiertz so that he died in poverty and obscurity. At the end she made an interesting connection between the artist himself and Christ:

They say that when he lay there, lifeless, the peace refused to him throughout his arduous years came on him at the last; and that when the summer sunrise streamed through the ivy shadows of his casement in the glory of the morning, his face was as the face of his Christ – his Christ, who brake asunder the bonds of the grave and rose triumphant in the power of God. (Ouida, 1872b, p. 32)

It is easy to connect «A Dog of Flanders» with this. Nello, like Wiertz, is an artist from a very poor background, is self-taught and, when he comes to Antwerp, is «entranced and subjugated» by the Rubens altarpieces in the cathedral. Nello is a version of Wiertz, and, like him, to be understood as a type of Christ whose suffering not so much redeems us as in Chris-

tianity (Ouida was militantly atheistic), as makes us alert to injustice. In short, then, Charlotte Zoë Walker's fury on reading «A Dog of Flanders» was perfectly in accord with what Ouida wanted from her readers. It may too have been another reason that Ruskin and Manning liked it, for we know that Ruskin recommended a later protest novel of Ouida's, *A Village Commune*, for its scathing depiction of local politics in Italy (Ruskin 1883, p. 30). Such a political use of the sentimental was not new, but it becomes increasingly typical of Ouida from the 1870s onwards when she began to employ the sentimental to effect change in the arena of international politics, not just single-issue politics internal to a country such as we are more familiar with in Dickens, Gaskell and Beecher Stowe.

To research a text as I have done here is to demonstrate that, however much one uses the electronic as a tool (as I certainly have), without attention to our physical encounters with texts – with *aesthesis* – one risks automatically considering a text as 'intrinsically' a particular genre directed at a specific market. This was the basis of my question above on whether Cardinal Manning and Ruskin would have delighted in a story with covers such as those in Figures 5 and 6. As long ago as 1923 the noted American novelist, critic and photographer Carl Van Vechten observed that

some of the inhibitions of the world and its critics in regard to Ouida are due to the printings and bindings of her novels. In America, their most elaborate dress is the red or green volumes stamped with gold, issued by Lippincott in Philadelphia. The reprints of Chatto and Windus in London are even worse, bound in tomato red, and printed from carious plates in small letters. Indubitably, a new edition of Ouida, on good paper, handsomely printed and bound, with prefaces by some of her more illustrious admirers, would do much to dispel the current illusion that in reading Ouida one is descending to the depths of English literature. (van Vechten 1923, p. xx)

We who have more in common with Manning and Ruskin than with «Gene Dedolph» who so carefully wrote his name in a childish hand on my 1902 Houghton Mifflin child's edition – aren't we just as likely to be affected in our judgements by a text lent an aura by high-status paratextual apparatus, whether online or in paper form?

I am not claiming that the political interpretation of the text I offered above was somehow 'purer' or less polluted by history than those influenced by the marketing and paratexts of the last dozen decades that techniques derived from History of the Book assisted me to map. That is entirely to miss the point. Following Shklovsky and Derrida after him (Crawford 1984), I maintain rather that it is one of the duties of the humanities academic to render the text strange, to seek to alter perceptions so as to avoid the casual violence of routinized and automatic reaction to

an encounter. Automatic reactions create blind spots, and I follow those politically-engaged critics in trying to help us open our eyes to them. At the same time, there is no pure first text that we can access, however we might seek to wash our idea of a text clean from its afterlives. We need to recognise, as van Vechten did, that a text is, to our reading bodies, the ever increasing sum of the history of its sensuous presentation and perception. Neither is it and its myriad colleagues tidily and abstractly arrayed in the hermetically sealed terraria of our screens. However much Big Data and Digital Humanities promise a grander reality based on the systematisation of vast quantities of information, that reality remains a simulacrum only present in machine code. Unless that simulacrum is translated into policy and action (which it increasingly is), it is not the reality of our bodies. We must not pretend that thrusting ourselves into a screen is more real than our corporeal sensations, just as we must remain sceptical of the latest critic who thrusts texts into fashionable categories, or the book historian who unreflectingly reduces a text to the costs of its production and distribution. In all cases, theirs could be an automatic research that requires interrogation and thereby animation. We need, like Ruskin and Manning, to «search with enthusiasm» «routing around», «getting covered with dust», and, like van Vechten, Shklovsky and Derrida, to raise questions based on, and about, our always impure researches.

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