

THE VICTORIAN NEWSLETTER

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SEXUALITY IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE*

What You Always Wanted To Know About Alice but Were Afraid To Ask

Donald Rackin

THE ALICE BOOKS enjoy a special place in Victorian literature, and there is no reason we should not continue to go to them for insights into our common human condition—whether we be male or female, gay or straight, moralists or mathematicians. However, despite their wide range of reference and the zeal of many critics, the *Alices* do not deal significantly with *all* important matters. The question here is, are they, as is frequently claimed, at their deepest levels books about sexuality.

To describe the *Alice* books as essentially sexual has become a critical commonplace. William Empson, for example, ends his study of the pastoral (1935) with a provocative chapter on the *Alices*—one of the first important explications of Lewis Carroll's art. He begins by stating that the *Alices* "are so frankly about growing up that there is no great discovery in translating them into Freudian terms; it seems only the proper exegesis of a classic even where it would be a shock to the author." Later Empson says, "to make the dream-story from which *Wonderland* was elaborated seem Freudian one has only to tell it." We should notice, however, Empson's careful choice of "seem" in both sentences, as well as his pointed distinction between the original dream-story and the finished book. And we should pay very close attention to the implications of passages from Empson like this one:

The symbolic completeness of Alice's experience is I think important. She runs the whole gamut; she is a father in getting down the hole, a foetus at the bottom, and can only be born by becoming a mother and producing her own amniotic fluid. Whether his mind played the trick of putting this into the story or not he has the feelings that would correspond to it. A desire to include all sexuality in the girl child, the least obviously sexed of human creatures, the one that keeps its sex in the safest place, was an important part of their fascination for him. He is partly imagining himself as the girl-child (with these comforting characteristics) partly as its father (these together make *it* a father) partly as its lover—so it might be a mother—but then it is clever and detached enough to do everything for itself.¹

When Empson finds so much "sex" in *Wonderland*, he

makes me think that the book's ultimate meanings probably reside beyond sex, for sexual symbolism so thoroughly pervades *Wonderland* that it somehow points to a curiously asexual theme, and the apparent excess of possible Freudian interpretations suggests a protagonist curiously asexual too. Empson himself finally calls his own sexual analysis a mere "peep at machinery" and reminds us that "the question for criticism is what is done with the machine."²

I cannot accept Empson's sexual interpretation, sophisticated and flexible as it often is. But compared with the crude Freudian analyses of Carroll's books that preceded and followed it from the 1930s until the present, it is a model of critical tact. Empson's essay will remain definitive because, among other things, it indicates the ways Freudian strategies can be used and yet subsumed under more meaningful aims—especially when a critic deals with works as delicate and elusive as the *Alice* books. However, those numerous simplistic, reductionist Freudian analyses have done their damage: they have softened our critical faculties to the point where many of us are perfectly willing to deny the evidence of our intelligence and common sense. And we complacently accept explanations of Alice and her adventures that are appropriate, if at all, for productions like *Candy* or *Deep Throat*.

Critics often seem to assume that Carroll's *Alices* are mere documents for explaining Charles Dodgson or his fellow Victorians in sexual terms. Published interpretations cover the entire spectrum from Alice as penis to Alice as vagina, from Alice as aggressive animus to Alice as gracious anima, from Alice as fetus to Alice as mother (and/or father). The widespread applicability of the *Alices* (several scholars claim that only the Bible is more frequently quoted in the twentieth century) has probably been overreached: how can they be equally amenable to interpretations by the most chauvinistic of Freudian sexists and the most militant of contemporary feminists? How can Alice herself be both the surreptitious expression of repressed masculinity and the ideal of womanhood? Answers to such questions do not come easy; but whatever

* The four essays that follow on the theme of Victorian sexuality are the subject of the English X Program for December 1973. Departing from tradition, *Victorian Newsletter* is publishing the papers in its Fall issue, to enable the membership to read them in advance of the meeting and then to participate in the discussion initiated

ated by the panelists. The members of the panel will include Robert Langbaum, Ada Nisbet, and Morse Peckham.

1. *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1935), pp. 253, 270–273.

2. Empson, p. 277.

the answers, it seems profitable to examine briefly the reasons the *Alices* lend themselves to such critical confusions in order, finally, to suggest a more satisfactory reading of their "sexuality."

Today, only that useful visitor from another planet would ask the question that would have occurred to almost everybody before Freud: "How can one find sexuality in books where there is almost no literal sex evident, where Alice is clearly presented as pre-sexual and where almost all the creatures she meets are pointedly neuter or obviously de-sexed?" I suspect that in some sophisticated American circles nowadays children not much older than Alice would be able to give plausible answers to that one.

First, there are all those indisputable biographical data about Charles Lutwidge Dodgson: his hard days at Rugby; his celibacy; the almost classic anality revealed in his diaries and letters; his lifelong little-girl mania; his alter ego complexes, including the revealing switch of identity from masculine to feminine in choosing his *nom de plume*;³ those photographs of nude girl children; his almost passionate (yet characteristically hilarious and nonsensical) letters to countless little female friends (whom he so often dropped at puberty); and so on and so on. Such a man's fantasy works should be fine subjects for Freudian analysis. And since these fantasies are also dreams and jokes, they mirror perfectly all three of Freud's major release mechanisms for the unconscious, the nasty, socially unacceptable id.

Add to this the putative facts of the original composition on those (not really) "golden afternoons" when the proper and Reverend Mr. Dodgson composed nonsense tales extemporaneously for his three little Liddells as they floated along on that placid Oxonian river. Add to all this an author so personally inhibited that he questioned the propriety of matters even Mrs. Grundy would overlook, so fearful of "unholy thoughts" that "dart unbidden into the most reverent souls" at night alone in bed that he produced *Pillow Problems* (1888, 1893), a collection of mathematical problems to work in the dark to keep the mischievous mind from such "unholy" temptations (and remember, the *Alices* appear to be the results of just such free associations as he deplored in his introduction to *Pillow Problems*).⁴ Indeed, almost any fact drawn from this eccentric Victorian eccentric's biography can be used to justify Freudian analysis of his imaginative works. Most persuasive of all, however, is the pattern of Dodgson's whole celibate life, which demonstrates a veritable

obsession with reversal problems (and Carroll's best fantasies depend heavily on reversals, looking-glass and otherwise). It stands to reason that such a man would, in creating books entirely free of sex, create books entirely full of sex.

Since we are told that Alice's adventures are dreams (although it is significant that readers forget that fact while they are reading them), and since modern psychoanalysis has offered so much convincing and fascinating evidence that dreams speak symbolically of sex (while advancing a not-so-convincing lexicon of the dreams' symbolic vocabulary), the reasoning seems complete and foolproof—if it were not for the disturbing fact that we are dealing finally with literature, fantastic and nonsensical literature at that, and *not* dreams, latent or manifest, literal or symbolic. And although the *Alice* books do have sexual implications, they are not books about sex. For example, all the emphasis on bodily growth and change (not explicitly male or female), although it indirectly involves issues of human sexuality, is much more directly and significantly linked to more fundamental issues, metaphysical and epistemological, concerning origins, growth, change, development, and especially identity: the truly "great puzzle" Alice refers to in Wonderland, the truly important puzzle for Victorians and us. The *Alice* books may sometimes, here and there, concern themselves obliquely with sexual matters. Far more importantly, however, they celebrate concerns prior to sex—and for many of us, even in the 1970s, there *are* concerns prior to sex.

What hidden motives, we may ask, actuate sexual interpretations of *Alice*? One of course is not so hidden: Freudian or Jungian dream analysis is simple (in its practice and results), attractive, and within its own self-defined system rather foolproof—like plane geometry. The *Alice* books are so enigmatic, so charged with elusive quantities and qualities, and yet so likely to produce in the reader a strange sensation of an encounter with the deepest, most complex meanings, and critics are so frequently in such a hurry or in such a quandary when facing difficult subtleties, that some are bound to succumb to the temptations of any coherent or manageable system of symbols. Perhaps more important for students of Victorian literature and the sexuality therein is the widespread desire among readers to strip away a Victorian false facade whose existence almost every modern assumes. It is something like a constant, dogged search for those "other Victorians," and when they cannot be found, one invents them, because

3. He dropped fully the surname Dodgson—with its masculine connotations: father's name, suffix "son" (the basis for a fine Joycean joke in *Finnegans Wake*). He chose instead to retain the initial of his mother's maiden name Lutwidge and be "Lewis Carroll," or "L.C." ("Lacie" being an anagrammatic nickname for his darling model Alice Liddell). Note also the similarities between

Carroll and Liddell. Moreover, "Lewis Carroll" is quite close to Louisa and Caroline—the names of two sisters.

4. Sidney Herbert Williams, Falconer Madan, and Roger Lancelyn Green, *The Lewis Carroll Handbook* (London, 1962), pp. 145, 168–169.

(like God) they are somehow necessary.

A more legitimate reason why so many have assumed and searched out patterns of sexuality in the *Alice* books is that the heroine and the books hold a strange fascination for so many adult readers, a fascination that seems at first almost totally unexplainable with the ordinary tools available to a literary critic. In many ways, the books are flat and silly (Carroll himself seems to have preferred the adjective "stupid"); their heroine is too young and too sketchily drawn to elicit any special interest; the plots seem almost nonexistent (there perhaps, but more like un-birthdays than birthdays); the prose style is crystalline but suited for children and almost defiantly unambiguous; the puns are often atrocious, almost never interesting or pregnant; and so on. Yet the books have tremendous power, and their attraction is inexplicably strong. Some of this power might derive from the covert and symbolically revealed sexual impulses of the creator and his unconscious creation. And some might derive from the unconscious sexual responses of his readers to those impulses. But saying that—and pursuing that in detailed interpretations—does not say what or how the books mean. For their deepest meanings reside in a protagonist, medium, incidents, and techniques fantastically free from sexuality—a fictional condition no more difficult to accept than trips down rabbit holes and through looking-glasses to meet Gryphons and Humpty Dumpties.

First and most important is the heroine, Alice. I have argued elsewhere that the Alice of Wonderland serves as our common surrogate on a journey beneath the groundworks of constructed order, a rather grimly comic and unsuccessful search for unambiguous meaning in an ambiguous universe.⁵ The necessary qualifications for such a surrogate seem quite strict and narrow: our protagonist from above ground (or this side of the mirror) must be a believable and quite ordinary human being who has reached the age of reason so that our own faith in reason can go on this journey embodied and operative in someone with whom we can identify (yet laugh at or condescend to when the going gets rough). On the other hand, our surrogate's faith in such rational constructs as time, space, causality, sequence, law, and so forth must be unironic and exaggerated in order to dramatize the search and struggle (and generate comedy or sentimental indulgence when we need it for sanity or self-preservation). All this adds up to a job description with, among other things, strict age limits: the protagonist must be at that age of normal human development "where the world appears completely explainable and unambiguous, that most

narrow-minded, prejudiced period of life where, paradoxically, daring curiosity is wedded to uncompromising literalness and priggish, ignorant faith in the fundamental sanity of all things."⁶

So far, this description implies the need for a special kind of innocence (mixed with a specially limited degree of experience)—the kind we often ascribe to children. But does the job description rule out sex? I think so. To the extent that our surrogate possesses distinctive sexual characteristics, he or she will be disqualified because the introduction of sex brings in extraneous ironies and complications that will undercut the surrogate's necessarily unambiguous mentality. What we need is a clear, forceful, but simple and innocent human eye—an almost disembodied critical intelligence.

Besides, would we *want* to send our sexuality as well as our consciousness on this particular journey? Would not the introduction of sex add a peculiar energy charge searching for an irrelevant energy release, an uncontrollable dynamism likely to muddy the waters and thus pollute the pure search for the meaning of meaning—the *Alices'* central and proper mission? Sex is of time and death and the yearning that results thereby. The worlds where Alice must travel are strangely static, extratemporal, deathless. Alice's crucial questions always revolve around the verb "am"—as unkinetic a verb as you can find.

But, one may ask, sexuality is a crucial part of our human nature, so how can this asexual surrogate be the "believable and quite ordinary human being" we need if we are to identify with her and her adventures? We could ask a similar question about the protagonist of another believable fantasy (whose author is frequently compared to Carroll): how can the most ordinary of human beings wake up one day as a giant cockroach? But he does just that, for the world of fiction is a world of givens and conventions. Victorian and pre-Freudian though he was, Charles Dodgson surely had at some level an awareness of infantile sexuality. But the real child Lewis Carroll presented as his "own invention" was a child straight out of the prevalent convention (literary, religious, social, intellectual) in which a girl of seven is rational but asexual (or at most what Empson calls "the least obviously sexed of human creatures"). Carroll's dependence on this girl-child cult is underscored by the syrupy poems attached to both *Alices*: while one stanza admits that some day Alice, like most pure innocent girls, will hear a "voice of dread . . . summon [her] to unwelcome bed / A melancholy maiden," she exists now in the adventures miraculously a "Child of the pure unclouded brow," a child who

5. Donald Rackin, "Alice's Journey to the End of Night," *PMLA*, LXXXI (1966), 313-326.

6. Rackin, p. 314.

through the miracle of fictional art will be found forever "moving under skies / Never seen by waking eyes."

This reference to dream skies brings us to another matter—the prevailing atmosphere of the *Alices*, especially *Wonderland* (which is decidedly superior to *Through the Looking-Glass*, the first being a work of imagination, the sequel a work of will). For despite the fact that Alice pursues her first quest underground,⁷ she does move, it seems, "under skies" whose clarity and purity are "never seen by waking eyes." Sex carries symbolic associations with death and darkness. In spite of claims by modern sexual reformers that sex is "better" in, or "belongs" in, broad daylight, to the extent that sex and sleep are symbolically associated with the dark womb, our primary response to the crystal light of Wonderland is something other than sexual. Nowhere in Wonderland occurs a scene we could imagine as anything but brilliantly lit (except, perhaps, the Duchess' smokey kitchen, but Tenniel's illustration of it—as fitting and essential as his other *Alice* pictures—glows as brilliantly as all the rest.) In *Looking-Glass Land* we find several darker scenes, but the general atmosphere again is flooded with a permanent, static, and dazzling light, perhaps best described poetically. Walter De La Mare writes,

And what of the visionary light, the colour, the scenery; that wonderful seascape, for example, in *The Walrus and the Carpenter*—as wide as Milton's in *Il Penseroso*—the quality of its sea, its sands, its spaces and distances? . . . The *Alices* indeed have the timelessness, the placelessness, and an atmosphere resembling in their own odd fashion not only those of the *Songs of Innocence* and Traherne's *Meditations*, but of the medieval descriptions of paradise and many of the gem-like Italian pictures of the fifteenth century. This atmosphere is conveyed . . . in a prose of limpid simplicity, as frictionless as the unfolding of the petals of an evening primrose in the cool of twilight.⁸

Effusive and sentimental as De La Mare might sound, his instincts are correct. "The *Alices*," he says, "lighten our beings like sunshine, like that divine rainbow in the skies beneath which the living things of the world went out into radiance and freedom from the narrow darkness of the Ark."⁹ The light he attempts to describe in these passages is the light many readers actually experience—its special free purity is central to the attractiveness of Carroll's best works. Moreover, De La Mare's identification of the atmosphere with the limpid, simple, frictionless prose is important here; for despite all the puns, the

stylistic context works to rule out sexual innuendoes. The prose style is generally about as sexy as mathematics.

So we might say that De La Mare (with, for example, his reference to the atmosphere in *Songs of Innocence*) and Dodgson himself (with his "Child of unclouded brow") are right for the wrong reasons, while even the best Freudian interpretations are wrong for the right reasons. Despite the embarrassing sentimentality that is probably the original source of Dodgson's and De La Mare's views of Alice and her adventures as "pure," and despite the admirable, honest intentions of many Freudian critics to see without prejudice or sentimentality, it is the sentimentalists who convey the heroine's role and her adventures best. Nothing more useful has been said on this subject than De La Mare's statement that "apart . . . from an occasional Carrollian comment, the sole medium of the stories is *her* pellucid consciousness."¹⁰ Alice's view is the view achieved by some mental faculty prior to our id (or ego), the deepest consciousness at the base of our unconsciousness, the static central eye that dreams our kinetic dreams for us. Alice's "pellucid consciousness" is our best surrogate on those oddly pellucid adventures that offer us release from time and all kinesis (the Mad Tea-Party comes, by the way, at the exact center of *Wonderland*). Sex has no place on this particular journey.

We should also remember that one of us does accompany our surrogate on her journeys in a more than vicarious fashion—that companion is the narrator, an obviously older, wiser, slightly ironic, and kindly observer. But, significantly, it is totally impossible to determine the sex of that narrator (both actors and actresses have been used successfully on phonograph recordings). Moreover, none of the narrator's brief remarks bears noticeable traces of sexuality.

Similarly, the sex of the many creatures Alice encounters is typically indeterminate, "it" being the most common pronoun applied to them in both books. And when their sex is mentioned (like the sex of the White Rabbit or the White Knight—similar figures in many ways and often interpreted as representatives of the celibate Dodgson), it is carefully de-emphasized. The White Rabbit, for example, would seem to carry great potential for sexual symbolism; but with his waistcoat and watch and his debilitating fear, he loses the traditional associations between rabbits and sex and is left merely with some rabbit associations naive seven-year-olds might make. So too with the furious Queen of Hearts, whose passion is de-

7. The original title, *Alice's Adventures under Ground*, has always seemed to me greatly superior. For one thing, the revision to "Wonderland" tends to fudge, looking like a frightened attempt to deny or dispel the threatening and subversive nature of the adventures.

8. Lewis Carroll (London, 1932), pp. 62-63.

9. Lewis Carroll, p. 56.

10. Lewis Carroll, p. 55.

fused (compare Carroll's revision from "passion flower" to "Tiger-Lily" in "The Garden of Live Flowers"): we learn along with Alice that she never really cuts off anyone's head (castrates?) and that she is merely a playing card, anyway (like the chess pieces behind the looking glass). Alice's chief "guides" are also de-sexed and unthreatening—indeed, one has no substantial body, but is all head, or smile. Another, the White Knight, is the most impotent of humans: his continual falling off his horse has special significance here. If there are any sexual connotations in these figures, then, the pattern that emerges is clearly one of impotence. Their force is akin to the stopped time and motion throughout the books that is caught best in the peculiarly static caucus race or mad tea-party.

If we accept these works for what they are—Carroll's "own invention" of a static world beyond sex—the books remain whole, and their strange unity never fails. If we read in sexuality, we introduce an element that destroys their "invented" organic completeness and interferes with their deepest purposes—aesthetic and philosophical. Most importantly, by such destruction or interference, we deny ourselves the sovereign chance to accompany Alice on those trips of the unimpeded intellect into lands beyond matter and change and death. Marianne Moore tells us that intellect has no sex. Read right, neither do the *Alices*.

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Two Approaches to Edward Lear's Nonsense Songs

Edmund Miller

ONE METHOD OF APPROACH to Edward Lear's nonsense songs, what might be called the traditional method if there were anything like a body of Lear criticism, is to regard the songs as nearly perfect confections of romantic poetry, to see them as self-contained descriptions of life in the green world. Aldous Huxley suggests, "Change the key ever so little and 'The Dong With a Luminous Nose' would be one of the most memorable romantic poems of the nineteenth century."¹ The "ever so little" is very significant. Lear's green world is not a Forest of Arden where bad people reform. It is a world where there are for the most part no people of any kind, no real human beings. The central characters of the songs do have a lot of human characteristics, but they meet few people and even few other humanoid animals, animals not in the dramatis personae at the very beginning of a poem. And the people—and whatnot—they do meet are always types from a very limited range.

Far and few, far and few

Are the lands where the Jumblies live.

In fact, the key to the romantic charm Lear's songs do have seems to be to a large extent the result of the melancholy apartness of the characters from any kind of traditionally organized society. The typical concern of the few central characters of a song is romantic relationship with

each other. Romantic longing is a motif. The courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò is the sort of thing we find. The Jumblies and the Dong are looking and looking, always looking. But the ultimate situation for a Lear nonsense song is the marriage of two green-world creatures who would be bitter enemies in the real world—or at least incompatible there. The strange couples Lear habitually establishes place especially strong emphasis on the need for love in his green world. Not only is marriage everywhere in the green world, but the most unlikely marriages are everywhere. The kangaroo lies down with the duck; the spider is a friend to the fly. But Lear's theme is not simply that all creatures love one another in his dehumanized green world. His moral is narrower, less traditional. He seems to be saying something like: This perverse relationship between two animals is the only one left and the only one available because these are the only two creatures about in the naked landscape of the green world, in the cardboard world painted a solid, flat, unrelieved pea-green.

"The Owl and the Pussycat," Lear's most famous poem, is the one that most clearly adopts this point of view. At the beginning of the poem Owl and Pussycat go out to sea, setting themselves apart from the normal world by the very color of their boat—pea-green: green, suggesting the

1. Aldous Huxley, "Edward Lear" in *On the Margin* (London, 1928), pp. 168-169. C. M. Bowra, "The Romantic Achievement," *The*

Romantic Imagination (London, 1949), pp. 278-280, makes basically the same point.

green world for which they are searching, but frivolous pea-green, making clear that the search is not serious comedy, not real romance. But the romance elements of the story are numerous and clear. Owl and Pussycat take food and money with them as if to establish themselves in a little society apart from the world (of course their provisions are parodic). Owl is infatuated with Pussycat and sings a love song to her, serenading her with the traditional romantic guitar under the traditional stars. Pussycat is charmed by the sweetness of the song and herself proposes marriage. After a ritual engagement of a year and a day, during which they sail away to a vague and distant land marked off from the real world by the Bong Trees that grow in it, they do get married. They have the traditional wedding breakfast of romance and then dance away as the poem ends in the tradition of romantic comedy. Howard Moss, in the introduction to his edition of Lear's nonsense, suggests that the romanticism and the haunting quality of the whole poem are to a large extent built out of the extensive repetitions that occur in the refrain lines of its stanzas.² Owl and Pussycat do dance away in the light of the moon, but the lines that say they do read:

They danced by the light of the moon,
The moon,
The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.

The repetition is insistent enough to be almost incantatory. Moss's commentary is illuminating. The mere fact that there seems to be nothing else to say at the same time that there is a clear and immediate need that something be said gives the poem its urgency. It becomes horribly clear that there is great emptiness someplace in the universe. But the green world cannot be the place of this emptiness because it is before the reader's eyes in all the reality of verbalization—insistent, repetitious verbalization. The world of the poem must be real because the reader believes in it enough to read about it. The world of the poem has an immediate if tenuous reality, so the emptiness is turned away from the green world of the poem onto the normal world that has no part in the poem. Horrible loneliness may throw the central characters of a Lear song together, but the characters are no longer lonely in the world and marriage they have. This is their escape. In "Mr. and Mrs. Discobbolos," Mr. Discobbolos sees the danger of the empty social forms of the normal world as being so great that he finds death preferable for himself and his whole family.

The joy of the green world is that fragile. This "note of melancholy desolation" in Lear's songs, as J. T. Brockway calls it, is especially explicit in a poem such as "Calico Pie" with its repeated "They never came back."³ "They never came back" is a refrain of several of Lear's songs, a theme of all of them.

But "melancholy desolation" and escape to the green world are only part of Lear's theme. A second approach can fruitfully be taken to Lear's nonsense songs. They need to be understood as a body of literature peculiarly stamped by their author's personality. When we dismiss nonsense as "only nonsense" or judge it to be "pure romance," we may have appreciated a great part of what it has to offer but we cannot have begun to understand how it goes about making its offering. Twenty years ago George Orwell was able to point out that "it is easy to guess there was something wrong in [Lear's] sex life,"⁴ and his suspicions have since been documented by Rupert Croft-Cooke and Vivien Noakes.⁵ But the psychological quirks and obsessions that are so easy—perhaps too easy—for the sophisticated mind to read into Lear's nonsense have yet to be made use of in a critical understanding of it. And Lear's psychological peculiarities, while irrelevant to an appreciation of the fun of his nonsense, cannot be regarded as merely his own personal business, because they are what his nonsense is about, what it presents under comic disguises. The limericks have for a long time been recognized as presenting a picture of Lear as a man with a narrow range of rather explicit obsessions—noses, beards, eating, growth, age. But many a nonsense song, as has not been widely noted, goes even further and plays with an obsession to suggest a thesis about it—that is, works out a complete theme through comic disguise.

Consider "The Pobble Who Has No Toes." "Who has no toes" is a persistent refrain, almost a Homeric epithet. The Pobble cannot so much as be mentioned without the central fact of his life's being mentioned too. His toelessness becomes terribly, metaphysically important. And the cold but perceptive *they*, the hard-headed people of the world who figure so prominently in Lear's nonsense,⁶ see from the beginning that the Pobble is bound to lose his toes, that losing his toes is going to be the theme of the Pobble's life. *They* are pointing out to him by the third line of the poem that "someday [he] may lose them all." Since the Pobble lives with his aunt and seems to have no parents, he is, the reader assumes, dependent and young

2. Howard Moss, ed., *The Nonsense Books of Edward Lear* (New York, 1964), pp. xvi-xviii. I have taken my Lear quotations from this text.

3. J. T. Brockway, "Edward Lear: Poet," *Fortnightly Review*, N.S. 167 (1950), 334-339.

4. George Orwell, "Nonsense Poetry," *Shooting an Elephant and*

Other Essays (New York, 1950), pp. 189-190.

5. Rupert Croft-Cooke, *Feasting with Panthers: A New Consideration of Some Late Victorian Writers* (New York, 1967), pp. 147-153; Vivien Noakes, *Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer* (Boston, 1969), pp. 250-251, 260n.

6. Huxley, pp. 169-172; Orwell, pp. 190-191.

and has had, to some extent, an unnatural childhood. His aunt is very concerned about his toes and gives him a tonic specially designed as good for them. When he sets out to seek the world in the immemorial fashion of youth, specifically to swim the Bristol Channel, he protects his toes by wrapping up his nose in scarlet flannel. The suggestion of sexual displacement becomes at this point inescapable. The male genitalia are at the root of the Pobble's problem. The color is, as usual in Lear, explicit. The Pobble's nose has a long, symbolic tradition behind it. The point is that by choosing to make his poem about Freudian displacement and comic disguise—that is, by having his character express his concern about his toes by doing something to his nose—Lear tells his reader to speculate that maybe Pobble and poet are concerned about neither toes nor nose, but about sexual potency and the possibility of castration.⁷

At any rate, a sudden stanza later, the Pobble, having carelessly lost his magic and symbolic flannel, discovers he has lost his practical and real toes as well. But he loses his toes in two solid stanzas of hypothesis and vagueness. Obviously something important enough to talk about for two stanzas happened; but what happened is not the sort of thing that can be talked about straightforwardly. The Pobble lost his toes "in a manner so far from pleasant," but he did not realize they were gone till he happened to look down at his feet. At the same time, the poet suggests many ways the Pobble might have lost his toes, but he and the world and the poet do not know for sure how he lost them. The second of these two stanzas ends with the interesting paraphrasis that he was robbed of his "twice five toes." The appropriate dual number is insisted on. When the Pobble gets home, his aunt plies and soothes him with food, a rather sensible and likely substitution for the potency he has lost, at least symbolically. The aunt shows herself a true vicarious parent by observing unnecessarily that

It's a fact the whole world knows,
That Pobbles are happier without their toes.

Her philosophicality disguises her relief that she did not have to perform the operation herself.

Lear lends himself to sexual explication rather readily. His very favorite word, *runcible*, for example, can be taken as pure nonsense and a charming irrelevance whenever it occurs. But there is such a thing as a runcible spoon, a kind of fork with two short blunt prongs and one

long, curved, pointed one—a virtual sculpture of the male genitalia, something never far from Lear's mind. Lear even ingenuously describes himself as wearing a runcible hat ("How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!"). And it is only charmingly and not grossly inappropriate in "The Owl and the Pussycat" that the two lovers eat their wedding breakfast with a runcible spoon. And of course it was for his aunt's runcible cat, with its crimson whiskers, that onlookers assume the Pobble is searching when he is out in the Bristol Channel. A suspicion that there is sex everywhere in Lear is readily rewarded. It is not casually that the reader decides Pussycat is female. At one level Owl's serenade is quite gross and explicit:

O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love
What a beautiful Pussy you are,
You are,
You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!

Where this kind of analysis ultimately leads, however, is another issue. Where it leads immediately is to the Dong with the luminous nose. Sometimes in Lear's nonsense songs the comic disguise and sexual displacement work beautifully, as in "The Owl and the Pussycat," and sometimes they work well, as in "The Pobble Who Has No Toes." Sometimes a poem is a consistent whole on its own terms and can be read and understood from a point of view that finds it sexually symbolic as well as from one that regards it as pure romantic nonsense. But sometimes Lear's obsessions just get in the way. "The Dong With a Luminous Nose" simply does not hold up as romantic melancholy. Lear here straps on the artificial apparatus right before the reader's eyes:

And he wove him a wondrous Nose,—
A Nose as strange as a Nose could be!
Of vast proportions and painted red,
And tied with cords to the back of his head.
—In a hollow rounded space it ended
With a luminous Lamp within suspended,
All fenced about
With a bandage stout
To prevent the wind from blowing it out;—
And with holes all round to send the light,
In gleaming rays on the dismal night.

You would have to have the wit of a six-year-old not to laugh at this. But you are not laughing in the spirit of the poem. You cannot laugh with the Dong—because the poet does not recognize phallic worship when he participates

7. Though it may be true, as Angus Davidson shows (*Edward Lear: Landscape Painter and Nonsense Poet* [New York, 1939], photographs passim and Ch. i), that Lear did have a big nose, he had more than just that. You cannot be so inordinately concerned with noses as he was, you cannot be so consistently interested in their

hugeness, you cannot tell so many stories as he does about noses that get snipped off, without being obsessed with other things as well. See also S. A. Nock's review of Davidson's book, "Lacrimae Nugarum: Edward Lear of the Nonsense Verses," *Sewanee Review*, XLIX (1941), 68-81.

in it. The comic character here is the poet himself. And you are embarrassed for him because he does not realize how funny he is.

What keeps "The Dong With a Luminous Nose" from being one of the memorable romantic poems of the nineteenth century is its *gaucherie*. The theory of the green world cannot explain the unfunny and the embarrassingly

ludicrous in Lear. Serious attention to Lear's sexual obsessions is helpful in understanding all his poetry. It is necessary for understanding why some of his poems are failures or partial failures, why some of his poems are ridiculous, rather than sublime, nonsense.

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The Nuns of *Villette*¹

Charles Burkhart

IN THE LAST CENTURY nuns seem to have haunted the female imagination, to have lurked, in their "gowns of shadow," in the dim regions of the mind where fears and fantasies are often indistinguishable, and merge. In Protestant England, the Roman Catholic figure of the nun was charged with a special significance: more than just an interesting and frequent Gothic property in tales of the late 1700s and early 1800s, she operated as an energetic symbol, at once attractive and repellent, of the celibate life. As we know, a young woman in Victorian England of the middle or upper class found a husband or a schoolroom: she who could, married; she who could not, taught. Charlotte Brontë, who was both a teacher and, at the end of her short life, a wife, protested with great spirit, especially in *Shirley*, against the poverty of opportunity offered to a young Englishwoman like herself. It was galling most of all to genius, this general lack, for a woman, of creative and administrative and professional outlets beyond those of the mere domestic. England was full of spinster aunts. They engaged in good works, and sincerely did their duty, but along with their sincerity there is always, to us today at least, a sense of *faute de mieux*. Whereas the nun elected her life of sacrifice, it was not forced on her; the husband she sought and found was heavenly. Her denials were not repressions full of pain, they were serene. Nuns fret not; but what frustration and even despair could lie behind the decorums of a Victorian spinster's life we can surmise, or we can experience in Charlotte Brontë's novels.

In them the nun, like any true symbol, operates ambivalently. The following are various examples of the way in which it pervades Charlotte's novels, listed simply as judg-

mental pro's and con's. There are more con's than pro's. Charlotte was the daughter of a Church of England clergyman. In many ways she was a conservative, parochial, even priggish woman, as witness her lifelong adoration of the Duke of Wellington. She was prejudiced against the Church of Rome and what she regarded indiscriminately as its trappings and errors—processions, incense, nuns, relics, and so on.² In *Jane Eyre*, the two Reed cousins, wicked stepsisters to Jane's Cinderella, are polished off with fates that are in heavy contrast to Jane's own sexual and Christian triumph³—Georgiana Reed marries a "wealthy worn-out man of fashion" (the key word is "worn-out"), and Eliza becomes Mother Superior of a convent in France (France was often the object of Charlotte's insular contempt). In *Shirley*, in Caroline Helstone's reflections on the spinster Miss Ainley, the convent becomes a living death: "... she looks, I suppose, to the bliss of the world to come. So do nuns, with their close cell, their iron lamp, their robe strait as a shroud, their bed narrow as a coffin" (XXII).⁴

Yet such grim musings can be set beside items of a more favorable implication, phrases here and there in Charlotte's four novels that precipitate as positive. For example, Charlotte's heroines often dress in nun-like garb, in "homely mourning habit"; Lucy Snowe of *Villette* is, according to the foppish young de Hamal, "*revêche comme une religieuse*" (XII), and Rochester twice calls Jane a nun, speaking of her "air of a little nonnette." And the references to the buried nun in *Villette* are reflective or frightened but never disapproving.

The most interesting tension in the novel is not that be-

1. This essay is the development of an idea or two in my book *Charlotte Brontë: A Psychosexual Study of Her Novels* (London, 1973).
2. She saw some value, however, in the confessional, having herself sought its aid during a period of mental stress in Brussels—an experience echoed by Lucy Snowe, the heroine of *Villette*.

3. Sexual, in that Rochester's virility is not impaired; Christian, in that he has repented and acquired the habit of prayer. In fact to the Byronic hero has been added the Victorian gentleman.

4. All Roman numerals refer to chapters.

tween pro and con, however. Rather it derives from the role of the nun in the psychosexual and philosophical—the two are here inseparable—development of its heroine, Lucy Snowe. For *Villette* is philosophical, in a way that *Jane Eyre*, rampant wish-fulfillment, is not. *Villette* is an adult novel and *Jane Eyre* is an adolescent novel—which is not at all to make it, just as a novel, inferior.

Villette concerns life-engagement vs. life-detachment. The drive to participate in life, to gain a place in the sun, to achieve self-expression, dominance, and fruition (on Lucy's arrival in London: "I had a sudden feeling as if I, who never yet truly lived, were at last about to taste life. . . . Who but a coward would pass his whole life in hamlets, and for ever abandon his faculties to the eating rust of obscurity?"—VI)—this drive is balanced against the urge to remain passive ("I like peace so well"—I), to accept defeat courageously after some attempted activity has ended in it, to withdraw in good order and embrace the reward of defeat, a stoic fortitude. *Jane Eyre* wants her share, indeed more than her share, of love and other fulfillment; at times Lucy Snowe, who is a far more complex young woman, wants them too, but she learns that she is not to have them. She surmounts her romantic needs and thereby becomes, in two senses, a realistic heroine, one of the most convincing in the Victorian novel.

The story of *Villette* is the story of the English schoolmistress Lucy Snowe's stormy time as teacher in the *pensionnat de demoiselles* situated in the Rue Fossette in Brussels. To see it as a record of Lucy's sexual growth is to give it a depth and direction that its readers have sometimes missed. For example, Charlotte's admired Thackeray said of *Villette* that none of his heroines was in love with two men at the same time, as Lucy Snowe is; yet the gradual though never quite total displacement of Lucy's love for Dr. Graham Bretton ("Dr. John"), a handsome young physician whom she had known in her childhood, by her love for the irascible M. Paul, her mentor and tormentor, is more like the way things happen in life than, often enough, the way they happen in Thackeray's own novels. More important than verisimilitude is the way in which Lucy's relationships with other people become meaningful and form the pattern of her complex growth towards maturity, whether it is her friendship with Ginevra Fanshawe, her judicious admiration and contempt for her employer Mme. Beck, or, most of all, her extraordinary involvement with the nun. The growth is quite believably organic in that it proceeds by fits and starts, seems sometimes to be moving in several directions at once, sustains damage whose remedies are change of diet and rest or hibernation. And the end of the novel, when Lucy is alone in her small house like a nun alone in her cell, is towards what these processes of growth all have tended. The ques-

tion of the novel is: will she enter into life, like her friend the brilliant and demure Paulina, or retire from it, like her early employer in England, the invalid Miss Marchmont? Characters like Paulina and Miss Marchmont function thematically as counterpoint or counterpart to Lucy, though from the beginning the withdrawal motif, no matter what passions she is tossed by, is the stronger of the two, and we early suspect that Lucy is to remain "a mere looker-on at life" (XIV) and that, in another beautiful phrase, "her walk in life lay rather on the shady side of the hill" (XXV). The drift of the novel is towards the solitude that Charlotte's own life at the time of its composition so tragically embodied. It is the growth of Lucy that gives the novel its beautifully articulated shape, with the ending prepared for from the beginning, and with the theme constantly but not obtrusively kept before us by a rich variety of metaphor.

To examine the forces in Lucy's emotional life in more detail is to see how she herself is habitually self-examining. Her introspection is often somber to the point of despair. She speaks of herself as "a shadow in Life's sunshine" (XXVIII), as "living my own life, in my own still, shadow-world" (XIII). She refers to herself as a "hermit" and a "solitary," one of those "who live in retirement, whose lives have fallen amid the seclusion of schools or of other walled-in and guarded dwellings" (XXIV). Yet though this nun-like existence is intermittently tolerable, though she seems nearly content when, at the evening study hour, she sits with the students "silent as nuns in a 'retreat'" (XXVIII), the melancholy can deepen into death-wish: "A sorrowful indifference to existence often pressed on me—a despairing resignation to reach betimes the end of all things earthly" (XV). Despite her "unutterable sense of despair about the future," however, she shrinks from death as from life: "Motive there was none why I should try to recover or wish to live; and yet quite unendurable was the pitiless and haughty voice in which Death challenged me to engage his unknown terrors" (XV).

Life is painful enough without seeking out further pain. Her withdrawal is cautious to the point of superstition, but she cannot maintain it with any consistency. She knows that hers is "a soon-depressed, an easily-deranged temperament" (XXVII). Victim of "the palsy of custom," she also is subject to "the passionate pain of change" (XXI). Like a nun, she had wanted "to compromise with Fate: to escape occasional great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains. Fate would not so be pacified" (IV). It had seemed to her "a great thing to be without heavy anxiety, and relieved from intimate trial: the negation of heavy suffering was the nearest approach to happiness I expected to know" (VIII), but these tenuous grim comforts prove untenable, as heavy suffering be-

comes her lot: "I concluded it to be a part of His great plan that some must deeply suffer while they live, and I thrilled in the certainty that of this number I was one" (XV). Curious masochism; strange version of the doctrine of the elect: and the suffering is not to issue from or in a fulfillment even temporary, for, as she says to herself in one of the innumerable references to the moon in the novel,⁵ "Lucy Snowe, the orb of your life is not to be so rounded: for you the crescent-phase must suffice" (XXXI). She is fixed in the pale virgin crescent, though she loves two men. Each in his way can seize upon one side of her: Graham calls her "a being inoffensive as a shadow" (XXVII), but M. Paul advises her to study the lives of Catholic "religieuses" because he sees her as the opposite: "a fiery and rash nature—adventurous, indocile, and audacious" (XXVI). This latter side of Lucy comes to a climax of expression when she cries out to Mme. Beck, who is trying to keep her from M. Paul just when he is about to depart for a long stay in the West Indies, "My heart will break!" (XLI).⁶ She combines such forthrightness with an awkward shyness; her manner is direct and brusque at some times, at others she appears the taciturn nonentity that Graham thinks her.

There is a legend in the *pensionnat* of a nun who in ancient times was buried alive in the convent grounds, which she still haunts. She was thus punished for "some sin against her vow," and we conclude, as the most likely and contextually relevant, that the sin was unchastity. This image, of the nun's living death, obsesses Lucy. Lucy's passivity, her philosophic resignation, her death wish, all find a useful metaphor here: "And in catalepsy and a dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my nature" (XII). When, after her day's duties are done, she wanders in that part of the garden called "*Pallée défendue*" ("*défendue*" to the pupils if not to the teachers because of its proximity to a neighboring boys' school), she is traversing the spot where, it is said, the nun was buried; and she fancies that she would impress whomever she encountered as "like some ghost, I suppose" (XII). At her worst moments her resemblance to the nun becomes complete: "I almost wished to be covered in with earth and turf" (XV). At the first appearance of the nun, the identification is suggested in Graham's ("Dr. John's") diagnosis: "'You think then,' I said, with secret horror, 'she came out of my brain, and is now gone in there, and may glide out again at an hour and a day when I look not for her?'" (XXII). Lucy talks of her "snow sepulchre" (note the pun) that "perhaps, one day . . . will open" (XXIV). And the "Fossette" of the

"Rue Fossette" where the convent/school is situated comes from the word *fosse*, which means a ditch or grave.

As a prologue to an account of the five appearances of the nun, which are to supply our chief argument for calling Lucy's history sexual as well as spiritual, two other aspects of her development may provide a supportive context. One is Lucy's extraordinary use of sexual metaphor. We will limit ourselves to two examples, one for Graham and one for M. Paul. The first describes the entry of Graham into *l'allée défendue*, which has so suggestive a name, and which is the haunt now of Lucy as once it must have been of the nun: "It was sacrilege—the intrusion of a man into that spot. . . . He wandered down the alleys, looking on this side and on that—he was lost in the shrubs, trampling flowers and breaking branches in his search—he penetrated at last the 'forbidden walk'" (XII). Paul also "penetrates": "You remind me, then, of a young she wild creature, new caught, untamed, viewing with a mixture of fire and fear the first entrance of the breaker-in." Paul accuses Lucy of longing for "sweet poison," by which he means Graham, rather than the "wholesome bitters" of himself, and warns her, "you should take your bitter dose duly and daily, if I had the power to administer it; and, as to the well-beloved poison, I would, perhaps, break the very cup which held it" (XXI). Such alliterative passages in Charlotte are not, as in some other writers, the rhetoric of an inspiration run dry, the whipping of a tired horse; rather they are an index of her fervor and conviction.

At times Lucy seems to be floundering in a sea of contrary sexual impulses—activity, passivity; pursuit, escape; masculinity, femininity. Her masculine moments are curious. It is as if her sexual energy was bent on finding an outlet no matter where, a blind and adolescent urge that has both its comic and pathetic sides. These moments occur largely in connection with Ginevra Fanshawe, a shallow, exuberant, and beautiful girl, an English pupil at Mme. Beck's *pensionnat*. She is robust where Lucy is slight, greedy where Lucy is abstemious; Ginevra is frequently granted part of Lucy's food; when they walk together, Ginevra leans her "not insubstantial" weight on Lucy's arm; her pet names for Lucy are often masculine, like Timon or Diogenes; in her abundance of youthful high spirits she will sometimes grab Lucy and whirl her about in a mad waltz. The highpoint of this schoolgirl crush is the school play in which Lucy, whose role is that of a fop and who is dressed half in man's attire, woos the charming heroine enacted by Ginevra (XIV). Of the real fop, Ginevra's lover de Hamal, Lucy invariably speaks in

5. Many of these I list in "Brontë's *Villette*," *Explicator*, XXI (September 1962), item 8.

6. George Eliot thought *Villette* was "a still more wonderful book than *Jane Eyre*" and appropriated "My heart will break!" for the climactic love scene in *Middlemarch*.

spiteful, feminine terms (he has "womanish" feet and hands; he "titters"—XIX). But Lucy sometimes thinks of herself as masculine in contexts apart from Ginevra. She considers the attractions of the *pensionnat's* plump proprietress and concludes that, if she were a man, "Madame would have found favour in my eyes" (XIII). Twice she wishes she could challenge to a duel, once her snaky fellow-teacher, Zélie St. Pierre (XIV), and once the two cynical rakes with the amusing names of Rochemorte and Boissec (XXXV). It is a heavy irony when Graham, whom Lucy has loved, tells her that he and Lucy would have been good friends had she been a boy instead of a girl (XXVII); earlier they had attended a concert together, where both were awarded door prizes—Lucy, a cigar-case, and Dr. John, a gorgeous blue and silver lady's turban (XX).

Charlotte's imagination operated in sexual terms, although she would have been outraged at the idea that it did. All five of Lucy's encounters with the nun occur at moments of intense sexual significance in her life and mark various epochs in her history.

The school of Mme. Beck where Lucy works was, as has been said, a convent in ancient times, and the adjective "conventual" and the like is common. There is an ironic contrast between the nuns who once inhabited the cubicles and the robust and worldly Labassecourienne maids who now make them their little dormitories. Mme. Beck herself is a hard and mundane woman; we are told that she has no taste for the "monastic" life, and that, after her charges are retired for the night, she avidly attends "operas, or plays, or balls" of the city. Her attitude towards the nun is neither credulous nor skeptic; in this, as in any matter that might affect the welfare of her school, she is merely prudential.

It is Lucy with whom the nun is concerned. She first appears halfway through the novel. Lucy's love for Graham has grown apace—she has "sat in sunshine calm and sweet"—during her stay at the house of Graham and his mother, where she was taken to convalesce from a nervous breakdown. Returning at last to the *pensionnat*, she has tried to steel herself again to the monotony of school custom. But finally, to her joy, a letter from Graham arrives, and in tremulous anticipation of its contents she asks herself, "Will it be long—will it be short? . . . Will it be cool?—will it be kind?" (XXII). Finally she has freedom to read the precious document, and for privacy mounts with her candle to the attic of the school—where, we have been told earlier, "the ghostly Nun of the garden had once been seen" (XIV). The nun appears; Lucy cries out, and runs below to apprise Mme. Beck. In her haste she loses Graham's letter: "'My letter! my letter!' I panted and plained, almost beside myself." But Graham, by chance

visiting the school at that moment, finds it for her, and returns it.

It is never clear—and it is one of Charlotte's best touches to his character, which has many ambiguities—whether or not Graham knows of Lucy's love for him, and, if he knows, to what extent he encourages it. Are they provocative or professional, his attentions to Lucy, such as taking her to the theatre after the nun's first visitation? His motive seems to Lucy simply kindness: "'To keep away the nun,' he said; 'he was determined to dispute with her her prey'" (XXIII). In other words, the actuality of Graham, who is to Lucy the symbol of radiant male energy, will dispel the vision of the nun, arch-emblem of repressive chastity. Ironically it is at the happy moment when Graham unexpectedly arrives to take Lucy to the theatre, that the nun once again, as if in admonition, appears. Again the nun is in the attic where Lucy has gone to fetch a wrap; this time no more than a "solemn light, like a star, but broader," reveals the spectre's presence. But that night she is almost forgotten in the excitement of the drama of "Vashti" (the actress Rachel), whose searing passions predictably both fascinate and repel Lucy. The irony culminates in the reacquaintance on this evening, high point of Lucy and Graham's relationship, of Graham and the young heiress Paulina, whom from then on he is to woo and finally to win.

For seven weeks Lucy is neglected by Graham and his mother, and drags on her life "of privation and small pains." Then, after she becomes a friend of Paulina, whom she too had known in childhood, she is placed to observe the dawn of Graham's and Paulina's love. In a chapter called "A Burial" (XXVI), she entombs the five letters she has received from Graham (she is to receive a total of five visits from the nun) under the "Methusaleh" pear tree in the *allée défendue* near where, the legend goes, that other nun was long ago interred. Some time later she is to ask herself about Graham, "Was this feeling dead? I do not know, but it was buried. Sometimes I thought the tomb unquiet, and dreamed strangely of disturbed earth, and of hair, still golden and living, obtruded through coffin-chinks" (XXXI). Perhaps she even expects the nun again to confront her when she has sealed the letters in earth, for, this third time, she boldly confronts the tall black figure: "'Who are you? and why do you come to me?' . . . I stretched out my hand, for I meant to touch her. She seemed to recede. I drew nearer: her recession, still silent, became swift," and she vanishes. Lucy is "a little desperate," as she says; the meaningfulness of the nun's appearance at this moment of "burial"—when the first two visits had marked moments of happy omen in her relationship with "Dr. John"—is too shockingly pointed and intimi-

dating. "This time there was no Dr. John to whom to have recourse: there was no one to whom I dared whisper the words 'I have again seen the nun.'" "

But the countermovement of her love for M. Paul has already begun. It is during an evening walk with Paul in *l'allée défendue*, where the subject of conversation has been the nun, that she, for the fourth time, appears. She interrupts what is close to a love scene with her "angry rush" and "fierce gesture"; and nature reacts with Lucy to her warning: "As she went, the wind rose sobbing; the rain poured wild and cold; the whole night seemed to feel her" (XXXI). That Paul is closer to Lucy than Graham, or, it may be, "righter" for her, in spite of their various quarrels and their difference in religious faith, can be seen not only in such verbal detail as that he is several times called "monkish" (e.g., XXXV), but also in the fact that the nun is visible to him as well as to Lucy, as it has never been to Graham; in fact Graham has regarded Lucy's spectre as no more than the product of a nervous malady.

Despite the nun's intervention, the love of Paul and Lucy continues to grow. And at this point nuns begin to proliferate in the story. There is already the buried nun who makes her symbolic entrances into Lucy's life, and there is Lucy herself, whose nun-like features have been described. Now the figure of Justine Marie, the betrothed of M. Paul twenty years ago, becomes central. That engagement had been broken off because of Paul's poverty; his intended had withdrawn to a convent, "and there died in her noviciate" (XXXIV). After Lucy sees a portrait of Justine Marie, to whose memory she learns, or thinks she learns, that Paul is faithful, she asks, and her second question is the significant one, "Was I then to be frightened by Justine Marie? Was the picture of a pale dead nun to rise, an eternal barrier?" (XXXV). But Paul assures her that it would be "folly" to connect his dead fiancée with the apparition (XXXV). He is in effect saying that he is free of that old romance and is urging her to see the nun who has visited them as an external and somehow explicable phenomenon, not as a very personal portent of what Lucy herself, psychologically if not in fact, could become. It is an option for life, a plea that the dead remain dead.

But the dead Justine Marie seems bewilderingly about to resurrect. It is the evening of a grand fête in the park of Villette (XXXVIII-XXXIX). Most of the principal personages in the novel attend as participants; Lucy, fighting off by sheer willpower the effect of the opiate Mme. Beck has had administered to her so that she will not seek out Paul before his departure for Guadeloupe, follows them, an obscure and semi-disguised figure who, characteristically, remains at the periphery of events, keenly observant. From M. Paul's friends and relations she overhears much

talk of a Justine Marie, who is someone's—it is not clear whose—fiancée. The uncertainty adds to the drugged confusion of Lucy's poor mind. She recapitulates her experience of the nun: "I called up to memory the pictured nun on the panel; present to my mind was the sad love-story [M. Paul's]; I saw in thought the vision of the garret, the apparition of the alley, the strange birth of the berceau." Even when the living Justine Marie appears, no ghost but a solidly fair and nubile girl whose name is inherited from her aunt, Paul's betrothed, Lucy concludes that this, then, is the bride destined for her lover on his return from the Indies ("the blooming and charming Present prevailed over the Past; and, at length, his nun was indeed buried").

Hers is not. She leaves the brilliant park and returns to the dark little street of the Rue Fossette. She tries to comfort herself with the thought that it is best to know the truth, whose "dread glance" she has "dared." But these rationalizations only serve to temporize; she is not to be spared. Its significance now openly malevolent, she sees, when she has arrived at her bed in the dormitory, "What dark, usurping shape, supine, long and strange?" It is the nun, occupying Lucy's own place. Lucy's nerves, "tempered by late incidents . . . disdained hysteria," and she tears up the bolster tricked out in black stole and white veil and reads the mocking words on a note attached: "The nun of the attic bequeaths to Lucy Snowe her wardrobe. She will be seen in the Rue Fossette no more."

The final few pages of the novel, where we learn that it was Ginevra's lover de Hamal who had dressed himself like a nun as a prankish aid in his stealthy visits to the school, culminating in his elopement with Ginevra on this night of the fête, or where we see the last love scene between Paul and Lucy in the little house he has rented for her, for her own residence and school, before his departure for the long journey from which he is not to return—these pages are delicately and vigorously done, but the meaning of Lucy's destiny is the shape that has usurped her narrow bed.

Lucy has learned more than the explanation of the black figure that has pursued her. Unlike Ginevra, who has sped off to her thoughtless fulfillments with de Hamal, unlike Paulina, in her genuinely blessed union with Graham, Lucy's victory is only that of an acquired fortitude and understanding. Telling her story as an old woman, she can look back on her life with stoic equanimity; her narrative tone, for all the dramatic passion she recounts, is detached, reflective, and serene. In this her last book there is far more satire, humor, and wit than in Charlotte's three earlier novels; like her heroine, she had attained to the objectivity that permits comedy. Her view had grown larger, she knew more, and like Lucy she had come to accept. Her hard-earned poise was the product of the inevit-

able attrition of ideals and the devaluation of romance that are the common sign or cause of maturity. In Lucy's story the nun is, on the surface, no more than a Gothic, extreme, and ridiculous figure; but in the psychological depths of Lucy's development, the nun is the operative

device by which she attains adulthood and, if not happiness, a wise acceptance of those deprivations for which she was, from the beginning, intended.

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Childhood and the Victorian Ideal of Manliness in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*

Henry R. Harrington

THE EUCHARISTIC VISION of the Holy Grail that is revealed to Galahad and denied to Lancelot in *Idylls of the King* (VIII, 464-484) divides the Knights of the Roundtable into the sexually pure and impure. Purity in Galahad's vision is rendered as "the fiery face as of a child," and eventually Galahad himself merges with that vision in an apocalyptic ascension "when the heavens open'd and blazed." That salvation should be a consequence of chastity explains the angelic appearance of the children of Victorian literature from John Bold, Jr., in *Barchester Towers* to Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*. Yet, staring sullenly across library stacks at these cherubic faces are the dark faces of their contemporaries, the Artful Dodger and Heathcliff. Whereas Mowgli and his spiritual brothers embody untrammelled natural innocence, the Artful Dodger's fraternity are characterized by their shrewdness and, as Arnold Kettle has demonstrated, their rebelliousness.¹ The worldly consciousness of these children protests against the characterization of their interest in women simply as mothers; the sexuality of Nancy and Cathy is as undeniably real as the rebellious energy of the Artful Dodger and Heathcliff. One set of children seems to confirm Victorian piousness, the other, by dint of its vitality, to deny it. The child's "fiery face," then, is more ambiguous than Tennyson admits: the price of childhood's sexual innocence is an inability to confront the harsh social world beyond the playpen or the perimeter of the friendly jungle.

Steven Marcus, in *The Other Victorians*, discovers the same ambiguous response to children in William Acton's *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1857), an "objective" account of human sexuality barely distinguishable from pornography. It seems that Acton

is unable to discover anything "to mediate between these two extreme states [sexual innocence and sexual "precocity"], no middle ground or connection between them. And the contradiction that children are both at once remains altogether unconscious."² Both visions of childhood are the products of the "logic of fantasy" and can admit no bridge of consecutive thought or of realism. But a bridge, a third state of childhood sexuality, did exist in Victorian literature and coincidentally appeared the same year as Acton's work. *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, by Thomas Hughes, reveals an ethical middle ground between supra-ethical innocents and the subethical rebels. Allowing little room for fantasy of the kind his contemporaries were indulging, Hughes set himself to the task of describing manliness as it was acquired and embodied in the Victorian child. With a realistic technique remarkable only for its application to childhood, Hughes seriously addressed Wordsworth's dictum, "the child is father to the man."

I

From the beginning of Hughes's novel it is apparent that he shares the peculiar and largely dominant attitude of other contemporary writers that moral growth and sexual energy are exclusively male phenomena. Even at ten years, Tom wants to be free from his mother and her maids in order to develop his athletic and masculine skills, which they try to discourage as unmannerly. Tom Brown, from the moment he escapes from his nurse, begins "fraternizing with all the village boys." Hughes makes clear, however, that this descent into the lower classes is a prelude to manliness rather than an initiation into sexual experience: "The village boys were full as manly and honest and certainly purer than those in a higher rank." With

1. *An Introduction to the English Novel* (London, 1953), pp. 123-139.

2. *The Other Victorians* (New York, 1966), p. 15.

this disclaimer Hughes balances democratic and pastoral "purity" against imputations of sodomitic "impurity" among lower class youth.³ So Tom continues to play at "wrestling, running, and climbing" with the village boys free from the taint of both women and the lower classes' childhood knowledge of sex.

Still lacking moral discipline, but sharing the animal vitality of the Artful Dodger and the innocence of Mowgli, Tom travels from his Berkshire home to a private school. Tom is singularly unsuited for the close supervision and limited muscular activities there. The fault Hughes found with private schools lay in their "constant supervision," a theory that was doomed in practice to deteriorate into "bullying" and "talebearing" that "sapped all the foundations of school morality." While far less cruel and repressive than Mr. Squeers's institution in Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), the school seems to cultivate secrecy and suspicion. Hughes almost certainly would have agreed with the Rev. John Chillingly, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Kenelm Chillingly* (1870), who arrived at the conclusion regarding private schools that "There is not manliness enough in those academies; no fagging and very little fighting. . . . Nothing muscular in the system."⁴ Fully aware of his hero's difficulties, then, Hughes removes Tom from private school by an honored convention of Victorian fiction; a fever breaks out in the town where the school is located and Tom is removed to a higher sphere, Rugby School, where the rest of the novel is set.

The difference between the private school and the public one that Tom now attends is largely of increased freedom and arises out of Hughes's Protestant mistrust of imposed systems (religious as well as educational) that restrict human behavior by defining human nature too narrowly. Hughes recognized, as perhaps no other of his contemporaries did, that the complexity of human nature involved children no less than adults. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays* the relationships between the characters assume social as well as sexual configurations, and indeed, as we might expect, the two are closely related. The corollary of freedom in Hughes's writings is democracy (before he wrote *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Hughes was a member of the Christian Socialist group that gathered around F. D. Maurice and after that became a Radical member of Parliament). He tended, therefore, to regard public school education as an education in democracy. Nor was he far from one of the fundamental tenets of British public schools in the nineteenth century: Walter Bagehot de-

scribed the leveling process that occurred as "removeable inequality."⁵ The inequality was certainly between all classes, but the only ones affected by public schools were the old upper classes, the new rich merchant and industrial classes, and the ambiguously defined clergy. Tom Brown belongs to the squirearchy and is thus placed in a mediate position among his fellows, which allows him the kind of interior anonymity that his name suggests. Below him in social class rank is Arthur, the son of a poor Low Church clergyman and "Freethinker" who died treating the poor of his typhus-ridden parish. By virtue of his wealth and "adroit toadyism," Flashman looms menacingly above Tom. Whether the source of Flashman's wealth is new or old money is not clear, but the point of the wealth, that it defines a social extreme, is very clear. Both Arthur and Flashman appear to define sexual extremes as well, and in proportion to their relation to their wealth: the one with the most money is an overt sadist, the one with the least sublimates sexual desire in religious devotion. Tom Brown, as we shall see, experiences sex on a level between these extremes by means of his participation in athletics. The effect on England of the kind of aversion to extremes that operates in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* is described tersely by Mrs. Leavis:

The upper and middle classes, affected by the modern Public School system, which has replaced the famous 'eccentric' Englishman of the Augustan and Georgian ages by the 'simple but virile' type, imposed upon a nation whose governing class had been for several centuries noted as having pronounced (because highly developed) personalities and keen intellectual interests, an ideal whose bywords were correctness and sport. This ideal has had the effect of arresting the development of whole generations at adolescence.⁶

To give perspective to Mrs. Leavis' opprobrium it should be noted that, while Hughes is undeniably turning his back on the "eccentric" Englishman, he is at the same time facing up to the real threats posed by social and sexual extravagances.

II

When the narrator cries in the passion of a rugby game, "Meet them like Englishmen and charge them home," school spirit and national spirit become indistinguishable. This is precisely the effect of games that Charles Kingsley, Hughes's close friend, had anticipated four years earlier

3. Marcus notes that in such balancing efforts "a good deal of collective amnesia must have taken place, and a good deal of folk-knowledge and traditional rural lore been repressed or denied" (p. 15).

4. Knebworth edition (London, 1892), XXX, 21.

5. Harold Nicholson, *Good Behaviour: Being a Study of Certain Types of Civility* (London, 1955), p. 263.

6. Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London, 1932), p. 190.

when he was arguing shorter working hours for factory laborers:

You may smile; but try the experiment, and see how as the chest expands, the muscle hardens . . . and sound sleep refreshes the lad for his next day's work, the temper will become more patient, the spirits more genial; there will be less tendency to brood angrily over inequalities of fortune, and to accuse society for evils which she knows not as yet how to cure.⁷

Athletics, in short, stem revolution. No less did they stem the anti-social threat of prostitution: the only way, said Bulwer-Lytton in *England and the English*, to correct prostitution was to "banish thought" by entering athletic contests.⁸ Hughes's faith in athletics coupled with his distrust of extremes, then, was by no means particularly original. Yet, he did place athletics in the one context, the public school, where they could almost completely dominate "thought." So, Tom learns, as Kingsley would have the workers do, to accept the status distinctions based on athletic ability and finds his "respect increases" for those players ahead of him in rank. Rendered in Freudian terms, this security, derived from Tom's confirmed social position in the hierarchy of and in games, is the result of "transferring the instinctual aims into such directions that cannot be frustrated by the other world."⁹

The concept of manliness as it occurs in Hughes's writings is inextricably bound up with these two fundamental presumptions: that one's place in society should be related more to ability than birth and that "instinctual" energy (for which we may read sexual energy) can be channelled into nondisruptive social activities. The word manliness has a venerable history in English literature, but underlying all of its modern meanings is the common theme of sociality. When Coleridge originally appended to the title, *Aids to Reflection*, the phrase in *the Formation of a Manly Character* (1825), "manly" seemed to denote a quality based on man's ability to reflect on "a higher good" that would distinguish him from the animals. There is something of Tillich's "ultimate concern" in Coleridge's "manliness" in that both terms are expressive of a fundamental, yet central component of religious life. Much of Coleridge's definition survives in Hughes so that he could write a book in 1889 called *The Manliness of Christ* and could write in *Tom Brown*:

. . . [Rugby] was no fool's or sluggard's paradise into which [Tom] had wandered by chance, but a battlefield ordained from old, where there are no specta-

tors, but the youngest must take his side, and the stakes are life and death.

But there is another voice implicit in this description of Rugby, that of Thomas Arnold, who was Hughes's headmaster at Rugby and a major figure in his novel. Arnold acknowledged Coleridge's influence on his thought but narrowed Coleridge's definition of manliness to mean a quality that could only be achieved at the expense of the moral irresponsibility of the juvenile. Rugby school boys found favor with headmaster Arnold only when they ceased to be boys in spirit or character. In *Tom Brown* this attitude is softened somewhat so that we find Arnold "with all his heart and soul and strength, striving against whatever was mean and unmanly and unrighteous in our little world." At work here is Hughes's ideal of manliness, which opposes not so much childishness as "effeminacy." Still manliness was a moral and religious quality but now with sexual connotations aimed at redirecting rather than denying sexual desires in children. To again quote Kingsley, "The day of 'Pietism' is gone, and Tom Brown is a heavy stone in its grave."¹⁰ Men, by virtue of manliness, are accountable not only to God but to their fellow men.

The measure of manliness is the ability to withstand pain. The very existence of pain in Tom Brown's world marks it off from the world of primal innocence that was Mowgli's. And the experience of pain overshadows all other childish emotional experiences that if indulged might appear "effeminate": "Don't ever talk about home, or your mother and sisters" is Tom's warning to Arthur. This fear of emotional excess eventually became endemic to the English character: "It is not that the Englishman can't feel," writes E. M. Forster, "it is that he is afraid to feel. He had been taught at his public school that feeling is bad form."¹¹ Feeling, as a result of this attitude, is not expressed and thus manliness begins to resemble masochism.

The turning point of the novel occurs in the famous "roasting scene," where Tom finally confronts and refuses to yield to the sadistic torture of Flashman: "'Very well then, let's roast him,' cried Flashman, and catches hold of Tom by the collar. . . . His shoulders are pushed against the mantlepiece, and he is held tight by main force before the fire, Flashman drawing his trousers tight by way of extra torture." The immediate cause of the roasting is the money that Tom has won in a horse lottery; Flashman tries to extort the lottery ticket. The relation of money to sex is common to the Victorian novel but somewhat sur-

7. *Sanitary and Social Lectures and Essays* (London, 1889), pp. 210-212.

8. (London, 1833), I, 233.

9. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (London, 1955), p. 32.

10. Letter to Hughes, 1857, quoted in Francis Kingsley, *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of His Life*, 2 vols. (London, 1877), II, 27.

11. *Abinger Harvest* (London, 1936), p. 6.

prising in this particular context. What it seems to acknowledge here is the intimate connection of the manly ability to withstand pain and the powerful attraction of money; for in this crucial scene Tom completes the journey to independence that began with his break from women. Here he becomes independent of the power of Flashman that originated in his wealth and found expression in his sadism. But Tom's independence here finds expression not in rebellion as it occurs in Heathcliff, for example, but in passivity and, to a certain extent, depersonalization. The relation of money and manliness is founded on the deliberate rejection of a particularized identity, of eccentricity. Tom's denial of painful emotions, as he refuses to cry out, is in a way a symbolic death followed by a second birth; indeed his first words as consciousness returns is "Mother!" This scene is quite literally an initiation into the mysteries of sex and money, the one being tied to the other, and the state beyond initiation is manly independence.

If the roasting passage demonstrates through Flashman the danger of not maintaining a strict control on the psychic economy of the libido, it also indicates that there is a very thin line even among school children separating repressed and overt sexual desire. Generally, the athletic life at Rugby (which Flashman significantly avoided) appears to be designed to hold that line by translating sexual energy into socially acceptable forms, but sublimation also occurs for the same purpose. Thus, avoiding the obvious problems with having Tom actually enjoy his pain during recovery, Hughes conveniently substitutes a verse from a hymn in Tom's mind: "Where the wicked cease from troubling/And the weary are at rest."

With the timing of Cordelia as she takes over the Fool's role of companion for Lear, Arthur replaces Flashman, who has been expelled from the school. Arthur, appointed by Arnold as Tom's ward, is perfectly suited to Tom's hymnic state of mind, but Hughes clearly was not comfortable with the subliminal influence of Arthur. For Arthur, even in his unquestionable innocence, has the look of a masturbator about him, fearing as he does "sleeping in the room with strange boys" and preferring contemplative solitude to fellowship with his mates. So despite the fact that Arthur in prayer reflects "Arnold's manly piety," he is advised by Arnold to take in "some Rugby air, and cricket, and . . . some good long walks." Arthur soon becomes athletic, and Tom in his manliness comes to value piety and sports. Hughes's faith in God was second to his faith in cricket when matters of sex were at stake.

III

Marcus in his discussion of the literature of flagellation describes as one of its characteristics that the dialogue "is unmistakably the language of the public school."¹² This literature reverts to childhood experiences of caning, but such experiences must be distinguished from Tom's at the hands of Flashman. Flashman's sadism manifests a dangerous anti-social impulse that belongs to a category of sexual expression that includes revolution and prostitution. But caning as it occurs in *Tom Brown* is an overt expression of social order that opposes such chaos. Thus Arnold asks the sixth former, Holmes, to beat a boy in another house because the sixth former in that house lacked the muscles to cause real pain: "Holmes has plenty of strength," observed Arnold. "I wish all the sixth had as much. We must have it here, if we are to keep order at all." Flagellation and pain, when backed by moral authority such as Arnold's, promote manliness; as Kingsley put it, "pain [is] necessary to bring out the masculine qualities."¹³ The most curious aspect of the masculinity of manliness, of course, is its implicit fear of overt sexuality. To young schoolboys, Hughes warned:

Let me urge you, by all that you hold most sacred, to avoid secret sins of impurity—*scelus onanis*—the source of the most fatal results in after years, and the destruction of all that is pure in a young man's heart and life. I could tell you of souls hopelessly besmirched and befouled, and of lives utterly ruined and lost, by this deadly habit.¹⁴

Although, as we have seen, manliness has a sexual orientation, it is a covert one. In a sense this hidden meaning of manliness as a youthful ideal addresses the "secret sins" on their own level, the unconscious. While the outward forms of manliness, especially athletics, were eminently public, the meaning was essentially private. While it is easy to dispose of this attitude toward sex as prudish, it is more enlightening to take Hughes at his word: masculinity is essentially a social condition. To regard it as anything else is to fall in one or the other antithetical positions of his contemporaries: either masculinity is to be ignored in children altogether, in which case they depart from the ranks of male humanity and join the angels, or masculinity is given no moral quotient and is debased into pure animality like the schoolboy fraternity in Rudyard Kipling's *Stalky and Co*. What Hughes proposes instead is that "strength, courage, and endurance, the products of athletic sports, ought to be cultivated, for they are given to us to protect the weak, to subdue the earth, to fight for our homes and country, if necessary."¹⁵

12. Marcus, p. 263.

13. *Letters*, II, 316.

14. Thomas Hughes, *Notes for Boys on Morals, Mind and Manners*

(London, 1855), p. 65.

15. Thomas Hughes, *The Scouring of the White Horse* (London, 1892), p. 249.

By transforming sexual energy into social, public commitment, Hughes was affirming a human communion that has largely disappeared. That the basis for the communion should be the common experience of pain is surprising only in its modernity. But it would be a mistake to regard pain in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* out of its public school context; it is not a metaphor for existence as it is for Sartre, for example. One has only to look at the fate of the black Earl of Clydesdale in G. A. Lawrence's *Barren Honour* (1862) to see the importance of the public school setting: "If any ordinary social danger had presented itself, he would scarcely have quailed before it. . . . But it so happened (he had not been at a public school) that in all his life he had never seen a blow stricken in anger."¹⁶ The Earl simply lacks the experience of public school to put pain and anger within the security of a public school reference, the result being that he is unable to "protect the weak," as Hughes would have it. The Victorian experience of the world was divided, as Masao Miyoshi has demonstrated in *The Divided Self*, into various configurations of public and private. Regarded in terms of its effects, manliness was a public virtue that was intended to fit into the Victorian intellectual impulse toward social reform; but in terms of its cause, it was a private virtue that offered substitutive gratification for the sexual desire that might otherwise be expressed in masturbation, sadism, or other prohibited sexual activities.

Yet, despite the straightforwardness of manliness, a problem remained. How long could Tom Brown uphold an implicit vow of chastity and remain physically fit? With Flashman removed from the picture and Arthur turned into a cricket player, athletics absorbs all the random energy of the schoolboys, but how long could Tom Brown uphold his implicit vow after he left Rugby? Not long, barring such an ascension as Galahad's. The cult of manliness was inevitably a cult of youth. Its emphasis on athletics as a means of diminishing sexual anxiety left out of account middle and old age, not to mention certain eventual contact with the opposite sex.

Lewis Mumford regards the devotion to sports that was an outgrowth of the cult of manliness as altering the whole conception of a well-balanced environment.¹⁷ His point is not difficult to see if one takes seriously Mrs. Leavis' judgment, mentioned above, that development of whole gen-

erations of Englishmen was arrested at adolescence. But even so, this judgment is somewhat misleading given the obvious fact that Englishmen continued to reproduce despite an alarming increase of professional athletics. Hughes was aware of the obvious limitations of his alternative to sexual innocence and sexual precocity, and his concessions to these limitations is interesting for the light it casts on the Victorian institution of marriage.

In *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861), the sequel to *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Tom finally confronts the opposite sex as desirable. But his rhetorical question, "Can there be any true manliness without purity?" suggests that the ending of the novel, Tom's marriage, is also the ending of manliness. For much of the novel Hughes is able to uphold in his hero the ideal of chaste manliness by giving women an ideal status that operates as the spiritual corollary of manliness. But Tom's fall is adumbrated when he carries his ideal in his arms: "For the credit of muscular Christianity, one must say that it was not the weight, but the tumult in his own inner man which made her bearer totter." No amount of athletic training could cover such a situation; while contact lasted, sexual excitement overrode Tom's carefully programmed circuits. And predictably, sexual excitement is characterized as physical weakness, the diminution of the most characteristic physical quality of manliness, strength. The crisis of sex does not pass until Tom is safely married at which point the tone of the novel shifts completely away from the heartiness of the earlier novel to a kind of mellowness tokened by the recognition of the "darkness in one and around one." The implication here as in most Victorian literature that deals with the topic is that marriage, though it contains sexual desire in a social institution, diminishes manliness. Like Tennyson's Arthur, Tom Brown must abandon in marriage the child's "fiery face" and settle for a compromised manliness upon which heterosexuality has intruded. In marriage, sexual precocity and sexual innocence, though presumably either is possible, lose their meaning. Manliness does not so much lose its meaning as its energy. It provides Tom with a vision of the "new world," but that vision turns out to be a fallen one: the "new world" is "the old, old world after all, and nothing else."

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16. 2 vols. (London, 1862), I, 207.

17. *The Culture of Cities* (London, 1940), pp. 428-429.

A Reading of Morris' *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*

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PRE-RAPHAELITE POETRY has the reputation of being "overloaded and too merely poetical, without relevance to anything but previous literature."¹ One might qualify this remark by saying that Pre-Raphaelite poetry relates as much to itself in an introverted or narcissistic way as it does to previous literature. As Rossetti says in "The Sonnet," poetry should be "Of its own arduous fulness reverent." Most of the sonnets in *The House of Life* deal with the beauty of love and of the beloved, and these are linked throughout with art: "Beauty like hers is genius." Through its focus on the experience of ideal beauty, *The House of Life* becomes self-reflective—on one level, its subject is its own aesthetic identity.

When we move from *The House of Life* to *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, we enter a less claustrophobic and apparently less narcissistic world. It has been said that Morris' poems offer "no cruxes to interpretation,"² and this is true in the sense that they are not autobiographical and seem otherwise to exist in total isolation from the present. In Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, the world of Arthur reflects the world of Victoria. But Morris' medieval world, far from reflecting the nineteenth century, seems intended merely as an escape from the present. Here, as in *The Earthly Paradise*, Morris evidently bids us to "Forget six counties overhung with smoke." But Morris' escapism, and that of Pre-Raphaelite poetry generally, is so self-conscious that it succeeds in reminding us of what it would lull us away from. That is, Morris' escapist, "idle singer" stance does as much to suggest the inadequacy and ugliness of the present as to allow us to forget our troubles in the manner, say, of an Agatha Christie mystery. Truly escapist art comes to us with no strings attached, but Morris' poetry reflects reality precisely by refusing to reflect reality.

In any case, while it is true that Morris' poetry lacks the thematic freight that, for example, Tennyson gives to his *Idylls*, it is not true that it is as void of contemporary relevance as Morris himself suggests. *The Defence of Guenevere* does contain "cruxes to interpretation," if by this phrase is meant thematic material bearing on the problems of modern life. Quite simply, it takes as its central theme the self-reflective, "aesthetic" one of its own signifi-

cance, or of the significance generally of artificial beauty in an inimical world. How conscious Morris was of dealing with such a theme is unclear; William Fredeman speaks of "the failure of the Pre-Raphaelites to clarify their initial aims and principles," and of "their willingness to acquiesce in vague and half-formed ideas."³ Whatever conclusions one reaches about Morris' themes must be qualified by this remark, for he is not as conscious or controlled an artist as Tennyson or Arnold or even Rossetti.

There are several ways in which *The Defence of Guenevere* presents us with questions about its own identity and about the nature of artistic beauty. Most obviously, the poems form a series of contrasts between the real and the ideal, or between harsh fact and lovely fantasy. In his essay on "Aesthetic Poetry," Pater emphasized the "dreamlight" or fairyland aspect of *The Defence of Guenevere*, but others have emphasized a very different aspect: "All these blood feuds, foul deeds and anguish are far from the visions of a sentimental dreamer. . . ."⁴ Morris' volume, of course, contains both the "dreamlight" of poems like "Rapunzel" and "The Blue Closet," and the stark realism of poems like "The Haystack in the Floods" and "Sir Peter Harpdon's End," for these are the extremes between which all life is torn. The characteristic Pre-Raphaelite mixture of realism and fantasy is here something more than just a mixture: it is rather a conflict of opposites. Morris' poems are about the temptation of beauty and the lure of the unreal, and about the consequences of following what Yeats was to call "the red-rose-bordered hem" of ideal loveliness. That is, they are variations on the True Thomas or "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" legend endemic to nineteenth-century culture. When Sir Peter Harpdon likens his situation to that of the Trojans, fighting in the foolish and yet noble cause of Helen's beauty, he offers us a microcosm of the story that runs through the whole volume. For the sake of Helen's great beauty—of ideal beauty—the Trojans abandoned reason and reality:

There! they were wrong, as wrong as men could be;
For, as I think, they found it such delight
To see fair Helen going through their town:
Yea, a little common thing she did
(As stooping to pick a flower) seemed so strange,

1. Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (New York, 1961), p. 69.
2. Howard Mumford Jones, "The Pre-Raphaelites," in *The Victorian Poets*, ed. Frederic E. Faverty (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p. 192.
3. William E. Fredeman, "The Pre-Raphaelites," in *The Victorian Poets*, ed. Faverty (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), p. 259.

4. Philip Henderson, "Introduction," *The Letters of William Morris to His Family and Friends* (London, 1950), p. xxviii. Quotations from *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* are from Cecil Y. Lang, ed., *The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Circle*, Riverside Editions (Boston, 1968).

So new in its great beauty, that they said:
 "Here we will keep her living in this town,
 Till all burns up together." And so, fought,
 In a mad whirl of knowing they were wrong. . . .
 (193-201)

As in a myriad other expressions of romanticism, beauty is seen leading men astray, untuning them from life. The characters in *The Defence of Guenevere* are near kin to Keats's pale knight and perhaps distant kin to Prufrock at the other end of the age, who has heard "the mermaids singing each to each."

Morris seems to have arranged the poems in his volume in pairs, and one effect of this is to accentuate the contrast between harsh fact and lovely fantasy, between life and art, that is their central theme. Meredith B. Raymond has observed that the four Arthurian poems, standing first in the volume, form pairs or "diptychs."⁵ Guenevere's "defence" is followed by her meeting with Lancelot in "King Arthur's Tomb," and "Sir Galahad" is followed by "The Chapel in Lyonesse," a continuation of Galahad's story. But it is not just the Arthurian poems that fall into pairs; the same is true for many and perhaps all of the poems in the volume. "Father John's War-Song," for instance, is followed by "Sir Giles' War-Song." "Old Love," in which the aged narrator mourns for the past when he served his duke and his beautiful duchess, whose beauty now he likens to "faded summer lilies," is followed by the fresh "Gilliflower of Gold," in which youthful energy rides forth into the thick of combat, love, and life. In "The Sailing of the Sword," Lord Roland proves to be a faithless lover, abandoning the girl who narrates the poem; in "Spellbound," the male narrator is a faithful lover, but trapped by sorcery in an unchanging autumnal landscape. "The Wind" and "The Blue Closet" form perhaps the most intricate pair in terms of imagery. In the first, the plaintive refrain states that the wind is wandering "the lily-seed to find"; in the second, "the wind plays . . . a knell for the dead," and the ghost of "lord Arthur" is announced by "a lily red" that shoots up through the floor from the land of death. Other parallels of imagery and situation make it imperative to read the two poems together and suggest that the bereft, ghostly lover in "The Wind" may be Louise's lost "lord Arthur" in "The Blue Closet."

These examples show the pairing of poems at work in *The Defence of Guenevere*, though they perhaps do not reveal a simple contrast between ideal and real, art and life. Such a contrast is much more obvious in the case of "Sir Peter Harpdon's End" and its mate, "Rapunzel." The first tells a realistic story, wholly without fairyland elements, of the foiling of love by war, treachery, and re-

venge. As a fantasy in which true love triumphs over jealous witchcraft, "Rapunzel" is simply its opposite. Love, the worship of Beauty, is destroyed in the realistic world of "Sir Peter Harpdon" or "The Haystack in the Floods"; it can endure only in the ideal world of "Rapunzel" or of the moon in "Two Red Roses Across the Moon." If, as I believe, Morris intentionally paired his poems, the contrasts between them reinforce the contrast between harsh fact and lovely fantasy, life and art, that is the theme of each poem.

Another way in which Morris' poetry is self-reflective, concerned with its own identity and with the experience of beauty, is through the deployment of a pattern of artwork images. There is, for instance, the arras that Lancelot describes in "King Arthur's Tomb":

Back to the palace, ere the sun grew high,
 We went, and in a cool green room all day
 I gazed upon the arras giddily,
 Where the wind set the silken kings a-sway.
 (85-89)

Morris, of course, draws the equation between the beauty of a woman and the beauty of art that is present in Rossetti and, later, in Yeats. "My lady seems of ivory," he says in "Praise of My Lady," and he proceeds to describe her as an art object "forged by God most wonderfully" and to charge all who see her "to kneel before her." Similarly, in "The Gilliflower of Gold" and "The Eve of Crecy," the knights' visions of their ladies' beauty transfigure the grim violence of reality and inspire them to heroic action. Love is the worship of Beauty with a capital "B," and the courtly love between Morris' knights and ladies involves attitudes towards art in an obviously more important way than attitudes towards marriage and adultery.

More significantly, in "Concerning Geffray Teste Noire," against a background of ambush and massacre, we witness the imaginary creation by Sir John of Newcastle of a story of ideal beauty and courtly love inspired by his finding the skeletons of a knight and his lady. So intense is Sir John's poetic vision that it seems for a moment as if the lady has arisen from death and he is in love with her. His vision is broken by the unsuccessful attempt in which he takes part to trap Geffray, but afterwards he returns to his castle with the bones of the unfortunate knight and lady, and there he has a "painted" chapel erected, wherein the sculptor, Jaques Picard, carves effigies for their tomb:

And over it they lay, with stone-white hands
 Clasped fast together hair made bright with gold;
 This Jaques Picard, known through many lands,
 Wrought cunningly; he's dead now—I am old.
 (197-200)

Lang uses the term "diptych" in his notes, p. 511.

5. Meredith B. Raymond, "The Arthurian Group in *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*," *VP* (Summer 1966), pp. 213-218.

For a moment, it has seemed to Sir John that the imagination could transcend time and death, but this was only an illusion. The tale ends with an assertion of mortality. Imaginative vision has the power to create lifelike beauty, but the beauty Sir John so vividly dreamt is now the attribute of the tomb wrought by Jaques Picard, himself no longer living. The poem is about the beauty of love and of an imagined lady as opposed to the ugly reality of Geffray Teste Noire, violence, and death, and both the central story and the conclusion focus on acts of artistic creation.

A similar emphasis on artistic creation comes at the close of "Sir Peter Harpdon's End," where the bereaved Alice says:

yea, perhaps they will,
When many years are past, make songs of us;
God help me, though, truly I never thought
That I should make a story in this way,
A story that his eyes can never see.

(715-719)

Following Alice's speech, "one sings from outside" a song about Lancelot, exemplifying the sort of transformation of life into unreal art that Alice sadly predicts for herself and Sir Peter and that occurs in the erection of chapel and tomb at the end of "Geffray Teste Noire." The conclusions of both poems involve acts of artistic creation and suggest not only that art endures while reality passes away, but also that art is an inadequate substitute for life. It requires no great stretch of logic to see in "painted" chapel and tomb and in the song about Lancelot adumbrations of Yeats's "self-born mockers of man's enterprise" or echoes of Keats's Grecian Urn. The art object—urn, tomb, ballad, icon, or golden bird—"mocks" us with the thought of an impossible timelessness.

When Queen Guenevere in the title poem bids her accusers "say no rash word / Against me, being so beautiful" (223-224), she is asking them to weigh moral values against aesthetic values. The substance of her "defence" is largely that she is so beautiful and love is so beautiful that she ought to be forgiven:

will you dare,
When you have looked a little on my brow,
To say this thing is vile?

(236-238)

And Guenevere says that on the day when Lancelot and she first came together, "I was half mad with beauty." In the four Arthurian poems, the worship of Beauty, represented by the love of Lancelot and Guenevere, clashes with the worship of Christ. Arthur and Christ are in the right,

but they also stand for an unappealing puritanism and an ugly reality that the whole volume, with its "aesthetic" stance, seems to repudiate. Christ tells Sir Galahad not to envy Lancelot and Guenevere, because

Her warm arms round his neck half-throttle ME,
The hot love-tears burn deep like spots of lead,
Yea, and the years pass quick. . . .

("Sir Galahad," 109-111)

Galahad does not exactly follow this order, but ironically winds up, in "The Chapel in Lyonesse," imagining the reunion of Sir Ozana and his lady, dreaming of love much as Sir John dreams in "Geffray Teste Noire":

Ozana, shall I pray for thee?
Her cheek is laid to thine;
No long time hence, also I see
Thy wasted fingers twine
Within the tresses of her hair
That shineth gloriously,
Thinly outspread in the clear air
Against the jasper sea.⁶

So the four Arthurian poems end, not with the discovery of the grail, but with a vision of love and beauty—the same vision that permeates the rest of the volume. In terms of the pairing of poems, "The Defence of Guenevere" is a defense of the worship of Beauty, but is followed by a faltering renunciation of that worship in "King Arthur's Tomb." This order seems to be reversed in the next two poems. "Sir Galahad" describes the renunciation of worldly love and beauty by Galahad, but we find him envisioning these wistfully, if not actually straying from Christ, at the end of "The Chapel in Lyonesse." Morris may be suggesting, however, not that Christ represents forbidding reality, but that He represents a higher and more demanding sort of love and beauty than the worldly love of Lancelot and Guenevere. In the same way that we can see in the carved tomb at the end of "Geffray Teste Noire" a symbol both for the harsh reality of time and death and for timeless perfection, so in the Arthurian poems Christianity is seen both as "grim curses out of Peter and of Paul" ("King Arthur's Tomb," 311) and as love and beauty more perfect than those in life.

There is a strange irresolution and uncertainty, at any rate, about the guilt of Lancelot and Guenevere and about just what Christ does represent in these poems, suggesting Morris' uncertainty about the morality of an art divorced from social reality. At the end of "Rapunzel," the voice of the Witch sounds very much like the prohibitive voice of Christ in "Sir Galahad," cursing the love between Sebald

that makes perfect sense if the poem is taken out of context—if, that is, one ignores the highly ambivalent treatment of Christ and the moral ambiguities that characterize the rest of the volume.

6. For a very different reading, see Curtis Dahl, "Morris's 'The Chapel in Lyonesse': An Interpretation," *SP*, LI (1954), 482-491. Dahl sees in the poem an uncomplicated pattern of salvation, Galahad bringing enlightenment and grace to Ozana, a reading

and Rapunzel-Guendolen as Christ condemns the love between Lancelot and Guenevere:

Woe! That any man could dare
To climb up the yellow stair,
Glorious Guendolen's golden hair.

In the dreamland of "Rapunzel," triumphant love is opposed by malicious evil, and following the lure of beauty or the stairway of Rapunzel's golden hair is the reverse of sinful. Rapunzel's hair is a kind of Jacob's Ladder, in fact, leading to the forgiveness of sins:

I have heard tales of men, who in the night
Saw paths of stars let down to earth from heaven,
Who follow'd them until they reach'd the light
Wherein they dwell, whose sins are all forgiven. . . .
(51-54)

Wish-fulfillment is the rule in "Rapunzel," but it vanishes in the Arthurian poems. Instead of a jealous witch, Christ confronts Lancelot, Guenevere, and Sir Galahad, and rather than leading to heaven, love or the worship of Beauty may only lead to hell.

The frequency with which Morris associates love, beauty, and art with sinfulness, while at the same time apparently affirming them, suggests his ambivalence about the conflict between life and art that he dramatizes. In "A Good Knight in Prison," Sir Guy speaks of his captors, "these Pagan beasts who love in sin," and of the "vile" things that surround him, but concludes:

Why, all these things I hold them just
Like dragons in a missal-book,
Wherein, whenever we may look,
We see no horror, yea, delight
We have, the colours are so bright;
Likewise we note the specks of white,
And the great plates of burnish'd gold.

(39-45)

Because he is in love, the evil that surrounds Sir Guy loses its horror for him. The metaphor that he applies to his love—the illuminated "missal-book"—presents us again with the equation between the beauty of art and the beauty of love, and it also presents us with a highly ambiguous idea. Sir Guy is saying that love (and therefore art, the "missal-book") has the power of transforming evil, but not clearly of transforming evil into good. On the contrary, the effect of the "missal-book" is to make the "horror" of evil a "delight"—to make it a thing of beauty. Instead of "specks" of sin or blackness, "we note the specks of white"; the beauty of love or of art has the power to deceive by making evil attractive.

The same ambiguity that resides in Sir Guy's "missal-book" metaphor, suggesting Morris' doubts about the morality of the worship of Beauty, is present when Guene-

vere tells her accusers that the choice between heaven and the "earthly paradise" of love was an impossible one for her to make. Suppose, she says, that an angel stood before you bearing two cloths and that "One of these cloths is heaven, and one is hell" (22), and you had to choose one.

"And one of these strange choosing cloths was blue,
Wavy and long, and one cut short and red;
No man could tell the better of the two.

"After a shivering half-hour you said:
'God help! heaven's colour, the blue;' and he said,
'hell.'

Perhaps you then would roll upon your bed,

"And cry to all good men that loved you well,
'Ah Christ! if only I had known, known, known. . . .'"

(34-41)

Not only is the choice between heaven and hell, virtue and love, as Guenevere describes it an impossible one, it is also a choice between two art objects—two painted cloths—or at least between two colors. As in Sir Guy's "missal-book" metaphor, the way these colors represent good and evil is entirely ambiguous and deceptive; Guenevere chooses the "blue of heaven" only to discover that it stands for hell. To accept her "defence" is to accept the argument that the lure of love, beauty, or art may outweigh the claims of good and evil, although we see her suffering for this view and striving to repent in "King Arthur's Tomb." But the meaning of her repentance is dubious, if only because she and Lancelot are so tormented by their forbidden longing for each other that we inevitably sympathize with them. They are not Paolo and Francesca, not clearly in hell, and in fact have been forgiven by Christ, although they don't know this. But their situation is throughout one of intense moral ambiguity, reinforced by the contradictory and deceptive qualities of the artwork imagery. As Lancelot rides towards Glastonbury in "King Arthur's Tomb," he compares Guenevere to a picture of "Maiden Margaret" on "the great church walls" (77-84), but Guenevere describes quite a different painting that shows

Christ sitting with the woman at the well,
And Mary Magdalen repenting there,
Her dimmed eyes scorch'd and red at sight of hell
So hardly 'scaped, no gold light on her hair.

(313-317)

While these pictures are not contradictory or deceptive by themselves, the contrast between them is one of irreconcilable moral extremes.

There is clearly a theme like Tennyson's "Sense at war with Soul" in *The Defence of Guenevere*, presented as the conflict between moral duty and harsh fact on the one hand, and the lures of art, love, and fantasy on the other. But unlike Tennyson, Morris does not resolve the conflict

that he dramatizes. Morris' ambivalence might almost be thought identical to the state of mind in which Lancelot rides to Glastonbury. Lancelot has ridden so far by night and is so weary that "whether good or bad / He was, he knew not" (4-5). He knows that he is "the bravest knight" who has ever fought "in wrong cause or in right," but he does not know whether his life has meant good or evil, and he goes on to imply that he does not know whether his love for Guenevere has been good or evil. Further, the moral positions of other characters are often equally ambiguous and clouded. In "The Haystack in the Floods," for instance, Jehane is trapped and "cannot choose but sin and sin" (96). And in "The Judgement of God," Roger and his father ("Lord Roger") are apparently imperiled by a gang of treacherous "butchers," the Hainaults. But in fact Roger and his father have been guilty of some foul deed—the "wrong" of stanza four—and Roger is preparing to beat Sir Oliver in a "crafty way." "The order'd garden" where Roger's lady walks contains not innocence, but "the biggest roses—any sin," and the "judgement of God" is not finally made, because the poem concludes before the trial by combat begins. What these moral ambiguities throughout the volume produce is an atmosphere of vague guilt and indefinite judgment in which the values of life and art, reality and dream, are suspended in inconclusive opposition. In Tennyson, on the other hand, judgment is passed and there is no moral uncertainty:

And so she throve and prospered; so three years
She prospered; on the fourth she fell,
Like Herod, when the shout was in his ears,
Struck through with pangs of hell.

The poem in *The Defence of Guenevere* where the conflict between art and reality is most fully and explicitly worked out is also the poem that is the most Tennysonian. "Golden Wings" is an allegory about life and art recalling especially "The Palace of Art" and "The Lady of Shalott," although if it is imitative, it also has a loveliness and energy of its own. At the outset, there is the identification of "Ladies' Castle" with both artifice and a perhaps dubious innocence. It stands in "a walléd garden," and over the walls shine "red apples," suggesting the Fall as well as Eden. The "scarlet bricks," the boat of "carven wood," the "painted drawbridge," and the dainty tastes of the five swans all point to artifice.

There were five swans that ne'er did eat
The water-weeds, for ladies came
Each day, and young knights did the same,
And gave them cakes and bread for meat.
(29-33)

The "five swans" perhaps represent the five senses, feasting on the delicate pastries of artifice rather than the ugly

"water-weeds" of nature. Into this Eden of art reality does not penetrate: "Little war that castle knew." War stands here in the same symbolic relationship to love and art as it does elsewhere in the volume, representing grim reality. Therefore, when Jehane expresses her longing for "golden wings" or the outside world, "She took a sword within her hand, / Whose hilts were silver" (109-110). When Jehane abandons the castle, war ensues, and we are left with glimpses of gruesome and treacherous violence that help to explain the significance of violence in a poem like "The Haystack in the Floods." Reality in *The Defence of Guenevere* is "nature red in tooth and claw"; instead of the beneficence of Wordsworthian nature, we get a mere senseless, bloody destructiveness and an undercurrent of emptiness, horror, and futility almost as despairing as that in Thomson's "City of Dreadful Night." Yeats's notion that Morris was "the happiest of poets" is simply a fuzzy notion.

The color scheme of "Golden Wings," moreover, forms a carefully wrought symbolic pattern. The happy lovers of "Ladies' Castle" wear red and white, the spiritual colors worn by Christ and the angels in "Sir Galahad," whereas gold and silver are associated with the love for which Jehane longs, with sunshine and moonlight, and with the outside world of reality, change, and death. Jehane is the only resident of the castle who lacks love. Because of this lack, she casts off her garments of red and white, redness for her now signifying both love and bloodshed:

The water slips,
The red-bill'd moorhen dips.
Sweet kisses on red lips;
Alas! the red rust grips,
And the blood-red dagger rips,
Yet, O knight, come to me! (118-122)

When Jehane leaves in search of "golden wings," death enters the land of red and white, and its palace of art falls into ruin:

The draggled swans most eagerly eat
The green weeds trailing in the moat;
Inside the rotting leaky boat
You see a slain man's stiffen'd feet. (235-238)

The five swans must now feed on the weeds of nature, of reality; as in Tennyson's "Palace of Art," isolated artifice and sensuality are doomed. But whereas the moral issue in Tennyson's poem is clear, "Golden Wings" leaves unanswered the question of whether Jehane's choice is right or wrong—of whether "Ladies' Castle," because it represents isolated artifice, deserves to fall, or whether reality itself represents no more than a meaningless and miserable annihilation of beauty.

The poem with which "Golden Wings" is paired, "The

Tune of Seven Towers," presents us with an inversion of Jehane's story. It begins with the description of another castle—this time a haunted one, where "no one walks" except "white ghosts." Oliver must go there to fetch his lady's coif and kirtle; the fact that she has left these articles in the haunted castle suggests her ghostly nature. But while Jehane leaves "Ladies' Castle" and finds death in reality, Oliver must journey from reality to a castle that represents death. The contrast between the two poems resembles the ambiguities of Yeats's Byzantium poems or, more closely, of his early fairyland pieces. In Yeats, the realm of Queen Mab may be a happy land far from human sorrow, like Jehane's castle of artifice, but for the living it is also a land of death, like the haunted castle of "Seven Towers." It is the tragic disparity between ideal and real that both Morris and Yeats dramatize, and that provides the stuff of much of the greatest romantic art. But Yeats was able to progress from his misty, conventional fairyland poetry to a poetry that is at once autobiographical and abstract, a particular life illuminated by brilliant symbols that connect it with its historic and cosmic context. Yeats's greatest poetry is realistic in the sense that it shows the conflict between real and ideal as it takes place in the actual world, in a specific life and in the history of a specific time and place. As a poet, Morris remains spellbound in the land of romance. The poems in *The Defence of Guenevere* and most of his later work present the conflict between real and ideal from the perspective of the ideal. Morris was unable to make concrete connections between "idle dream" and his own life that would have given his poetry more than the vague significance of general symbols.

The fact that Morris was unable to connect art and reality is, of course, culturally significant—a failure that expresses the wider failure of industrial civilization to foster art. Reality is inimical to beauty in *The Defence of Guenevere* and in Victorian society as well. In this broad sense, "Rapunzel" and "The Haystack in the Floods" are reflections of the alienation of the artist from his age, although they are not about alienation in the way that *News from Nowhere* and *Hopes and Fears for Art* are. William Myers makes this point in a recent essay on "William Morris and the Dream of Revolution":

I have been trying to show that Morris's literary work cannot be seen as a mere relief from or appendage to his directly active work as a Socialist in the eighties. It constitutes a formal response to the realities of his own situation which can be validated in terms of the historical consciousness with which he came into contact (both Marxist and non-Marxist). Specifically, he

invents new worlds or reinvokes dream versions of old worlds, not in order to escape the exigencies of the depressing actuality but in order to insist on a whole structure of values and perspectives which must emerge in the conscious mind in order to assert the inner truth of that actuality, and give man the knowledge of his own participation in the historical process which dissolves that actuality.⁷

Myers, in short, sees the two halves of Morris' career as quite different but not contradictory ways of saying the same thing. Through his socialist writings, Morris diagnoses the evils of industrialism and capitalism showing how they fail to embody both artistic and humanitarian ideals. And through his Pre-Raphaelite poetry, Morris reflects the evils of industrialism and capitalism, presenting us with the theme of the gulf between what is and what ought to be, and creating objects of beauty that, by their very fragility and apparent irrelevance, call forth their opposite—the ugly hardihood of facts and factories. In this general sense, at least, Myers is correct in finding no contradiction between Morris' poetry and Morris' socialist writings. The separation between romance and reality, dream and fact, with which Morris' work confronts us is a separation imposed from without, a contradiction inherent in industrial capitalism itself. Morris the poet shadows forth symbolically that which Morris the socialist was later to analyze logically—the hostility of industrial civilization to the values embodied in romance and in all forms of beauty.

To read *The Defence of Guenevere* with the assumption that it is not devoid of "cruxes to interpretation" and that it dramatizes the conflict between life and art to be found elsewhere in Morris' work demonstrates at the very least that the whole volume and individual poems within it are more highly structured and meaningful than has usually been thought. It is no doubt true, as Yeats tells us, that Morris the poet was less interested in ideas than in the creation of beauty, but his work nevertheless embodies complex questions about the nature of beauty and its relationship to life. Each poem in *The Defence of Guenevere* is a dialectic between art and life, ideal and real, and the pairings of antithetical poems make the structure of the whole volume a dialectical one—although it is a dialectic that results in no synthesis. Morris' poetic world is conditioned by a sense of failure—by a sense that art is unreal and somehow doomed or forbidden—but it is a mistake to believe that his creations are merely "hollow puppets" because he tells us they are. The failure is that of his age, rather than of Morris himself, to perceive

7. In John Lucas, ed., *Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1971), pp. 269-270.

the full significance and seriousness of beauty. In any case, to read *The Defence of Guenevere* as something more than an "idle dream," as an arena in which Morris brings the forces of beauty and the forces of reality together in a kind of chivalric trial by combat, even though the com-

bat is inconclusive, is to see him as a more accomplished and coherent poet than has usually been claimed and to suggest the sorts of "cruxes to interpretation" that are present in his other "idle dreams" as well.

Indiana University

Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Ernest Chesneau

Mario Maurin

IN 1868 A VOLUME of collected studies on contemporary art issued from the presses of the Librairie Académique Didier et Cie in Paris, under the title *Les Nations rivales dans l'Art*. The author, Ernest Chesneau, was an art critic who since 1863 had been writing a weekly article on the arts in the daily *Le Constitutionnel*, which also carried Sainte-Beuve's influential literary column. Since the first section of his volume was devoted to modern English painting with particular emphasis on the Pre-Raphaelites—mainly on the basis of the Paris exhibitions of 1855 and 1867 and the London exhibition of 1862—he sent his book to Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

The account was by no means favorable of the Pre-Raphaelites' aesthetic principles and artistic realizations. Ruskin was taken to task.¹ Many individual paintings were vigorously criticized, and neither Holman Hunt nor Millais came off unscathed. Madox Brown and "Jones Burne" were more fortunate, since Chesneau had seen no work of theirs and consequently had nothing to say about them. Such was also the case for Rossetti, whom the author labeled "the genuine leader of the school" (p. 72). He noted that Rossetti had not sought publicity and had held only a single public exhibition. "Is it austerity or supreme cleverness?" he pertly inquired. Be that as it may, Rossetti's reputation, he noted, was as great as that of the school's best-known and most prolific painters. On the strength of a friend's account, Chesneau did venture to describe one of Rossetti's paintings. Unfortunately, this

turned out to be Holman Hunt's *The Hireling Shepherd*, as Rossetti pointed out to him in his long and circumstantial reply.

Rossetti's very interesting letter of acknowledgement was written in French. Chesneau parted with it some time before his death in 1890, for it eventually came into the possession of Paul Mariéton, writer, friend of the Provençal poets, and autograph collector, who allowed Edouard Rod to quote parts of it in the latter's *Etudes sur le XIXe Siècle* (Lausanne, 1888; 2nd ed., Paris, 1894).² These fragments have been reproduced in William Michael Rossetti's edition of his brother's *Family-Letters* (1895), and more recently in the second volume (pp. 671–672) of the *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* edited by Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl (1965–1967). They constitute undoubtedly the most valuable part of the letter, since they express Rossetti's modest disclaimer of leadership in the Pre-Raphaelite movement and his clarification of Ruskin's part in it. But these excerpts represent only about one half of the whole. The other half also contains opinions and judgments that warrant publication *in extenso* of the text. The holograph manuscript of this letter is to be found cataloged, with the rest of the Mariéton collection, in the Avignon Library in southern France. I transcribe it here, respecting as Edouard Rod and subsequent editors have done, the occasional vagaries of Rossetti's very serviceable French. The passages previously published are set off by brackets.

1. Chesneau seems to have based his brief discussion of Ruskin entirely on J. A. Milsand's account in *L'Esthétique anglaise* (Paris, 1864).

2. Rossetti's letter, writes Rod, before coming into the possession of Paul Mariéton, was part of A. Bovet's autograph collection. Rod's essay quoting the letter, "Les Préraphaélites anglais," was a review-article of recent English publications on Rossetti and the PRB and appeared initially in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1887,

2). Among French critics who had treated this subject, Rod mentions J. A. Milsand and G. Sarrazin, but not Chesneau.

3. In a letter to Miss Lash, dated November 9, 1868, Rossetti mentions his reply to Chesneau: "I have written to M. Ernest Chesneau, the author of that Book on Art, and set him right about myself, Scotus, and others" (*The Letters of D. G. Rossetti*, ed. Doughty and Wahl, II, 673).

7 Novembre 1868
16 Cheyne Walk
Chelsea
Londres

Cher Monsieur,

J'ai reçu le cadeau très apprécié de votre livre, "Les Nations Rivaless dans l'Art", et, en le lisant, je me sens tout d'abord fortement impressionné de la conscience enthousiaste avec laquelle vous vous êtes appliqué à rendre justice à notre école anglaise ainsi qu'aux autres écoles de l'Europe. J'ai la conviction que jusqu'ici nul critique étranger à l'Angleterre n'a compris et n'a analysé si bien la peinture actuelle anglaise, surtout en ses sections exceptionnelles. Ce n'est point que je partage toutes vos vues sur des individus. Surtout je crois qu'en voyant plus de l'ouvrage de Poole et de Leighton, vous leur rendriez une attention plus sérieuse; et je m'étonne de ne pas trouver en tout votre travail ni le nom de Maclise ni celui de Watts. Toutefois je ne sais pas s'ils aient exposé à Paris en 1867, n'ayant pas moi-même visité l'exposition.

Je me sens porté à vous fournir un renseignement à propos de ce que vous dites si justement du noble ouvrage de Paton ("In Memoriam"), touchant le *fiasco* de l'émotion tragique produit par l'introduction des soldats anglais à l'endroit que les Cipayes devraient occuper. Quand le tableau a été exposé à l'Académie Royale de Londres (je crois en 1858) les Cipayes y étaient à leur véritable place, et ce n'est qu'après les réclames d'un public et d'une presse assez banales que le peintre a été persuadé de changer sa tragédie en mélodrame. J'éprouverais une vraie satisfaction si par hasard votre critique le décidait à rétablir le vrai catastrophe de son terrible sujet.

Je n'ai trouvé (inévitavelmente) que les noms seuls de deux de nos plus admirables peintres; c'est à dire, de Madox Brown, le plus doué parmi tous les artistes anglais de force et d'émotion dramatiques, et de Burne Jones, qui est à mon avis (quoique ce soit chose grave à dire) le plus grand maître en couleur passionnée et en poésie mystique de tout l'Art moderne.

A la page 49 vous faites mention de certaines compositions décoratives auxquelles le nom de l'artiste n'était pas attaché. Elles sont de William Scott, peintre de grandes pensées et de grand dignité historique, dont les ouvrages de pure histoire sont loin d'être aussi connus qu'ils méritent d'être chez nous.³

Maintenant je dois vous remercier de ce que vous êtes si généreusement efforcé de dire sur mon compte d'après des indices si faibles et, malheureusement pour moi, si peu correctes. Le tableau qui vous a été décrit par la bienveillance intelligente de M. Georges Pouchet est un des plus beaux ouvrages de Holman Hunt, dont le titre est "The Hireling Shepherd". [En ce qui concerne la qualification de "chef de l'école préraphaélite" que vous m'attribuez d'après vos renseignements, je dois vous assurer le plus chaudement possible qu'elle ne m'est nullement due. La

renommée vêtait toujours l'inconnu de quelques qualités mystérieuses; et c'est seulement à ce phénomène si commun que je puis attribuer le bruit sur mon compte que j'ai trouvé dans votre ouvrage et ailleurs. Loin d'être "chef de l'école", par priorité ou par mérite, je puis à peine me reconnaître comme y appartenant, si le style du peu que j'ai fait en peinture venait à être comparé avec les ouvrages des autres peintres nommés préraphaélites. Ainsi, quand je trouve un peintre si absolument original que l'est Holman Hunt décrit comme étant mon "disciple", il m'est impossible de ne pas me sentir humilié en face de la vérité, et de ne pas vous assurer du contraire avec le plus grand empressement. Les qualités de réalisme émotionnel mais extrêmement minutieux, qui donnent le cachet au style nommé préraphaélite, se trouvent principalement dans tous les tableaux de Holman Hunt, dans la plupart de ceux de Madox Brown, dans quelques morceaux de Hughes, et dans l'oeuvre admirable de la jeunesse de Millais. C'est la camaraderie plus que la collaboration réelle de style, qui a uni mon nom aux leurs dans des jours d'enthousiasme d'il y a vingt ans.] Je puis ajouter que la petite exposition privée qui vous a été décrite (p. 73) comme consistant de mes tableaux ne contenait que quelques petites choses de moi parmi plusieurs d'autres artistes. Depuis l'âge de vingt-deux ans, je puis dire que je n'ai jamais exposé nulle part, pour des motifs qui me sont personnelles et dont le détail ici serait égoïste.

Encore une parole. [L'idée que M. Ruskin a fondé par ses écrits l'école préraphaélite est une méprise que j'ai trouvé être presque universelle, mais qui n'est pas moins pour cela une méprise absolue. Je crois en vérité que, parmi les peintres fondateurs de l'école, pas un n'avait jusque-là lu un seul des admirables livres de Ruskin, et certainement pas un parmi eux ne lui était personnellement connu. Ce n'est qu'après deux ou trois expositions annuelles de ces tableaux que ce grand écrivain c'est généreusement constitué leur défenseur contre les attaques acharnées de la presse.]

Enfin, je dois m'excuser sérieusement auprès de vous, cher Monsieur, de vous avoir occupé si longuement de moi dans un si mauvais français; mais ne sachant pas si l'anglais vous soit familier, j'ai fait de mon mieux avec une langue dans laquelle je suis loin de pouvoir m'exprimer aussi passablement que dans la mienne.

Croyez-moi, cher Monsieur, avec la plus haute considération,

votre dévoué serviteur
D. G. Rossetti

A Monsieur Ernest Chesneau

Rossetti's courteous corrections did not go unheeded. In a later work, *La Peinture anglaise* (Paris, 1882), parts of which he borrowed from *Les Nations rivales dans l'Art*, Chesneau breezily incorporated most of the information, without acknowledgement and sometimes verbatim. Rossetti had emphasized the fact that the Pre-Raphaelite

painters had held several yearly exhibitions before Ruskin became their champion. Chesneau now adds to his polemics with Ruskin, not without an obvious hint of smugness:

On remarquera que je n'attribue pas, comme on le fait généralement, l'origine du mouvement à M. Ruskin. C'est une méprise presque universelle, mais une méprise absolue. Je crois que, parmi les peintres fondateurs de l'école, pas un n'avait jusque là lu un seul des admirables écrits de Ruskin, et certainement il n'était personnellement connu d'aucun d'eux. C'est seulement après deux ou trois expositions annuelles de leurs tableaux que le grand écrivain se fit généreusement leur défenseur contre les attaques acharnées de la presse anglaise. C'était un point d'histoire à fixer. (pp. 183-184)⁴

The anecdote on Noel Paton finds a place among Chesneau's comments on "In Memoriam" 's dramatic failure (p. 211), while a discussion of Madox Brown and Burne-Jones is introduced by Rossetti's characterization of them:

Le premier est, de tous les peintres britanniques, celui dont l'art réalise la plus grande somme d'émotion dramatique. Le second, au point de vue de la couleur et comme intensité de conception mystique, de poésie passionnée, est le plus grand maître de l'école anglaise contemporaine. (p. 235)⁵

About Rossetti himself, Chesneau seems to have little more first-hand knowledge in 1882 than he did in 1868. Heedful of the letter's disclaimer, he demotes Rossetti from leader of the school to "one of the representatives of early preraphaelism," an illustrious poet who is also an eminent painter. He does not alter the impertinence of his question about Rossetti's motives for avoiding ex-

hibitions of his work, since the poet had not expatiated on them, but he does promise to deal with him at greater length in his forthcoming *Histoire de l'École préraphaélite en Angleterre*. This study was never completed.

A footnote pays homage to Rossetti who died while *La Peinture anglaise* was in the press. At first glance, one wonders whether knowledge of his actual or impending demise may have emboldened Chesneau to use so liberally the information that had been communicated to him, without giving credit to Rossetti. But perhaps he felt that the impartiality of quoted statements from such a partisan source would have been open to suspicion. In his footnote, Chesneau mentions a recent communication from Rossetti that accompanied the gift of the latest edition "of his admirable *Poems, Ballads and Sonnets*" and included a complete list of his paintings, which Chesneau proceeds to transcribe. It is likely—and charitable to suppose—that, having decided to incorporate into *La Peinture anglaise* the information supplied by Rossetti's 1868 letter, Chesneau wrote to him asking for his permission and probably requesting further information. That Rossetti was willing to help, insofar as his health allowed, seems clear enough. His answer has not yet come to light, but the holdings of French collections, especially in provincial libraries, have not been fully explored. One may quote here lines of Baudelaire for which he too was indebted to an English writer:

—Maint joyau dort enseveli
Dans les ténèbres et l'oubli,
Bien loin des pioches et des sondes.

Bryn Mawr College

Hopkins' "Dapple-Dawn-Drawn" Charioteer

Bruce Wallis

CONSIDERING THE QUANTITY of criticism the poem has sustained, it is surprising to discover that the early reading of even a single element in Hopkins' "The Windhover" has persisted without challenge. Yet ever since its formu-

lation by I. A. Richards in 1926, the image of bird as knight on horseback has been a persisting aspect of the vision the poem evokes for us.¹ The image needs to be challenged, for it not only contradicts the language

4. In very much the same vein, Rod writes: "Toutefois—et c'est là une erreur qu'ont commise la plupart des écrivains français qui se sont occupés des beaux-arts en Angleterre,—il ne faut point considérer M. Ruskin comme l'initiateur du mouvement préraphaélite" (*Études*, 2nd ed., pp. 63-64). Rod is careful to quote Rossetti's letter in a footnote as a confirmation of his statement, but he emphasizes that it was communicated to him after the publication of his two articles in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*. That may

well be: Rod was usually an honest and scrupulous writer. But who is above a bit of innocent one-upmanship?

5. These judgments reappear, barely modified and again without quotation marks, in the section on English painting in the *Grande Encyclopédie's* general article on England, this time under the signature of G. Ollendorff.

1. "Gerard Hopkins," *The Dial*, LXXXI (September 1926), 198.

through which the bird is presented, but also both weakens the turn in the sonnet and severely undermines the theological implications with which the sonnet is infused. Father Boyle has accurately remarked the inadequacy of the tether analogy as Richards first expressed it, since the bird is rider rather than horse, and since the bird is in control of the rein.² He might have added that the mind is not unduly dazzled by "the achieve of, the mastery of" a knight in armor trotting in tame circles on a tethered horse. The rein is clearly a rein. But the rider need not so clearly be seated on a horse.

One of the most characteristic and impressive representations of classical divinity is the god in command of a speeding chariot. Such an Apollonian image seems especially adapted to Hopkins' "The Windhover," where it more adequately conveys the sovereign position of "our Captain Christ," commander-in-chief of "choirs of angels, regiments with officers, ranks, discipline, subordination."³ The king, the Dom. (*Dominus*) of the kingdom of daylight is the sun. The classical god of the sun drives a chariot. Surely the Christian kingdom of daylight's dauphin may do as well.

To consider the chariot is to see at once that much of the rest of the octet is more fitted to describe a chariot than a plain horse. Horses bounce; chariots are "level . . . steady." Horses do not exactly "roll"; chariots do. Horses merely turn; a chariot can "swing" and sweep "smooth on a bow-bend" (one might think of the old spiritual). Chariots also have reins, and require considerable "achieve" and "mastery" to control.

If we change the horse to a chariot, we can also modify another image in the poem, for the bird is then not so much "etched against the dawn" or "attracted by the dawn" (though he may be both of those) as he is drawn across the sky by the dawn. "Drawn" thus takes its primary denotation ("pulled"), the "rolling level underneath his steady air" becomes the chariot, and the "dapple-dawn" becomes the chariot's horse or horses (opposite of *noctis equi*). "Dapple" is a favorite word with Hopkins for parti-colored things, but it is a word most used in English to describe a parti-colored horse. The hyphenation of "dapple-dawn-drawn" even suggests (perhaps unintentionally) the appearance of hitched-together horses.

Alan Heuser, though picturing the windhover on horseback, has already suggested the analogy of all of Hopkins' riding images to Plato's myth (Phaedrus, 245-246) of "the tripartite soul whose functions of reason, spirit, appetite (*logos, thymos, epithymos*) were represented by a chari-

oteer driving two winged horses . . . the winged control of *thymos* . . . steady, the flight of *epithymos* untamed, erratic,"⁴ and Hopkins' abiding interest in the classics makes the chariot analogy seem especially appropriate to his picture of Christ in His majesty. The analogy is much more appropriate to Hopkins' Christian purpose, if we recognize that the absence of *epithymos* yields a figure far more consonant with the flawless mastery of Christ, as symbolized in the steady, controlled flight of the bird in the poem.

It is true that Christ rode into Jerusalem on an ass, but that act epitomized the type of humility that appears in the sestet of Hopkins' sonnet, rather than the majesty that characterizes the octet. It is also true that a flying horse suggests Pegasus, but what Pegasus has to do with Christ has yet to be made clear. However Keatsian our reverence for poetry, we might want to see something inappropriate in the connection. Like the tether analogy, too, the Pegasus analogy suggests a dependency in the wrong direction, for the poet's control of Pegasus is never flawless, and the winged horse often carries the rider along at its own will.

The distinction is crucial, for the image of bird in complete and proud control reinforces the distinction between the octet of the sonnet, where bird and Christ are in absolute majesty and dominion, and the sestet, where by a deliberate act of humility ("air, pride, plume here / Buckle"), both bird and Christ plunge earthward—bird in pursuit of prey, Christ to the state of manhood and the death of the cross.

The chariot image thus functions imagistically to render an already splendid metaphor (bird as Christ) more superb, by adding to it the irresistibly dramatic picture of divinity in might and majesty driving across the dawn sky a chariot of flame. Because it intensifies the majesty of the vision presented in the octet, the image also functions structurally to sharpen the crucial distinction between the poem's octet and sestet. But most important of all, the image functions theologically to suggest the presence of the Son of God.

I have demonstrated elsewhere in another context the similarity between the cluster of images (bird, wind, cloud, fire, rings, embers, bow) in the octet of "The Windhover" and the cluster of images in the first chapter of *Ezekiel*, and have suggested that Hopkins' poem, written four months prior to his ordination, is, like Ezekiel's vision, intended to represent a vision of the glory of God that precedes in each case a call to God's

2. Robert Boyle, S.J., *Metaphor in Hopkins* (Chapel Hill, 1961), p. 108.

3. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Sermons and Devotional Writings*,

ed. Christopher Devlin, S.J. (London, 1959), p. 234.

4. *The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London, 1968), pp. 60-61.

service.⁵ Now, according to the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (V, 777-778), the first few chapters of *Ezekiel* contain his "vision of the glory of God and his call to prophecy," the concept of the glory of God being "represented in a series of visions having as their point of departure the doctrine of the presence of God, signified by the ark of the Covenant." The ark itself is "the visible sign or extension or even the embodiment of the presence of God," and from the period at Silo onwards came to be considered "the throne of God" (I, 817). The earlier (1907) edition of the *Encyclopedia* notes that

Catholic tradition, led by the Fathers of the Church, has considered the ark of the Covenant as one of the purest and richest symbols of the realities of the New Law. It signifies, in the first place, the Incarnate Word of God. "Christ himself," says St. Thomas Aquinas, "was signified by the Ark." (I, 724)

The ark is thus both the throne of God and the Incarnate God. But in the first vision of Ezekiel, the image of the ark (the "throne" of Ez. 1:26) is fused with the image of a chariot, since it is carried along on wheels that come and go with it:

And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whosoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. (Ez. 1:19-20)

The entire vision has been described as representative of "the spectacle of the throne-chariot and the glory of Yahweh."⁶

If the octet of "The Windhover" is to represent Christ in the glory of heaven, from which, by the deliberate act of humility—the "holding of himself back"—that Hopkins sees as defining Christ,⁷ he descends in the sestet to manhood and the death of the cross, it must contain, if only implicitly, the ark or throne, perfectly imaged, as it is in *Ezekiel*, as a throne-chariot. The homely image of a lumbering knight on horseback is totally inadequate to the full implications of the glory of Christ in the octet of this poem that Hopkins can dedicate "To Christ our Lord."

University of Victoria

Who Was Lady Morley?

John W. Bicknell and C. L. Cline

READERS OF LORD MORLEY'S *Recollections*, 2 vols. (London, 1917), and F. W. Hirst's *Early Life and Letters of John Morley*, 2 vols. (London, 1927), have been struck by the reticence of both authors on the subject of Lady Morley. Her husband barely mentions her: she was shy of meeting Mill, but he soon put her at ease; she objected to John's keeping the Secretaryship for Ireland in Rosebery's government of 1894-1895 (but "these concerns of State," Morley told Rosebery, "were not to be settled on the principles of the domestic affections"); in 1909 she was ill and partly the cause of his not having a holiday; and in 1910 he remarked, on the death of Alfred Lyall, that he and his wife had known Lyall for forty years. Surely, two volumes of recollections could hardly say less of a "loyal and devoted wife," as Hirst calls her.

Hirst himself is almost as reticent: "About this time

[circa 1867 apparently, but Hirst is perversely or purposely vague] he fixed his affections on a very pretty and graceful girl, Rose Ayling, whom he married after his mother's death in 1870. She was slim, but not tall, with flaxen hair and light blue eyes, a good walker and afterwards an ardent cyclist, fond of the country, of trees and plants and birds. She never cared much for politics, books, or society; seldom visited or dined out" (I, 60). There is very little more. A few years later, when Hirst wrote his *DNB* biography of Morley, he devoted the following sentence to the wedding: "In May 1870 he married Mary, daughter of Thomas Ayling, of Abbey Road, London."

Already, even on the basis of such sparse information, a disparity appears—in the first name. In his earlier account, Hirst seems to be following the practice, customary among Morley's friends like Meredith, of calling Mrs.

5. "The Windhover" and the Patristic Exegetical Tradition," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XLI (Spring 1972): a study of the bird of prey as Christian symbol.

6. *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York, 1952), VI, 69.

7. Devlin, p. 108.

Morley "Rose." The *DNB* sentence is apparently based on the marriage certificate located at Somerset House. According to the certificate, John Morley, bachelor, of 30 Abbey Road, was married on May 28, 1870, in the Register Office of the District of Marylebone, to Mary Ayling, spinster, also of 30 Abbey Road, daughter of Thomas Ayling, gentleman. The bride's age is given as 29 and the witnesses were W. J. Marriott (whom we have not identified) and Ellen Ayling, presumably her sister. The problem of the name resolves itself on examination of the Morley tombstone at Putney Vale, Surrey, whereon is inscribed the following:

Rose Mary, his wife
Born Nov. 19, 1840
Died Nov. 28, 1923.

So far, then, we know Lady Morley's date of birth, her age at marriage, and what appears to be her maiden name and the name of her father and sister. None of these "facts" is contradicted by Margot Asquith (Lady Oxford), who recalled "a memorable talk" with Morley in 1908, shortly after her husband became prime minister: "We were sitting in the Garden at Flowermead [Morley's home] discussing men and things. He spoke of his youth and how he had met Mrs. Morley first at a student's ball..." (*Autobiography* [London, 1922], II, 109). It is also a matter of record that she had no children by John Morley.

But there were children in the house soon after the marriage. James Sully speaks of tutoring a step-son in the seventies, Morley refers to his "little family" in letters (quoted by Hirst) to Frederic Harrison and to a step-son in a letter to Huxley (December 14, 1877, *HP*); and a postscript to a letter from George Meredith of November 28, 1877, to Morley reads as follows: "I salute your wife. A kiss to Florence. A punch in the ribs to Johnson." This letter precedes by about a month Morley's letter to his sister Grace (quoted by Hirst) about the arrival from India of his nephew Guy, whose father, William Morley, had died in India in 1877 and whom John Morley later legally adopted. Thus by early 1878, there were three children in the house: Guy Morley, and as identified below, John (Meredith's "Johnson") and Florence Ayling, step-children.

Florence is identified as Morley's step-daughter in Clause VIII of his will, which directs his trustees to set aside £1,000 and pay the income thereof "as a mark of my attachment to my step-daughter Florence Ayling now a nun in High Park Convent, Drumcondra, Dublin. . . ." It is possible that persistent search might reveal more information about Florence, but that is all we know of her at present.

Of John Ayling we know a good deal more (mostly unsavory), but nothing that would help us identify his place or exact date of birth. The story of John Ayling's trial for forgery has been most recently told by Stanley A. Wolpert (*Morley and India, 1906-1910* [New York, 1967]), who had access to the Hirtzell Diaries at the India Office. There are other sources, including newspaper accounts and legal documents. Twice married, the father of three children by his first wife and three more by his second, a member since 1893 of the firm of T & A Constable, Edinburgh, John Ayling forged several promissory notes in the names of W. B. Blaikie, John Morley, and others to the amount of £13,350 in April and September of 1907. Arrested in Edinburgh in late October, he pled guilty and on November 25 was sentenced to ten years imprisonment. On November 28, 1907, bankruptcy proceedings were held; the sequestration was later reopened, in 1924, to account for the share falling to Ayling from the estate of his daughter Isabella, who had died intestate in August 1919. Unfortunately, neither the legal records nor the newspaper accounts contain a single reference to Ayling's parentage or place of birth. The only helpful fact is to be found in the *Times*' reports of the case (November 5 and 26, 1907), which include a statement by Ayling's counsel to the effect that his client was forty-seven years old (see also *The Scotsman*, October 30 and November 19, 26, and 30, 1907). Ayling's approximate date of birth (either late 1859 or 1860) is confirmed by the information given at his first marriage, to Catherine Clark Morrison, on June 6, 1889, in Edinburgh. On the marriage certificate he gives his age as twenty-nine. The certificate, moreover, reveals information about his parentage. He designates himself as John Ayling, printer, son of John Ayling, farmer deceased, and Rose Ayling, maiden surname also Ayling. Thus if John Ayling's understanding of his parentage is accurate, his mother married a cousin or at least a man with a surname identical with her own.

So far, the date would seem to confirm the account of John Morley's marriage given by J. W. Robertson Scott in his *The Life and Death of a Newspaper: The Story of the Pall Mall Gazette . . .* (London, 1952). Robertson Scott reports that the story of Morley's marriage came to him "many years ago," but does not say from whom. He quotes the account, which does not give Mrs. Morley's name before she married John Morley, nor any other biographical details. The account, as Robertson Scott reports it, follows:

When a young man, Morley became friends with a young married woman whom he afterwards married. It was, as one would expect, a strictly honourable and very respectable friendship and nothing in

the nature of a liason. One dark winter night she knocked at the door of his rooms and in great distress told him she could stand no more of her husband's brutality (he *was* a brute), had fled from the house and had nowhere to go as she was penniless. Morley had only two rooms—he told her to sleep in his bedroom and spent an uncomfortable night on the sofa in his sitting room. The next day he said: 'I have compromised you; the only thing to do is for me to write to your husband and invite him to divorce you and then I will marry you.' The husband refused to divorce her, with the result that she and Morley lived together for many years until her husband died, whereupon Morley married her. She had several young children by her first husband . . . and Morley had them educated. 'Everyone' knew of his long cohabitation before marriage and it says much for Morley's high reputation as a man of strict integrity that it never prejudiced his social and political career. But she 'never went anywhere' with him socially and led a life almost of a recluse, and this had become such a habit with her that, even when they were eventually married, she rarely went out to social functions with him. (pp. 54–55)

That the affair never had any effect on Morley's social and political career may be doubted. A private memoir on John Morley in the Rosebery papers suggests that the status of his wife, at least in part, cost him the Foreign Office in 1894. The memoir is quoted by R. R. James in his *Rosebery* (London, 1963): "John Morley was a very lovable man, but very difficult to understand. . . . He wanted, I believe, to succeed me as Foreign Secretary [in 1894]—an impossible appointment, partly because his wife could not have received ambassadors' wives, she having a slight cloud on her, John having anticipated the ceremony of marriage . . ." (p. 310). At least two other details in the account are inaccurate or misleading. The informant says that Morley's wife had several children by her first marriage, yet there were only two, both of whom Robertson Scott mentions by name on a subsequent page. Moreover, the informant asserts that Morley and his wife "lived together for many years" before the husband died and the marriage took place. Now the Meredith letters reveal (for the first time in published sources) a love affair between Morley and a Miss Virtue, daughter of the publisher-printer George Virtue, which may have begun as early as 1862 and had progressed to the point of an interview with the father in December 1864. It was broken off abruptly, apparently by James Virtue, the girl's brother, by January 1865. It was the fault of neither Morley nor the girl, Meredith says, but "Mysterious Fate has struck division" (*The Letters of George Meredith*, ed. C. L. Cline [Oxford, 1970], I, 300). As Morley married in May 1870, it seems unlikely that cohabitation with his future wife could have been "long"

or have lasted "for many years," flexible as those terms may be. Moreover, Hirst's hint of their first meeting as being near 1867 and his statement that Morley married Rose "after his mother's death in [March] 1870" reduces the time element, fits better with the Meredith account, and suggests that the marriage might have been delayed out of deference to his mother. In the Robertson Scott story it is the death of the husband that makes the wedding possible.

Lately the Robertson Scott story has been repeated as if it were received truth. Wolpert, for example, seems to accept it (*Morley and India*, p. 12) as well as M. R. D. Foot in "Morley's Gladstone: A Reappraisal" (*Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, LI [Spring, 1969], 379). For this reason it is important to stress the discrepancies in his account and the difficulties it presents.

If Rose Mary Ayling was a widow when she married John Morley, why did not Hirst say so, especially as he had access to private papers and the intimate letters Morley wrote to his sister Grace, many of which have long since been destroyed or mutilated? Why does Hirst call her "a pretty and graceful girl," implying maidenhood? And why, if she were a widow, does the "Mary" of the certificate list herself as "spinster" and thus imply the illegitimacy of her children? And why the peculiar—almost unchivalrous—answer Morley gave to Margot Asquith when she asked him about the paternity of John Ayling? According to the late Sir Maurice Bowra (*Memories, 1899–1939* [London, 1966]), Margot Asquith

was in a way fascinated by John Morley. He had, in a moment of quixotic chivalry, married a totally unsuitable woman, and their son [John] got into trouble. Margot then continued, "I knew that it couldn't be *his* son—a slight, womanish man like that. So I asked him, 'Whose son is he?', and John replied, 'I don't know, and I doubt if she does.'" (p. 202)

Drawing on this line of evidence and testimony, one might speculate that the story reported to Robertson Scott was the one "given out" among intimates in order to clear the name of Mrs. Morley and even told to John and Florence Ayling in order to cover the fact that they were illegitimate. The difficulty is that the trail goes cold just at the point when the game begins to be in sight. Careful search of the records at Somerset House yields no birth certificate for a Rose or a Mary or a Rose Mary Ayling born on 19 November 1840 as asserted on the tombstone. Nor have we been able to find birth certificates for either John or Florence Ayling (with appropriate parentage) in any of the years that seemed profitable to investigate. The simple fact seems to be that there is insufficient data to confirm either "story"; we do not

even know the date of the alleged marriage between John and Rose Ayling.

For the time being, then, we are at a standstill. The extant correspondence of Morley with his close friends seems to tell us nothing; reports from reliable scholars who have consulted the vast collection of Morley papers in various depositories can give us no help. Possibly there are still records of the membership of High Park Convent which would throw light on the origins and parentage of Florence. Possibly someone may be able to tell us who

Robertson Scott's informant was or if his papers are extant and accessible to scholars. Possibly, also readers of this communication may be able to supply us either with relevant information or suggestions about new lines of inquiry, or hypotheses and inferences that we have not thought of in attempting to answer the question—who was Lady Morley?

*Drew University
University of Texas*



English X News

A. THE CHICAGO MEETING

Chairman, Michael Timko, *Queens College, City University of New York*
Secretary, G. B. Tennyson, *University of California (Los Angeles)*

I. Business

II. Papers and Discussion: Sexuality in Victorian Literature

1. "What You Always Wanted To Know About Alice but Were Afraid To Ask," Donald Rackin, *Temple University*
2. "Two Approaches to Edward Lear's Nonsense Songs," Edmund Miller, *State University of New York at Stony Brook*
3. "The Nuns of *Villette*," Charles Burkhart, *Temple University*
4. "Childhood and the Victorian Ideal of Manliness in *Tom Brown's School-days*," Henry R. Harrington, *University of Montana*

Panelists: Robert Langbaum, Ada Nisbet, Morse Peckham

Executive Committee: Chairman, David J. DeLaura, *University of Texas at Austin* (1972-1974); Ronald E. Freeman (1970-1973); John F. Stasny (1973-1975); Flavia Alaya (1971-1973); Edgar Johnson, Boyd Litzinger (1972-1974); Thomas J. Collins, Donald J. Gray (1973-1975).

1973 Program Chairman: Ruth apRoberts, *University of California (Riverside)*

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Editors, THE VICTORIAN NEWSLETTER: William E. Buckler, *New York University*; Robert A. Greenberg, *Queens College, City University of New York*.

1973 Officers: Chairman, G. B. Tennyson, *University of California (Los Angeles)*; Secretary, Richard C. Tobias, *University of Pittsburgh*.

(Nominations to be voted on.)

B. THE VICTORIAN LUNCHEON

The 1973 Victorian Group Luncheon will be held December 27 at 1:00 p.m., preceded by cocktails beginning at 11:45 a.m. For reservations, please send a check for \$7.50 to Keith Cushman, English Department, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill. 60637, by December 15.

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