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Cover illustration: "I make myself known to my Aunt," etching for David Copperfield, 1849.

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Newman's Way with the Reader in *A Grammar of Assent*

Philip Snyder

A RECENT ESSAY by Father Walter J. Ong proposes that "the writer's audience is always a fiction." Even within the domains of non-fiction, he suggests, the "historian, the scholar or scientist, and the simple letter-writer all fictionalize their audiences, casting them in a made-up role and calling on them to play the role assigned."¹ Special attention to these kinds of rhetorical fictions has liberating possibilities, particularly in considering our response and resistance to somewhat time-bound texts. Certainly this line of inquiry helps foster a more generous understanding of the particular pleasures and strains of the modern reader in his engagement with the religious controversialists of Victorian England. What sorts of roles, for example, are required to read *A Grammar of Assent*? It is now and then a reader's pleasure to grapple with an argument, like Newman's, which raises this question in a surprising and subtle way. For Newman, through his shifting appeals to logic, imagination, experience, and feeling, also offers an opportunity for the critical reader to consider his own role in the act played between himself and a text.

One might even go so far as to suggest that Newman's central achievement in *A Grammar of Assent* is neither his defense of the faith, nor his display of rhetorical skill, but the coalescence of these in his creation of the reader. Too many of his apologists or admirers have confined themselves either to his doctrinal or to his aesthetic triumphs, to the detriment of both. Christian humanists such as David J. DeLaura, who believe that man cannot even be man without God, insist that Newman's "implied object is a transference of values, and a transformation of the reader, effected by Newman's conveying to him and acting out before him a special and intense way of looking at things which in his view is the uniquely personal context for the 'habit' of supernatural faith."² Such critics as DeLaura are understandably dissatisfied with the "uncritically positivistic premises" of John Holloway and his formalist colleagues, who are content to appreciate the techniques by which the texture of Newman's work brings us "imperceptibly to a living understanding of his creed" and "modifies our receptivity until we find ourselves seeing the world as he sees it." Both schools of criticism, insofar as they divide the sacred and the secular unconditionally between them, have the effect of putting off

the uncommitted but inquisitive reader who might otherwise be sympathetic to Newman's performance.

Newman is surely more tolerant and persuasive, in this respect, than any of his critics. He begins *A Grammar of Assent* by postulating the widest possible audience of disinterested observers, then progressively narrows this audience until it includes only the faithful; at the same time, he persuades each individual reader imperceptibly to adopt a series of roles, so that the reader is first undesiring, then unwilling, and finally perhaps unable, to abandon Newman at any of the stages of this progressively selective postulation of a hypothetical audience. Thus it often comes as a salutary shock to the secular humanist who has co-operated in so many of Newman's roles throughout the book, only to come at last to the cardinal's final *vade retro me*:

I do not address myself to those, who in moral evil and physical see nothing more than imperfections of a parallel nature; who consider that the difference is one of degree only, not of kind . . . that sin is a bugbear, not a reality . . . that if we do our duties in this life, we may take our chance for the next; and that it is of no use perplexing our minds about the future state, for it is all a matter of guess.³

The reader may well believe, in his heart of hearts, that sin is indeed a bugbear. He may believe the humanist creed expressed in every clause which precedes that phrase. He may believe in the agnostic position that characterizes every clause which follows it. But the chances are very good that the same reader will also feel blasted from his moral center by this confrontation, whereby his "permanent self" and his "Newman-created self" clash in a drama of self-recognition.

The question is: where did these personae develop, where did they divide, and how?

The drama between reader and writer in *A Grammar of Assent* opens out upon a deceptive stage. While Newman's intent is polemical and his subject psychological, the vehicle of his discussion in its first few paragraphs has all the earmarks, instead, of a technical and scholarly treatise. Newman makes formal assertions (e.g., "Propositions . . . may take a categorical, conditional, or interrogative form" [p. 2]), defines distinctions (e.g., "An assertion is as distinct from a conclusion, as a word of command is from a persuasion or recommendation" [p. 4]), proceeds in strict logical sequence,

1. Walter J. Ong, S. J., "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction," *PMLA*, 90(1975), 17.

2. David J. DeLaura, "Newman's *Apologia* as Prophecy," in David J. DeLaura, ed., *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 494.

3. John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay in aid of A Grammar of Assent* (1870; rpt. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917), p. 416. All subsequent references to this edition appear in the text.

and is careful to indicate exactly the perimeters of his generalizations (e.g., "Command and assertion, as such, both of them, in their different ways, dispense with, discard, ignore, antecedents of any kind, though antecedents may have been a *sine qua non* condition of their being elicited" [p. 4]). The formal apparatus of the passage is formidably correct: numbered categories, parenthetical example, qualification of each statement, explication of each term. For all the hints of argument and psychological penetration in evidence here, Newman might well be the type for Browning's dead grammarian.

The man behind this format, meanwhile, is somewhere above and beyond his creation, paring his fingernails; Newman is invisible, if not altogether absent. He is an abstract, disembodied voice of authority. The speaking "I" is non-existent; "he" is never spoken of; "they" are the terms of an abstract proposition, as in "They [command and assertion] both carry with them the pretension of being personal acts" (p. 4); and "we" are purely demonstrative, as in, "We may assent to one man, and conclude to another, and ask of a third . . ." (pp. 4-5).

The reader is accordingly obliged to play the part of a passive receiver of information, who stands in relation to the text as might a schoolboy to a table of irregular verbs. Resistance, critical detachment even, are thereby reduced in the reader at the outset. While the reader is encouraged to relax his sovereignty as a critic, Newman simultaneously registers an increase in his own authority, so that the vehicle of discussion is not a neutral exchange of information in the least. On the contrary, it is an elementary academic lecture carrying with it all the connotations that such elementary instruction implies. Newman casts himself as teacher and the reader as student, which alters the balance of power. Finally, the respective roles of writer and reader are coupled with Newman's use of personal pronouns to make a subliminal statement about the subject matter itself. The lack of "I" and "you" implies agreement on non-controversial points of objective fact. Thus "No one is likely to deny that a question is distinct both from a conclusion and from an assertion" (p. 4); though Newman's real gain in saying so is to reinforce in the reader a passive habit of agreement, which has its consequences when applied later in the book to matters of controversy.

All of this takes place in the opening section, "Modes of holding Propositions." When Newman and the reader arrive a few pages later at the section, "Modes of apprehending Propositions," the stage is set a bit differently. Again there is a great deal of authoritative explanation, formal introduction of terms, and so on. But for the first time, examples are introduced as cues to a role. Newman illustrates notional propositions, for instance, with the examples: "Man is an animal, some men are learned, an Apostle is a creation of Christianity, a line is a length without breadth, to err is

human, to forgive divine" (p. 9). Real propositions he illustrates by such examples as, "Philip was the father of Alexander," "the earth goes round the sun," and "the Apostles first preached to the Jews" (p. 9). The examples serve at least two functions. Their surface intention, of course, is simply to show what notional and real propositions are like. Beneath the surface, however, the fact that they are enlisted as non-controversial commonplaces has the effect of predisposing the reader to uncritical acceptance of further examples.

The man behind this format, meanwhile, has begun to make himself visible. Newman is present as an "I": "I mean," "I have stated," "I observe." Proverbs and maxims "sanction me in so speaking" (p. 12). On the surface this "I" is a stylized persona, non-controversial, dispassionate, a maker of declarative sentences merely. And as the declarations seem impersonally self-evident, so impersonally trustworthy seems their maker. The reader, then, is engaged with an abstract impersonal author in a task of logical clarification. Or so it seems. For it now appears that Newman's examples serve yet another function, as appeals to a body of experience shared by (personal) reader and (personal) writer alike.

The grace of a commonplace is its illusion of implied communion. To read that "to err is human, to forgive divine" is to congratulate both Newman and ourselves as wise and sensitive beings, and cultivated readers of Pope. To read that "Philip was the father of Alexander" unites us with Newman as informed students of history, and so on. When we read, however, that "an Apostle is a creation of Christianity," or that "the Apostles first preached to the Jews," do we not begin to give the same credence to anything which Newman may choose to "illustrate" by examples from Christianity, as we do when he says "the earth goes round the sun"? What if Newman were suddenly to alter the character of his examples and take the reader unawares?

That appears to be what is happening in chapter II, "Assent considered as apprehensive." On the face of it, the chapter continues the familiar pattern of definition and illustration already established. Examples have until now been commonplaces, implying communion of writer and reader, and rhetorical demonstrations, to show what Newman's terms mean. They are indulged for the sake of argument and illustration, leading the reader to entertain what Newman would call conditional inferences about notional apprehensions. In this chapter, despite its similarities to the previous chapter, Newman impresses his examples into a still higher service: they are designed to invite unconditional implicit assents to real propositions—propositions, moreover, which are not formally brought before the reader's judgment until the reader's assent has in large measure already been given.

When Newman says of a hypothetical child and his mother that her "veracity and authority is to him no abstract truth or item of general knowledge, but is bound up with that image and love of her person which is part of him-

self, and makes a direct claim on him for his summary assent to her general teachings" (p. 17), then his example is in the service more of an emotional than of an intellectual argument. The center of interest is no longer "summary assents" or "veracity" or the assertion of inapprehensible propositions—at least, it is not in these as intellectual constructs—but is rather directed with full force to the reader's image of a mother and to the reader's own emotional associations concerning a child's love. The consequences of this shifted interest, especially as it involves related images of the child and Newman's understanding of the conscience, I shall reserve until later for fuller discussion.

Let it suffice to suggest, at this point, that at chapter II yet another change of roles is effected within Newman's ostensibly academic discourse. No longer is Newman the dispassionate authorial guide, though he maintains that convention as a means of securing the reader's allegiance. Beneath that convention is an artist shaping the emotions. That a child "would lay down his life in defence of his mother's veracity" is an example as distinct from a commonplace as is a poem from a proverb or maxim. The ideal reader, though, should imagine himself still attending to a strict definition of intellectual constructs. His emotional response to Newman's image of the child should be acted out on a different plane than is the role he is already playing; otherwise, much of the image's power (and its further use) is compromised. Thus the reader is asked to play two roles at once: in one role he is directed to the intellectual appeal (of which the example is a part), while in the other he is drawn to the emotional appeal (of which the example is the whole). Newman's strategy seems to be a calculated overlapping of roles, so that the reader is halfway committed to a new role before he must switch roles completely.

The switch is delayed by this interim rehearsal, then, until chapter III, when Newman may confidently rely at last on his more characteristically direct personal appeal. Perhaps the clearest difference between this and the introductory chapters is Newman's intimation of himself, for the first time in this book, as what he calls in the *Apologia* "the concrete being that reasons."⁴ When he relates that "I see those who once were there and are no more; past scenes, and the very expression of the features, and the tones of the voices, of those who took part in them, in a time of trial or difficulty," he is far from adducing mere instances of memory to elucidate a point about "real apprehension"; he invokes instead, consciously or not, the image of the Catholic convert who long ago took leave of Trinity College and has "never seen Oxford since, excepting the spires, as they are seen from the railway."⁵ When he asks how he may imagine the wit and grace of the French Salons, "being myself an untravelled

John Bull," his display of personality is his guarantee to a sympathetic hearing. Newman begins to manifest his presence as a personality expressed within his sentences, rather than as a shadowy maker above and beyond them. He himself is the thinking, feeling, imagining, remembering being within each of his vivid first-person examples. The reader, for his part, is invited by these means to act out assents which remove him further and further from skeptical judgments.

This invitation to assent is extended not only by the increasing personal appeal of the author, but by a parallel increase in concrete examples generally, as well, which affirms by structure what Newman at the close of the chapter lays down in a statement: "As notions come of abstractions, so images come of experiences; the more fully the mind is occupied by an experience, the keener will be its assent to it, if it assents, and on the other hand, the duller will be its assent and the less operative, the more it is engaged with an abstraction; and thus a scale of assents is conceivable . . ." (p. 35). The reader's place on this scale of assents differs in this chapter from its place in the introductory chapters, in that it exhibits an accelerated movement from notional to real assents, as Newman the personality presents himself to closer inspection.

It is not until Newman approaches the topic of religion proper that he begins to narrow the audience he has shaped thus far. At this point the agnostic reader begins to sense the presence in his own being of two selves, his "permanent self" and his "Newman-created self"; Newman's strategy, beginning in chapter V, is to initiate a distancing movement between these two, hoping gradually to extinguish the first while promoting the reader's identification with the second. The process of transformation continues while the process of selective discrimination begins. Chapter V marks the first formal separation between Newman's created reader and the reader to whom *A Grammar of Assent* initially addresses itself.

Consider how different is Newman's style in this chapter, beginning with the section "Belief in One God." Exposition gives way to exhortation, homiletic, catechism: "I speak then of the God of the Theist and of the Christian: a God who is numerically One, who is Personal; the Author, Sustainer, and Finisher of all things, the life of Law and Order, the Moral Governor . . ." (p. 101). Belief in God is a given, as Newman's catalog of attributes demonstrates. The being of a God he does not propose to prove, insisting only that a real assent may be given to the image of God. This assent he justifies by an appeal to conscience as a first principle. (Again he introduces the image of the child, and again I shall reserve for a moment my discussion of its consequences.) Fully aware that he stands the risk of forfeiting

4. John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. David J. DeLaura (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 136.

5. Newman, *Apologia*, p. 183.

his carefully cultivated non-Christian audience at this point, Newman provides the reader with alternative roles in the course of making a distinction between religion and theology. "When the proposition is apprehended for the purposes of proof, analysis, comparison, and the like intellectual exercises," he suggests, "it is used as the expression of a notion; when for the purposes of devotion, it is the image of a reality. Theology, properly and directly, deals with notional apprehension; religion with imaginative" (p. 120). What he suggests in explanation of his thesis applies equally as a support for his method. As he says at the close of this chapter: "Sentiment, whether imaginative or emotional, falls back upon the intellect for its stay, when sense cannot be called into exercise; and it is in this way that devotion falls back upon dogma" (p. 121). The reader, conversely, finds by Newman's example a way for dogma to fall back upon devotion.

Newman's role throughout the chapter is two-fold: that of theologian, and that of religious man. He recites dogma in his propositions and shows his personal devotion through his examples. Thus the reader also has two roles: one of notional assent to Newman's argued dogma (such as the catalog of attributes of Deity), and one of real assent to Newman's demonstration of devotion (as in the image of the child). "Of course I cannot hope to carry all inquiring minds with me in what I have been laying down in the foregoing Section" (p. 122), Newman adds; although of course he can always hope to carry with him the sympathetic spirit, which he knows will nearly always sweep before it the objections of the inquiring mind. And so long as Newman can divide his readers along these lines, he is relieved of the necessity of arguing with unbelievers. Of those who would question the validity of conscience as a first principle, he concedes only that there are those "who can see and hear for all the common purposes of life, yet have no eyes for colours or their shades, or no ear for music; moreover, there are degrees of sensibility to colours and to sounds, in the comparison of man with man, while some men are stone-blind or stone-deaf" (p. 123). He that has eyes, let him look; he that has ears to hear, let him listen. "They" and "those" are separated not only from Newman, but also from his hypothetical reader. For who will readily confess to being stone-blind? Even if one does, by this time one tends to read on, and in doing so one implicitly adopts Newman's vision.

A second separation, more explicit than the first, takes place long afterward, in chapter IX. The point of view in "The Illative Sense" is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand it is Newman's most personal and most self-limiting statement: "I have never had the thought of an attempt which in me would be ambitious . . . Especially have I found myself unequal to antecedent reasonings in the instance of a matter of fact . . . Every one who reasons, is his own centre; and no expedient for attaining a common measure of minds can reverse this truth . . ." (pp. 343, 345). On the other hand it is most objectively definitive: "Our hoping," he maintains,

"is a proof that hope, as such, is not an extravagance; and our possession of certitude is a proof that it is not a weakness or an absurdity to be certain [*italics mine*]" (p. 344). His key statement is this: "I think it enough to appeal to the common voice of mankind . . ." (p. 344).

All but the most blindly antagonistic readers are obliged to answer this appeal, because unless we are committed theologians of another stripe than Newman's, then what we are responding to is essentially an appeal to the laity. Newman ranks himself with the Illative Sense, with common sense, with lay understanding of religion (as opposed to clerical interpretation of theology); the reader, in turn, unites himself with Newman in opposition to theological obscurantists, agnostic logic-choppers, and sophistic humanists alike. Newman's defense of the reader in one capacity imposes on the reader an obligation to defend Newman in others.

In the section on the "Sanction of the Illative Sense," Newman reinforces this obligation by a radical shift in both manner and matter. "We are in a world of facts," he begins, "and we use them; for there is nothing else to use. We do not quarrel with them, but we take them as they are, and avail ourselves of what they can do for us . . . And as we use the (so called) elements without first criticizing what we have no command over, so it is much more unmeaning in us to criticize or find fault with our own nature, which is nothing less than we ourselves, instead of using it according to the use of which it ordinarily admits. Our being, with its faculties, mind and body, is a fact not admitting of question, all things being of necessity referred to it, not it to other things" (p. 346). Prior to this, both Newman and the reader stand above the world of facts, analysing and observing. Insofar as they analyse and observe facts of human psychology, their relationship to these facts is possessive: know thyself. When Newman and the reader step *within* the world of facts, however, and consider themselves as facts, then they alter their very relationship to those facts. The new model is: trust thyself. "We ourselves"—that is, Newman and the reader—of course become one thing in this relationship, for the time being, by virtue of the first-person plural pronoun.

What happens when the plural pronoun is then exchanged for the singular? Simply this: Newman modulates his own voice into the reader's, then subsumes the reader's voice under his own. "I am what I am," says Newman, with the reader's voice, "or I am nothing. I cannot think, reflect, or judge about my being, without starting from the very point which I aim at concluding. My ideas are all assumptions, and I am ever moving in a circle" (p. 347). This we believe as we believe ourselves, but something peculiar happens when we allow Newman to say it for us. In accepting his appeal to our subjective sense of self, we also implicitly agree to accept his definition of that self; his defense of our ideas about ourselves involves our adoption of his conclusions as part of our ideas.

This union paradoxically prepares for the third and final

separation of writer and reader. In the next chapter Newman will announce that he does not address himself to those who do not admit his first premises, but by this time the reader has either fictionalized himself as a believer, or he has not. If he has not, however, it is only because his own first principles are proof against logic and example alike, and therefore he can no longer even provisionally act his role. If sin is a bugbear to the reader, and the reader is what he is, then sin is a bugbear still, or he is nothing. Newman's discourse on the martyrs of revealed religion is a species of preaching to the converted, in which Newman finally may legitimately feel himself at perfect liberty to drop argument, persuasion, and defense altogether, and go in for straight evangelism. To paraphrase Newman in another context: quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as rhetoric and converging probabilities to change the first principles of a man. The essence of the reader's role throughout *A Grammar of Assent* is to place one's self in a position to say "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief." Without that grain of belief no further roles are possible, and it is to create that single grain that Newman expends his best efforts in evoking his images of the child and of conscience.

Newman's foremost supporting principle is his appeal to conscience. That is, conscience is the first principle on which all of his converging probabilities depend, and it is presented in a way that skirts verbal logic altogether. Conscience, for Newman, wears the human face of a child, as it did for the early Romantics. If Wordsworth may be said to be something of a Christian *manqué*, then Newman is a Wordsworth Victorianized and made explicit, nowhere so markedly as in their mutual preoccupation with the image of the child. "Faith, in the realist," writes Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "does not spring from the miracle, but the miracle from the faith."⁶ *A Grammar of Assent* stands or falls, as an argument, on whether or not Newman can direct the reader to play the role of a child, and in that notional childlike faith produce the miracle of real faith.

There are three instances in which Newman exploits the image of the child, either directly or by implication. The first of these, which occurs in chapter II, we have considered earlier. Here Newman introduces a hypothetical child, ostensibly to illustrate what is meant by apprehensive assent. A child who possesses only the rote knowledge that "lucern is medicago sativa," we learn, apprehends ever so much more about lucern if he is told that "lucern is food for cattle" and shown cows grazing in a meadow: "He now knows enough about lucern to enable him to apprehend propositions which have lucern for their predicate, should they

come before him for assent, as, 'That field is sown with lucern,' or 'Clover is not lucern'" (p. 15). The child in the clover is a casual, non-controversial example, which the reader therefore attends as he would to an algebraic formula. Propositions and predicates are the formal subject matter to which the image of the child is subordinated; according to the cues given by the formal apparatus, then, Newman is still a grammarian and the reader is still a student intent on mastering a formula.

In the paragraph following this introduction, Newman supplements his image of the child with an image of the child's mother. Both images are subordinated to the service of illustrating a technical proposition: "Thus the child's mother might teach him to repeat a passage of Shakespeare, and when he asks the meaning of a particular line, such as 'The quality of mercy is not strained,' or 'Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,' she might answer him, that he was too young to understand it yet, but that it had a beautiful meaning, as he would one day know: and he, *in faith on her word* [italics mine] might give his assent to such a proposition . . ." (pp. 15-16). Newman's position on the issue of authority, as I have indicated by the italicized phrase, is not so much subordinated as it is hidden. As Newman himself says of it: "I am speaking of assent itself, and its intrinsic conditions, not of the ground or motive of it. Whether there is an obligation upon the child to trust his mother, or whether there are cases where such trust is impossible, are irrelevant questions, and I notice them in order to put them aside" (p. 16). But if such trust is beside the point, then why does Newman immediately return to it? Why insist that the child's assent to his mother's teachings "is bound up with that image and love of her person which is part of himself" (p. 17)? If Newman is not concerned with the obligation of the child to trust his mother, then how can he insist that the child "would lay down his life in defence of his mother's veracity" (p. 17)?

The truth is, Newman and the reader are each playing two roles at once. Newman the grammarian uses the algebraic formula of a child to discuss the intrinsic conditions of varying modes of assent with a reader who acts the role of a technically-minded student. Newman the artist uses the emotionally loaded image of a child to bring home the fact of unconditional assent to a reader who acts the role of a child himself, remembering the power of his first response to authority. The first role serves as a buffer to the emotional impact of the second, lest the reader should be prematurely conscious of Newman's unfolding design.

That design takes shape more clearly if one bears the image of the child in mind while reading Newman's remarks on conscience. Since Newman nowhere proposes to

6. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Vintage, 1955), p. 25.

prove the Being of a God, his only recourse is to prove some first principle which he can use "to explain how we gain an image of God and give a real assent to the proposition that He exists" (p. 105). This first principle, conscience, is thus the cornerstone of Newman's belief. Here again, Newman does not attempt to prove his first principle; instead, he appeals to the reader for personal evidence of the workings of conscience, and suggests how conscience comes into being. The evidence for the existence of conscience is two-fold, and self-evident to all but the psychopath: "its testimony that there is a right and a wrong, and its sanction to that testimony conveyed in the feelings which attend a right or wrong conduct" (p. 106). To this the reader will readily agree. But the crucial point in Newman's theory is his demonstration of how conscience comes into being, and how it leads to assent in the existence of God:

If, on doing wrong, we feel the same tearful, broken-hearted sorrow, which overwhelms us on hurting a mother; if, on doing right, we enjoy the same sunny serenity of mind, the same soothing, satisfactory delight which follows on our receiving praise from a father, we certainly have within us the image of some person, to whom our love and veneration look. . . . If the cause of these emotions does not belong to this visible world, the Object to which his perception is directed must be Supernatural and Divine; and thus the phenomena of Conscience, as a dictate, avail to impress the imagination with the picture of a Supreme Governor, a Judge, holy, just, powerful, all-seeing, retributive. . . .

(pp. 109-110)

It is impossible to escape the conclusion that Newman, without benefit of Freud or Jung, nevertheless states their secular case: that parents are internalized to form the conscience, and projected outward again as God. Whether there is an obligation on the child to trust his mother is not in the least an irrelevant question, though Newman may say so when he is talking about the child in the clover. When he is talking about the child and his conscience, certainly, Newman takes that obligation as an assumption, and proceeds from there to enunciate his first principle. So does the reader, if he follows the cues of Newman's pronouns. "We" feel the broken-hearted sorrow of the child who has offended his mother; "we" feel the delight of a child praised by his father; "we" become, in fact, what Newman helped us begin to become long ago—the child who would lay down his life for his mother's veracity. So the first image of the child and the second of the conscience are united after all.

The child and the conscience are of vital importance in a third instance, which on the face of it has nothing to do with either one. They form a subliminal bulwark to Newman's defense of the infallibility of the Catholic Church, in his chapter on "Belief in Dogmatic Theology":

To her is committed the care and the interpretation of the revelation. The word of the Church is the word of the revelation. . . . 'I believe what the Church proposes to be believed' is an act of real as-

sent, including all particular assents, notional and real . . . by believing the word of the Church implicité, that is, by believing all that that word does or shall declare itself to contain, every Catholic, according to his intellectual capacity, supplements the shortcomings of his knowledge without blunting his real assent to what is elementary, and takes upon himself from the first the whole truth of revelation, progressing from one apprehension of it to another according to his opportunities of doing so.

(p. 153)

Holy Mother Church resembles, in this passage, the mother we have met twice before in another context. The Catholic, according to Newman, believes the dicta of his Church as a child believes the word of his mother, an assent to the authority quite as much as to the authoritative word. Meanwhile, what of the reader? In the first instance, he plays the role of a faithful child, though at the time he does so indirectly. In the second, he acts that role as thoroughly as his own conscience will permit. Finally, having accepted these two roles, the reader is invited to accept the role of believer. And if he senses the unspoken analogy between the child and the believer, and can accept Newman's conception of the religious implications of conscience without reservation—then he in fact becomes a believer, and Newman's quotation in closing is for him: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them everlasting life, and they shall never perish; and no man shall pluck them out of my hand" (p. 492).

Of course a reader may at any time refuse to be a writer's fiction. Even with the most willing suspension of disbelief, he may be unmoved by logic or limited in imagination or narrow in experience or blind to certain shades of feeling. On the contrary, he may be sufficiently suspicious at the outset that he simply cannot play a role; his very self-consciousness may leave him feeling manipulated, and tempted to give it over as a bad business. Yet in no way can he fail to glimpse at least the possibility of a personal transformation, and in most cases is surprised to discover how many of Newman's values he has unconsciously appropriated as his own. To this extent are Newman's Christian apologists justified. So far does Newman modify our receptivity that we come actually to a kind of faith, as long as he can play the roles provided. Those of Newman's humanist admirers who acknowledge only the possibility of a "living understanding" of his creed underestimate the assents which those roles create. At the very least, the reader is urged to a revelation of his own capacities for faith, which enable him to play Newman's graceful game as long as he can, and is grateful for the quiet dignity with which Newman makes available the roles by which he can do so. Perhaps, toward the very end of *A Grammar of Assent*, the reader may discover with something of chagrin and something of dismay that he is not one of those to whom Newman addresses himself. But he is not apt to regret that he comes as close as he does.

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Tennyson, Chambers, and Recapitulation*

David Charles Leonard

ALMOST AS CONTROVERSIAL as the nineteenth-century debate between Agassiz and Darwin is the debate among recent critics whether Tennyson believed in the theory of successive separate creations or the theory of mutability and development of lower species to higher species as ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. Potter, Hough, and Beach have been convincing enough to persuade George O. Marshall to assert in his *Tennyson Handbook* that Tennyson did not believe in the organic development of lower species to higher species.¹ But they have not convinced James Harrison, who cites the similarity between Chambers' *Vestiges* and its espousal of mutability and ontogenic development of species, and Tennyson's "Poems 54-56" from *In Memoriam*.² In order that James Harrison's argument be made more convincing, detailed evidence is necessary to cement the relationship between *Vestiges* and "Poems 54-56," thereby proving Tennyson's belief in the mutability and recapitulation theory and suggesting its implications for the rest of *In Memoriam*.

At Cambridge, Tennyson proposed that the "development of the human body might possibly be traced from the radiated, vermicular, molluscous and vertebrate organisms."³ According to Potter:

Pretty certainly Tennyson was referring to the idea that an individual in its embryonic development passes through stages that resemble lower forms of animal life. Von Baer had published his work on that subject in 1828, the year Tennyson entered Cambridge. . . .⁴

But Potter assumes that, since Von Baer did not connect his theory of embryonic development with the theory of mutability of species, neither did Tennyson, until Darwin connected the two theories in *The Origin of Species* published in 1859. But Chambers did make this connection in his *Vestiges*, published in 1844:

It has pleased Providence to arrange that one species should give birth to another, until the second highest gave birth to man, who is the very highest: be it so it is our part to admire and to submit. The very faintest notion of there being anything ridiculous or degrading in the theory—how absurd does it appear, when we remember that

every individual amongst us actually passes through the characters of the insect, the fish, and reptile, (to speak nothing of others) before he is permitted to breathe the breath of life! (234-235).⁵

Tennyson ordered a copy from his publisher in November, 1844:

I want you to get me a book which I see advertised in the *Examiner*: it seems to contain many speculations with which I have been familiar for years, and on which I have written more than one poem. The book is called *Vestiges*. . . .⁶

Dating "Poems 54-56" between 1837 and 1844, Harrison finds their developmental ideas most similar to those expressed in *Vestiges*.⁷ Tennyson and Chambers both combine Von Baer's theory of embryonic development with the theory of mutability of species. This can be clearly evidenced by studying "Poems 54-56" from *In Memoriam* together with the "Mental Constitution of Animals" from *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*.

Chambers' intent in the chapter is to demonstrate the similarity and difference between man's mind ("Mind being again a received synonym with soul, the immortal part of man" 325) and the soulless brain of lower creatures.

There is, in reality, nothing to prevent our regarding man as specially endowed with an immortal spirit, at the same time that his ordinary mental manifestations are looked upon as simple phenomena resulting from organization, those of the lower animals being phenomena absolutely the same in character, though developed within much narrower limits (326).

In reviewing the developmental growth of the brain from lower creatures to higher creatures, Chambers discusses faculties of mind by which man has superiority over his biological ancestors. These mental faculties in man are much less restricted than those faculties of creatures lower on the developmental chain. And, as the faculties of the brain of an adult lower creature are restricted, so too are the faculties of the mind of a human infant. But, as ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, the growth of the faculties of the mind of

*This essay was previously published in *Unisa English Studies* XIV, No. 1 (April 1976), 34-37.

1. George Reuben Potter, "Tennyson and the Biological Theory of Mutability in Species," *Philological Quarterly*, 16 (1937), 341-342. Graham Hough, "The Natural Theology of *In Memoriam*," *Review of English Studies*, 23 (1947), 246. Joseph Warren Beach, *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry* (New York: Pageant Book Co., 1956), p. 418. George O. Marshall, Jr., *A Tennyson Handbook* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1963), p. 123.
2. James Harrison, "Tennyson and Evolution," *Durham University Journal*, 33 (1971), 26-29.

3. Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1897), I, 44.

4. Potter, 331.

5. All *Vestiges* quotations are followed by parenthesized page numbers referring to Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844; rpt. New York: Humanities Press, 1969).

6. Hallam Tennyson, I, 222-223.

7. Harrison, 27.

the human infant is recapitulated in the growth of the faculties of the brain of an adult lower creature, so that both the ontogenic development of the human infant and the phylogenetic development of the lower creature culminate in the adult man with all his faculties, moral, spiritual, and physical, keenly developed. In the "Epilogue" of *In Memoriam*, Tennyson's description of spiritual progression parallels Chambers' developmental paradigm:

A soul shall draw from out the vast
And strike his being into bounds,
And, moved through life of lower phase,
Result in man, be born and think,
And act and love, a closer link
Betwixt us and the crowning race (Epilogue, 123-128).⁸

According to Masterman, Tennyson's belief in the growth of the race is contingent upon the individual immortality of each man.⁹ In a conversation with John Sterling over the progress of the human species, Tennyson stated:

I should consider that a liberty had been taken with me if I were made simply a means of ushering in something higher than myself.¹⁰

To Tennyson, each individual soul must progress in order that man as a race may progress. But with the realization of nature's annihilation of the lower creatures and with the firm belief in man's connection with them, Tennyson in "Poem 54" expresses through his persona the fear that God is careless of his creation.

Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;
That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete (54, 1-8);

Tennyson's hope of immortality for man and his biological ancestors is based on trust in God. Ward Hellstrom has indicated Tennyson's indebtedness to the Liberal Anglicans including Julius Hare, who was a resident Fellow of Trinity College, a biographer of John Sterling, and a member of the Apostles at Cambridge.¹¹ Indeed, it is possible that, when writing "Poem 54," Tennyson had in mind Hare's definition of faith as trust expounded in his sermon, "Faith, the Victory that Overcometh the World" from *The Victory of Faith* (1840).

Faith which was merely a belief founded on the calculations of the Understanding, would be no Faith at all. It would want that very quality which is absolutely essential to all Faith, and which makes it what it is. For in all Faith there must be confidence, there must be reliance, there must be trust.¹²

To Hare, faith in God's providence is possible through trust and reliance on God's will and benevolence. Thus, in "Poems 54-56," Tennyson understands that God in nature appears to be careless of man's individual immortality, but he trusts that man's physical connection with the lower creatures proves rather than disproves his immortality and spiritual development.

Given his strong belief in individual immortality, Tennyson finds it necessary to perceive a harmony between man's organic development and his spiritual development. Like Tennyson in "Poems 54-56," Chambers in the "Mental Constitution of Animals" sees the necessity of connecting organic development with the moral and spiritual development of man's soul. In a long footnote quoted from Hope's *On the Origins and Prospects of Man*, Chambers echoes Hope's belief that matter and mind (soul) both originate with God, that matter is imperishable as it recombines into higher forms, that in matter God has laid the seeds for every faculty of mind, a mind that becomes morally perfect as it moves upward on the physical continuum.¹³ In Tennyson's "Poems 54-56," his persona is undeveloped, mentally and spiritually. The persona's finite faculties and sense perceptions bind him to a limited awareness of his own immortal identity. Tennyson himself is aware that one must rely on something other than the physical "doors of perception" in order to grasp the imperceptible. But for the persona, in his unevolved state, the awareness of an immortal identity is severely restricted due to his undeveloped faculties.

Before discussing the mental faculties of man and the lower creatures, Chambers in the "Mental Constitution of Animals" charts the developmental growth of the brain from invertebrates to vertebrates:

The brain of the vertebrata is merely an expansion of one of the ganglions of the nervous cord of the mollusca and crustacea. Or the corresponding ganglion of the mollusca and crustacea may be regarded as the rudiments of a brain; the superior organ thus appearing as only a further development of the inferior (333).

... And then from lower vertebrates to higher vertebrates:

as the brain of the vertebrata is just an advanced condition of a particular ganglion in the mollusca and crustacea, so are the brains of the

8. Citations from *In Memoriam* in my text are to *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed., Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969).
9. Charles F.C. Masterman, *Tennyson as a Religious Teacher*, 2nd ed. (London, 1910), p. 73.
10. Hallam Tennyson, II, 474.

11. Ward Hellstrom, *On the Poems of Tennyson* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972), pp. 28-29.
12. Julius Charles Hare, *The Victory of Faith and Other Sermons* (London and Sydney: Griffith, Farran, Okeden, & Welsh, 1840), p. 13.
13. Chambers, pp. 326-328.

higher and more intelligent mammalia only further developments of the brains of the inferior orders of the same class (340).

Having shown the developmental progress of the brain from species to species, Chambers elaborates on the faculties of mind by which man is able to conceptualize and communicate these conceptualizations:

Through these faculties, man is connected with the external world, and supplied with active impulses to maintain his place in it as an individual and as a species. There is also a faculty, (language) for expressing, by whatever means, (signs, gestures, looks, conventional terms in speech), the ideas which arise in the mind (342).

Given Chambers discussion of man's mental faculties, we can see that the persona's despair in "Poems 54-56" is based on an awareness of his own faculties' limitations. His finite sense perceptions are bound by an incomplete development that will evolve in time. At present, the persona's language function itself allows an articulation of his aspiring hope of immortality only within the imperfect medium of a plaintive cry:

So runs my dream: but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry (54, 17-20).

In "Poems 54-56," Tennyson's persona is an infant; and, as ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, a lower creature, whose mental faculties are severely limited. According to Chambers' "Mental Constitution of Animals" from *Vestiges*, the mental faculties of man when an infant are as restricted as the mental faculties of an adult lower creature:

But when the human brain is congenitally imperfect or diseased, or when it is in the state of infancy, we see in it an approach towards the character of the brains of some of the inferior animals (346).

Both Chambers and Tennyson connect the organic growth of the species with the organic growth of the individual within a species. In "Poems 54-56," Tennyson's persona is an infant unable at this early developmental stage to articulate and conceptualize man's individual immortality. Tennyson himself trusts that "good / Will be the final goal of ill," "That nothing walks with aimless feet," "That not one life shall be destroyed," "That not a worm is cloven in vain; / That not a moth with vain desire / Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire; / Or but subserves another's gain." Having linked man's ontogenic development with the phylogenetic development of animals, Tennyson, as Bradley suggests in his com-

mentary, trusts "that in the end 'good shall fall' to animals as well as men" and that animals may "find their pain and death 'gain' to them."¹⁴

Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring (54, 13-16).

From his limited ontogenic state of spiritual infancy, Tennyson's persona in "Poems 54-56" fails to see his immortal part. He sees only "God and Nature . . . at strife" (55, 5); he sees "Nature, red in tooth and claw" (56, 15) that destroys species and individuals of species at the same time that it destroys man's Godly works. As an infant and as a moth, the persona's knowledge is but a dream of wisdom to be. In the "Prologue" of *In Memoriam*, "knowledge is of things we see" (line 22); but in "Poem 114," knowledge "earthly of the mind" (line 21) is replaced with wisdom, "heavenly of the soul" (line 22). With this higher faculty of wisdom, "mind and soul" will "make one music as before" ("Prologue," 27-28). But in "Poems 54-56," the persona's knowledge is based on the sight of man as nothing more than brute creatures fighting for survival:

No more? A monster then, a dream,
A discord. Dragons of the prime,
That tare each other in their slime,
Were mellow music matched with him.
O life as futile, then, as frail!
O for thy voice to soothe and bless!
What hope of answer, or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil (56, 21-28).

The persona in his limited developmental state must replace his cry of knowledge with the language of wisdom. At this point, his senses are infantile in contrast with the supra-sensory faculty that will allow him to perceive and understand the individual immortality he vainly longs for in "Poems 54-56." Behind the veil and within his limited sense perceptions, the persona envisions dragons of discordant God and Nature; but beyond the veil is a moral, spiritual, and physical harmony based on the solid footing of his supra-sensory perception of individual immortality.

In *In Memoriam*, the persona's search for Hallam is actually his search for his own immortal identity. In "Poems 54-56," Tennyson trusts that the developmental connection between the lower creatures and man does not deny each soul its immortality necessary for the spiritual and moral growth of the race. Unlike his persona, Tennyson is fully

14. A. C. Bradley, *A Commentary on Tennyson's In Memoriam* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1929), p. 150.

aware that his faith in individual immortality and his knowledge of contemporary biological theory can be reconciled only by means of a higher wisdom that perceives the universal harmony and will of the creator, despite the apparent discord in nature as perceived by our senses. For Tennyson's persona, nature's discord denies him faith in individual immortality. The persona's unevolved and limited sense perceptions permit him in "Poems 54-56" only a vain hope amidst resounding despair. But Tennyson himself realizes

that only when sensory knowledge is transformed into supra-sensory wisdom, will the persona's nightmare of a destructive nature become instead a fuller vision of nature evolving, of man evolving according to "One God, one law, one element, / And one far-off divine event, / To which the whole creation moves" (Epilogue, 142-144).

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W. B. Yeats, Matthew Arnold and the Critical Imperative¹

Vinod Sena

YEATSIAN SCHOLARSHIP over the past two decades has expended much of its energy on studying the sources of the poet's art and thought. This is hardly surprising when we remember how very articulate Yeats was on the subject of his indebtedness to his predecessors and contemporaries. In the case of one particular relationship, however—that with Matthew Arnold—he unwittingly covered up his own tracks, and as a result it has gone unnoticed. I mean to focus on it in the present essay in order to bring out the full extent of Yeats's indebtedness to Arnold and the amazing resourcefulness with which he extended his predecessor's ideas and found strikingly new applications for them.

If we examine the first half of Yeats's literary career, we shall find that far from acknowledging his debt to Arnold, he lost no opportunity for lashing out at him. This is particularly true of his writings during the 'eighties' and the 'nineties.' Thus in his very first essay, "The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson" (1886), published while Arnold was still alive, Yeats took him to task for his principle of *touchstones*, asserting that if one relied on this "method of short quotations," the meretricious Londoner would "rule the roost" and the great epic poets and dramatists of the past who depended primarily on the design of the whole would stand forgotten. (UP.92) Again, he was less than happy with the Victorian's account of the Celtic temper in literature, and was particularly ruthless in attacking Arnold's description of literature as "a criticism of life." And yet, as John Eglinton tells us, even before he started on his career as a writer, Yeats

had surprised his classfellows by the passion with which he announced: "no one can write an essay now except Matthew Arnold."² Bearing this early enthusiasm in mind, if we look beneath the surface antipathy which showed up later, we shall find that, far from being an author who had little of value to offer to Yeats, Arnold was, in fact, one of those idols of youth whom one never quite forgives for failing to live up to one's extravagant expectations. Arnold's enunciation of the touchstone principle, his dismissal of a fellow-spirit like Shelley as "an ineffectual angel," his simplifications about the Celtic temper, and, above all, his confusion of a form of vision with "a criticism of life," were lapses too gross in one whom, but for these, Yeats would have been happy to accept as his principal guide. Accordingly, Arnold came to be for Yeats a thinker to be accepted in the part, not the whole; to be taken for granted where there was agreement but not to be spared where there was none.

Disagreements such as these, howsoever violent on the surface, are really of the nature of qualifications to a deeper kind of agreement. T. S. Eliot, too, in spite of his extensive debt to Arnold, was to attack him in his early critical essays. If we remember this, we will discover that in spite of his onslaughts, Yeats remained an avid student of Arnold and used his ideas extensively. Following him at short remove, he directly inherited the Victorian's concern for a strenuous and healthy national tradition of criticism as a prerequisite for creative excellence, and laboured all his life even more rigorously than Arnold to foster one in Ireland.

1. In quoting from Arnold I use the following abbreviation:

Ar.: Matthew Arnold, *Poetry & Prose*, ed. J. Bryson, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954).

And from Yeats:

Au.: *Autobiographies* (London: MacMillan, 1961).

EL.: *Essays & Introductions* (London: MacMillan, 1961).

Ex.: *Explorations* (London: MacMillan, 1962).

L.: *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. A. Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954).

M.: *Mythologies*, (London: MacMillan, 1959).

UP.: *Uncollected Prose I, 1886-1896*, ed. J. P. Frayne (London: 1970).

2. *Irish Literary Portraits*, (London: MacMillan, 1935), p. 21.

In "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," Arnold had found something *premature* about "the burst of creative activity" which marked English literature in the early nineteenth century, and had argued that "this prematureness comes from its having proceeded without having its proper data, without having sufficient materials to work with." What the creative artist needed most was a "current of ideas in the highest degree animating," a climate "permeated by fresh thought," (Ar. 354-55) and a critical effort was the instrument that made it possible, a necessary "means of preparation." To accomplish this task, to be itself, criticism had to be *disinterested* and had scrupulously to keep aloof from "the practical view of things," dissociating itself from questions of utility and concerning itself with not just the best from national thought and art but with "the best that is known and thought in the world," being "perpetually dissatisfied" while artistic productions "perpetually fall short of a high and perfect ideal." (Ar. 360, 361, 370) In other words, it had to adopt an international standard, for to be complacently content with one's own national performance was, as Arnold explained in a different context, "both vulgar, and besides being vulgar, retarding," for when a vigorous international "standard of excellence is lost it is not likely that much which is excellent will be produced."

The Phillistinism which resulted from the lack of such a strenuous tradition of criticism not only became Arnold's subject in *Culture and Anarchy*: it preoccupied him when he reviewed the reissue of Pellisson and D'Olivet's history of the French Academy. The one word which summed up everything was *provinciality*. Arnold declared:

The less a literature has felt the influence of a supposed centre of correct information, correct judgement, correct taste, the more we shall find in it this note of provinciality.

Giving the example of masters of English prose like Taylor, Addison and Ruskin, he went on to stress that without such a centre even the most gifted writer could not escape lapses in taste:

Great powers of mind will make him inform himself thoroughly, great powers of mind will make him think profoundly, even with ignorance and platitude all around him; but not even great powers of mind will keep his taste and style perfectly sound and sure if he is left too much to himself, with no 'sovereign organ of opinion' in these matters near him. (Ar. 385)

Arnold's essays on "The Function of Criticism" and "The Literary Influence of Academies" are familiar enough. If one cites them here it is because Yeats's relationship to them has gone unnoticed. Much of his own early critical work may have been commissioned journalese undertaken to help earn the money which his verse-writing could not bring in. Nonetheless, Yeats had from the very first a lofty conception of the function of criticism, a conception which he directly derived from Arnold. I have already mentioned how he aimed his

first shot at Arnold in his 1886 essay on Ferguson. Ironically, on the opening page of that essay itself, he revealed the extent to which he was indebted to the Victorian for one of his most enduring preoccupations. Noting the lack of sustained poetic achievement in Irish writing, he went on to observe:

If Ireland has produced no great poet, it is not that her poetic impulse has run dry, but because her critics have failed her, for every community is a solidarity all depending upon each, and each upon all. Heaven and earth have not seen the man who could go on producing great work without a sensitive and exacting audience. (UP.88)

Thus at the very outset, Yeats had not only accepted Arnold's concept of the relevance of criticism to creative excellence, but begun to apply it to account for his own national situation. In the course of editing his numerous Irish anthologies, one thing that struck him was the incapacity of even the more gifted writers to maintain a given level of excellence. Such failure could scarcely be attributed to lack of imaginative ability. When even men like Carleton and Banim failed to achieve real distinction, Yeats was compelled to ask if it was not because in the Ireland of their day "a novelist, no matter how great his genius, found no fit convention ready to his hand and no exacting public to forbid him to commingle noisy melodrama with his revelations." (L.248) In later years Yeats was to try and explain the failure of some of his own friends and contemporaries in similar Arnoldian terms. Thus if Dr. Douglas Hyde and Standish O'Grady were unable to fulfill their immense early promise, it was because the former, as Yeats found, had "no critical capacity" whatever, while the latter, "shaped by his youth in some provincial society," was beyond culture and redemption. (Au.218, 221)

Culture became, in fact, for Yeats, as it had been for Arnold, "the sanctity of the intellect," and provincialism its degradation. (Au.489) Arnold had attacked the complacency of the "Anglo Saxon race" as the root corruption in English and American life. Yeats, adapting the principle to his own country, set upon the smugness and self-righteousness of the Irish middle class with a fierceness beyond anything in his mentor. As he saw it, Ireland's situation was far more serious and called for more drastic action. On the one hand, deprived of a true national aristocracy, culturally "Ireland had suffered more than England from democracy," for there was "no accepted authority to explain why the more difficult pleasure is the nobler pleasure." (Ex.257, Au.491) On the other, its religious and political problems were such as made it peculiarly vulnerable to provincialities of every kind. There was thus the Gaelic enthusiast who had to be contended with, recognizing nothing which did not in some way go back to peasant speech and peasant tradition. There was, too, the priest—still very much a power in the land—who would not countenance any "ideas that might perplex a parish of farmers." Last, and most potent, there was the

ubiquitous politician, all-too-influential in a country struggling for freedom, "who would reject every idea which is not of immediate service to his cause."³

If the arts in Ireland were to be rescued from the compulsive demand for practical "utility" of one kind or another and the country saved from a barbarism worse than any Arnold feared for England, one needed "a criticism at once remorseless and enthusiastic," (EI.256) passionate in its advocacy of a new approach to the arts, ruthless in demolishing the false gods ruling public opinion. To the self-appointed task of such a criticism, Yeats committed himself early in life with a more than Arnoldian dedication. For one thing, in a country so radically polarised as Ireland by political and religious strife, the odds against Yeats were much greater, and one needed a different order of commitment if one was to survive without submitting to a compromise. For another, we do at times catch in Arnold a note of regret, a hint that criticism was for him a second-best, a substitute for creative work which an unpropitious age made almost impossible. (Ar.352-53) In Yeats there is no such suspicion. The five decades during which he was active as critic were also active ones for him as poet and playwright. His criticism meant time off from creative work; but that creative work itself took its meaning from a larger context. Insofar as his criticism helped to make that context more congenial, it complemented his work as artist: it never became a substitute. Yeats saw his work as critic and as artist as in fact twin aspects of a single commitment, and one of the most important advances he made over Arnold was the finality with which he set to rest his rather artificial division between the two faculties. Arnold may have spoken of the importance of criticism for a healthy creative tradition, but he nonetheless viewed them as separate functions, the one preparing the way for the other. As late as May 1896 Yeats himself was speaking in similar terms, affirming that the critical faculty "clears the rubbish from the mouth of the Sybil's cave, but it is not the Sybil." (L.262) But the example of Richard Wagner (learnt of from Arthur Symons) helped him make the jump and affirm the indivisibility of criticism and creation almost two decades before Eliot:

All writers, all artists of any kind in so far as they have had any philosophical or critical power, just in so far as they have been deliberate artists at all, have had some philosophy, some criticism of their art; and it has often been this philosophy, or this criticism, that has evoked their most startling inspiration . . . (EI.154).

Yeats, in fact, invariably extended and adapted what he took from others. Had his work as critic been adequately

examined, his close relationship to Arnold would have been a commonplace of criticism. He clearly recalls the Victorian in his concern for international standards in criticism despite his marked literary nationalism, his insistence that criticism must dissociate itself from all questions of immediate practical utility, his account of the dangers of provinciality, his use of terms like *culture*, *taste*, *sweetness*, *light*, or his onslaughts on the Philistinism of the Irish middle class. The important thing, however, is not that Yeats came to learn from Arnold the imperative need in our times for a healthy critical tradition: it is the amazing resourcefulness with which he interpreted his role as critic in the context of his country's conditions.⁴ Thus even as a young man he recognized that the Arnoldian instruments were not quite adequate for him. In contrast to Victorian England, Ireland had hardly a Reading Public, and by itself the written word was only a voice in the wilderness. Accordingly, during the 'nineties, in spite of his youthful timidity, Yeats preoccupied himself with setting up a large network of literary societies, helped them acquire suitable Irish books, and through lectures encouraged their members to study Irish myth, folklore and literature. He hoped by such means to help build an Irish Reading Public, and if he did write at all, it was openly as a propagandist, providing through anthologies the kind of Irish writing he deemed desirable, or in the public press supporting what he considered good writing and attacking what he thought unhealthy and undesirable.

Once the Irish Dramatic Movement was under way, Yeats hoped to show by this "the most immediately powerful form of literature" what his new approach to the arts meant in practice. The affairs of the Abbey kept him all too busy, to say nothing of the plays written to help fill its bills. But through all this he was writing, exhorting, lecturing, in an all-out drive to educate audiences, actors and would-be playwrights in the "first principles" of dramatic appreciation, production and construction. Only a compelling faith in the necessity of criticism and of critical integrity could have given Yeats the energy to have carried on his work as critic amid so many competing preoccupations or to fight so uncompromisingly over the issue of *The Playboy* or that of *Blanco Posnet*.

The years that followed marked a period of partial "estrangement" from his countrymen, but with the establishment of the Free State, Yeats was once more to the fore. Anyone studying his *Senate Speeches* can see that for him his senatorship meant an unexpected extension of his work as a promoter of the arts and an educator of national sensibility and taste. He occupied himself primarily with matters concerning the arts (Censorship, Copyright), their support

3. Quoted, D. Greene & E. Stephens, *J. M. Synge* (New York: MacMillan, 1959), p. 148.

4. In interpreting the critic's role in the widest possible terms as a promoter of the arts and an educator of national sensibility, Yeats showed

himself closer to Arnold's essential spirit than, say, T. S. Eliot for whom criticism was concerned with "the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste." "The Function of Criticism," in *Selected Essays* (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace, 1932), p. 14.

and encouragement, the choice of beautiful and dignified designs for coinage and official robes, the patronage of learned bodies and the preservation of works of art, and last and most important, national policy on education and through it the training of Irish sensibility.

The closing years of the aging poet saw him bringing to the founding of an Irish Academy of Letters something of the fervor that went to the making of the Abbey. Arnold's account of the benefits of an institution like the French Academy had not been lost on Yeats. In 1910 he supported Gosse's proposal for an English Academy, and in 1926, when conditions began to return to normal in Ireland, proposed an autonomous committee of men of letters within the Royal Irish Academy, arguing that in "a new state, where conditions are unsettled, it is important to have an authoritative body, not merely in matters of learning but in creative literature." (L.717). His work in the senate made him feel the need for such an organ of authority all the more acutely, for it enabled him to see that a more immediate threat to the creative arts in the new Ireland was posed by the provinciality of its legislators and administrators than by that of the general public. Arnold may have been right in supposing that it was past the time for an academy that could, like the French, discipline the provincialities of the English nation at large. But could not such a body—a sort of guild or union of distinguished writers—serve as a bulwark against the encroachments and obtuseness of an ill-educated democratic state? The idea represented a brilliant extension of Arnold's account of the function of a literary academy and with characteristic determination, Yeats, in spite of failing health, saw it through. When the Irish Academy he proposed was finally launched, he with Shaw made its object quite clear. Reminding prospective academicians of the existence in Ireland of a kind of censorship which could at any moment deny an Irish author of his rightful public, Yeats and Shaw went on:

As our votes are counted by dozens instead of thousands and are therefore negligible and as no election can ever turn on our grievances, our sole defence lies in the authority of our utterance. This, at least, is by no means negligible, for in Ireland there is still a deep respect for intellectual and poetic quality. In so far as we represent that quality we can count on a consideration beyond all proportion to our numbers, but we cannot exercise our influence unless we have an organ through which we can address the public or appeal collectively and unanimously to the government. (L.801)

If over the years, Yeats came to extend Arnold's ideas and to find strikingly original applications for them, he also learnt to make his peace with his Victorian mentor. The change appears to have set in with his work for the Irish theatre. Endeavoring to educate would-be dramatists in the

first principles of drama, Yeats was at pains to warn them against confusing art with mere entertainment. "A play to be suitable for performance at the Abbey," he declared in his "Advice to Playwrights,"

should contain some *criticism of life*, of Irish life by preference, important for its beauty or from some excellence of style; and this intellectual quality is not more necessary to tragedy than to the gayest comedy.⁵

In spite of his earlier repudiation of the phrase, "a criticism of life," Yeats was compelled to fall back on Arnoldian terms in order to define the intellectual strength which characterised good drama.

With his work for the theatre, Yeats came to focus increasingly on tragedy until he saw it not simply as the most significant form of drama, but as "the best that art—perhaps that life—can give." This preoccupation with tragic art, which continued to the very end, is not difficult to explain. On the one hand, it helped Yeats to discover a positive purpose in his failure as a lover—"The poet finds and makes his mask in disappointment, the hero in defeat"—and so to come to terms with it. (M.337) On the other, it enabled him to resolve the conflicting claims of art and of the spirit which provided his life with one of its most enduring tensions. The artist was compelled to inhabit the world of the flesh and to use its concrete forms. In tragedy, however, he could carry us to the "storm-beaten threshold of sanctity" at which the mystic's explorations begin.

I have examined elsewhere at some length Yeats's account of tragedy.⁶ What is interesting for us here is the manner in which, in developing this account, he came to resolve his seeming differences with his Victorian predecessor. In the Preface to his 1853 edition of *Poems*, Arnold seeks to explain his withdrawal of *Empedocles on Etna* from circulation in terms of a distinction between two modes of suffering: the passive and the active. Of the former, he declared:

In such situations there is inevitably something morbid, in our description of them something monotonous. When they occur in actual life, they are painful; the representation of them in poetry is painful also. (Ar.611)

He excluded such suffering, "in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done," from the domain of art. For, as he affirmed:

All art is dedicated to Joy, and there is no higher end, no more serious problem, than how to make men happy. The right art is that alone which creates the highest happiness. (Ar.610)

Accordingly, despite its lyric grace and its accurate represen-

5. Quoted, Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre* (London: G. P. Putnam, 1914), p. 100. Italics mine.

6. "W. B. Yeats & the Storm-beaten Threshold," *The Dublin Magazine* (Summer-Fall 1970), pp. 56-75.

tation of human thought, his own *Empedocles* had to be discarded. But as Arnold went on to explain, active suffering remained a legitimate theme for the artist, and, strange as it might seem, in such art "the more tragic the situation, the deeper becomes [our] enjoyment." (Ar.611)

Confronted with the new literature which began to pour in with the Great War, Yeats found himself quite out of sympathy with an art which focussed on man as a passive victim rather than an active agent. In accounting for this acute distaste, he turned increasingly to Arnold, declaring that he "showed himself a great critic by his reasons" for withdrawing *Empedocles*. (EI.354) Faced by the unprecedented scale of suffering unleashed by the war, Yeats "felt it better that in times like these / We poets keep our mouths shut." (L.599) As a member of the Abbey's management, he decided to turn down O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* even though no one knew better the extent to which that theatre owed its prosperity, indeed its very survival, to O'Casey's earlier plays. To accept *The Silver Tassie* would, for Yeats, have been to betray his idealist conception of art. In the heated controversy that followed this rejection, Arnold's name may have gone unmentioned, but Yeats clearly derived his rationale from him. In 1936, when he published his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, Yeats did not fail to make the crucial acknowledgement. His friends had done their utmost to dissuade him from excluding the War Poets altogether, but Yeats was not to be deterred. In private he pointed to the stylistic defects of poets such as Wilfred Owen. In his Preface, however, he went directly to the point:

I have rejected these poems for the same reason that made Arnold withdraw his *Empedocles on Etna* from circulation; passive suffering is not a theme for poetry. . . . When man has withdrawn into the quicksilver at the back of the mirror no great event becomes luminous in his mind; it is no longer possible to write *The Persians*, *Agincourt*, *Chevy Chase* . . . (p. xxxiv)

In his Preface, Arnold had clearly indicated that accuracy of observation and felicity of expression were not enough. If beyond these, he demanded of the greatest art that "it shall inspire and rejoice the reader," he was clearly as little committed as Yeats to a purely mimetic conception of art. Arnold the propagandist often got the better of Arnold the thinker, and in seizing on "a criticism of life" as a slogan he did less than justice to Arnold the sage. True, he eschewed terms like "vision," "ecstasy," "reverie"; but his rejection of his own *Empedocles* showed beyond any doubt that he was as much concerned with art's affirmative capability as his Irish successor. Thus Yeats's prolonged quarrel with Arnold proved to be one with a shadow, a quarrel of terminology not substance. Having finally come to recognize this, Yeats could hardly have made more generous amends than by offering Arnold as an all-sufficient precedent for his own high-handed exclusion from the Oxford anthology of a whole school of poetry. In doing so, he not only answered his critics: he at long last publically made his peace with one to whom his extensive indebtedness had gone unacknowledged on account of a youthful misunderstanding.

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John Ruskin, C. R. Cockerell, and the Proportions of Architecture

Michael Brooks

"YOU MUST NOT when you leave this room," John Ruskin told an Edinburgh audience near the end of an assault on the classical architecture of the Athens of the North, "refer yourselves to some architect of established reputation, and ask him whether I am right or not. You might as well, had you lived in the sixteenth century, have asked a Roman Catholic archbishop his opinion of the first reformer (XII, 71)."¹ It is a dramatic picture: the mob jeering in the town square, the embattled reformer tied to the post, the flames licking at his feet as he defiantly tosses his head and shouts truth to posterity. It is necessary to resist the appeal of Ruskin's language and give his opponents their day in court, for they

help us to define, if only by contrast, the contours of Ruskin's theories. They show that while some of Ruskin's claims only struck at conventional opinion, others were heresies against the nature of architecture itself.

It is certain that Ruskin expected little sympathy from the profession and deliberately sought converts among the unlearned. His contemptuous references to Vitruvius, Palladio, and Sansovino resemble bear-baiting, and the anonymous writer in *The Builder* who signed himself Zeta was merely replying in kind when he expressed a wish to "transform John Ruskin in a Saint Bartholomew, by flaying him alive, without the slightest mercy or compunction."² The archi-

1. *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London and New York: George Allen, 1903-1912), XII, 71. All further references to this edition appear in the text.

2. "Zeta," "Our 'Rotten Rags,'" *The Builder*, XI (October 22, 1853), 654.

pects had reason to respond with anger and alarm. They had invested much in the classical tradition and they had built enduring monuments. If we consider only important structures erected shortly before or shortly after the publication of *The Seven Lamps* and *The Stones of Venice*, it is impossible not to be impressed by Sir Robert Smirke's Ionic facade for the British Museum, George Basevi's giant Corinthian columns for the Fitzwilliam Museum, Sir William Tite's imposing portico for the Royal Exchange, the sophisticated archeology of C. R. Cockerell's Ionic order at the Ashmolean Museum, the vast peripteral colonnade of H. L. Elmes' St. George's Hall in Liverpool, and the Corinthian portico and proud cupola of Cuthbert Broderick's Town Hall in Leeds. Churches were Gothic and gentlemen's mansions often had battlements, but when a building was to be proud, confident, and massive, a classical style was chosen. Hospitals, banks, insurance offices, public baths, railway hotels, and clubhouses were all built in styles derived from Greece or Rome or the Italian Renaissance.

For those pleased by this state of affairs, Ruskin's views required careful scrutiny. On the whole, Ruskin's opponents were considerably more scrupulous in criticizing his views than he had been in his attacks on the classical tradition, and there are two—an anonymous article in *The Illustrated London News*³ and a defense of columnar architecture in *The Builder* by Samuel Huggins⁴—which are still valuable reading after more than a century. The most important of Ruskin's opponents, however, was one whom he never attacked—indeed, one for whom he expressed deep respect. That was Charles Robert Cockerell (1788-1863), one of England's leading architects, Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy, and easily the most eloquent defender of the classical tradition. His six dry, scholarly lectures a year were being given (and published, first in *The Athenaeum*, then in *The Builder*) during the same period that Ruskin was forming and publishing his own theories. No other teacher so well represented the accumulated wisdom of the profession, and a comparison of his views with Ruskin's shows the choice of doctrines that confronted young architects at mid-century.

I

The son of a successful surveyor and architect, Cockerell had begun his training in the office of Robert Smirke, where he arrived just in time to help prepare the drawings for the first building in England to display a Greek Doric portico—the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. This initiation into

Regency England's favorite style was followed by seven years of travel, in the course of which the young man became an acknowledged authority on such matters as the temple sculptures at Aegina, the use of polychromy on Greek temples, the unique Doric order employed at Bassae, and the use of entasis on the columns of the Parthenon. Cockerell's early aesthetic outlook is indicated by a letter he sent to Lady Burghersh in 1816 along with his design for Wellington Palace: "As there exists no original style of architecture in the present day & as whatever style is adopted must be imitation, there can be little doubt that the Greek as the most classical & convenient should be preferred. . . ." As the years passed, however, Cockerell's understanding of the classical went far beyond the narrow limits of the Greek revival. It is not too much to say that his sense of the great tradition is the same as Ruskin's highly flexible use of the word Renaissance: it includes the precedents of Greece and Rome, the authority of Vitruvius, the treatises of Alberti and Vignola, the great structures of Palladio, Wren, and Vanburgh, the doctrines of Sir William Chambers, and such contemporary work as the new town of Edinburgh.

Cockerell's prestige was an obstacle to the Gothic revival and it is hardly surprising that Pugin should have spoken with contempt of his "vile compounds of Italian detail."⁶ Ruskin's attitude was more respectful. There is a letter in The John Rylands Library, written from Ruskin's Park Street address, and therefore to be dated in 1850, in which Ruskin seeks the older man's support for a proposal to have G. F. Watts paint murals in Cockerell's Taylorian Institute and an 1851 appendix to *The Stones of Venice* refers to Cockerell as "my good friend" (IX, 430). To some extent, Ruskin accepted Cockerell's archeological writings as a model for his own work. On February 18, 1852, he wrote to his father: "If Fergusson and Cockerell were both at work in Venice, I should not be; but the one works in India, the other in Greece."⁷ The two men would probably have met at public lectures during the eighteen-fifties and in 1857 they corresponded in connection with Ruskin's testimony before the National Gallery Site Commission. In January, 1858, Cockerell distributed the prizes to art-workmen that Ruskin had donated to the Architectural Museum and Ruskin, according to the transcript of his remarks that appeared in *The Building News*, began his lecture that evening with both a tribute and an apology:

. . . they were permitted to meet that evening under the auspices and presidency of their venerable Professor of Architecture at the Royal

3. "Ruskin on Architecture," *The Illustrated London News*, XXII (December 3, 17, and 31, 1853), 467, 514-15, 602-04.
 4. Samuel Huggins, "Classical Columnar Architecture and the 'Stones of Venice,'" *The Builder*, XI (December 3 and 10, 1853), 722-24, 743-44.
 5. Quoted in David Watkin, *The Life and Work of C. R. Cockerell* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1974), p. 29.

6. A.W.N. Pugin, *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture* (London: John Weale, 1843), p. 33.

7. J. L. Bradley, *Letters from Venice* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), p. 185.

Academy—one of the most graceful and distinguished designers in the School of Classical architecture—a style distinguished for grace and beauty of design. He felt this the more deeply, because he knew that the Professor of Architecture could not countenance some of those things which he (Mr. Ruskin) might have audaciously or perhaps ignorantly advanced, either in the impulsive haste of a young man, or in a state of mind in which he referred to things which he felt to be false or evil, and where that was not perceived which was associated with the right, the wise, and the good. He knew that Professor Cockerell had much to forgive him, and he felt his forgiveness though he could not adequately give expression to it. . . .⁸

Clearly Ruskin regarded Cockerell with respect, almost with awe, yet in temperament and theory the two men had little in common.

Cockerell spoke as a representative of orthodoxy. The great names that appear in Ruskin's work only as objects of abuse are invoked by Cockerell as living, guiding presences. He names Vitruvius, Alberti, Vignola, Palladio, Blondell, Philibert Delorme, and Quatremere de Quincy as if he were drawing up a list of current research for a graduate seminar. Above all he admired Vitruvius, treating his views, as Pope treated Homer's poems, as nature methodized. He defended the Roman against modern detractors who accused him of bad grammar and a pedestrian imagination. He assured his students that when he faced a difficult problem in design, he was usually able to solve it by opening Vitruvius' treatise to the relevant pages. He even assimilated Gothic into the Vitruvian tradition by arguing that the Roman's manuscripts were widely read in the middle ages but that their illustrations were lost, with the result that a Gothic cathedral would illustrate, though in naive and unexpected ways, the eternal principles of architecture.

Although his own buildings were dazzling virtuoso variations on classic themes, Cockerell's advice to his students was cautious and conservative. In an age that had seen the revival of the Hindu and Moorish styles, he felt compelled to warn against fads. "A builder with whom he was acquainted," Cockerell told his students in 1845, "once produced an exceedingly fine portico, so much so that the professor inquired of him how he had designed it. 'Why,' said the man, 'I opened Sir William Chambers' book, and copied it exactly.'"⁹ The students were not to follow tradition quite so slavishly, but they were urged never to forget that, as Cockerell put it in 1851, they would always be safe "in the hands of Chambers, whatever be the fashion of the time."¹⁰ One result of this caution was that while Cockerell could approve the growing use of Gothic for religious buildings (though still insisting that the Queen Anne churches had

never been bettered), he could only deprecate its wider use. In 1851, the same year that the first volume of *The Stones of Venice* was published, he assured his students that to construct hotels and bazaars in Gothic was as ridiculous as it would be to build the Parthenon in a swamp. "Gothic was now in the ascendent," he said, "but the rage for mimicking it would soon pass away. Youth follows blindly, but at mature age we criticize and reflect."¹¹

The self-confidence of this remark, set against the growing power of the revival, suggests that Cockerell was a slightly anachronistic figure. When introducing Ruskin at the South Kensington Museum in 1858, Cockerell spoke of himself as "one of the last century, and not of the present century."¹² Though he had once praised the wild originality of Beethoven, admired Delacroix, and enthusiastically praised the air of Turner's landscapes as "beaming with light, heat, and vegetation,"¹³ one would never guess these enthusiasms from either the tone or content of his lectures. It is as though a distinguished literary critic, in an age when Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats were the triumphant influences, had continued to base himself upon the theories of Samuel Johnson. A revolution in sensibility had occurred, but Cockerell had, one must assume deliberately, refused to allow it to alter his views on architecture. That is why so many of the young architects who responded so eagerly to Ruskin seem to have been unaffected by Cockerell. He did not speak to, did not seem even to acknowledge, minds nurtured on the emotionalism of the Evangelicals, the medievalism of Scott, the nature imagery of Tennyson's verse. The most passionate Goths ignored Cockerell and embraced Ruskin. That they were right to do so should not blind us to the fact that Cockerell's theories were often very sound while Ruskin's were, in significant ways, quite simply unarchitectural.

II

The issue in dispute between the two men was whether architecture was the art of proportion or the art of decoration. Ruskin never doubted that it was the latter. His imagination was deeply stirred by the carving of a cable moulding or the unexpected contrast of colored stones, but very little moved by geometrical floor plans, double cubes, and juxtapositions of oval with oblong spaces. He was sure that the interest of a building lay not in its utilitarian structure but in the features, "venerable or beautiful, but otherwise unnecessary" (VIII, 28), which were added to it. He ranked styles according to the amount and variety of the ornament they accommodated, criticizing Greek architecture because

8. "Mr. Ruskin at the South Kensington Museum," *The Building News*, IV (January 22, 1858), 91.

9. Cockerell, *The Builder*, III (February 8, 1845), 63.

10. Cockerell, *The Builder*, IX (February 8, 1851), 85.

11. Cockerell, *The Builder*, IX (February 8, 1851), 85.

12. "Mr. Ruskin at the South Kensington Museum," 91.

13. Quoted in Watkin, p. 92.

its ornament was limited and praising the once despised Venetian Gothic because its decorations were colorful, various, and abundant. He thought the Early English capital unworthy of admiration because it could not be decorated. Cockerell, on the other hand, spoke for the Renaissance tradition when he insisted that the splendor of a building began with the geometrical order or its plan and that ornaments were merely added graces—"nets to catch a customer," as Philibert Delorme had called them."¹⁴ He cautioned his students against "admiring the *prettiness* of the art—mere matters of detail—long before they were able to appreciate the value of a complete homogenous whole."¹⁵ He warned against the seductions of pretty drawings which showed only parts of facades or veiled the whole with the use of *chiaroscuro* or aerial perspective. One need only think of Ruskin's illustrations—always showing portions of buildings, always emphasizing color and shadow—to see how wide was the gap between the two men.

The great majority of Ruskin's early critics, raised within the tradition that Cockerell represented, were quick to assail Ruskin's equation of architectural beauty with ornament as a major blunder. Samuel Huggins maintained that "architecture is the art of the beautiful manifested in structure, of which, by its very nature as a structural art, *form* must be the dominant principle."¹⁶ Ruskin's critic in *The Illustrated London News* was sure that a

very essential point of architectural merit is the structural economy achieved in it—determinable by consideration of the relative proportions of the whole areas, and the areas of the points of support; and the relative proportions of the solids and voids in section. These, and other points revealing the creative intelligence of the designer, are the arcana of the art which the reasoning mind is never tired of contemplating, and in comparison with which mere decorative detail is a matter of but secondary import.

By concentrating on ornament rather than structure, he added, Ruskin made "the same mistake as it would be to describe the coat instead of the man, and sometimes not even the coat, but the buttons and braid which cover it."¹⁷ Many other critics agreed. The anonymous pamphleteer who wrote *Something on Ruskinism* complained that "he looks at everything by itself, labels it a specimen, and puts it by into a pigeon-hole of architectural grammar."¹⁸ Edward Lacy Garbett, the first man to discuss Ruskin's theories within the cover of a book, insisted that "the art which engrossed a great part of the attentions of a Phidias, a Michael Angelo, and a Wren is something more than decoration."¹⁹ After Ruskin lectured in Edinburgh, the attacks were re-

doubled. A writer in *The Scottish Press* complained that Ruskin's views had reference only to the facades of buildings, another insisted in *The Edinburgh Advertiser* that grandeur, repose, and majesty lay only in straight lines and rectangles, and the architects of the city met to solemnly reaffirm the traditional importance of proportions.

Against this barrage, Ruskin replied with all the considerable rhetorical weapons at his disposal. Only once did he even waver. That was when he admitted in the "Reply to Mr. Garbett" appended to Volume One of *The Stones of Venice* that a distinction could be drawn between the ornament that is intrinsic to a design (presumably capitals, mouldings, corbels, and the like) and the additional decoration that may be added later. "That additional decoration is not the architecture," he said; it consists only of "curtains, pictures, statues, things which may be taken away from the building and not hurt it" (IX, 452). But this was only a temporary detour into moderation. Perhaps roused by the resistance he still encountered from the profession, Ruskin pushed his heresy to new extremes. He dropped the moderate paragraphs of the "Reply to Mr. Garbett" from the second edition of *The Stones of Venice* in 1857 and he began to insist that, as he put it in his 1855 preface to *The Seven Lamps*, what we call architecture is only the association of paintings and sculpture "in noble masses, or the placing them in fit places" (VIII, 11). He reminded his readers that the greatest architects were those who, like Phidias, Giotto, and Michaelangelo, regarded architecture as their play and painting and sculpture as their real work. During the mid-fifties he shifted his stylistic loyalties from Venetian palaces to the cathedrals of the *Ile de France* solely because they carried so much figure sculpture. So intense was Ruskin's devotion to the kind of ornament that he had, for one brief moment, called extraneous, that he decided that the architect of the Gothic cathedrals, the only man important enough to have supervised the over-all construction, must necessarily have been the man in charge of carving the portals.

III

Ruskin was not likely to convince the wavering by merely stating his love of ornament in increasingly violent form. The classical view of architecture assumed that beauty ultimately derived from the harmonious proportions that existed between all parts of a building. Ruskin could not discredit classical architecture without assailing the classical doctrine of proportions.

14. Cockerell, *The Builder*, IV (January 17, 1846), 25.

15. Cockerell, *The Builder*, VI (February 12, 1848), 75.

16. "Classical Columnar Architecture and the 'Stones of Venice,'" 723.

17. "Ruskin on Architecture," 514.

18. "An Architect," *Something on Ruskinism with a Vestibule in Rhyme* (London: R. Hastings, 1851), p. 37.

19. Edward Lacy Garbett, *Rudimentary Treatise on the Principles of Design in Architecture* (London: John Weale, 1850), p. 2.

The views that Ruskin opposed were descended from Vitruvius' use of the module and from the theory of harmonic proportions recommended by Alberti, Palladio, and a small army of sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century writers on architecture. In Book III of his treatise, Vitruvius says that an order should be constructed in accordance with a single part selected as a standard unit of measurement. He called this part a module and explained its use in a discussion of the five orders. He takes the diameter of the base of the columns (or, in the case of the Doric order, one half the diameter) as his unit of measurement. By using modules rather than such an absolute standard as meters or feet, an architect shifts his attention from the actual dimensions of a building to the proportional relations between its parts. The thickness of a Doric column will be two modules and its height fourteen. The height of a capital is one module, its breadth two and a sixth modules, and so it goes, with all the figures referring back to one accepted standard. The five orders were valued not simply for their structural or decorative qualities but because they provided the young architect with training in what Rudolph Wittkower has called "the metrical organization of buildings."²⁰ Accordingly, the five orders provided the subject of the first engraving in most treatises on architecture. Cockerell was merely repeating the traditional advice when, in 1850, he urged his students to "collect examples of the various masters, with reference to the modulus they employed, and to consider their application to actual dimensions—the principle of greatness might be so understood and acquired."²¹

Basing themselves on the system of proportions revealed in the five orders, Renaissance humanists developed a theory which related the ratios of architecture first to those of the musical scale and ultimately to those of the cosmic order. There were seven lengths of string which, when plucked, produced the seven notes recognized by the human ear, and the relation between each of these seven lengths and the whole string could be expressed in terms of certain harmonic ratios. These same ratios, expressed in spatial terms, produced shapes which were claimed to have special appeal to the eye. Their appeal was intuitive; in Alberti's words, it proceeded "from a secret argument and discourse implanted in the mind itself."²² A viewer would perceive a violation of one of the seven harmonic ratios in architecture as surely and as quickly as he would recognize a discord in music. Ultimately, the harmony of a facade reflected that of the universe.

The theory of harmonic proportions had an immense and pervasive influence on European architecture in general

and on English architecture in particular. As expressed by Palladio, both in his buildings and in his *Quattro Libri*, it had a decisive influence on Inigo Jones in the seventeenth century and on the circle around Lord Burlington in the eighteenth. By the time of Cockerell, to be sure, the philosophical substructure supporting the theory of harmonic proportions had come to be viewed with skepticism. It was noted that since sounds and shapes were perceived by different physio-psychological mechanisms, they were unlikely to be governed by the same laws. Moreover, measurements had shown that the proportions in ancient buildings were more diverse than Alberti or Palladio would have expected. By the latter half of the eighteenth century, Sir William Chambers could simply set aside the analogy of musical and architectural proportions as an error, but he did this without in any way weakening his conviction that the five orders were the basis of architecture, that their proportions were to be expressed in terms of modules, and that beauty of proportion was the chief goal of the architect. For his part, Cockerell simply sidestepped any philosophical difficulties. "It is a comfortable conclusion to the practical architect," he told his auditors, "that the empirical rules of Vitruvius, the harmonic, the geometrical and the arithmetical rules of Alberti and his followers, agree in the main; so that either may be adopted without material deviation from correctness."²³

Cockerell wanted to preserve a tradition, even if its theoretical basis had been weakened. Ruskin wanted to destroy it and denounced the limitation of the possible orders to five as a fraud. He was convinced that the chief merit claimed for the modular system—its ability to preserve the same proportions for an order in spite of any change in actual size—would produce only such aesthetic blunders as the interior of St. Peter's in Rome, where Corinthian columns that might have graced the pump room at Leamington Spa had been puffed up to Brobdingnagian size. Ruskin's most impassioned assault on the view that proportions were the glory of architecture came in his 1857 address to the Architectural Association on "The Use of Imagination in Modern Architectural Designs." The speech was printed in *The Two Paths*, but the transcript that appeared in *The Building News* will be quoted here, for it indicates audience reaction.

The Chairman opened the meeting by listing Cockerell among those who regretted their inability to attend. It was just as well. Ruskin used the evening for a prolonged *reductio ad absurdum* of the traditional theory of architecture, and it is hard to believe that Cockerell's dignified tolerance could have taken the strain.

20. Palladio and Palladianism (New York: Braziller, 1974), p. 59.

21. Cockerell, *The Builder*, VII (February 16, 1850), 77.

22. Leon Battista Alberti, "On Architecture," in Elizabeth Holt, *A Documentary History of Art* (New York: Anchor Books, 1957), p. 236.

23. Cockerell, *The Athenaeum* (February 25, 1843), 185.

Ruskin opposed the expressive power of architectural decoration to the classical theory of proportions. Granted that invention was needed for "the disposition of lines, mouldings, and masses in agreeable proportions," what did architects really achieve with all their complicated ratios?

He thought they would agree with him in saying that the beauty accomplished was not of a pathetic or touching order. They would, however, admit that well-disposed lines in music, properly executed, could rouse the feelings—could give courage to the soldier—language to the silent—consolation to the mourner—more joy to the joyful—more devotion to the devout;—could architects do that by a group of lines?—(cheers) Could they suppose for a moment that the architectural lines in front of Whitehall could ever dispose the two mute soldiers on black horses under the alcoves to valour?—(a laugh)—or could they suppose that any person feeble in faith was ever made firmer and more steadfast in creed by the proportions of the architraves of the structure in which they were accustomed to worship?—(Laughter.)²⁴

One would like to know the age of the members of the audience who were responding with such sympathy. Since the Architectural Association had been formed for educational purposes, they were probably young. The older generation of architects was hostile, and a writer in a subsequent issue of *The Building News*, commenting on Ruskin's address, found it "scarcely possible to believe that he actually gave utterance to such incoherent rhapsody and palpable nonsense."²⁵ Yet the spirit of the age was surely on Ruskin's side. The idea that architecture might be regarded as a kind of poem, valued for its ability to express and communicate emotion, had already swept the field in church architecture and was soon to be applied universally.

Since lines and masses can do little to convey feeling, it is hardly surprising that when Ruskin picks an example to convey what he asks of architecture, it turns out to be the carving on the south transept door of Amiens Cathedral. A builder could display a sense of proportion, but only an artist could show that essential requirement of romantic theory, a sympathetic imagination:

How could a man (he continued) produce such a picture as that without sympathy, without entering into, and being able to portray the feelings of others?—(Cheers.) Just think how much sympathy there was in this one picture [i.e. in a picture of the portal carvings]—sympathy with a man who did not want to be made a bishop—sympathy with the disputing monks—sympathy with all the figures indicated in the photograph. Let them consider how much knowledge was needed in the architect before he could produce such a work. . . . But he might be told that this was sculpture and not architecture at all.

Well, could they tell him what was the difference between sculpture and architecture?²⁶

There was presumably an answer to that question, but Ruskin did not wait for it. He went on to insist that in the great ages there was no difference, except that that which was easy was called architecture and that which was hard was called sculpture. If the two skills were again combined, if architects would again take up the chisel, it would be possible to scatter cathedrals over England like mist upon the waters.

IV

Ruskin denied that architecture was the art of proportion without for a minute denying the importance of proportions in architecture. The kinds of proportions he admired, however, were in sharp contrast to those which had descended from Vitruvius to Alberti and Palladio and finally to Chambers and Cockerell.²⁶ Their theories stressed order, symmetry, and the subordination of parts to the whole. The proportions Ruskin admired, by contrast, had to be compatible with the spirits of changefulness and redundancy which he listed as among the six defining characteristics of Gothic. Where Alberti and Palladio compared architectural proportions to the limited ratios of musical harmony, Ruskin compared them to the infinite possibilities of melody. Where Chambers and Cockerell urged a respect for precedent, Ruskin substituted a romantic emphasis on the individual genius of each architect. "Not by rule, nor by study," he told the members of the Architectural Association, "can the gift of proportionate design be obtained; only by the intuition of genius can so much as a single tier of facade be beautifully arranged."²⁷

Ruskin insisted that any single aspect of a structure confronted the architect with an infinite range of beautiful proportions. In the first volume of *The Stones of Venice* he gave as an example the five elements (the height of a shaft, its diameter, the length of the bell stone, its slope, and the thickness of the abacus between shaft and bell stone) that determine the proportions of the capital. Each element could be altered, and "for every change in any one of the quantities we have a new proportion of capital: five infinites, supposing change only in one quantity at a time: infinity of infinites in the sum of possible changes" (IX, 142). Even within the system that he had freely chosen, an architect would delight in subtle, almost undetectable variations.

At the Cathedral Church on the Island of Murano, for example, Ruskin found a simple arithmetical progression be-

²⁴ My interpretation of Ruskin's theory of proportion is in disagreement with that presented by George Landow on pages 125-133 of *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (Princeton, 1971). Landow finds Ruskin's explanations of proportions to be much like those of Alberti and Palladio, and believes it to be ironic that he should have condemned their architecture so harshly.

24. John Ruskin, "Use of Imagination in Modern Architectural Design," *The Building News*, III (January 30, 1857), 119.

25. "Chips of Criticism," *The Building News*, III (February 27, 1857), 208.

26. "Use of Imagination in Modern Architectural Design," 120.

27. "Use of Imagination in Modern Architectural Design," 120.

tween the interval of the nave shafts, the width of the aisle, the width of the transept, and the width of the nave. In the intervals between the arches that ring the back of the semi-circular chancel, however, he found a different principle at work. On what Ruskin scornfully termed Grecian principles each width would be the same. The actual measurements were as follows:

	Feet	Inches
First interval	6	7
Second interval	7	7
Third interval	7	5
Fourth interval	7	10
Fifth interval	7	5
Sixth interval	7	8
Seventh interval	6	10

The progression is from the widest interval at the center to the narrowest at the extremes. There is a further variation within this pattern, for the architect allowed the second and sixth intervals to be slightly larger rather than slightly smaller than the third and fifth. Above all, no two intervals are precisely the same size.

Ruskin found similar patterns in the arcades stretched across the facades of such Byzantine palaces as the Fondaco dei Turchi and the Casa Loredan. While each interval might have looked identical to the casual glance, they never proved to be so when brought to the test of measurement. It might be claimed that these variations resulted from the hazards of building construction. After all, Rudolph Wittkower finds similar variations from fixed ratios even in Palladio's buildings. It might also be claimed that the variations Ruskin found were insignificant. Samuel Huggins complained that "the proportion in which Ruskin delights is an invisible one, —that can only be discovered by measurement; and what he most lauds in the early architecture of Venice is a delicacy of proportion that is microscopic, and altogether unappreciable by the eye."²⁸ Ruskin ignored these arguments and continued to insist that the Byzantine and Gothic architects' exquisite sense of proportion had been crushed by the

mathematical deadness of the Renaissance. In his examinations of medieval buildings, he found confirmation for his view that the finest proportions resulted from "a fixed scorn, if not dislike of accuracy of measurements; and in most cases . . . a determined resolution to work out an effective symmetry by variations as subtle as those of Nature" (VII, 210).

As one might expect, this insistence on the infinity of possible proportions had important consequences for the battle of the styles. Cockerell, who was by no means bigotted against Gothic, nonetheless objected to it as anomalous because it had no fixed laws of proportion: columns or supports might be five to fifty diameters in height and were bounded only by possibility. For Ruskin, the incredible variability of Gothic proportions demonstrated the style's superiority. "It is difficult to express with sufficient force," he said in the Addenda to his Edinburgh lectures, "the absurdity of the supposition that there is more room for refinements of proportions in the relations of seven or eight equal pillars, with the triangular end of a roof above them, than between the shafts, and buttresses, and porches, and pinnacles, and vaultings, and towers, and all other double and trebly multiplied magnificences of membership which form the framework of a Gothic temple" (XII, 87-88).

Cockerell never doubted that architecture was the art of proportion. Ruskin was sure that it was the art of decoration and presented a theory to show how proportions themselves might be part of decorative effect. It was Ruskin's view that had most appeal for both young architects and the general public. Though he was honored with a place between Barry and Pugin on the pedestal of the Albert Memorial, Cockerell lost influence steadily until, as Ruskin's influence began to wane at the beginning of the new century, his buildings were rediscovered in A. E. Richardson's dignified folio on *The Monumental Classic Architecture in Great Britain and Ireland During the XIIIth and XIXth Centuries*.

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Michael and his Lost Angel: Archetypal Conflict and Victorian Life

Bruce Wallis

THE MOST RESPECTED dramatist of his era, Henry Arthur Jones, has subsequently come to be regarded almost solely as a historical figure. When one of his plays is at times an-

thologized, it is presented more as a curious historical document than a piece of literary art. Jones, of course, regarded himself as first and foremost a literary artist, and during the

28. "Columnar Architecture and the 'Stones of Venice,'" 744.

major portion of his adult life engaged in a continuing crusade, through lectures and essays, to reelevate the drama to the position of serious importance in English life that it had not held for several centuries. Yet we have come to share the opinion of those early critics who found that "the temptation to contrast Jones's own plays with his ideals was irresistible," and who believed that Jones "battled for a literary drama of a perfection he himself could not attain."¹

Why we should have done so is not fully clear, since no less perceptive a contemporary than Shaw considered Jones preeminently an artist, terming him "first, and eminently first, among . . . his own generation of playwrights."² Shaw opens the review of Jones's *Michael and his Lost Angel* in which he expresses this judgment by saying,

one of the great comforts of criticizing the work of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones is that the critic can go straight to the subject-matter without troubling about the dramatic construction. In the born writer the style is the man; and with the born dramatist the play is the subject. Mr. Jones's plays grow: they are not cut out of bits of paper and stuck together. . . . But Mr. Jones's technical skill is taken as a matter of course. Nobody ever dreams of complimenting him about it: we proceed direct to abusing his ideas without delay.³

This is a high compliment, adequate to suggest that as dramatic craftsman alone Jones is worthy of attention we have not given him. But it is a delightfully backhand compliment, suggesting also as it does that Jones's "ideas" are less felicitous than his craftsmanship; and it is, indeed, primarily in response to Jones's ideas (as we see them) that we have elected to ignore him. In his ideas, Jones is, of course, both a product and a victim of his age. It has been said of the dramatist of that era, the age of what was even then denominated "the problem play," that he "invariably reveals his calibre" by assuming that "the 'problem-play' must treat of marital infidelity: there is only one sin—the Decalogue has become a monologue."⁴ Like most serious artists, Jones did employ the materials of his age, and his canon is crowded with plays that ostensibly treat of marital infidelity. Unfortunately for Jones's subsequent reputation, the problem of marital infidelity has not only ceased to be a matter of public or literary concern, but has also become the touchstone, as it were, of a dated, clichéd, and essentially uninteresting theatre.

The difficulty in Jones's case, however, is that the dramatist himself so vigorously espoused universality, rather than parochiality of dramatic theme, and so vehemently rejected "ideas" altogether as dramatic substance, that one cannot

quite rest easy with the conclusion that despite the high praise of his artistry by Shaw and others, Jones was in fact either too inept an artist to practice what he so lucidly preached, or too imperceptive an artist to see the difference.

A fundamental premise in Jones's understanding of the drama, evinced throughout his life, is an Aristotelian conception of the pre-eminence of action over "ideas" or thought, that "faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances" that Aristotle placed third in importance after action, or the plot that imitates it. In a speech at a dinner held by the English Speaking Union for John Barrymore, Jones said of Barrymore,

He has done a good turn to a deserving but temporarily discredited dramatist. [Barrymore had just won great favor as Hamlet.] By an old-fashioned dramatist I mean one who deals, not in notions and opinions and what are called modern ideas, nor in the crude realism of sexual impropriety—by an old-fashioned dramatist I mean one who in a well-constructed story deals with the permanent, universal passions, emotions, and follies, foibles, and vices of our common humanity.⁵

Elsewhere, in his notes, he wrote:

The word "ideas" has become ambiguous in our theatre. Certainly a play is empty when it is without ideas—that is, without an insinuation of the author's interpretation of life and his sense of its value and meaning. How full of ideas are *Hamlet* and *Lear*! . . . But in our modern theatre of "ideas" we are fed with debates upon passing social questions, and the vociferous advertisements of the raw opinions and controversies of the hour. These are called "Ideas." Obviously they tend to exclude the exhibition of the permanent passions and emotions, the permanent vices and follies and foibles that are common to all mankind at all times; plot and careful consequent construction become obnoxious antiquities and the theatre is changed into a platform.⁶

In a similar vein, he wrote to a London newspaper that "art should teach as nature teaches—implicitly, silently, with unobtrusive, far-removed results."⁷

The implications of such statements are clear. Like most dramatists, in fact, if somewhat unlike Shaw, for whom "ideas" *per se* are of such pressing importance that they spill out of the drama into introductions as large as the plays themselves, Jones viewed the drama as an imitation of life, rather than as a forum for visualized socio-political debate, or a platform for political and moral pronouncement. An excessive focus on ideas *per se* was, for Jones, a contradiction of the proper province of drama, which is action. Yet ideas, what Jones terms "an insinuation of the author's interpreta-

1. Richard A. Cordell, *Henry Arthur Jones and the Modern Drama* (New York: R. Long and R. R. Smith, 1932), p. 74.

2. *Dramatic Opinions and Essays* (New York: Brentano's, 1907), I, 309.

3. Shaw, *Dramatic Opinions*, I, 308.

4. Gilbert Norwood, as quoted in "The New Drama," ed. Carl M. Selle (Coral Gables: Univ. of Miami Press, 1963), p. 33 n.

5. Cordell, pp. 58-59.

6. Cordell, p. 60.

7. Doris Arthur Jones, *The Life and Letters of Henry Arthur Jones* (London: V. Gollancz, Ltd., 1930), p. 84.

tion of life and his sense of its value and meaning" may and should, he felt, implicitly inform the drama, and it is through selection and organization of action, rather than through overt discussion, rhetoric, and propaganda that Jones chose to "insinuate" his ideas.

It is, therefore, somewhat beside the point to examine the extent to which Jones's plays "treat of marital infidelity" and to arrive by doing so at the conclusion that they are part of the "Theatre of Ideas" (as though they were thus fully explained and of no further interest), without undertaking to educe something of the "insinuation of the author's interpretation of life" that implicitly informs them. Having done so, we may discover that the "ideas" responsible for our neglect of Jones are in fact little more than the materials of the age that serve as vehicle for the larger "interpretation of life" that Jones (and each of us) expects from meaningful drama.

Michael and his Lost Angel, the play Jones considered his best, and his most enduring literary achievement,⁸ adequately exemplifies Jones's ability to transcend the merely transient concerns of time and place to engage the truly permanent and universal concerns of our common humanity. Like *The Playboy of the Western World*, one of another dramatist's most enduring literary achievements, *Michael and His Lost Angel* opened as an egregious theatrical failure. Even before opening night, Mrs. Patrick Campbell (who was to have played Audrie Lesden) withdrew from the cast because of what she regarded the profaneness of some of her lines, and the first night reviews found even the title profane. *Truth* called the title "as silly as it was objectionable,"⁹ and the actor-manager of the production, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, had himself had reservations, and had written to Jones: "the title is wrong. A 'lost angel' has been a term for a lady of pleasure for many years. . . . It could not stand as it is, seeing that 'lost angel' is such a well-known term for a class to which 'Audrie' certainly does not belong."¹⁰

Yet the title is neither silly, nor objectionable, nor inappropriate in its implications, and Jones's refusal to alter it throughout the controversy it engendered suggests the importance he felt it to have toward the understanding of his play. In alluding to the women of the streets as it does, it establishes a metaphoric identification between Audrie Lesden and a class to which she may not in social, but unquestionably does in moral terms belong, and thus serves to penetrate the cloak of acceptability that, in the particular English society with which the play is concerned, social distinctions could throw over moral and spiritual actualities. Just by so expanding the values of the play beyond those of a single

class, the title separates the play from the parochial class concerns of the typical "problem-play" of the period.

But the title alludes more importantly to the Book of Revelations, which provided the fundamental conflict Jones was translating into, and expressing through, nineteenth-century terms. The relevant portion of the Bible begins with Revelations 12:7—"and there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels"—though Jones has loosely exploited elements from the remainder of Revelations. The conflict of the play is overtly cast as a battle, with Michael, a "sculptured saint," and Audrie, "some bad angel," as the antagonists. Audrie has "said to the devil, 'Give this sculptured saint to me, and I'll give both our souls to you,'" and has bitten her arm to seal the contract. "I made the teeth meet," she says; "There's the mark. If there is a devil, he heard me."¹¹ The allusion to the mark of the beast in Revelations is obvious. Subsequently, in the fourth line after the act that ends with Michael about to succumb sexually, we learn that he has done so from the fact that his "hands are blistered" (Act III, p. 44). They are literally blistered from rowing Audrie furtively back from St. Decumen's Island, but the figurative implication is again clear. By seducing him into a sexual relationship with her, Audrie has caused him to assume the mark of the beast himself, for "If any man worship the beast and his image, . . . [he will] receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand" (Rev. 14:9). In terms of Revelations, Michael is thus barred from the chorus of those who will sing "a new song before the throne. . . . These are they which were not defiled with women" (Rev. 14:3-4), and as a result, he is disenfranchised from the City of God, for "there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth" (Rev. 21:27). Therefore, in the context of the play, Michael may rebuild the tabernacle, but because of his sexual sin, must make his public confession and leave the minster before the consecration ceremony begins, saying, "I may not enter. I dare not enter. I have sinned—as David sinned" (Act IV, p. 76). Probably also in reflection of Revelations, where, in the City of God, "there shall be no night there: and they need no candle" (Rev. 22:5), in Michael's world, the darkness comes to predominate. As Michael and Audrie talk on the evening of his yielding to temptation, the stage directions tell us, first, "*It gradually grows darker*," and then as Michael's collapse draws near, "*By this time it is dark outside*" (Act II, pp. 33 and 42). Audrie anticipates a "cold, dark voyage" back (Act II, p. 42), and Michael, anterior to his public confession and departure from England, sees himself "setting out on a cold, dark journey" (Act IV, p. 68). The play ends in the evening,

8. "Michael has done more for my reputation than any success I've ever had"; quoted in Doris Arthur Jones, p. 180.

9. Doris Arthur Jones, p. 175.

10. Doris Arthur Jones, p. 174.

11. Act II, p. 40. References to *Michael and his Lost Angel* (subsequently

included parenthetically within the text) are to the edition in *Representative Plays by Henry Arthur Jones*, ed. Clayton Hamilton (London, 1926), Vol. 3, and will include pagination for lack of scene and line divisions in the text.

with Audrie's death set to "A *vesper hymn heard off at some distance*" (Act V, p. 84).

As the temptress, stamped with the mark of the beast, Audrie assumes in the play a role analogous to that of the Whore of Babylon. Her first meeting with Michael is cast as an archetypal temptation scene (Jones wrote an earlier verse play entitled *The Tempter*). Seen first as only a disembodied face outside his window, a haunting effect used for several of her entrances to frame her in antithesis to the portrait of Michael's "good angel" (his mother) that hangs prominently on the wall at the play's opening and close, she comes on to offer the traditional three temptations, to sins of the world, the flesh, and the spirit. Posing as a penitent, tempting him to the sin of pride, she asks: "Don't you find it an exquisite pleasure to feel your sense of power over your people. . . . To play with people's souls" (Act I, pp. 18-19). She then offers the sin of the world, "a little contribution for the restoration of your Minster. . . . Won't you take it?" (Act I, p. 20).

Michael's resistance at this point is firm: "Why are you here?" he asks:

Come to me as a penitent, and I will try to give you peace! Come to me as a woman of the world, and I will tell you "the friendship of the world is enmity with God. . . . The Church has no need of you, of your pretended devotions, of your gifts, of your presence at her services. Go your way back to the world, and leave her alone." But you come neither as a penitent, nor as a woman of the world. You come like—like some bad angel, to mock, and hint, and question, and suggest. How dare you play with sacred things? How dare you! (Act I, p. 20).

But she does dare, and we learn as he looks at her letter early in the next act that she has "unlocked the holiest places" of his heart, that her "skirts have swept through all the gateways" of his being, and that there is a fragrance of her "in every cranny" of him. "You possess me!" he admits, but summoning his strength, he cries out in resistance, "No! No! No! I will not yield to you! . . . I will be servant to none save my work and my God!" (Act II, p. 31). This *non serviam* to the devil is Michael's moment of greatest strength in the play, the prelude to his collapse through the third temptation, to sin of the flesh. Audrie herself makes her role clear, when she tells him to cast her away. "I'm not strong enough to leave you of my own free will," she says. "I shall hang about you, worry you, tease you, tempt you, and at last destroy you!" (Act II, p. 41).

The particular and local conflict of the play is thus expanded, illuminated, and given point by its reference to an archetypal conflict of the forces of good and evil that, in Biblical terms, extends beyond merely human history. Pro-

pounded discursively, this Biblical substructure of the play seems perhaps stiff and mechanical; but it is evidence both of Jones's artistic skill and his esthetic philosophy that on the surface of the play, it is scarcely in evidence—his symbols and allusions are so quietly unobtrusive, so thoroughly suffused into a credible, natural, contemporary dramatic action. As a result of its Biblical freight, however, what appears as a particular Victorian treatment of the theme of marital infidelity (cast with a priest as the hero on the old tragic assumption that the greater the hero, the more tragic his downfall) is expanded into the universal through its pointed analogy to an archetypal conflict. The play is thus enabled to express the "universal passions . . . and vices of our common humanity" as Jones felt a genuinely meaningful drama should do.

At the same time, the use of the archetypal conflict enables the particular personal conflict of Michael and Audrie to represent as well a larger Victorian conflict between the spirit and the flesh, between faith and doubt, between God and mammon. Michael's dilemma is in essence the Victorian dilemma, and the peculiar achievement of the play is to have cast the particular, personal conflict of its protagonists in such a way that it can not only reflect the universal, archetypal conflict, but can do so in terms that are expressly relevant to the Victorian society at which it is aimed—the conflict of values in the play is precisely that conflict of antithetical values that dominates much of Victorian literature from Carlyle and Dickens to Tennyson, Newman, and Arnold.

And it is by examining the play in its relationship to these larger questions of Victorian life that we will discover the "insinuation of the author's interpretation of life" that Jones felt combined with the presentation of the "universal passions . . . and vices of our common humanity" to inform a play like *Hamlet* with "ideas" in the richest, rather than in the narrowest sense of the word. For Jones does not take the position of a lay preacher,¹² and the play does not end, as suggested by an early writer on Jones, with Michael living on "to console himself with religion."¹³ It ends, rather, with Michael, like many Victorians, torn between divided allegiances, unable to choose, unable to act, paralyzed by his inability to give either his total commitment. "Take me!" he says to Father Hilary, the Catholic priest (like Newman, he is trying to give himself up to the authority of Rome), "I give my life, my will, my soul to you! Do what you please with me! I'll believe all, do all, suffer all—only—only persuade me that I shall meet her again!" (Act V, p. 85).

The crucial concluding clause, which contradicts the very sentence of which it is a part, clearly denotes that there can

12. "I have done without churchgoing for a long while past—being unable to accept the dogmas of orthodox theology"; quoted by Doris Arthur Jones, pp. 47-48.

13. Cordell, p. 125.

be no consolation for Michael, this side of the grave or after, no genuine resolution to the dilemma in which he has been embroiled. There is no joy or completeness without union with Audrie, yet union is impossible, and even meeting is destructive, within the context of his religious commitment. The action of the play thus poses a problem, but ends with the problem in no way resolved. Worse, it is clearly resolved that the action can have no resolution. Contradictory aims and conflicting desires assert their equal claims for allegiance, and a liberating choice is impossible.

Not only in conclusion, but throughout, the play is a tissue of carefully controlled contradictions and ambiguities. For example, the play opens, much like *Hedda Gabler*, with a portrait hanging prominently on the wall to suggest the principal formative influence on the main character. A lady "very delicate and spirituelle," it is Michael's dead mother, a woman Michael refers to as his "good angel," and who in dying told him, "I'm not leaving you. . . . I shall watch over you every moment of your life. . . . Remember you are watched by the dead" (Act I, p. 22). Under the influence of Michael's bad angel, the portrait comes down for most of the play, but in the last act is prominently displayed again. By this time, however, the values for which it stands have been seriously undermined, and Michael's "good angel" herself has been tainted by something we learn about the genesis of her portrait. It was painted in Italy, where Michael's mother had gone for her health when Michael was three. "This young Italian saw her and asked permission to paint her," Michael says. "She came home and died of consumption. Then my uncle sent this portrait to my father with the news that the young painter had also died of consumption" (Act I, p. 22). "How strange!" Audrie remarks, her comment surely intended to suggest the not so strange explanation that Michael, in his righteousness, could never suspect of his mother. The picture, and what it stands for, is thus rendered equivocal even as the play begins.

Michael's last name is Feversham, and the fever he shams could be called righteousness, most evident in the play's opening Hawthornesque confession scene (prefiguring his own moral struggles) to which he has driven Rose Gibbard, who bore an illegitimate child.¹⁴ His fever of righteousness proves to be sham when he later commits adultery himself with Audrie, and the confession itself, so crucial to Hawthorne's moral vision, proves to be pointless when Michael subsequently concludes that he was "harsh and cruel to Rose." "I punished her more than she deserved," he says; "I was a hard, self-righteous priest" (Act III, p. 53). Nor does his own confession serve to bring him the peace he seeks through it.

But while it pointedly contradicts his earlier position of

priestly righteousness, his new commitment to worldly love is also a sham, for the priestly righteousness in his character makes him destructive of such love. Just as Rose, her name symbolic of such love, was earlier crushed by her experience in the church, Audrie's rose, that she later leaves on the "white marble altar steps," is crushed by the procession the next day, and Michael can only return to pick it up after it has been crushed lifeless. Sir Lyolf, who still later tries to keep Audrie from Michael for the sake of his religious well-being, tells Father Hilary, "I felt all the while that I was helping to crush the life out of her" (Act V, p. 78).

This association of righteousness with death, emblemized by the portrait of the "good angel" who in dying told her son he was "watched by the dead," and carried through a complex of subsidiary symbols in the play, is also evident in the chill that surrounds Michael. He is spoken of as "cold and priestlike," a "sculptured saint" (Act II, p. 40). "Be brave—and very cold to me, now," Audrie tells him. "Be like marble—and death" (Act II, p. 42). He is compared to a statue of "a stone saint" with only "a stone heart" (Act IV, p. 69), and is called "a very cold, distant man" (Act IV, p. 70). Michael's ultimate objective in his religion is to find peace; but even peace is death-like and false. He tells Rose she will find "great peace—great peace" in the convent (Act I, p. 10), and indeed, she does. "You were right," she tells him later. "You said it would bring me great peace. And so it has—great peace. . . . It seems I died that morning and left all my old life in a grave" (Act IV, p. 67). "I was right, then?" he asks. "I was right? You are happy?" And she replies, "Yes, I am happy—at least, I'm peaceful, and peace is better than happiness, isn't it?" (Act IV, p. 67). The concluding question, of course, renders the whole statement equivocal, and Michael himself seeking peace in his own monastery ultimately cries out to Father Hilary, "No! No! No! Why should I deceive you? Why should I deceive myself? All this pretended peace is no peace! There is no peace for me without her, either in this world or the next!" (Act V, p. 80). Thus his renewed commitment to righteousness is also undercut, and Michael remains equivocally in between to the end of the play.

Similarly equivocal is the figure of Father Hilary, who offers Michael eternal peace in reward for righteousness, but whose name, Edward Lashmar, reminiscent of medieval flagellation and human disfigurement, clearly suggests the method and the cost by which righteousness is attained.

Likewise, Michael's book, "Hidden Life," its title suggesting a sacred inner world of the spirit, is pointedly juxtaposed to Audrie's awareness of the sinister "world there is within oneself that one never dares speak of" (Act II, p. 39), and Sir Lyolf's expression of thankfulness at having a son who,

14. Jones acknowledged indebtedness to Hawthorne for a confession scene in the earlier *Judah*, see Cordell, p. 81.

partly through his book "Hidden Life," "is shaping religious thought throughout England today" (Act I, p. 14) is similarly contrasted a few lines later when Michael notes that the devil "still has something to do with the shaping of character in this world" (Act I, p. 15). When Lyolf immediately connects the devil with the shaping of Audrie's character, the Biblical analogy might suggest that the play comprises a clearcut battle of angels and devils, but Lyolf, who confesses to "the latent old Adam" in himself (Act I, p. 14), emerges on the side of the devils, and proves as well to have influenced Michael, the son, as much as did the tainted "good angel," the mother. Early in the play, Audrie expresses the conviction that "a little love on this earth is worth a good many paradises hereafter" (Act II, pp. 36-37—"It's a cold world, hereafter," she says: "It chills me to the bone when I think of it!"). But Lyolf toward the end of the play declares that "love is love, and whether it comes from heaven, or whether it comes from the other place, there's no escaping it." "I believe," he says, "it always comes from heaven. . . . I'm getting my morals mixed up in my old age, I suppose" (Act V, p. 78). And if Michael sees himself as setting out on a journey that is cold and dark as a result of his sin of sexual love, Audrie had seen herself as setting out on a journey that was cold and dark because of the absence of that love. The values are contradictory and equivocal wherever one looks in the play.

Yet it is the existence of conflicting and equivocal values—of angels and devils, or mixed up morals, as it were—that creates all the trouble for the characters in the play, and in the world they reflect. "In a well-regulated world there would be no room for angels or devils," Audrie has said earlier (Act IV, p. 69), and as she is dying she repeats the idea: "Not quite a well-arranged world, is it?" (Act V, p. 84). Yet the ill-arranged and equivocal Victorian world of ambiguities, of conflicting values, divided allegiances, and inconclusive half-truths is the world Michael and Audrie are stuck with, and the world Jones is concerned to portray in his drama.

Shaw noted this characteristic equivocalness and inconclusiveness of the Jones play, and wrote to Jones of an earlier one,

Judah amused me. It consists of clever preliminaries; and when the real play begins with the matrimonial experiment of Judah and Vashti, down comes the curtain as usual. Come: I will write plays for the next ten years; . . . and then the public will be ready to hear the solution of the problems you so fancifully pose it.¹⁵

It is not difficult to imagine *Michael* as Shaw would construct it. Indeed, he has told us himself:

Let me rewrite the last three acts, and you shall have your Reverend Michael embracing the answer of his own soul, thundering it from the steps of his altar, and marching out through his shocked and shamed parishioners, with colors flying and head erect and unshamed, to the freedom of faith in his own real conscience.¹⁶

But Jones's interpretation of life is not Shavian. It is much closer to that of Matthew Arnold. Arnold himself noted a kinship when writing to Jones about his play *Chatterton*. He found it "too painful," though it had "good writing." "I feel so strongly the defects of a situation where 'everything is to be endured, nothing to be done,'" he went on, "that I suppressed a dramatic sketch of my own on that account."¹⁷ Jones's own statements of intellectual indebtedness to Arnold are frequent and pointed, as, for example, his comment repudiating the influence of Ibsen on one of his plays: "The view that I took of English middle-class life was that of Matthew Arnold. If you read his prose writings, you will note their influence on *Saints and Sinners*."¹⁸

And it is ultimately for his ability to translate an Arnoldian view of a world crippled by uncertainty and irresolution into genuinely dramatic terms in a way that Arnold himself could not that Jones should be of most interest to us. It is a confused, divided, and troubled world that is presented by *Michael and his Lost Angel*. Within such a world, clear and untroubled allegiance is impossible. In a real sense, the play chronicles not only the dilemma of Victorian England on the verge of the age of anxiety, but also the continuing dilemma of the western world for the last two hundred years.

Contrary to the view that we have inherited from earlier criticism, and have mutely accepted, Jones's play thus seems much more significantly to fulfill his ideals, than to contrast them, and its author thus gives us scope for an expanded examination of the nature and role of the drama in later Victorian England, as well as of the serious Victorian artist's "criticism of life." Unfortunately, our own historical position in the sexual rebellion almost forces us to focus on the surface problem of the play and to reject it as trite—a reaction we have, one suspects, precisely because we are not so free in fact from "Victorian" sexual attitudes as we would like to believe we are—and thus prevents us from taking seriously a dramatist who can be read quite richly. The passage of time will give us enough distance from that problem, such

15. Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters 1874-1897*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1965), p. 459.

16. Shaw, *Dramatic Opinions*, pp. 310-311.

17. Letter of 20 May 1884, in *Letters of Matthew Arnold 1848-1888*, ed. George E. Russell (London: MacMillan, 1895), II, 312. Arnold is speaking of "Empedocles on Etna."

18. Letter of 3 Sept. 1924 to James Waldo Fawcett, quoted in Doris Ar-

thur Jones, p. 88. Particularly illuminating is Jones's comment in a *Daily Express* article, "My Religion," recalling his Unitarian friend the Rev. T. W. Chignall: "Although we had thrown away all dogma, his was one of the most religious minds I have held in communion. Together we found great religious support in Matthew Arnold" (quoted in Doris Arthur Jones, p. 49).

distance as we have, for example, from the devils that dance about *Dr. Faustus*, to view the play more objectively. In the meantime, the reader willing to encounter the dramatist on the level at which he always claimed to be operating can

turn to it for unexpectedly complex and meaningful Victorian drama.

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Perspectives on *Henry Esmond*

Mary Rosner

"You may describe, but who can tell whether your sight is clear or not, or your means of information accurate?"

THIS QUESTION, so important to *Henry Esmond*,¹ is, of course, crucial to a reading of any fiction. Many novels simply put us at the edge of a fictional world that is gradually defined by the additional information we discover as we read. But a second class of novels presents brief, almost self-contained previews that usually provide information about settings, themes, and narrative techniques, establishing some general expectations but never fully anticipating the works. Witness the "Author's Introduction" to *Felix Holt*, which places the action in the world of the glorious coachroads and suggests some of the mystery and suffering surrounding the main characters; the opening of *The Return of the Native* ("A Face on Which Time Makes But Little Impression"), which develops a major symbol; and "Outside Dorlcote Mill" of *The Mill on the Floss*, which prepares us for the "tone of brooding melancholy that haunts the whole book" by appealing to our own childhoods "as a means of understanding and pity."² These openings, by giving us broad introductions to the novels, can make us better prepared readers.

Some previews are more complex than the examples above, raising questions about what we think we see or know, often demanding several responses rather than simply (and comfortingly) directing us to the narrative. The dual opening of *Henry Esmond*, for instance, offers us conflicting views of its hero-narrator that are continued throughout the novel to confuse our perceptions, to challenge our judgments, and to make our sense of Esmond and his story contradictory and insecure.³

Published in 1852, *The History of Henry Esmond, Esq., A Colonel in the Service of Her Majesty Queen Anne Written by Himself* pretends to be an eighteenth-century personal

memoir addressed by the soldier-author to "his children who come after him," a subjective account of his life and times. A good imitation, it includes the usual apparatus associated with the earlier literary form: the elaborate title page, complete with the location of the publishers "over against St. Peter's Church in Cornhill"; the dedication to a patron; the preface giving a brief biography of the history's subject; the asterisked notes that qualify the text. In its first edition, *Henry Esmond* was presented in a three-decker format with Queen Anne print; though this style was discontinued, the dated spelling and punctuation, the smattering of classical quotations, the balanced sentences, the *Spectator* imitation, and, of course, the political, literary, and artistic allusions—all contribute to make this seem a work from the eighteenth century.

As the dedication signed by Thackeray (not Esmond) makes clear, however, this book is a nineteenth-century fiction masquerading as an earlier history, both an example of a short-lived but popular type of the 1840's⁴ and an answer to the historical fiction of his day. Having studied the eighteenth century for his lectures on the English humorists (1851) and for his earlier *Barry Lyndon* (1844), Thackeray drew on that knowledge of history and his own literary expertise to create *Esmond*. In contrast to the works of such authors as Ainsworth and Bulwer Lytton (attacked by Thackeray in *Mr. Punch's Prize Novelists* [1847]), here the conventions of historical fiction—the antiquated costume and language and setting, the political intrigues—are made subordinate to the development of the protagonist. Great figures and great events are undercut in this book; Henry dominates.

The interest we still have in *Henry Esmond*, however, rests

1. First edition: *The History of Henry Esmond, Esq., A Colonel in the Service of Her Majesty Queen Anne Written by Himself* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1852). All quotations come from the following text: *The History of Henry Esmond*, ed. John Sutherland and Michael Greenfield (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972).
2. Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson, *Mid-Victorian Studies* (London: Athlone Press, 1965), p. 19.
3. Of the many critics who have called the novel ironic, Wolfgang Iser

(*The Implied Reader* [Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1974]) and Elaine Scarry ("Henry Esmond: The Rookery of Castlewood," in *Literary Monographs* [VII], ed. Eric Rothstein and Joseph A. Wittreich, Jr. [Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1975], 1-43) have offered especially convincing arguments. Neither, however, has closely examined the openings of *Esmond*.

4. James C. Simmons, "Thackeray's *Esmond* and Anne Manning's 'Spurious Antiques,'" *VNL* 42 (Fall, 1972), 22-24.

less on its being a corrective to Thackeray's contemporaries or a successful imitation of a literary type and more on its being an experiment in multi-leveled narrative that deliberately discourages our dependence on its various storytellers. In *Barry Lyndon*, Thackeray's earlier attempt at an eighteenth-century memoir, Barry clearly condemns himself. But Henry Esmond is not so obviously an ironic tool. He may be "a very noble type of the Cavalier softening into the man of the eighteenth century. . . . the accomplished man, the gallant soldier, the loyal heart, and the passionate lover . . .";⁵ he may be a prig and a bore;⁶ he may be a subtle masochist;⁷ he may be an "Oedipus manque."⁸ Like the "interesting books" James Kincaid writes about,⁹ *Henry Esmond* invites contradictory readings, and primarily, I think, because the character of Henry is not fixed. Before the story proper, remarks by his daughter and by the Colonel himself reveal quite different perceptions of what a history should be and who the subject of this history is. And throughout the book, while Esmond tries to reflect an image of a selfless gentleman and an accurate historian, Thackeray makes us question these portraits because of discrepancies between Esmond's avowed purpose and its realization, because Book I warns us against the transforming power of language, and because the structure of the novel, with its openings and its notes and its conflicting details, seems to indicate that all versions of this history will be incomplete.

Almost from the first, from the epigraph on the title page, we are challenged to know and judge Esmond:

Servetur ad imum

Qualis ab incepto processerit, et sibi constet.

(If you try something not yet attempted in the theater, and boldly create a new character, *have him remain to the close the sort of person he was when he first appeared, and keep him consistent* [my italics indicate the two lines of Latin].)

Although John Loofbourow argues that, because these lines are from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, they lend an epic quality to Esmond's story and indicate that the Colonel sees his life unfolding on a grand scale and himself as great a hero as Achilles or Odysseus,¹⁰ they more directly offer a critical precept to test against Esmond's history and Thackeray's novel: as Horace says, the original character found therein should be consistent. But our evaluation of Henry is immediately complicated by the two openings of the book: the letter by Rachel Esmond Warrington that gives a brief and glorified account of her father, and, at the start of Book I, Esmond's

own emotional preface that undercuts that idealistic picture.

Because Rachel is the first storyteller we meet in this history, she affects our expectations of the others, of Esmond especially as well as the notewriters; our experience with her cautions our approach to them. In her biography of Esmond, she egotistically reveals as much about herself as about him: her education in England, the death of her husband, the birth of her sons, her attitudes to her parents and to her step-brother and -sister. Biased, she attacks the "junior branch" of the family, making especially catty remarks about that step-sister:

I pass over as odious and unworthy of credit those reports. . . . how this person, having *left her family* and fled to Paris, out of jealousy to the Pretender betrayed his secrets to my Lord Stair . . . and nearly caused the Prince's death there; how she came to England and married this Mr. Tusher, and became a great favourite of King George the Second, by whom Mr. Tusher was made a Dean, and then a Bishop.

Devoted to Esmond, she writes a description full of abstractions and unqualified superlatives. Her father is a man of peace and honor, beloved and respected by all his fellow citizens, inexpressibly dear to his family; a man who

gave the best example, the best advice, the most bounteous hospitality to his friends; the tenderest care to his dependants; and bestowed on those of his immediate family such a blessing of fatherly love and protection as can never be thought of, by us, at least, without veneration and thankfulness.

Rachel may have "known him entirely," as she says; but, because her portrait of the Colonel—like the brief biographies that traditionally preceded these memoirs—is not a balanced examination of its subject, it tells us more about Rachel's opinion of her father than about the man himself. Thackeray forces us to be cautious about this opinion. Though the adoring daughter presents Henry as a saint upon earth, most readers suspect that no one could be so faultless, especially when some of the details in Rachel's letter indicate that Esmond may not be the ideal she sees.

He may have been in all ways "truly noble," but that nobility seems to include aristocratic egoism ("he liked to be first in his company") that respects "the practice and knowledge of Truth, and Love, and Honour," but not Forgiveness, as Rachel's puzzling reference to that unabsolved tipsy Yorkshire gentleman, who once took a liberty, implies. Esmond's

5. From a review by [George Brimley] quoted in *Thackeray: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson and Donald Hawes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 141.
6. Thackeray's own words, quoted by J. Hillis Miller in *The Form of Victorian Fiction* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1968), pp. 17-18.

7. Juliet McMaster, *Thackeray: The Major Novels* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 119.

8. Miller, p. 102.

9. "Coherent Readers, Incoherent Texts," *CI 3* (Summer, 1977), 781-802.

10. *Thackeray and the Form of Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1964), p. 111.

attitude to women seems equally unfair: "All women were alike," he said; "... there was never one so beautiful as that one; and ... we [women] could forgive her everything but her beauty." Of course, only the garrulous Rachel's eulogy of her father makes these few examples seem noteworthy, but the reader who has been invited to expect a paragon has been introduced to someone who seems flawed. Although judgment of Esmond must be withheld until more details are received from the autobiography, here Thackeray lets us see an Esmond Rachel apparently can't, making us unsure about both the storyteller and her subject. Questions about the Colonel's identity and about historical accuracy increase when his daughter's letter is compared to Henry's own essay opening Book I, for Rachel's "official" presentation of a sanctified Henry is at odds with his own definition of history: an account that speaks to the common man by chronicling the activities of individuals who are fallible.

In his preface, Esmond introduces himself as a literary critic, promising that his work will escape the flaws of both ancient tragedies and modern histories, productions that have become defined by conventions, stylized representations rather than accurate reflections of life—qualities, in fact, which can also describe the brief biography by Rachel we have just read. These criticisms are identical with Thackeray's, who, in *The English Humourists*, chose to present Fielding, for instance, "not robed in a marble toga, and draped and polished in an heroic attitude, but with inked ruffles, and claret stains on his tarnished lace coat. . . ."¹¹

In his irreverent attack on drama—"the actors in old tragedies, we read, piped their iambics to a tune, speaking from under a mask, and wearing stilts and a great head-dress"—the Colonel conjures up an image of comic absurdity where costume replaces catharsis. Like drama, most history seems to be defined by "costume." A servant to royalty, standard history presents public masks of noblemen rather than their own faces, distortions earlier attacked by Thackeray.¹² Using ridicule again, Esmond demonstrates how Lewis, Anne, and Charles typify those royal actors who so delude their audiences. In public, Lewis XIV may be "the type and model of Kingship" who "moved but to measure" and who lived and died "according to the laws of his Court-marshal. . . ." In private, "divested of poetry," he was "a little

wrinkled old man, pockmarked," who needed a great wig and heels to make him "heroic" (i.e., larger than life). In marble dignified and stately, Anne is "tearing down the Park slopes" in life, "a hot, red-faced woman, not in the least resembling the statue of her which turns its stone back upon St. Pauls";¹³ her actual behavior is a direct contrast to her glorified public image. Painted "god-like" in the manner of a Kneller or a Le Brun, Charles II is actually drunken and disorderly, a fit subject for Ostade or Mieris, both of whom captured gambling louts.

Henry argues that these historical delusions can be dangerous. The German may only make a fool of himself by boasting descent from ancestors who for twenty generations had been kicked by the king's foot, but Lord Castlewood ruined himself, a victim of the heroic myth like the others who offered thanks for the return of a monarch who "sold his country and . . . took bribes of the French King." To discourage this naive trust in royalty, the Colonel promises that the subject of his book will be an Everyman, not a special individual whose faults are glossed but a recognizably fallible character; as the running head ("De te fabula") at the essay's end in the first edition indicates, he is writing a story that applies to everyone.¹⁴

While here Esmond may share some of Thackeray's critical attitudes, he is, of course, not Thackeray but a fictional creation. Neither is he the lifeless saint that Rachel paints but a man of this world, knowledgeable of the aristocrats in their most unaristocratic moments, of the army, the theatre, the judge, and the criminal; ruled by an interest in dignity which may account for his condemnation of the tipsy Yorkshireman who somehow affronted Henry's own dignity (the Tragic Muse, Lord Castlewood, the exiled King, all are criticized for lacking dignity); ready to use his satire against the arrogant and the false (Lewis, the "wine-dribbled divinity," History with its "court-ridden" periwig). Above all, he is discontented. Part of the spirit of this essay comes from the satire; part from the nine emotional rhetorical questions (out of thirty-nine sentences); part from the dynamic structure of other sentences whose parenthetical expressions and qualifiers show Henry actively creating and shaping his material. This is not objective writing.

Like Rachel's letter, Esmond's preliminary remarks, with his constant repetitions of "I" and "me," force our attention

11. *The English Humourists*, from *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, xxiii (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1901), 300.

12. In "Duchess of Marlborough's Private Correspondence," from *Stray Papers*, ed. Lewis Melville (1901; reprint New York: Krauss, 1971), Thackeray writes:

In our orthodox history-books the characters move on as a gaudy play-house procession, a glittery pageant of kings and warriors, and stately ladies, majestically appearing and passing away. Only he who sits very near to the stage can discover of what stuff the spectacle is made. The kings are poor creatures, taken from the dregs of the company; the noble knights are dirty dwarfs in tin foil; the fair ladies are painted

hags with cracked feathers and soiled trains. One wonders how gas and distance could ever have rendered them so bewitching (p. 79).

13. Sir Edward Gleichen, in *London's Open Air Statuary* (London: Longman's, Green & Co., 1928), describes this statue as a marble Anne, seated and surrounded by four figures, probably representing England, France, Ireland, and North America (p. 128).

14. Loofbourow identifies the running head ("De te fabula") as a passage from Horace: "mutato nomine de te Fabula narrator" ("change the name and the story applies to you"), a quotation that recurs in the false *Spectator* letter addressed to Beatrix (see Loofbourow, p. 115).

on this storyteller. Throughout, though the Colonel occasionally appeals to his fictive audience ("as we read," "in our age"), primarily he asserts himself as the voice of truth ("I have seen . . .," "I have heard . . .," "I could name . . ."), promising a reliable narrative in the history that follows. Thackeray, however, allows us to question Esmond's promised reliability, and not merely through the emotionalism Henry demonstrates here. First, the Colonel's boast that he is a fallible Everyman asks us to consider whether his fallibility will have any effect on his narration. Second, Esmond's use of the actor motif in a work that pretends to be an eighteenth-century memoir draws our attention to the possibility that Esmond may not be what he seems; he, too, may wear a mask. Finally, in his arguments for historical accuracy, Henry remarks that only art can legitimately change reality: Lewis is "a hero for a book if you like, or for a brass statue or a painted ceiling, a god in Roman shape." Yet, at the very least from the signature on the dedication and from the mixture of historical and fictional characters Thackeray gives us in this essay, we know that Henry's history is Thackeray's art. Is Henry to be embellished and transformed?

Thus, as we approach the story of the Colonel's life, we have no solid picture of our subject but a series of flickering images—Henry as patriarch, as god, as hero, as snob, as irritated and emotional man—from a pair of storytellers whose reliability is doubtful. For us to follow Horace and test the characterization for consistency, for us to judge the accuracy of our information and the clarity of our sight, for us to read *Henry Esmond*, we need a firmer impression of its subject-narrator than the two beginnings give. The book itself, however, does not unify these portraits into a single, unambiguous image but continues to present a series of overlapping and contradictory "Henrys."

In the history proper, the Colonel appears to be the educated gentleman-soldier that his daughter has described as well as the perceptive critic reflected in his introduction. He knows art and literature; he distinguishes himself in military campaigns and creates a clever plot to return the throne to the Pretender; he experiences the horrors of war and sees the flaws in great heroes; he protects the Castlewood family. Like Quixote, he is a faithful knight to his lady; like Jacob, he labors many years before he is rewarded with a bride; like Aeneas, he makes a home in a new world. But our educated wariness of historians and our knowledge that Esmond and his narrator are one, make us test this account for biases to discover that he is neither the writer he claims to be in his preface nor Rachel's paragon.

Although Henry promises a superior history which includes "the agreeable and disagreeable qualities of our humanity," Thackeray allows us to perceive discrepancies be-

tween Henry's word and his work: the Colonel does not draw all characters as fallibly human. While recognizing Rachel's jealousy, Esmond repeatedly describes her as a *Dea certé*, someone angelically soft and extraordinarily good, a portrayal at odds with the critical stance promised in his theoretical introduction and affirmed in his text. When we examine the character of the woman he idolizes, moreover, we find "disagreeable qualities" of which he apparently is unaware. As Juliet McMaster has convincingly argued, Rachel's treatment of her husband forces us to recognize an ironic tension between the Colonel's admiration of her moral rectitude and our knowledge of the damage that rectitude has done.¹⁵ It is in spite of Esmond that Rachel's humanity is revealed.

Esmond is the second "paragon" in the book: the glorious patriarch drawn by his daughter is not unlike the self-portrait Henry creates. From his original description of himself as a "sad, lonely little occupant of [the] gallery busy over his great book," to his picture as a revered and contented figure in the autumn of life, except for an occasional gentle laugh at his youthful naiveté, the Colonel draws himself uncritically, as a very special man who made a very great sacrifice, not an Everyman as his opening has led us to expect. But like the Quixote he compares himself to, he is deluded. Along with the other "heroes" in this history, he too is shown to be flawed. As Thackeray demonstrates, the Colonel appears to take an inordinate pleasure in renouncing his name and title, soon wearying us with his self-congratulations: "On one side were ambition, temptation, justice even; but love, gratitude, and fidelity pleaded on the other. And when the struggle was over in Henry's mind, a glow of righteous happiness filled it . . .," a glow apparently not stemming entirely from selflessness. For Henry tells us that "perhaps he took a greater pride out of his sacrifice than he would have had in those honours which he was resolved to forgo."

Thackeray makes us uneasy about Esmond not only as a critic but also as a chronicler. Surely the most startling act recorded in the memoir is the marriage at its end. Though Esmond again and again describes himself as an orphan-adorer of his "mother," Rachel, he is unaware of the undeniably Oedipal implications of their relationship that make this, for George Eliot and for us, a most uncomfortable book.¹⁶ Nor does Henry realize that his final assertion of a "happy and serene" life with "the tenderest heart in the world" runs counter to his unwarranted criticisms of women (continually attacked as cruel, hypocritical, and tyrannical) and his cynical reflections on marriage:

it is Chloe, in the dark, stark awake, and Strephon snoring unheeding; or *vice versa*, 'tis poor Strephon that has married a heartless jilt,

15. McMaster, pp. 99-101.

16. Thackeray: *The Critical Heritage*, p. 151.

and awoke out of that absurd vision of conjugal felicity, which was to last for ever, and is over like any other dream.

The inconsistencies that distort Henry's personal history and challenge our trust in his accuracy are not so apparent in his public history, except for the example of Marlborough, which is used to establish Esmond's impartiality. Although the soldier-Esmond may have judged Marlborough as a ruthless leader who "used all men, great and small, that came near him as instruments alike, and took something of theirs, either some quality or some property . . .," as the reflective memoir-writer, Henry corrects his description, cautioning his children not to "judge the great Duke by what a contemporary has written of him," blaming a "private pique" for his own harsh criticisms. Throughout the novel, the Colonel establishes his credibility by persuasively demonstrating the discrepancy between the noble public figure and the private scoundrel or fool. He shows us that the Pretender prefers a pretty face to a crown, and that the English soldier is a common looter whose warrior activities center on "burning farms, wasted fields, shrieking women, slaughtered sons and fathers, and other [drunken] soldiers. . . ." Steele is hen-pecked, Swift is rude, and the Dowager, who "was for dying like Mary, Queen of Scots (to whom she fancied she bore a resemblance in beauty)," chooses to hide in bed instead. Frank, Holt, and Beatrix are fallen idols. All of these figures are persuasive examples that develop Esmond's "familiar" approach to history. As we read the novel, then, our trust in him is repeatedly invoked and undercut: on the one hand, we have a convincingly disillusioned recorder; on the other, a clearly prejudiced narrator.

Thackeray reinforces the ambiguity of Esmond's portrayal through the various notes that the fictional characters append to the history. Some correct textual faults: in II, 9, Esmond justifies the unexpected presence of Lockwood at Blenheim (281). Some indicate Henry's biases. In II, 15, for example, a note by Esmond's grandsons suggests that the judgments he makes against Marlborough result from both a personal slight and the stories told by the Jesuit, "who was not always correctly informed . . ." (357); in II, 10, an unsigned note (by Henry's publishers?) tries to explain the Colonel's rejection of his own evaluation of the Duke ("This passage . . . is written on a leaf inserted in the MS. book, and dated 1744, probably after he had heard of the duchess's death" [285]); in III, 1, Rachel Esmond apparently disagrees with Henry's description of soldiers' wives as "poor tender creatures . . . sickening and trembling . . ." (357), responding to his implied question—"What must have been the continued agonies of fears and apprehensions which racked the gentle breasts of wives and matrons in those dreadful days . . .," with a curt, "What indeed? Psm. xci. 2, 3, 7—R. E." Other notes extol the Colonel's virtues. In one, Rachel Warington agrees that he is an example of "perfect calmness and politeness" in his attitude to women (a remark in direct

opposition to his wife's annotation in III, 10 [483]), and offers her minister's testimony to prove that Esmond was "the humblest man . . ., the least exacting, the most easily contented . . ." (481), a contrast to the figure we meet in the preface and in the text.

As an exercise in perspective, *Henry Esmond* demonstrates the historian's power to create and the limitations of those creations. Through Book I especially, by repeating the same actions from the familiar/heroic viewpoints, Thackeray shows how events can easily be transformed by their recorders. Rhetoric can make a hero. In Henry's preface, for instance, Sir George Castlewood's sacrifice is described "familiarily": "He pawned his plate for King Charles the First. . . ." In I, 2, the same act is presented in the "heroic" mode: "the King being in Oxford in 1642, Sir George, with the consent of his father, then very aged and infirm, and residing at his house of Castlewood, melted the whole of the family plate for his Majesty's service." Of Lord Thomas Castlewood's death, Esmond first familiarly relates: "he lay for a while concealed in the marshy country near the town of Trim, and more from catarrh and fever caught in the bogs than from the steel of the enemy in the battle, sank and died" (I, 6). Immediately thereafter comes the heroic description: "'He is dead of a wound received at the Boyne fighting for King James.'" Mourning Frank Esmond are some who saw him as an adventurer, some as a joker, one as a saint. By contrasting these diverse reports of the same act, Thackeray indicates that even Esmond's familiar history must be inadequate, for it too is only one version of a truth which is defined (and redefined) by each perceiver. Refusing us the comforting certainty of a similarly inadequate response, Thackeray gives us no focused image of Henry to appraise but many Esmonds—son, lover, soldier, traitor, schemer, martyr, fool, and father—all possibly creations of their recorders, all possibly reflections of a complicated personality.

Like the whole memoir artifice, the two distinctly subjective viewpoints at the book's beginning, the ironies of Rachel's and Henry's portraits, and the conflicting footnotes, these alternating perspectives invite us to consider how accurate Esmond's history is. We find that though his Muse may no longer kneel before royalty, it has discovered more personal subjects to glorify, and that Esmond is a flawed historian who promises a true record but who, blinded by his love for Rachel and for himself, does not consistently deliver. He is a critic whose own work may be just as limited as those formal histories he deplures.

More than a test of the Colonel's preface, an example of a new kind of historical writing, *Henry Esmond* is a disturbing experiment in fiction. In "The Second Funeral of Napoleon," Thackeray wrote that

it is no easy task in this world to distinguish between what is great in it, and what is mean; and many and many is the puzzle I have had in reading History (or the works of fiction that go by that name), to

know whether I should laud up to the skies and endeavour, to the best of my small capabilities, to imitate the remarkable character about whom I was reading, or whether I should fling aside the book and the hero of it, as things altogethor base. . . .¹⁷

In *Henry Esmond*, he forces us to share this insecurity. While the novel warns us of the subjectivity of truth and the distortions of the "perspective-glass," only through these glasses do we see anything of Henry, suggestively contradictory portraits without a finally unambiguous image. What we are left with is an incoherent picture of our hero—perhaps, as some say, the result of Thackeray's carelessness, but perhaps too an extension of the contradictions that greet us at the work's beginning.

Deliberately old-fashioned, *Henry Esmond* is more than a

curious artifact, and the irreconcilable details of the openings, the notes, and the text very quickly move us beyond a comfortable recognition of self-conscious fictiveness. Far from safely distancing us, these inconsistencies force us to wrestle again and again with Henry as subject and storyteller, drawing us further and further into a confusingly unstable world where reading is not a simple process of testing an epigraph but of recognizing that we can test nothing because we can finally know nothing. This is a book of reflections; its "appurtenances" do not disguise the history but define it.

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Victorian Group News

A. THE SAN FRANCISCO MEETING

28 December 1979, 10:15-11:30 AM, Continental 6, Hilton
Presiding: J. Hillis Miller, Yale University

I. Business

II. Papers and Discussion: The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Circle

1. "Pre-Raphaelite Painting: A Reinterpretation," George P. Landow, Brown Univ.
2. "Hopkins, Christina Rossetti, and Pre-Raphaelitism," Jerome Bump, Univ. of Texas, Austin
3. "How It Struck a Contemporary: Tennyson's 'Lancelot and Elaine' and Pre-Raphaelite Art." Catherine B. Stevenson, Univ. of Hartford
4. "The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Their Circle: The Formation of the Victorian Avant-Garde," Herbert Sussman, Northeastern Univ.

B. THE VICTORIAN LUNCHEON

The Annual Victorian Division Luncheon will be held in Continental Parlor 7 at the San Francisco Hilton. Bar at 11:45 a.m.; lunch at 1:00. For reservations send a check for \$13 by 15 December to John O. Jordan, 3306 Fulton St., San Francisco, CA 94118.

C. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Northeast Victorian Studies Association Conference: "War and Violence," April 11-13, 1980, University of Pennsylvania. For program information address Joanne Hutchinson, Department of English, Haverford College, Haverford, PA 19041.

DICKENS STUDIES ANNUAL will be published beginning with volume 8 (1979) by AMS Press and will be edited by the Victorian Committee of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, in association with Queens College. The new Editors are Michael Timko and Fred Kaplan; the Managing Editor is Edward Guiliano.

Dickens Studies Annual, which welcomes essay and monograph-length contributions, will continue its emphasis on Dickens, but will broaden its scope to include essays on other Victorian novelists and on the history or aesthetics of Victorian fiction. Its new title is *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction*.

Please send submissions to the Editors, *Dickens Studies Annual*, Room 1522, Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York, 33 West 42nd Street, New York, New York 10036; please send subscription inquiries to AMS Press, 56 East 13th Street, New York, New York 10003.

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