

# The Victorian Newsletter

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Cover: Aubrey Beardsley's Merlin in *Le Morte Darthur*

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## Swinburne, Clough, and the Speechless Christ: "Before a Crucifix" and "Easter Day"

M. K. Louis

Thou bad'st let children come to thee;  
What children now but curses come?  
What manhood in that God can be  
Who sees their worship, and is dumb?

Swinburne, "Before a Crucifix," 187-90<sup>1</sup>

D. G. Charlton has observed that, "whereas in England the story of the nineteenth-century 'honest doubters' is above all one of attempts to *adapt and revise* Protestant Christianity, the comparable story in France is chiefly concerned with men's attempts to *replace* Catholic Christianity" (12; italics Charlton's). This is true enough, so far as it goes; but it is also true that in England there were several writers who never adopted the unassuming stance of the "honest doubter," and who approached Christianity with a frankly subversive belligerence. Such poets as Walter Savage Landor or Algernon Charles Swinburne, allying themselves with the forces of continental liberalism, helped to sustain a theologically and politically radical tradition within English literature throughout the Victorian period. Victorianists have dealt with this tradition rarely and reluctantly; there is, for example, almost no detailed commentary on "Before a Crucifix," one of the most formidably effective lyrics in Swinburne's polemical *Songs before Sunrise*.<sup>2</sup> The central theme of this lyric is, precisely, the necessity of discarding and replacing the Christian mythology, which now constitutes a language of exploitation and oppression.

We can best appreciate the originality and brilliance of Swinburne's strategy in "Before a Crucifix" if we compare the poem with Clough's "Easter Day" and its sequel. Educated by the liberal Protestant theologian Thomas Arnold and exposed by such associates as Bonamy Price to a "stream of German Divinity," Clough finely typifies the "honest doubter" of the mid-nineteenth century. To Clough, the myth of the Resurrection is empty in its literal sense, and empty too as a figure of our own Resurrection—even as a figure of our salvation from sin, in the orthodox sense. "What is the meaning of 'Atonement by a crucified Saviour'? —How many of the evangelicals can answer that?—" he asks, tartly. Nevertheless, he is not prepared to deny what he sometimes prefers to call "Xtianity."<sup>3</sup> Patrick Greig Scott has pointed out that "most of Clough's religious poetry is engaged and serious, with the will to believe predominating over the skeptical, ironic unbelief which has attracted critical attention" (40). Certainly in the "Easter Day" poems Clough desperately attempts to claim some sort of enduring significance for the Resurrection and for "Xtianity" as

a whole. To Swinburne, on the other hand, the Christian mythos is semiotically "full" in ways which Christ never anticipated, and must be discarded precisely because it means too much. Born into a High Church family, and tutored, at different periods, by no less than three vicars, Swinburne never ceased to feel the power of Christianity, and responded to it with violent (if largely negative) emotion. In "Before a Crucifix" this passion is controlled and directed so well that the poem succeeds both polemically and aesthetically.

"Before a Crucifix" begins modestly enough: a dramatic monologue, apparently, the "I" addressing the carved figure on a crucifix (lines 13-18; for the text see *Poems* 2: 81-87). But after the third stanza the "I" all but disappears; the speaker is granted an impersonal authority, as he confronts in turn the icon, the unknown historical Jesus, the hypothetical deity who ascended into heaven, the " 'bon sans culotte' " <sup>4</sup> who typifies the People, and the mystic Bridegroom of the Church. In the end, the speaker rejects every one of these Christs; for in every shape Christ embodies the power and subtlety of the exploiter, or, at best, the impotence of the exploited.

To begin with, the image carved upon the crucifix is presented in quasi-Feuerbachian terms as the anthropomorphic "likeness" (14) of the poor who worship it. "God is the mirror of man" (Feuerbach 63). Of course, Swinburne's frame of reference here is more narrowly political than Feuerbach's; but the antimetabole in 9-10 does suggest a mirror image: "The face is full of prayers and pains, / To which they bring their pains and prayers...." But these prayers are the vain outcries of "helpless" victims (16); and the carved Savior's "ghastly mouth...gapes and groans" (12). It seems that the idol of the poor women who are kneeling before the crucifix can only mirror and echo the misery of the poor. By contrast, the speaker, who has "nor tongue nor knee / For prayer," has a distinct "word" to speak: a word of reproach and condemnation (17-18). The inspiring "flame" of the historical Christ's speech, and the "word" he "passed to set men free," have destroyed and enslaved men; the very "name" of Christ is now a fetter; his "words" are "whips" and "brands" (19-20, 35-6, 32, 51-2). (Some months before the composition of "Before a Crucifix" in November 1869, Swinburne was insisting that the "foul gordian word" execrated in Shelley's "Ode to Liberty" must be "Christ," rather than "King.")<sup>5</sup>

As the speaker challenges the hypothetical deity to "Look down, turn usward...and see" the church (43-8), we begin to understand how Christ's language has been so cruelly per-

1. Compare Swinburne's description of Christ's "Mute lips forlorn of words" in "Siena" (*Poems* 2: 87, 164).

2. Fallis 182-86 provides a useful discussion of basic themes in the poem; see also the brief but pregnant comments in Greenberg 186-87. *Letters* 2: 160-62 and Corelli 404-8 testify to contemporary outrage over "Before a Crucifix."

3. Letters to J. P. Gell, 18 April 1839; to Anne Clough, 4-23 May 1847; and to Gell, 24 November 1844 (Nos. 60, 149, 107 in *Correspondence*

1: 90, 182, 141). Italics Clough's.

4. Letter to William Michael Rossetti, October 19, 1871; according to Lang's note, Swinburne is quoting the French revolutionary Camille Desmoulins (No. 402 in *Letters* 2: 160; and n5).

5. Letters to William Rossetti, March 15 and 31, 1869 (Nos. 290, 291, in *Letters* 2: 7-9); "Notes on the Text of Shelley," May 1869 (*Complete Works* 15: 353-54).



verted. On one hand, the Church has exploited the sufferings of the historical Jesus, so that the Crucifix is now, in part, significant of the wealth and wanton power of the priesthood:

Thy nakedness enrobes thy spouse  
With the soft sanguine stuff she wears  
Whose old limbs use for ointment yet  
Thine agony and bloody sweat. (57-60)<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, Christ's agony mirrors that of the poor, whose suffering also enriches the Church. As the dead Christ lay bound in linen bands, so the Church binds the People in the iron bands of Christian dogma (64-70); and the People, like the living Christ, "have not where to lay their head" (78; cf. Matt. 8.20 [Rosenberg 184n]). Yet their miseries are greater than Jesus'; they have not even "the rich man's grave / To sleep in" (73-4; cf. Matt. 27.57-60). Therefore, they, and not Jesus, endure the true Passion: "So still, for all man's tears and creeds, / The sacred body hangs and bleeds" (83-4). The ambiguity of "still" points toward Victor Hugo's eternal sufferer in "À un Martyr"—the "Dieu pensif et pâle" whom priests sell to tyrants, and who, "debout sur la terre et sous le firmament, / ... / Sur le noir Golgotha saigne éternellement" (11. 105-11).<sup>7</sup> But Swinburne's martyr is more explicitly assimilated to the class struggle:

O sacred head, O desecrate,  
O labour-wounded feet and hands,  
O blood poured forth in pledge to fate  
Of nameless lives in divers lands,  
O slain and spent and sacrificed  
People, the grey-grown speechless Christ!

Is there a gospel in the red  
Old witness of thy wide-mouthed wounds?  
From thy blind stricken tongueless head  
What desolate evangel sounds  
A hopeless note of hope deferred?  
What word, if there be any word? (97-108)

The paradox in line 97 sets a tone of reverence mingled with indignant compassion; but Swinburne emphasizes less the People's pain than their impotent silence, "nameless," "tongueless," "speechless." The faint echo of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (III.ii.225) is appropriate enough: Swinburne, like Antony, would wish the "poor, poor, dumb mouths" of the victim's wounds (Shakespeare 1122) to stir his audience to mutiny. But the figure whose dumb agony proclaims the gospel of suffering is doubly a "desolate evangel," a messenger with no word of hope:

And we seek yet if God or man  
Can loosen thee as Lazarus,

Bid thee rise up republican  
And save thyself and all of us;  
But no disciple's tongue can say  
When thou shalt take our sins away. (127-32)

The allusion to Lazarus heightens our sense of the People's passivity: they await a savior. So the radical Gerald Massey wrote, "They have bound thee in the grave-clothes, but we watch with tears and sighs, / Till Freedom come like Christ, and thou like Lazarus shalt rise" ("The Exile to his Country," Massey 129). Swinburne revises Massey's republican doggerel: where Massey does not question the implications of his imagery, Swinburne uses one Biblical image to undermine another. The resurrection of Lazarus, which traditionally foreshadows Christ's, ironically highlights Christ's failure to redeem humanity, and the failure of the People to "rise up republican." At this point in the poem Swinburne's hostility to Christianity in every form becomes explicit. When the People do arise, the priests who "made songs" of their victims' shame will "hail and hymn" the laborers; but the latter should not permit any admixture of Christianity to taint either their liberalism or their liberty (145-51).

Let not thy tree of freedom be  
Regrafted from that rotting tree.

The tree of faith ingrafted by priests  
Puts its foul foliage out above thee,  
And round it feed man-eating beasts  
Because of whom we dare not love thee;  
Though hearts reach back and memories ache,  
We cannot praise thee for their sake. (155-68)

The priests have grafted the "tree of faith" upon the Cross, and the Cross has been corrupted. If the Cross in turn is grafted on the "tree of freedom," the rotting tree will contaminate the healthy plant. Swinburne's "tree of freedom" suggests at once the iron "trees of liberty" set up in Revolutionary France; Hugo's "arbre saint du Progrès," the republican organism which will grow "Sur le passé détruit" ("Lux" 236, 239, Hugo 248); and Hertha herself, the "life-tree" whose "topmost blossom" is human freedom (*Poems* 2: 76, 80; in *Songs before Sunrise*, "Hertha" immediately precedes "Before a Crucifix"). Of course, the tree of Christian faith functions as a demonic parody of the life-tree, just as the "dead God" on the crucifix is a mockery of that "communist and stump-orator of Nazareth"<sup>8</sup> whose "live lips" spoke of liberty (157, 161).

As for the historical Jesus, that "transcendent revolutionary" (Rénan 116), he has passed beyond our knowledge. Swinburne's agnosticism extends to Rénan's "history": the human Christ is "hidden" behind the "viewless veil" woven by centuries of Christianity (167-68, 170, 181-86). We can see only

6. The conceit that the Whore enrobes herself in another's madness may owe something to Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper," in the version quoted in Swinburne's *William Blake* (*Complete Works* 16: 171n1): "God and his priest and king...wrap themselves up in our misery."  
7. Hugo 62-63; on Swinburne's longstanding admiration for *Châtiments*, see *A Study of Victor Hugo* (*Complete Works* 13: 48-66 and *Letters* 1: 168 (No. 120, to George Powell, August 2 [1866]). In a letter to William

Michael Rossetti (No. 222, October 6 [1867], 1: 268), Swinburne implies that *Châtiments* was one of the models for *Songs before Sunrise*.

8. "Notes of an English Republican on the Muscovite Crusade" (Swinburne, *Complete Works* 15: 414). F. A. C. Wilson points out that the "gallows tree" of "Before a Crucifix" is Yggdrasil's "desolate antithesis" (58); Greenberg relates this "contrary" of the life-tree to Blake's *Tree of Mystery* (177-78, 186).

the "carrion crucified" (192) which the Church presents as its deity. Throughout the poem, oral imagery and the imagery of corruption have predominated; now they combine in the image of the Church as a leprous and syphilitic bride, whose Judas-kiss betrays both Christ's teaching and the symbolic value of his martyrdom.

So when our souls look back to thee  
 They sicken, seeing against thy side,  
 Too foul to speak of or to see,  
 The leprous likeness of a bride,  
 Whose kissing lips through his lips grown  
 Leave their God rotten to the bone. (175-80)

The Bridegroom of the Church, the "bon sans culotte," the carved image, and the supposed god—all are disgraced beyond redemption by their own impotence to protest against this exploitation and corruption. "What manhood in that God can be / Who sees their worship, and is dumb?" This "god" has produced a starved world of "haggard" wood and sun; he neither is, nor utters, a saving "word"; he can save neither himself nor others (189-90, 2, 196, 157-58). At the close of the poem, therefore, in a series of monosyllabic imperatives, Christ is dismissed: "Come down, be done with, cease, give o'er; / Hide..., strive not, be no more" (197-98). To the liberal speaker, as to the People, the symbol of the crucifix is worse than useless.

The implacable anticlericalism of the conclusion recalls some continental attempts "to replace Catholic Christianity": for example, Michelet's *Histoire de la révolution française* (1846-53), with its intensely dramatic, urgent, and emotive vision of a radical opposition between Christianity and the Revolution. Yet Swinburne also uses the rhetorical strategies of such English radicals as Landor, Shelley, and Massey; but his deployment of these strategies is strikingly original. It is indeed the structure of the lyric, or, as we may say, the strategy of the poem as a whole, that makes "Before a Crucifix" peculiarly successful. The first two-thirds of the poem (1-132) are composed in a tone of "mild and modified hostility," as Swinburne wrote to William Michael Rossetti (November 25, 1869, *Letters* 2: 57). This political attack upon the Church is marked by "the strong bitterness of pity" ("Apologia," *Poems* 2: 316), rather than by the vituperative frenzy of the "Hymn of Man"; Swinburne is exploiting the emotive value of the crucifixion. By a strategy dear to Western heretics at least since Lessing's day (see Gay 332), Christ is pitted against Christianity: "Change not the gold of faith for dross / Of Christian creeds that spit on Christ" (153-54). Of course, the most famous use of this motif in English literature is Shelley's in *Prometheus Unbound* (1.546-59, 597-615, Shelley 220-2), echoed in Swinburne's "Siena" (1868), and, later, in his sonnet "On the Russian Persecution of the Jews" (1882). In both of these poems, Swinburne, like Shelley, insists that Christ's worst suffering must have sprung from his prophetic vision of Christianity—his foreknowledge that "the word of Christian should / Mean to men evil and not

good." In "Siena," he goes further, suggesting that Christ's eternal crucifixion is entirely the work of his worshippers. "Still your God, spat upon and sold, / Bleeds at your hands" (*Poems* 2: 165): the lines echo "À un Martyr" and anticipate "Before a Crucifix." But "Siena" does not consider how this crucifixion by creed invalidates the traditional significance of Christian symbolism.

"Siena," composed a year earlier than "Before a Crucifix," is thus less radical than its successor. But to appreciate the full audacity of the later poem, we must return to Clough's sombre ode, with its more conventional strategy. Like "Before a Crucifix," Clough's "Easter Day: Naples, 1849" buries a Christ long dead and rotten: "Long ere to-day / Corruption that sad perfect work hath done... / Ashes to ashes, dust to dust" (lines 15-24, Clough, *Poems* 199-203). "Easter Day" also opposes the reality of Christ's life and death to the falsifications of "an after-Gospel and late Creed" (33). And that reality is not merely "speechless," but absent, irrecoverable: "Where they have laid Him is there none to say! / No sound, nor in, nor out; no word / Of where to seek the dead or meet the living Lord" (147-49). In both poems, the disappearance of the "historical Jesus" behind the veil of the years leaves Christianity, apparently, as a system without the central force which should inform and direct it. The reader is therefore encouraged to abandon that system. Both "Easter Day" and "Before a Crucifix" are hortatory lyrics. The emotional content and the emotive strategy in these poems reinforce the didactic energy of the exhortations, and the rhetorical structure in each case makes it clear that this didactic impulse is paramount.

"Before a Crucifix" and "Easter Day" both open deceptively as dramatic monologues, concealing their suasive purpose ("ED" 1-4; "BC" 1-18), but drop the first person for the greater part of the poem. Each then proceeds to a series of four rhetorical questions emphasized by anaphora ("What though...What if...Or what if...What if...," ["ED" 9-38]; "It was for this...?" four times, ["BC" 19-35]). Both lyrics use a series of dogmatic statements ("ED" 11-26, 29-35, 42-63; "BC" 49-96) to lead up to an emotional outburst of interjection and apostrophe ("ED" 65-71; "BC" 97-102, 109-114). Both climax in *commands*: from "Eat, drink, and die," to "Let us go hence" ("ED" 72-152); from the imperatives addressed to the People ("BC" 149-56) to those addressed to Christ ("Come down,...be no more," ["BC" 197-98]).

So close a correspondence in structure may tempt the reader to perceive "Easter Day" as a direct influence on "Before a Crucifix," particularly as Clough's ode was first given to the general public in 1869; reviews of the *Poems and Prose Remains* were appearing well before Swinburne wrote "Before a Crucifix" in November of that year.<sup>9</sup> However, there is no definite evidence that Swinburne ever read "Easter Day." It is more profitable to consider the differences between these lyrics, as symptomatic both of the changes in free thought between 1849 and 1869, and—perhaps more importantly—of the distinction between a liberal and a radical strategy within the religious

9. Swinburne's casual allusion to "Dipsychus" on 2 December 1869 (letter 327, to W. M. Rossetti, *Letters* 2: 61) does not show clearly whether he had read the poem or not; his later jibe at Clough in "Social Verse" (1891), however, seems to be aimed precisely at such passages in

Clough's poetry as the anguished central section of "Easter Day." Swinburne sums up Clough's religious views in one unkind couplet: "We've got no faith, and we don't know what to do: / To think one can't believe a creed because it isn't true!" (*Complete Works* 15: 283).



(or anti-religious) poetry of the Victorian age. It is not only that "Before a Crucifix" at some points displays an affinity with Rénan and Feuerbach, whereas "Easter Day" (as the Spirit in *Dipsychus* points out) has "a strong Strauss-smell about it" (I.viii.36, *Poems* 263); the crucial difference between the poems concerns the meaning of myth, and the fluidity of meaning.

Clough finds it necessary to attack a strictly literal reading of the mythos of the Resurrection. The apostles were correct in their initial doubt; the Resurrection is an "idle tale" (124; cf. Luke 24.11). Like Strauss, Clough perceives myth as an unconscious, rather than artful, fiction created by a community rather than by an individual, class, or institution:

As circulates in some great city crowd  
A rumour changeful, vague, importunate, and loud,  
From no determined centre, or of fact,  
Or authorship exact,  
Which no man can deny  
Nor verify;  
So spread the wondrous fame.... ("ED" 48-54)

Clough's language divests the "wondrous fame" (his Latinate pun identifies *fame* with *rumour*) of all exact form or significance. From a literal point of view, nothing can be more unstable than the heavenly truth supposedly conveyed by such a tale: "Set your affections *not* on things above, / Which moth and rust corrupt, which quickest come to end" (106-7, Clough's italics). Even the reported words of Jesus are infected by this instability, and become "changeful, vague"; the poet can turn the Biblical cadences of Christ's teaching (Matt. 6.19-21) against the spirit and the letter of His Word, or can use Christ's own prophecy (Luke 23.30) to express the horror of Christ's inevitable disappearance: "Ye hills, fall on us, and ye mountains, cover! / In darkness and great gloom / Come ere we thought it is *our* day of doom" (67-69, Clough's italics). Though Christ once "spake as never mortal spake" (40; cf. John 7.46), yet He "Nor heard, nor spake" (44) after death, and His words are as perishable and remote as He was Himself. The Word fades away into "silence, which is best" (153).

And as we turn from that "empty vacant void" (131) we have now only to perform our ordinary and possible duties: "Tie the split oar, patch the torn sail...and be content, since this must even do" (123-35). In "Easter Day II" Clough does attempt to "patch the torn sail" of St. Peter's vessel; a "graver word" assures the speaker that "In the true Creed... / Christ is yet risen" (1-21). What constitutes the "true Creed" is never explained in "Easter Day II," an unconvincing hotchpotch of tautology and flatly stated paradox; but Clough's shorter (and better) "Epi-Strauss-ion" (*Poems* 203-4, 163) suggests that, when the mythical nature of the gospels is clearly understood, the "religious conception" which they embody will also be more firmly grasped. Like Strauss, Clough tries to "re-establish dogmatically that which has been destroyed critically" (Strauss

3: 396), or, in Charlton's terms, to "*adapt and revise* Protestant Christianity." Clough "modèle ses poèmes sur un schéma comparable à celui de la *Vie de Jésus* [Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*]: négation de l'authenticité historique de la Bible, affirmation d'une foi épurée par le rejet des miracles" (Veyriras 489). The iconoclastic exhortations of the first "Easter Day" modulate, toward the close of that lyric, into a calm acceptance of our "own and only Mother Earth" (133), which in turn prepares the reader for the constructive impulse of "Easter Day II."<sup>10</sup> In "Epi-Strauss-ion," Clough even goes so far as to adopt Strauss's Neo-Hegelian concept of an Idealist deity manifest to the intellectual vision; when the rich stained glass of Christian mythology is gone, the divine "Orb" is more clearly visible, to the philosopher at least.

But this confidence is not characteristic of Clough. In his letters and essays, and in such of his other lyrics as "Why should I say I see the things I see not," we find, rather, a flexible and yet impassioned agnosticism, a deeply reverential attempt "to vindicate the unknown" (Clough, "Paper on Religion" 287). Most often Clough's devotion is to "the better thing / Unfelt, unseen, unimagined, all unknown" ("Why should I say....," 57-58, *Poems* 23). This attitude helps to explain the peculiar urgency of the exhortations in the first "Easter Day." For Strauss, myth can at least embody "absolute inherent truth," although within a popular and distortive medium; myth is "the shell of an *idea*—of a religious conception" which is valid in itself (1: 48; italics Strauss's). But for Clough, as a rule, myth and dogma alike must necessarily blur "the bare conscience of the better thing." So in "Easter Day II" the Christian mythos, scrupulously divested at once of literal and of intellectual content, is reaffirmed only by way of celebrating the bare will to believe: the Resurrection now allegorizes the obstinate resurgence of an emotional attitude.

Now too, as when it first began,  
Life yet is Life and Man is Man.  
.....  
Hope conquers cowardice, joy grief:  
Or at the least, faith unbelief.  
Though dead, not dead;  
Not gone, though fled;  
Not lost, not vanished.  
In the great Gospel and true Creed,  
He is yet risen indeed;  
Christ is yet risen. (40-51)

Myth is permissible as a device for reinforcing a valuable emotional impulse; and the Christian mythos still retains its emotional power, as the first "Easter Day" testified. We have seen with what passionate regret Clough initially dismisses Christianity. "We are most wretched that had most believed" (75); "we are souls bereaved" (86). These expressions of attachment, together with Clough's carefully timed use of the first person plural in these passages, attempt to disarm the Christian reader and subtly invite him into the company of sceptics.

10. Critics have interpreted "Easter Day" as a lament for lost faith (Chorley 112) or, more positively, as "a consoling statement about anachronistic suffering" (Gollin 302-3, and see Timko 48-50); others—justly, I think—see no real conflict between these interpretations. The destruction of the old order is accomplished with a passionate distress which most powerfully

colors the reader's impression of the lyric; but the "emotional direction" of the ode does shift in the concluding section (Biswas 325). Hardy expresses the complexity of the poem best, when she declares that "the sense of doubt's suffering is eroded but not removed by the consolations of rationality" (274n).

Swinburne had a virulent contempt for such rhetorical ploys: "Nothing...is more wearisome than the delivery of reluctant doubt, of half-hearted hope and half-incredulous faith." The "melodious whine of retrospective and regretful scepticism" may advertise a Tennyson or a Clough as a responsible, moderate thinker with an instinct for reverence and a proper respect for the feelings of churchmen; but whining, Swinburne insists, is not singing (*Complete Works* 15: 66, 71). Yet he himself exploits this strategy of regret with dignified brevity in "Before a Crucifix," when we are compelled to reject Christ "Though hearts reach back and memories ache" (167).

However, the concessive clause here marks the gap between Swinburne and Clough. Whereas Clough denies Christianity and then reaffirms it, in a novel but constructive sense, Swinburne attempts to affirm the worship of Christ in a new sense, and then finds that any kind of Christian affirmation is impossible. For Clough the "wondrous fame" has no definable intellectual significance; Swinburne, on the other hand, perceives religious language and symbolism as heavy with precise and oppressive meaning. The prayers of priests in "Before a Crucifix" have a function as concrete as that of eating (183-84). While Clough ascribes blind folly to the "ministers and stewards of a word / Which [they] would preach, because another heard" ("ED" 139-40), Swinburne attacks them for their craft in turning the Word to their account: "They scourge us with [Christ's] words for whips" ("BC" 51). Christianity would be an impotent weapon in republican hands only because it is so potent as an instrument of oppression.

It follows that Massey's use of Christ as an emblem of the People, and even Landor's (in "Regeneration") of Christ as an image of freedom (16: 124), must be rejected as partial and misleading. In "Before a Crucifix," Swinburne himself has tried his hand at relabelling the elements of the Passion: Christ is the People; the nails that fix him to the Cross are fear, faith, and falsehood; the seamless coat is the natural soul's freedom, and so on (85-90, 118-19). But these parallels have at best only a temporary value. In the last dozen stanzas of "Before a Crucifix," Swinburne deliberately shatters the expectations which his earlier moderation may have encouraged. The identification of the People with Christ is decisively rejected, and, despite our inevitable regrets, so too is Christ. Swinburne's poem implicitly rebukes Clough and all other "philo-Christian disbelievers" (*Complete Works* 13: 197) who employ the affectionately reductive strategies of Victorian liberalism.

Yet each of these two poems is eminently successful within its own terms; Clough's strategy of conciliation is used as elegantly as Swinburne's strategy of aggression. To Swinburne the silence of the crucified Jesus expresses a state of political oppression which must be ended; to Clough the image of deity rearisen conveys a word "Which no man can deny / Nor verify"—a word, however, of hope, encouraging that impulse of aspiration and reverence which Clough regarded as genuinely religious. But, for both poets, it is clear that the image of Christ

no longer embodies a redemptive Word in any sense traditionally accepted. It is for the poet either to reject the speechless Christ or to find in His silence a new and wordless music.

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## Pier Glasses and Sympathy in Eliot's *Middlemarch*

Barbara McGovern

George Eliot has been accused by more than one critic of handling the narration in *Middlemarch* with too much unease. That is, her omniscient narrator has been seen as too uncertain and apologetic. Walter Allen, for example, says that Eliot is "too self-conscious, too anxious that we should not misunderstand the point that the incidents and episodes...should make themselves" (84). Quentin Anderson, commenting on the traditional view that there is internal division in Eliot's concept of her fiction, sees this disjunction as evident in the voice of the narrator; Eliot, he writes, conveys through the narrator "a gentle schoolmistress's irony which places her between the book and our apprehension of it" (283). And Basil Willey, more condemnatory than Allen and Anderson, says of Eliot, "It is when she breaks off her own narratives to justify her methods that, in spite of the interest and truth of the matter, the manner and tone make one writhe..." (245).

The cause of this narrative unease is usually traced to the inherent contradiction Eliot faces in her attempts to present realism while being simultaneously aware that any work of art is a distortion of life filtered through the artist's mind. The famous parable about the pier glass and candle at the beginning of Chapter XXVII can perhaps demonstrate the basis for attributing narrative uncertainty to an artistic trap. In this passage the narrator suggests the fallibility of human perceptions by comparing them to the false illusion which results from a physiological phenomenon:

Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent—of Miss Vincy, for example. (182)<sup>1</sup>

We all, Eliot insists, impose our individual perceptions upon the random events of our lives, forming in our minds a pattern where there is none. But, some have argued, because the novelist is herself imposing just such a pattern upon the world she creates, she has thrust herself into a literary cul-de-sac. In other words, Eliot is asking us to accept the truth she presents, yet she is aware that by the very process of transforming life into art, she is imposing a false pattern, just as each of us does with the events of his life, and hence the narrative unease—or so the argument goes.

Such a view, however, does not allow for the rich complexity of the narrator's role in *Middlemarch*, a role which encompasses a far larger concept than that of, say, a Dickens narrator. The pier glass parable and other similar passages in the novel which probe the fallibility of human perception, suggest a thematic

significance that extends beyond narrative technique. Indeed, the narrator's role, as I hope to demonstrate, is inextricably involved with the development of the major theme of the novel and its partial realization through the character of Dorothea. Narrative unease surely exists in *Middlemarch*—with that there can be no quarrel. But rather than being the unfortunate result of an inevitable trap Eliot has created for herself, it is, in actuality, an intentional, finely conceived artistic device.

The narrative in *Middlemarch* works on several levels. First, we have the presentation of facts, of objective reality, as nearly accurately as the omniscient narrator can present this reality. Here we get such things as dialogue, the objective portrayal of action, the presentation of historical and scientific material, and the description of place. The selection of these things, the choice of what we are permitted to see, is, of course, up to the author, and at this level she is in absolute control of her world.

But the novelist then projects her own images and concepts, her unique perceptions, upon that world she has created, and these fuse with factual reality. Hence, we have a second level—the narrator's attempt to understand that reality. We can see this attempt in such a passage as the one in Chapter X in which the narrator, having been analyzing Ladislaw and his prospects for the future, suddenly interposes herself: "But at present this caution against a too hasty judgment interests me more in relation to Mr. Casaubon than to his young cousin.... I protest against any absolute conclusion" (56). And again, soon after this interjection the narrator asserts that Casaubon "claims some of our pity" and that she feels "more tenderly towards his experience of success than towards the disappointment of the amiable Sir James" in winning Dorothea's hand (57).

In both these passages the narrator displays that judiciousness which some see as a dichotomy between the artistic intellectual in Eliot, and her sympathetic understanding of the characters in the world she has created. An even more deliberate imposition of the narrator occurs in the following passage:

One morning, some weeks after her arrival at Lowick, Dorothea—but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage? I protest against all our interest, all our effort at understanding being given to the young skins that look blooming in spite of trouble; for these too will get faded, and will know the older and more eating griefs which we are helping to neglect....Mr. Casaubon had an intense consciousness within him, and was spiritually a-hungered like the rest of us. (192)

And still later in the novel we have a further example of narrative interjection when Casaubon, tortured by jealousy, misinterprets Dorothea's generosity towards Ladislaw. As our disgust and anger with Casaubon grow more intense, the narrator suddenly breaks off a description of Casaubon's feelings to ask the reader, "must not we, being impartial, feel with him a little?" (259).

It is at this level that some critics find Eliot too self-conscious a narrator, yet the narrative impositions seem too conscious, too deliberate, to be merely the unfortunate or inevitable result

1. All future references to the novel are from the Norton Critical Edition.



of Eliot's own limitations. At this second level, the narrator is no longer in absolute control; we are told the meaning of what we see, but only as the individual persona of the narrator perceives that meaning, and it is the *process* of interpretation, rather than the end result, which seems of most importance to her. Here, then, is an important distinction: Eliot's narrator is providing the reader with a model for how we are to approach life, and as such she becomes, in one sense, a character in the novel. The narrator's role is so integral a part in the development of the novel's theme, that her self-consciousness and caution become positive assets. We are each, we are reminded, a world unto ourselves, yet we can overcome the dreadful distances that exist between us through bonds of human understanding and compassion. This process of imaginative sympathy is what the narrator demonstrates throughout the novel.

A third dimension of narration in *Middlemarch* is one in which the reader, having both the facts and the narrator's interpretation of them, must judge for himself the validity of the narrator's perceptions by measuring them against his own. The additional rich dimension which the narrator provides is that she has shown us how to make such judgments through a process of empathy. Her interjections become not the apologies of an uneasy author, but, instead, the deliberate imposition of one who throughout the novel is reminding us that we are all human and bound by our limited perceptions. Through an awareness of our limitations, an acceptance of each other's unique perceptions (each other's pier glass), and a reaching out through sympathy, we can establish bonds of understanding, thereby approximating what the novelist herself does in the artistic process.

It is against the background of this narrative process of empathy that we see the development of a parallel sympathetic understanding in Dorothea. In *The Great Tradition* F. R. Leavis concludes that the weakness of *Middlemarch* lies in Dorothea. Even though acknowledging that in the opening chapters of the novel Dorothea "is not exempted from the irony that informs our vision of the other characters," Leavis nevertheless finds the novel marred by what he sees as the author's "unqualified self-identification with Dorothea" (73-74). Yet it is precisely because Dorothea's sympathetic understanding grows to approximate that of the narrator's, that the novel achieves full thematic realization. The major characters in *Middlemarch* struggle with an inability to fulfill their aspirations because of their own imperfect knowledge and their individual frailties, as well as because of society, but it is Dorothea who is the central character, and her struggle is closest to the heroic. As the novel's "Prelude" has already warned us, she does not become St. Theresa, but she does manage to transform the lives of Lydgate, Rosamond, Ladislaw, and herself, particularly by her selfless efforts to aid Lydgate and to reconcile Rosamond and her husband. Her goodness is not of epic grandeur; it consists of what Wordsworth termed the "little, nameless, unremembered, acts/ Of kindness and of love."<sup>2</sup> Yet the novel ends with an optimistic expression of the moral evolution of mankind and its debt to the Dorotheas of the world:

But the effect of her [Dorothea's] being on those around her was

incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

In the major scenes between Dorothea and Ladislaw we can trace her growth as she develops that unifying sympathy which the narrator embodies and which is so crucial in making the human predicament bearable. When Ladislaw calls upon Dorothea in Rome, she has been crying in her apartment after an earlier excursion to the Vatican Museum. She has been analyzing her disappointment with Roman art and comes to realize something about herself and her marriage. She decides that her inability to respond to art with spontaneous delight is due to Casaubon's restraint. She had hoped that he would expand her vistas, yet she has found during her honeymoon that her attempts at fresh vision are reduced by him to "a sort of dried preparation, a lifeless embalmment of knowledge" and she is left with a "mental shiver" (137). Dorothea's short-sightedness is of course both of the body and the spirit, and we realize that Casaubon has merely compounded her problem. We know that she has always had trouble with sensuous and emotional responses, because her idealized vision of the world distorts things. We see this distortion in the opening chapter, when she and Celia sort out the jewelry that her mother has left to them. Dorothea struggles with her attraction to the beauty of an emerald ring and bracelet, feeling such attraction to be in conflict with her Puritan ideals, and she resorts finally to a contradictory decision to keep the jewels but not wear them.

Eliot is never direct when dealing with matters of sex, but the reader is well aware that the development of the sensual part of Dorothea has also been stifled by Casaubon's cold propriety. His sexual inadequacies are strongly suggested, and Dorothea's tears are at least in part the tears of sexual unfulfillment. The narrator tells us, furthermore, that even the little gestures of affection and attempts at any physical contact which Dorothea makes, are repulsed by Casaubon.

When Ladislaw appears, Dorothea is pleased because she thinks he will afford her an opportunity for "active sympathy" (141). His good humor and spontaneity are refreshing to her; throughout the novel he offers her a chance to grow sensuously and emotionally to develop those areas in which she is weak, just as she helps him grow in his moral and humanitarian concerns. The speech of both Dorothea and Ladislaw is here very direct, almost to the point of being blunt. When describing her lack of pleasure in art, she likens herself to a blind person who cannot understand what others are saying when they talk of the sky. Ladislaw associates her in his mind with an Aeolian harp, as he did on their first meeting—a significant symbol when one remembers the importance of the Aeolian harp for the Romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth and Coleridge. For them, the Aeolian harp was emblematic of the free-flowing energy of nature, and Ladislaw, we realize, feels that Dorothea is wasting her natural energies on the dried-up pedant Casaubon. Their discussion is interrupted by the arrival of Casaubon, and Ladislaw leaves. The narrator says, however, that Dorothea, who was born into that "moral stupidity" which all of us begin from, has that day begun

2. "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," 11. 34-35.



to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling—an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects—that he [Casaubon] had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference. (146)

The recognition that Casaubon has an “equivalent centre of self” not only anticipates the pier glass/candle metaphor that occurs a few chapters later, but also echoes the narrator’s own realization earlier in Chapter X, that “Casaubon, too, was the centre of his own world” (57). We have here, one of many indications of the growing embodiment in Dorothea of that process of imaginative sympathy which the narrator demonstrates throughout the novel. This passage, moreover, provides a key to understanding the nature of Dorothea’s moral development. The emphasis upon a movement from reflection to feeling and the necessity to get back to the directness of sense, strongly echo Wordsworth, whom Eliot admired. In fact, Dorothea displays a reversal of the growth process which Wordsworth articulated in such poems as “The Prelude,” “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” and “Tintern Abbey.”

In the Hartleian psychology which Wordsworth espoused, the mature human being perceives things through a threefold process: first through the senses, then the emotions, and finally through the mind. Furthermore, this epistemological process is approximated in the stages of human growth. That is, the human being as an infant has only a very fundamental contact with the world about him through his senses, and his responses are purely physical. He moves from this stage into one of emotional responses, but he is still thoroughly self-indulgent. As he grows to adulthood he develops qualities of reflection—the ability to analyze and understand himself and his relationship to other human beings. This moral development, which comes with maturity, is what Wordsworth in the “Intimations Ode” calls “the philosophic mind” and it is what binds human beings together. In “Tintern Abbey” this philosophic mind is what enables one to hear “The still, sad music of humanity” (1. 91). For Dorothea, this process of development has been reversed, partly because the other stages have been perverted and stifled. The concern for humanity she already has (as evidenced, for example, in her grand scheme for the cottages); it is the emotions and sensations which she must learn to develop.

The next two important encounters which Ladislav and Dorothea have are both symptomatic of how much she has grown and of how much misunderstanding still exists between them. Through a clever technique by which the dialogue is juxtaposed with each character’s thoughts, much like the use of asides and soliloquies in Elizabethan drama, a tension is created between the factual world and each one’s misconceptions. And, we realize, these faulty perceptions are created both by the shortcomings of each and by the capriciousness of events in their lives. Each remains aloof, caught in a web of faulty perceptions. And in both scenes, just at the point at which they might break through their web, they are interrupted by someone and they part.

It is Dorothea’s compassion, her exercising of the philosophic mind, which brings about a final resolution to the differences between her and Ladislav. The reconciliation scene begins with great formality and restraint, a result of the difficulty they have always had in reaching beyond the misunderstandings which gratuitous circumstances and their own weaknesses have placed upon their relationship. Dorothea’s confusion and anxiety have caused her to appear before him in a stiff, queenly stance which Ladislav interprets as aloofness. He also appears aloof as he stands with hat and gloves in hand, “as he might have done for the portrait of a Royalist” (558).

Just as the narrator has demonstrated throughout the novel, caution and self-questioning are a necessary part of the process of sympathetic understanding, so each of the lovers must now struggle to reconcile his perceptions with the other’s. If their stance and demeanor are awkward, their language is even more so. They try to reach out to each other through a series of broken-off sentences, stumbling phrases, and tentative utterances—all reminiscent of numerous earlier narrative interjections. Gradually their speech becomes more direct, their manner less restrained. They are not interrupted by someone’s entry at an unfortunate time, as occurred in prior meetings. Instead, the interruption to their speech is the outbreak of a storm, and it is fortuitous; a sudden flash of lightning causes them to grasp each other’s hand. The storm is also beneficial in affording a distraction, a means of allowing time for reflection so that each can more clearly form his thoughts into words. And it is Dorothea who takes the initiative. She suggests that despite all the financial barriers, they might nevertheless some time marry. Ladislav says that he could never ask a woman to share his life of probable poverty, and again it is Dorothea who speaks with directness as she renounces her fortune for love: “I don’t mind about poverty—I hate my wealth” (560). Her final words, that they can live quite well with little money and that she “will learn what everything costs,” though hardly romantic on the surface, are, within the context of their love story, highly emotional and charged with great passion. Dorothea has learned to balance her lofty ideals with emotion and sensuality. She has overcome the distance between herself and the man she loves, through sympathy and a struggle to understand. Her final words are a triumphant assertion of the philosophic mind over both society and individual frailties. In Dorothea we at last see embodied in action and speech the process of sympathetic understanding which the narrator has demonstrated throughout the novel.

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## The Religion of Culture: Arnold's Priest and Pater's Mystic

Clay Daniel

T. S. Eliot in his essay "Arnold and Pater" argues that the strongest link between the two men's critical writings is their attack on the Christian religion. In Eliot's judgment, Arnold and Pater are brothers in unbelief, whose careers are for the most part "blundering attempts" (393) to supplant religion with culture. Eliot accuses Arnold of wanting "to get all the emotional kick out of Christianity one can, without the bother of believing it" (385). Arnold, then, is in Eliot's eyes something worse than an atheist, if only because he is less honest. Eliot concludes his indictment by blaming Arnold for the errors of Pater's romantic relativism:

The total effect of Arnold's philosophy is to set up Culture in the place of Religion, and to leave Religion to be laid waste by the anarchy of feeling. And Culture is a term which each man not only may interpret as he pleases, but must indeed interpret as he can. So the gospel of Pater follows naturally upon the prophecy of Arnold. (387)

It would appear indisputable that Arnold and Pater seek to fill with culture what they perceived to be the void created by a vanishing Christian faith. But many other earnest Victorians were also convinced of the necessity of such efforts. Arnold's and Pater's formulations of culture are part of an era's attempt to construct a replacement for a religion that had attached itself to the fact, and which fact had failed it. It has been persuasively argued that Arnold's and Pater's critical efforts are more properly assessed as attempts to salvage, rather than to destroy, the cultural heritage of a Christianity embattled and faltering in mid-Victorian England (DeLaura 168-69).

This paper will not attempt to establish whether Arnold and Pater functioned as saviors or heretics but will examine the significance of the different ways in which Arnold and Pater approached religion. It is inadequate merely to state that Arnold and Pater attempted to replace religion with culture; the nature of that attempt must be examined. By focusing on certain sections of Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864) and "Sweetness and Light" (1867), and Pater's Preface (1873) and Conclusion (1868) to *The Renaissance*, I hope to suggest that in their approaches to religion during the early part of their careers, when each critic was most estranged from traditional Christianity, Arnold and Pater provide two sides of the same coin. Separately they may justify Eliot's contemptuous assessment of "half-prophet" (393), but together their theories cohere into a more comprehensive alternative to traditional Christianity.

Arnold furnishes a substitute for that part of Christianity concerned with the ethical behavior of an individual as part of a social aggregate; his culture functions in the tradition of the priesthood. Arnold's culture promotes a substitute for a specific aspect of an endangered Christianity: its ethical, social aspect. Eliot notes the "powerful element of Puritan morality" (385) in Arnold, and in his early cultural writings Arnold seems to

be elaborating something of the creed of the Christian militant, wayfaring and active, who toils in the tradition of assayed virtue, ordeal, and perhaps triumph. Pater presents a replacement for another side of religion, the side that deals with the rare individual who is capable of effecting a union with God while still amidst the confusion of the darkling plain; his culture functions in the tradition of mysticism, epiphany, the unutterable mystery of ritual, and ecstasy. For Arnold, heaven can, and indeed must, wait, while Pater, discounting that which cannot be got within the moment's mystery, gets his heaven while he can. Arnold, by taking the low road of cultural evangelism, the quiet work of spreading the light, and Pater, by taking the high road of mystic revelation, come to a culture between them. The cultures of Arnold and Pater are intricately related yet necessarily different.

It has been stated that "a central thread of Arnold's ethical progress is the theme of the religious solidarity of mankind, based on sympathy, an idea related to the social utility of culture" (DeLaura 270). Even in his essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," published in *Essays in Criticism* (1865), Arnold's most radical argument for a separation of literary and social criticism, the argument is to a certain extent weighted with consideration for social utility. Early in the essay, Arnold states that "it is the business of the critical power, as I said in the words already quoted, 'in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is'" (CPW 3:261). But later in the same essay, Arnold qualifies his definition of criticism by adding that after the critic grasps the object as it really is, he must function as a social force "by in...turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas" (CPW 3:270). Still later in the essay, we encounter Arnold's final definition of criticism as "a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world" (CPW 3:283).

Even in this essay, which together with the rest of the *Essays in Criticism* left Arnold open to charges of "hedonism, ethical self-centeredness, and indifference to the needs of the world" (DeLaura 180), the concept of social utility provides an integral part of Arnold's conception of culture. It is not enough to learn the truth, one must propagate it; and it is not enough to propagate the truth, one must propagate it keeping in mind its social consequences. A simple philosopher dedicates his life to the pursuit and love of truth. But for Arnold's cultural priests, society takes precedence over truth. The high priest of culture is not permitted to promulgate an idea simply because it is the truth; he must also consider the effects of that "truth" on society. Arnold seems to say, "Ye shall know the truth, and it shall make ye bad, if that truth were hard and the minds that receive it weak." It is from this angle that Arnold in "The Function of Criticism" denounces John Colenso's wanderings in the wilderness of Higher Criticism, which could tell the intelligent nothing new and but work the rabble into a hopeless frenzy of doubt. The priest of culture, possessed of only one doctrine, the disinterested pursuit of truth, is exempt from the terrors that modern scientific investigation induces in the true believers of partisan creeds and in the merely ignorant; however, the "priest's" duty to his "flock," his fellow countrymen, dictates a careful handling of potentially disruptive ideas.



It is in *Culture and Anarchy* that "Arnold is setting up a frankly rival ideal to that of historic Christianity" (DeLaura 70). In the book's first chapter, "Sweetness and Light," Arnold declares that culture has "its origin in the love of perfection; it is a study of perfection" (CPW 5:91). Culture, like religion, is in quest of the perfect man. But Arnold assesses contemporary religion as inadequate to perform this task. Religion is dominated by Hebraism, a code of obedient conduct, which, as Arnold states in the chapter "Hebraism and Hellenism," is governed by "strictness of conscience" (CPW 5:165). Consequently, the religious man limits himself to cultivating this impulse at the expense of his Hellenism, the play of mind that sees things as they are, which is governed by "spontaneity of conscience" (CPW 5:165). Such imbalance does not represent perfection, and Arnold attempts to revitalize the modern spirit by liberating it from the deadening influence of a factual, literal interpretation of the Bible, whose authority is limited to matters of morality. Contemporary religion, restricted to morality, cannot arbitrate such essential matters as science or poetry. Culture, then, must go beyond religion if it is adequately to usurp the religious function of producing the perfect man.

The social imperative of criticism, to a certain extent latent in "The Function of Criticism" and the other *Essays in Criticism*, receives full amplification in *Culture and Anarchy*. Just as the priests of historic Christianity, trained in what they had thought to be perfect knowledge, had once set out to minister to the darkened multitudes of pre-modern Europe, so Arnold's cultural priests, trained in the new gospel of sweetness and light, will minister to the modern masses, recently enfranchised by the Reform Act of 1867. In "Sweetness and Light," Arnold explicitly imparts a religious aura to his disciples when he declares, in that remarkable phrase, that their duty was "to make reason and the will of God prevail" (CPW 5:91). Arnold appropriates God for the side of faith and reason, of sweetness and light, of Hebraism and Hellenism, leaving the traditional exponents of religion to thrash about in the unbeautiful dark of Hebraism and superstition. Arnold's reasonable facsimiles of perfection, beautiful and good, must take up the burden that traditional Christianity can no longer shoulder: the conversion of mankind to the ways of sweetness and light. With something of the evangelical fervor we often associate with nineteenth-century Methodist missionaries, Arnold explains that

because men are all members of one great whole, and the sympathy which is in human nature will not allow one member to be indifferent to the rest or to have a perfect welfare independent of the rest, the expansion of our humanity, to suit the idea of perfection which culture forms, must be a *general* expansion. Perfection, as culture conceives it, is not possible while the individual remains isolated. The individual is required, under pain of being stunted and enfeebled in his own development if he disobeys, to carry others along with him in his march towards perfection, to be continually doing all he can to enlarge and increase the volume of the human stream sweeping thitherward. (CPW 5:94)

Arnold's priests, to gain the crown of perfection, must spread the light among the masses, who, in the meantime, are allowed to console themselves with the fictions of traditional religion.

The emphasis on the traditionally religious associations of

culture, prominent throughout the essay, crescendos at the essay's conclusion. Arnold, using language rife with traditionally religious connotations, declares that "the men of culture are the true apostles of equality" (CPW 5:113). Arnold then explains, "The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time"; he adds that these men of culture "broadened the basis of life and intelligence" and "worked powerfully to diffuse sweetness and light, to make reason and the will of God prevail" (CPW 5:113). Significantly Arnold gives as examples of these dedicated purveyors of sweetness and light Augustine, Abelard, Lessing, and Herder: two Christians from the early Church and two German hellenists from the eighteenth century. Arnold's implication is clear: the modern intellectual is the heir to the priestly tradition of Christianity, and the *Zeitgeist* demands that the clergy be exchanged for a clerisy. When in *Literature and Dogma* (1873) Arnold declares that traditional religion must be "recast" because it had become impossible to believe, he had already been working at that very task for several years (CPW 6:150).

Arnold's culture in his writings of the sixties reflects his anti-mystical bent and his concern for, as he also states in *Literature and Dogma*, "that three-fourths of life which is conduct" (CPW 6:177). For all his scorn for Philistine utilitarianism, Arnold conceives a practical culture, whether in the production of the perfect priest, Hebrew and Hellene, or in the perfect convert, a lovelier British businessman. In Arnold's writings of the seventies and eighties, the ethical, social imperative grows more emphatic. Arnold's dislike for that which cannot be verified by reason precludes any inclusion of mysticism in his religion or culture. For Arnold, religion "is an imaginatively elevated moralism in a universe without metaphysics" (DeLaura 114). Yet the irrational and the mystical, despite Arnold's protestations, have always composed an integral part of the Christian religion. Therefore, Arnold's critical writings are an attempt to salvage, or replace, only one tradition of the Christian religion, the priestly tradition of doing God's work among the people, of making the will of God prevail on earth. It is Pater, complementing Arnold's ethical emphasis, who contributes the irrational aspect to the religion of culture. Pater's culture relates to Arnold's as the religion of Theresa relates to that of Augustine: both men represent different approaches to the same faith.

David DeLaura has commented on Arnold's and Pater's conception of Greek culture, opposing Arnold's Apollonian ideal to Pater's Dionysian one:

Arnold's Hellenic ideal of "reason, ideas, light" shines with a cold and rather academic clarity; most damagingly, it was, even in his generation, uninformed. Pater was far more alive, both temperamentally and for dialectical reasons of his own, to the "other" tradition—roughly the Dionysian—in Greek art and religion. (171-72)

Arnold's rational approach to Hellenism parallels his rational approach to religion. Arnold, restricting his conception of the Hellene to the Apollonian tradition, attempts to hellenize the English middle-classes with Greek reason. This is the Hellenism with which Arnold hopes to complement Hebraism,



and Apollo finds himself reduced to a priest of reason, pressed into the Christian tradition of service to the masses. Pater's interpretation of religion also parallels his approach to Greek culture. Pater's Dionysian Hellenism, bereft of its darker, more terrible associations with the irrational, is similar to the ecstasy that illuminates the more intense moments of the Christian mystic.

In his Preface to *The Renaissance*, Pater declares, "To see the object as in itself it really is," has been justly said to be the aim of all true Criticism whatever" (viii). Pater's misquotation clearly reveals his relationship to Arnold, because Arnold does not say that "the aim of all true criticism" is to "see the object as it really is." "Aim" denotes "goal" or "purpose," and Arnold defines criticism as "a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world" (CPW 3:283). This was the ultimate purpose of all true criticism, not seeing things as they are. To see the object as it really is was only a means with Arnold; the end, or aim, was the propagation of the best that is known and thought in the world. Pater, then, takes Arnold's means and makes them his end, and promotes art for art's sake, an idea inimical to Arnold who, had he believed in Hell, would no doubt have loudly echoed Tennyson's assessment of that notion. For Arnold, the ability to see the thing as it is is meaningful only as it relates to the responsibility of the critic to advance mankind by creating a healthy cultural environment, nourished by a critic-provided fresh flow of vital ideas. Yet Pater quotes Arnold. Christopher Ricks has noted that "Pater's misquotations are the rewriting of his authors so that they say special Paterian things" (1385).

In "Sweetness and Light," Arnold envisions his man of culture "in his march towards perfection, to be continually doing all he can to enlarge and increase the volume of the human stream sweeping thitherward" (CPW 5:94). But where Arnold conceives of culture as a march, en masse, Pater thinks of it as a dance, and solo at that. Arnold's culture has an end, a destination; it marches. Pater's culture is an end, a destination; it dances. Arnold sees culture as a means to a better life; Pater sees it as a better life. All of these polarities, while they may separate Arnold and Pater into discrete spheres of critical influence, also serve to unify them as representatives of two sides of a cultural religion, which are analogous to two sides of the Christian religion: the tradition of the priest, and the tradition of the mystic.

Eliot argues that in *The Renaissance* "the degradation of philosophy and religion, skillfully initiated by Arnold, is competently continued by Pater" (388). And Pater does attempt to recast Christianity or at least that part of Christianity to which Pater was attracted, its mystical tradition. Pater in *The Renaissance* writes of "the reconciliation of the religion of antiquity with the religion of Christ" (33). It has been observed that "Pater's aestheticism is somehow the extreme development of one aspect of religion itself" (DeLaura 275). As I have suggested, Arnold approaches religion in its aspect of reason, but such an approach is impossible for Pater, a man who in the Conclusion to *The Renaissance* exults in the recognition that "to regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of

modern thought" (233). Arnold's quest for facts that will not fail is absurd when viewed from the perspective of the Paterian flux. Pater, leaving Arnold to cultivate the rational Apollonian aspect of religion, rehabilitates the irrational aspect of religion, the aspect of mysticism.

Objective facts, so essential to Arnold's concept of culture, are in Pater's culture impossible to ascertain. According to Pater, both the nature of reality and the individual render impossible Arnold's efforts to capture truth and exhibit it before the astonished multitudes. Reality, Pater argues in his "Conclusion," is but "a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than it is" (235). Even if reality were something more constant than this, the individual would be unable to apprehend it because experience "is ringed around each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without" (Pater 235).

In addition to rejecting Arnold's empirical tradition, Pater also rejects his notion of how one attains perfection. Arnold claims that no man can attain perfection in isolation; Pater asserts that one can attain perfection, if at all, only in isolation: "Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world" (235). Yet these differences, instead of precluding a close connection between the two men's cultural theories, emphasize that they, like Theresa and Augustine, represent two approaches to the same religion.

Arnold's priests, a select group themselves, must toil among the masses. But Pater's culture strictly pertains to "a small band of elite 'Oxonian souls'" (DeLaura 230). Pater's cultural man dedicates himself to intense aesthetic experience, separate from the bulk of mankind, following a way of life that, like the mystic's heaven, is an end in itself: "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end" (236). Pater's cultural man is like the Christian who believes, at the very least, that virtue is its own reward, and who in his most sublime moments revels in divine rapture on earth as a result of his mystical connection with God. On the other side is Arnold's cultural man, who resembles the Christian who labors tirelessly on earth in order to attain an eventual heaven. Pater's cultural man is the mystic who is understood by God; Arnold's cultural man is the priest who is more often misunderstood by men. Pater's culture is one of saints and divinity; Arnold's culture is one of priests and masses. Art for society's sake, declares Arnold, as earthly tribulation for heavenly reward. Art for art's sake, counters Pater, as heaven for heaven's sake.

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## Walter Pater's "Romantic Morality"

Wolhee Choe

The Victorian period inherited from the Romantics a profound sense of the unmooring of a post-Renaissance civilization. The Romantics and their successors have speculated endlessly on its causes: the turbulent power of science, the loosening embrace of institutional religion, the shocks of industrialization, and so on. Whatever the causes may have been, some of the fragmenting effects on our lives are clear and were already clear to Walter Pater, who, like other Victorians, sought no less than to repair the culture. His "aesthetic criticism" theorized about art and life on the basis of Romantic poetry for cultural restitution, just as Schiller based his argument on the Kantian system when he proposed that art should be the basis of education (24).

This paper focuses on the bond which Pater saw between aesthetics and ethics as one major aspect of his overall re-unifying project. Aesthetic perception as a mode of being, according to this view, enables the self to cultivate itself in the world and to grow. Growth, as Gregory Bateson says, makes its formal demands (12). The formal demands are met, according to Pater, by the imagination working through "constructive intelligence," tracing "that conscious artistic structure" (AP 21).<sup>\*</sup> A simple ideology of progress will not do. The self can, of course, be fooled—it can merely be convinced—but when genuine sympathetic communion is achieved through aesthetic perception, that is when the formal demands are met, the self can be educated, not into a static ideologue, but into a growing sensibility.

In response to the modern world of unprecedented change, Pater searches, in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*, for the most general categories of human experience that can restore a sense of wholeness: the physical world of nature, "inner experience," and longing—intellectual, aesthetic, and moral. Pater does not simply oppose such categories to modern experience but projects them also as aspects of a finer reality gained in the light of nineteenth-century scientific and philosophical thinking. His vision does not exclude science and philosophy as precise descriptions and organizations of the world and our experience; quite the contrary, good poetry that leads us toward evaluation and eventual justness requires and subsumes knowledge and precision.

It is not always that poetry can be the exponent of morality but it is this aspect of morals which it represents most naturally, for the true justice is dependent on just those finer appreciations which poetry cultivates in us the power of making, those peculiar valuations of actions and its effect which poetry actually requires. (AP 191)

His "aesthetic criticism" is, in addition, an attempt to transform

the apparently unliving universe of science into a living poetic spirit. Art injects a knowledge of life into life.

To treat life in the spirit of art, is to make life a thing in which means and ends are identified: to encourage such treatment, the true moral significance of art and poetry. (AP 62)

Yet Pater is often thought to have drained and sealed-off art from life. Indeed, Pater was the first radical formalist who removed art from immediate moral concerns. Static, didactic, and normative dictums were not to be looked for in art. Nor could any particular laws, codes, or moralities be chosen through art. Still he insisted, throughout his life, on the ultimate affinities, not to say identities, between the processes by which art affects us and mature moral judgment is cultivated. His criticism aims to move us toward being supreme axiologists. Supreme evaluators, beyond a necessary training in making particular evaluations (of behavior or character), do look toward the cultivation of the capacity to evaluate. Pater's aesthetic criticism, expressing the most fundamental reality of our bodies, aspires to a morality of cultivation beyond the normative concerns of everyday life, for the abstract humanity of pure evaluation is broadened and substantiated by accepting for refinement (but never leaving) the sensory experience of our dying bodies.

Pater's aesthetic morality bridges anew the historical self and the world that is continually being discovered. It is a far cry from the common view of Pater as an advocate of hermetic art. Exactly how far this common view is from Pater's own theory of life and art can be attested to by Pater's Romantic concerns. Pater de-idealized the Romantic language of self, death, and process with his own language of nineteenth-century science and philosophy. His notion of beauty as a moral agent, for instance, has its origin in the Keatsean conception of truth and Blakean conception of energy that liberate the self. The Romantic source of Pater's aesthetic morality may be examined around a number of important and overlapping issues addressed by both Pater and the British Romantic poets: I) the nature of the self, II) the self in relation to the objective world, III) the self in relation to others, IV) change in the self and the world as force of history, and V) the moral artist.

### I The Self

A key, shared philosophical assumption between Pater and the Romantics is that the self, the subjective collection of feelings and experiences, is not barred from the objective world. There is an insistence, in contrast to the scientific description of a world alien to subjectivity, that the self already lies within the capacious center of existence. Pater and Coleridge had striking affinities in this connection. Pater explicitly dissociated himself from his predecessor's speculative sensibility, and yet their critical language, intellectual positions, and general inten-

#### \*Abbreviations

All references to Pater's works are to the 10-volume Library edition of the *Works of Walter Pater*. The titles are abbreviated as follows:  
AP *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style*  
ES *Essays from "The Guardian"*  
GL *Gaston de Latour*  
GS *Greek Studies: A Series of Essays*

IP *Imaginary Portraits*  
ME *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas. 2 Vols.*  
MS *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays*  
PP *Plato and Platonism*  
R *The Renaissance in Art and Poetry*  
SK *Sketches and Reviews*



tions had a similar philosophical basis. Certainly Pater was comfortable with one of Coleridge's aims, which was, as Owen Barfield says, "to supplement the metaphysic and the current science of quantities [or primary qualities] with a metaphysic and science of qualities [or subjective secondary qualities]" (11). They broadly agreed on the importance of individual, subjective mind in the perception of the real.

Another philosophical belief shared by Pater and the Romantics is that the moral is part of the real. But a Paterian qualification is important here. He found fault with Coleridge's way of allowing theological argument to spill over into criticism. Coleridge feared that, with the rejection of the supernatural, man would lose the spiritual element in his self. For Pater, however, the spiritual element in man is "the passion for inward perfection with its sorrows, its aspirations, its joy" (*SK* 100). It is the moral instinct, not the supernatural, Pater says, that makes the spiritual element in life active.

The self can achieve vision into the moral realm. The crucial link is provided by the aesthetic imagination. The Paterian self can proceed, through its medium of imagination and its creation of art, toward its ideal of a aesthetically broadened morality. The Romantic poets too (Blake most radically and Shelley most systematically) insist on the primacy of poetic perception in unlocking imprisoned selves for a passage to greater reality, which is identical with a greater morality. One can see Blake in Pater by examining the fusion of aesthetics and morality operating within the Blakean poetic perception. It is poetic perception that enables one to break the confines of a narrow self, mistakenly identified with its encrustations of the social and ideological past. A self freed from its petty identity can follow, according to Blake, the Poetic Genius toward the raw, overwhelming truth of the divine source of morality. Blake describes the impulse as breaking away from selfhood. In the context in which his prophets and mystics were said to break away from their church and society, to burst out of fixed consciousness is a moral act. "To beat/These hypocritic Selfhoods on the Anvils of bitter Death./I am inspired (*Jerusalem* 1.8.15-17).

Shelley's "Defense of Poetry" also anticipates Pater's aesthetic morality. To Shelley ethical systems are built with the "elements which poetry has created." These elements are metaphorically ordered and become in time "signs for portions and classes of thoughts" that create ethical systems (para. 3) Pater, like Shelley, believed: "Philosophy itself, mental and moral, has its preparation, its forethoughts, in the poetry that preceded it" (*PP* 5).

## II Self and World

Pater, like Coleridge, struggled to protect the integrity of the moral self and nature although Coleridge was, in Pater's view, neither scientific nor philosophical enough. Speaking of Coleridge, Pater observes that the moral world is "ever in contact with the physical" (*AP* 66). Pater and Coleridge clearly shared a common outlook in terms of their uncompromising acceptance of the world as it is and the world of "I am." Pater sought what he considered to be an adequate expression of Coleridge's moral vision, a greater harmony of the inner life with scientific facts. But given Pater's re-establishment of the

subjective view as a genuine aspect of the real and the self's internally generated, aesthetically possible morality, what then keeps such a "cultured" person from solipsism?

A concern with epistemology brings the Paterian Romantic self to the world. And a sympathetic concern relates one human being to another (as it does the person to a work of art). These concerns are, again, buttressed by philosophical assumptions. Pater is interested in showing not only that the self has access to external reality but that the reality of the subjective realm is also related to the "outside." Perception reveals bits of reality that are shared aspects of the subjective and objective worlds. In addition, the very workings of our minds have a shaping influence on the universe. As Coleridge says, "We learn all things indeed by occasion of experience; but the very facts so learned force us inward on the antecedents, that must be presupposed in order to render experience itself possible" (*Biographia Literaria* 142). In this Coleridgean context, Pater interprets Matthew Arnold's definition of criticism—"To see the object as it really is"—as meaning "To know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly" (*R* xix). In his *Treatise on Method*, Coleridge writes: "there is an inspiring passion, or desire or instinctive feeling of truth, which is immediate and proper offspring of the Mind" (59). This intuitive *reason* or *initiative* is included within Pater's notion of *impression*. Both refer to an intuitive grasp of formal properties.

Pater's epistemology can yield us a non-alienating science because the self that is part of reality is able, in part through intuition, to know other manifestations of reality. While his epistemology is more suggestive than systematic, it is clear that it provides for the possibility of the full subjective self as a necessary condition for the scientist. The scientist is made over into partial artist, partial in the sense that his work ends with analysis. The world is not simply out there; in a serious way, one can say that its elements come from within us and must be sketched by us into a coherent (and imaginative) picture. In a way, the world is an artistic work constructed, in part, from our desire in it. The self can see out into the world. But the essentially close relationship between the self and reality enables a reverse process to take place. The picture gained of the world is so dependent on aspects of the self that one may learn about oneself by seeing the world. "The artist and he who has treated life in the spirit of art desires only to be shown to the world as he really is; as he comes nearer and nearer to perfection, the veil of an outer life not simply expressive of the inward becomes thinner and thinner" (*MS* 249). But the process extends beyond clarified introspection. "For sensation itself is vision nascent," as Coleridge says, "not the cause of intelligence but intelligence itself revealed as an earlier power in the process of self-construction" (*BL* 286).

These intuitive powers are given an ethical program by Shelley. "Ethical science arranges the elements which poetry has created, and propounds schemes and examples of civil and domestic life" (Shelley 487). Pater, whose aesthetic morality is more aligned with Shelley's than Coleridge's, makes the same claim for poetic perception (a product of intuition and imagination). Pater sees, therefore, "a kind of moral expressiveness" and "an intellectual triumph" in aesthetic perception.



"Simplicity in purpose and act is a kind of determinate expression in dexterous outline of one's personality" (MS 249). Poetry improves man, as Shelley eloquently argues in his "Defense of Poetry," because it is the epistemological path-finder, reformer of society, rejuvenator and redeemer of life. Poetry is, to Shelley and Pater, the "root and blossom" of all other systems of thought, because the categories (and goals) of self, truth, and morality are here gathered close together.

### III Self and Others

The aesthetic self, when alive with sympathy and love, is not content with any conception of outer reality that sinks into an abstraction. Spiritualize the concept, Pater urges, by putting it into an "express, clear, objective" form (R 176). Sympathy not only urges us outward toward moral encounters but energizes the clarified imaginative expression of what we meet. Pater, like the Romantics, sets great store by sympathy, for it is an agent for both aesthetic experience and personal growth, including sympathy for others. To Shelley the empathy necessary for being moral is not a feeling for another, as Hume argues, but a feeling as another. One can break away from a narrow preoccupation with self through sympathetic union with an object of contemplation—as illustrated by poetic metaphor.

Feeling as another, however, also requires a perceptual harmony within oneself and with others. The Romantic notion of sympathy or love has a Greek origin, which re-emerges to influence Pater's notion of sympathy as a concord of perception. Plato suggests that sympathy between conflicting things may create a new rhythmic harmony by patterning them within a larger context. For Pater this is analogous to the aesthetic temper that imparts a new more inclusive moral perspective even to the impinging physicality of the world. In fact, both Coleridge and Pater affirm their sympathy with the aesthetics and ethics of Plato.

It is life itself, action and character, he [Plato] proposes to colour, to get something of that irrepressible conscience of art, that spirit of control, into the general course of life, above all, into its energetic and impassioned acts. (PP 282)

Putting the spirit of art into life's "energetic and impassioned acts" inspires other sympathies and diversifies our ideals in life. Sympathy as a necessary outgrowth of poetic apprehension of the human situation provides a moral perspective. Sympathy as a kind of metaphoric or aesthetic becoming of another entails moral concern. In *Marius the Epicurean* the protagonist predicts that the future will be "with those who have most of it [sympathy]." For the present, those who have much sympathy "have something to hold by, even in the dissolution of a world, or in that dissolution of self, which is for every one, no less than the dissolution of the world it represents for him" (ME 2: 183). Sympathy gives us access to fundamentals of the psyche that underlie personality.

"[A]t bottom rights are equivalent to that which really is, to facts" (AP 190). Just as the self creatively and scientifically arrives at facts, just so the self creatively and sympathetically arrives at rights. The culture is further healed. Inner and outer, is and ought, are gathered into a fuller whole,

...and the recognition of his rights therefore, the justice he requires of our hands, or our thoughts, is the recognition of that which the person, in his inmost nature really is; and as sympathy alone can discover that which really is in matter of feeling and thought, true justice is in its essence *finer knowledge and love*. (AP 190, my italics)

Finer knowledge, through love, endlessly assumes new shapes. No form remains absolute. If this process ceases, a concept may become, as Blake shows us, an instrument of death. In the context of Shelleyan *knowledge, empathy, and utility*, poetic perception is indeed justice; the poet does not take a snap-shot but attends to the object, be it a person or an art work, and creates an atmosphere for seeing it not only accurately but lovingly and justly. Shelleyan sympathy, like Aristotelian pathos, accompanies the ordering intelligence. As such, sympathy is the medium for learning and becoming.

Sympathy for a work or a person is an already existing communion with that object or person. Sympathy is paradoxically the dwelling within the area of the self where there is least accident or individual particularity. It is a devotion of attention to those parts of selfhood which partake of universal reality. Deep within one's self, one finds the other. Aesthetic experience disciplines one's sympathy to bypass the superfluous interests of personality, to seek and rest within the disinterested center of self, where the boundaries of identity collapse and unite. In Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," for instance, sympathy nourishes thought and becomes the redeemer of life.

Thou messenger of sympathies  
That wax and wane in lover's eyes  
Thou—that to human thought art nourishment  
Like darkness to a dying flame!  
Depart not as thy shadow came,  
Depart not—lest the grave should be,  
Like life and fear, a dark reality. (Shelley 194)

Pater likewise fuses a number of the elements of life. The self has dignity and access to the world (through science) and others (through sympathy) and to the possibilities of the true and the good. The great heat of this fusion is supplied by the creativity of the self. But what about the furthest extremes of longing, a re-creation of the self using the very materials of the true and the good?

### IV Change in Self and World

For the early Greeks, Dionysus is the god of overwhelming destructiveness with ensuing regeneration. The powers at the heart of sacrifice, demanding and granting, attest still to one of the primary enduring forces of necessity: change itself. It is in dealing with change that Pater is most himself. In his philosophical embrace of the reality of change Pater is certainly least Platonic and, perhaps, most Romantic. In individual life, change is one of the great conditions bringing the limit of death into life as decay and bringing transcendence into the vital forms of growth. For the species, change has brought us into history. And it is the link between the possibility of individual achievement and the possibility of a meaningful present time



for history (as past and future) that is the central moral and aesthetic concern for Pater.

Pater is ultimately neither Heraclitean nor Hegelian: between sheer change and the deterministic patterns of change lies the field for the most characteristic and worthwhile human effort, the fusing of human freedom and human values, that is, the achievement of beauty in life. "Beauty becomes a distinction, like genius, or noble place" (R 207). This achievement is double-sided; it is the achievement of appreciation and the achievement of making. This aesthetic/moral vision is no retreat from history. It is rather an assertion of the power of art, to see the past of mere ideological preconceptions in a way that transforms the world. Mere philosophical visions of the world distort the world with their overlay of abstract values. Art, Pater seems to be saying, may color the world, but it is the most fundamentally human color, without ideological special pleading.

In that aesthetic world, our selves, our greatest poems, need to encounter death in order to kill our lesser selves. Not that death is far away. "When you look close the very stone is a composite of minute dead bodies" (MS 227). Indeed, Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" also presents a powerful expression of the desire to be separated from the "dark reality" that life is. But death, the most radical change in our lives, is only a shift to another mode of change. There is no release from the imperative to refine. Pater and Shelley place death, as aesthetic matter, even above life, although Pater pays greater attention to the grave and its attendant sorrows. "Death [is seen] at first as the worst of all sorrows and disgraces, with a clod of the field for its brain, afterwards, death [is seen] in its high distinction, its detachment from vulgar needs, the angry strains, life and action escaping fast" (R 88). Contemplating death, Pater suggests, frees us and allows a saner perception of life.

Concern with physical death was a large component of Romantic consciousness. Apprehension of the condition of man as a "perishing clay," as Wordsworth and Keats show us, awakens and nurtures the Romantic sensibility. In fact, their poetry reverberates with the "existential poignancy" which accompanies the "full acquiescence to the power of mortality" (de Man 74). "She dwells with Beauty, Beauty that must die;/ And joy, whose hand is even at his lips/Bidding adieu" (Keats 355). Keats' language of death enters Pater's poetic consciousness early and "brain-builds" the aesthetic mind: "the physical horror of death, with its wholly selfish recoil from the association of lower forms of life, and the suffocating weight above" never leaves the autobiographical character in "The Child in the House" (MS 191). The heightened consciousness of death not only allows us to break with ordinary life based on rational calculation, but also, in Keats, asserts the centrality and normalcy of aesthetic response: "His soul shall taste the sadness of might;/And be among her cloudy trophies hung" (Keats 541).

In "the pitiful awe and care for the perishing clay," Pater, like Keats, saw the source for both true literary emotion and religious sentiment (AP 48). The Romantic "obsession with death" is far from deadening or morbid because the invasion of the body by death startles us into seeing reality: "the visible function of death is but to refine, to detach from ought that is vulgar" (AP 158). Only with a fresh awareness of death, Pater

believed, can we embrace life in all its fullness and discover that which is refused by the experience of ordinary life. This Romantic concern, mortality as poetic substance, emerges as Pater's own central aesthetic concern. Pater's essentially Romantic concepts of sympathy and beauty both have death as their semantic components.

The process of change leading away, though not looking away, from death is that human action toward an ideal—an ideal of permanent value but no fixed content. Pater's Romantic morality does not envision the ideal end of the evolution of the total man in the classical sense, but a movement of ideal perceptions. In fact, the final endlessness of intellectual and moral effort gives his criticism a distinctly modern turn and a palpable yet austere character. Appreciated beauty is necessarily temporary, mortal; but its epiphanic aura persists. This permanent quality of "pure effect" is created, according to Pater, by essentially aesthetic transformations, changes into novel forms (MS 51).

This idealized or "formalized" change contains in it the principle of motion (change) and repose (resistance to or cessation from change), with which Aristotle defines "natural objects" (*Physics* II). To Pater aesthetic perception, like objects that exist by nature, operates in terms of motion and repose. Aesthetic objects, thus, are elevated to the level of objects that exist by nature. Pater tacitly places aesthetic perception above aesthetic objects by this identification. Behind it is the Heraclitean metaphysical principle of opposing forces in flux as one comprehensive formal framework for Pater's moment of apprehension: "That which is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony" (Freeman 25). Beside Heraclitus' tension of opposites, Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" and Coleridge's notion of polarity apprehend aesthetic perception in a similar manner in terms of dialectic opposites. Pater's notion of reconciliation of opposites, like Coleridge's "law of polarity," is at the conceptual center of aesthetic criticism. The "vital, not mechanical, unity" of organic form cannot be revealed without its twoness, or without its centrifugal and centripetal forces in equilibrium (Fogle 4-5).

Knowing the tentativeness of knowledge, the human mind still aspires to see the wholeness. The constant in aesthetic perception is therefore the formal unity the self apprehends as beauty, as the self incorporates the opposing elements in historical objects and ideas. This is the constant that allows moral growth in the individual and the spirit of man to evolve—though not in only one temporal direction. As Pater says in reference to Plato, the philosopher who begins with "the verb to be is after all afraid of saying, 'it is'" (PP 189). The skepticism of modern man, as the Romantic poets were fully aware, came with "an appeal from the preconceptions of the understanding to the authority of the sense," while the Greeks had to move in the opposite direction, "an appeal from the affirmations of sense to the authority of newly-awakened reason" (PP 31). In one sense, the human spirit, for Pater, is that which unites the most fundamental moral-aesthetic impulses and accomplishments of individuals with the widest temporal and collective perspectives of the race.

The critic's strong historical sense is essential to Pater in



keeping the human spirit alive. Augustine, reflecting the culture of his age, wrote, according to Pater, in terms of metaphysical theory detailing "what theologians call the fluctuations of the union of the soul with its unseen friend." But "for those who have passed out of Christianity, perhaps its most precious souvenir is the ideal of transcendental disinterestedness." Those who are capable of a passion for moral perfection, says Pater, still experience the same mental states (*SK* 104). The aesthetic quality of our encounter with such ideals enables us to overcome their limited, though powerful, appeal, in favor of an unending development of humanity. It is from this perspective that Pater regards Coleridge's criticism not to be "entirely disinterested" or historically minded.

Pater, separating himself from Coleridge, who had not "passed out of Christianity," claimed a clearer historical sense for himself. Pater did not argue for "an abstract reason or ideality in things" that would inspire, nor for a realization of a type. Ideas and types, for him, are historically relative, not absolute; they are changing manifestations of the aspiring spirit. A type is a transitory and self-limiting form that may yet move the spirit toward a discovery of the nature of the ideal human form, unlimited by the mere self-projection of ideals. Concepts may be kept alive for this all-encompassing human project only by endowing them with the "elasticity" of truth. His insistence on historical sense stems from his own Romantic humanism, the essence of which is defined as the belief "that nothing which has ever interested living men and women can wholly lose its vitality" (*R* 68). Keeping the human spirit alive in natural or scientific perspective is Pater's romantic purpose, linked to the Keatsean natural perspective that sees death spiritualizing life, as well as to the Coleridgean analytical and moral perspective.

Pater, affirming the unity of the apprehending mind in expression and sympathy, says, in a resounding Coleridgean voice, "All depends on the original unity, the vital wholeness and identity, of the initiatory apprehension of view" (*AP* 19). And here again it is poetic perception that allows for the human spirit to be so alive; it allows for the chance of post-religious atonement. Only poetic perception could encompass each circle as it completes itself on the series of biographical and historical ideals. It is only poetic perception that could remain free enough, then, successively to break and widen each circle. Like Coleridge, Pater probes the interweaving of natural and conscious elements in art, historical change and the ideal of perfection that enter into poetic perception. "The mind of the race, the character of the age, sway this way and that through the language and current ideas" (*AP* 66). The material for this aesthetic perception is history and ideas in language within the individual mind. Coleridge's imagination, "the living Power and the prime Agent of all human perception" also represents "in the finite mind" the "eternal act of creation in the infinite I am." What is crucial to Pater, however, is the operation of the imagination: "...at all events it struggles to idealize and unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead" (Coleridge, *BL* 244, 272).

The aesthetic struggle that allows growth in the self and in the human spirit affects the relation of human being with human being and with the world; it has its collective aspect. Blake's

identification of the human with personal creativity returns the world to humanity and makes religion a work of Poetic Genius. In so doing, Blake discarded religious dogmas, as Pater did philosophical systems, retaining the religious spirit as the human spirit and the idea of mystic communion with God, as poetic fusion of humanity and world. "The religions of all nations are derived from each Nation's different reception of the Poetic Genius" (Blake 98). The Poetic Genius stands opposed to his age. By opposing the hardened reality of rigid moral codes, which tend to be tyrannical and arbitrary like instruments of will, the poet gives a new directive for the future. "What is now proved was once only imagined" (Blake 151). Poetic expression in Pater is identified with poetic consciousness, that is, Blake's Poetic Genius. To Pater, the degeneration of poetic language leads to the decay of judgment, because art, "the supreme expression," is "a kind of moral expression." Such expressiveness is possible only as a union between the depth of things and the depth of the self; it takes place in the judgment of the apprehending mind. And, like divine communion in mysticism, it is simultaneously private and universally human.

The universal human spirit comes into being through individual moments of vision reordering human consciousness in history. When Pater theorized the unity of form and matter in art, he envisioned a kind of complete organization that takes place in the mind at the moment of perception. But this perception is of the moment only: "in the perception of the concrete phenomenon, at this particular moment, and from the unique point of view—that for you, this form—now perhaps not then" (*GL* 93). This selective and formal process is simultaneously private and collective. Intuitive apprehension of a particular object implies, therefore, a greater unity, not necessarily realized in a poem or a person at hand but nevertheless existing in the language and mind of the viewer. In this process, the human spirit evolves with its new discoveries.

The concept of unity then implies the evolving human spirit that provides synthesizing vitality. The critic as an artist selects from an ever-increasing corpus of experience of the past and tries to possess a greater formal unity. Blake's Poetic Genius, seeks greater unity with truth as it is being discovered, not "by traveling over known lands" but by finding out the unknown (Blake 98). The conversion of a known dogma into an experience of "primitive sentiment" was an aesthetic and moral imperative for Pater as it was for Blake (*MS* 182). In temporal terms, it converts the past into the living present. In existential terms, dead ideas become sensations of passion, thought, and sight. In religious terms, the moment intimates the timeless space of art, the realm of living forms in which divine communion takes place. Pater added a Hegelian touch to the Romantic belief in a forcefully unifying aesthetic vision. This Romantic re-vision of the world in terms of essentially human moral yearnings required an inclusion of humanity's past and future. Pater's aesthetic morality of initiating "a new organ for the human spirit" saves the future by aspiring to the past (*R* 177). Thus the return to nature or to antiquity, as in the Renaissance spirit, shapes the future (*R* 111).

## V The Moral Artist

A Paterian life, being ceaselessly refined by knowledge of physical reality, death, and desire to transcend the actual, creates new forms of self which move toward an ideal being—a detached sensibility, skeptical of all inherited ideas, and yet self-reliant and creative. Pater's essays and narratives are all singularly concerned with such aesthetically patterned lives. One example will suffice.

If the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* is the clearest paradigm of Paterian moral perspective, "A Prince of Court Painters" in *Imaginary Portraits* represents a paradigmatic Paterian life. Here the perennial conflict between what is actual, a life "agitated, exigent, unsatisfying," and what is desired, "that nobler world of aspiration and idea," is portrayed as the conflict that compels the aesthetic act of solace and of finer organization of one's life. The act of writing a journal, for instance, affords the narrator "an escape from vain regrets, angers, impatience." By putting "this and that angry spasm into it," we are delivered from it (IP 42). This act of deliberation and choice, with "its care for beauty, its cleanly preferences," makes life valuable (IP 35). The diarist-narrator observes Watteau, a mason's son, who enters her Flemish household only obliquely, and "appropriates" his life through her simple, singular, and appreciative response to the painter as a life lived in the spirit of art. Watteau paints from early in his life, with a "kind of grace," distilled from "vulgar reality"; and he later presents "that delicate life of Paris so excellently, with so much spirit, partly because, after all, he looks down upon it or despises it" (IP 27). That search for the nobler in the actual is what makes imaginative perception "moral."

Those trifling and petty graces, the insignia to him of that nobler world of aspiration and idea, even now that he is ware, as I conceive, of their true littleness bring back to him, by the power of association, all the old magical exhilaration of his dream—his dream of a better world than the real one. (IP 37)

By contrast, Jean Batiste, the diarist's brother, who had once been apprenticed to and dismissed by Watteau, sees the world

without deliberation or choice.

He [Jean Batiste] approaches that life, and all its nothingness from a level no higher than its own; beginning just where Anthony Watteau leaves off in disdain, produces a solid and veritable likeness of its ways. (IP 28)

This failure as an artist is his moral failure as well—a failure of aspiration. The moral stagnation, suggested by Jean Batiste's uncritical contentment, contrasts sharply with Watteau's discontent, an aesthetic impulsion to seek "something, a sign, a momento, at the least of what makes life really valuable" (IP 35).

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## Bent and Broken Necks: Signs of Design in Stoker's *Dracula*

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One of the striking characteristics of the considerable number of critical essays written about Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) in the past thirty years is that, more often than not, they deny that Stoker really knew what he was doing as he wrote it. The book and its author certainly seem to invite such a conclusion. The novel's central figure, Dracula, has been transformed by Stoker from an incredibly cruel but historical, fifteenth-century tyrant into a fictional vampire with rich folkloric associations. Knowing readers quickly reach for their copies of Ernest Jones's *On the Nightmare* (1931), with its chapter on the psychological symbolism of vampires in dreams. The novel is framed and punctuated with episodes which glow with sexual symbolism

that seems lurid even in a horror story: the temptation of the young, supine solicitor, Jonathan Harker, by female vampires at Dracula's Transylvanian castle at the beginning; the staking of Lucy Westenra, Dracula's first English victim, by her fiancé Arthur Holmwood under the direction of the old wise man, Dr. Van Helsing, to release her from her vampirism; the scene in which Dracula forces his second victim, Jonathan's wife Mina, to drink from a wound Dracula has opened in his own chest; and the shearing of Dracula's throat by Jonathan in the final episode. Freudian readings are virtually irresistible, and along with them the assumption that the story comes straight from Stoker's repressed drives and fantasies.



This assumption of virtually unconscious authorship seems to be supported by the pedestrian, sometimes ludicrous quality of Stoker's other fiction and by the life of the man himself. Stoker published a number of short stories for popular consumption in periodicals such as *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* and *Pall Mall Magazine* beginning in the 1870s, while he was a young legal clerk in Dublin, a book of fairy tales for his son in 1881, and eleven romance and adventure novels in the period 1890 to 1911, but only a few of the stories—particularly "The Squaw," which is preserved in *Dracula's Guest and Other Weird Stories* (1914)—seem to have drawn enduring critical praise, and Stoker's final novel, *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911), is frequently singled out for critical astonishment at its bizarre representation of an evil woman who is really a great white worm living in a well beneath her mansion.<sup>1</sup> While this fiction does not seem to elicit critical confidence in Stoker's subtlety and literary skill, his life invites the speculation that it was divided into public success and private frustration in a typically "Victorian" way. The public Stoker was the affable, capable business manager of the famous Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre company from 1878 to its liquidation in 1903 and was married to a noted beauty who had been courted by Oscar Wilde and sketched by Burne-Jones. Privately Stoker may have both idealized and envied his "chief," Irving, and may have had a sexless marriage which led him to extra-marital sources of satisfaction. It is indisputable that his death certificate identifies the cause of his death as locomotor ataxia (syphilis) in 1912.<sup>2</sup>

Maurice Richardson's witty essay, "The Psychoanalysis of Ghost Stories," in 1959 established *Dracula* as an unpremeditated revelation of Stoker's psychic depths for several successive generations of critics. In a felicitous figure, Richardson begins with the premise that "some ghost stories...can be compared to little volcanoes that go straight down into the primitive strata of the mind. ...The phantasy material that erupts...has been expressed and disguised by symbolism but...has not been transformed out of all recognition. ...The author...is quite likely to be completely unconscious of its inner meaning" (421). To Richardson, only "from a Freudian standpoint—and from no other—does [*Dracula*] really make any sense": it is a "blatant demonstration of the Oedipal complex" (427), and Richardson "doubt[s] whether Stoker had any inkling of the erotic content of the vampire superstition" from which he drew his stand-in for the enviable but hated "father" (429).

Indeed the novel does make sense as an Oedipal contest, and successive critics have embellished Richardson's explanation and repeated his caveat about Stoker's conscious ignorance of the essence and eroticism of his novel. In 1972 C. F. Bentley, for example, acutely studied its sexual symbolism and con-

cluded, "Nothing in Stoker's other writing or in what is known of his life suggests that he would consciously write quasipornography, and it must be assumed that he was largely unaware of the sexual content of his book" (72).

Also in 1972 Leonard Wolf, borrowing his terminology from Jung, described *Dracula* as a "visionary novel"—that is, one which presents material from "the hinterland of man's mind...primordial experience which surpasses man's understanding" and eludes the shaping powers of the novelist (206). In Wolf's view Stoker was a "part-time hack" (205), and the "work that Stoker made," consciously, is an epic struggle between good and evil, personified in Van Helsing and Dracula, with a "Christian message" (180, cf. 206). This message, however, is "entangled" with implications of homosexuality among the novel's good men (210), the potential deadliness of erotic beauty such as is embodied in the Transylvanian vampire women, Lucy, and even Mina (213, 217), the sexual hunger and power discovered in and by Jonathan (211, 213-14), and the human potential for self-gratification embodied especially in Dracula (223). These implications are "probably unconscious on Stoker's part" (181), and he "evades what he guesses—while he decks it out in the safer Christian truths that he repeats" (206, cf. 222).<sup>3</sup>

Stoker's most knowledgeable biographer, Daniel Farson, expresses the same view although it was Farson who recently discovered and published the evidence that Stoker died of syphilis. To that evidence, Mr. Farson adds the hearsay evidence from Stoker's granddaughter that the Stoker marriage was celibate after the birth of a child in 1879, and the totally unsupported assertion that Stoker was known as a "womaniser" and probably turned to prostitutes in London or Paris.<sup>4</sup> Farson concludes that the sexually symbolic materials in *Dracula* are the product of Stoker's "sexual frustration" and subsequent "sense of guilt" for his alternative satisfactions (213-14, 234). Farson introduces his discussion by quoting from, and agreeing with, Richardson on the applicability of "a Freudian standpoint" to *Dracula* and on Stoker's ignorance of the novel's "erotic content." "I am sure," Farson adds, "that my great-uncle [Stoker] would have been aghast" to learn that his novel is (and here Farson returns to Richardson's words) a "sado-masochistic orgy" (211).

In the past ten years or so, feminist criticism has brought psychological analysis to bear on *Dracula* and has often reiterated the description of Stoker as an author unconscious of the essential nature of his novel. In 1977, for example, Stephanie Demetrakopoulos stated that "Stoker's conscious authorial intentions" were to demonstrate the vulnerability of the traditionally Victorian "Womanly Woman," personified in Lucy, and the strength of the more modern, rational, but nevertheless

1. For bibliography see Dalby. For recent appraisals of Stoker's fiction, see Farson and Dematteis, Osborne, and Roth, *Bram Stoker*.

2. The Burne-Jones is privately owned. For other biographical details see Farson, esp. 233-35.

3. See also Bierman, "Dracula"; Craft, *Leatherdale* 145-175 (esp. 159, 175) MacGillivray, and Wall. *Leatherdale's* copious secondary bibliography is very useful; his discussion of critical approaches to *Dracula* including the psychological, refrains from evaluating the criticism or asserting a definitive interpretation of the novel.

4. Farson 212-14, 234-35. Ludlam, whose biography was written in concert with Stoker's son Noel (9), says nothing of all this; nor do Laurence Irving's biography of his father, Henry Irving, or reminiscential works by Stoker's contemporaries such as L. F. Austin (Frederic Daly), Hall Caine, and Ellen Terry. Personal inquiry leads me to conclude that Stoker's granddaughter has reversed her opinion of the marriage since the publication of Mr. Farson's book. A cartoon, "A Filial Reproof," in *Punch* 11 Sept. 1886: 126, suggests that Florence Stoker was a cool mother in public, more interested in her social presence than in her son, but not necessarily a cold wife to her solicitous husband.



sexually temperate Mina (109), but Demetrakopoulos drew also upon Bentley's analysis of " 'the novel's covert treatment of perverted sexuality' " (105) to argue that the male phallicism of Dracula and the vampire hunters and the aggressive sexuality of the female vampires reveal "Stoker's backlash against Victorian sexual mores," a theme that is "probably unconscious, rising out of his own dream reservoir" (109). Other feminist criticism provocatively finds beneath the novel's surface an unconscious fear, in Phyllis Roth's fine phrase, of "suddenly sexual women." She argues that "central to the structure and unconscious theme of *Dracula* is...primarily the desire to destroy the threatening mother," the "*vagina dentata*" of folklore, personified by Lucy and Mina in their vampirism.<sup>5</sup> A similar analysis is offered by Judith Weissman, who observes that "Lucy and Mina...say things [such as Lucy's wish to marry three men at once] which reveal—without Stoker's conscious knowledge, I am sure—his anxieties about women's sexuality" (400).<sup>6</sup> Thomas Byers agrees with Roth and Weissman that *Dracula* shows "covert misogyny" (in fact "covert" goes back to Bentley, p. 28), particularly the fear that men may be unable to conceal their "emotional dependence" on, and "vulnerability" to, women. The male dependence is symbolized by Dracula's need for blood. Byers argues that since the novel represents the dependence by means of a mere "myth," to be dismissed ultimately as unreal by the reader, the novel's "real (if covert) mission...is not to propound the existence of literal vampires, but to conceal the existence of figurative ones" (29).

Not all recent *Dracula* criticism by any means stipulates a "covert" theme or motif which rose volcanically from Stoker's psychic depths without his conscious knowledge. Particularly useful criticism has set the novel in its cultural context: Richard Wasson's examination of *Dracula's* political connotations in relation to late nineteenth-century imperialism; Mark Hennelly's interpretation of the novel as a "gnostic quest" by its young men in the context of an intellectual continuum from the "wasteland" of Victorian rationalism through turn-of-the-century vitalism (embodied in the novel by Dracula) which Hennelly associates with Henri Bergson (15) and especially with the anthropology of Frazer's *Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*; the provocative development of Leonard Wolf's characterization of the novel as a Christian epic with Dracula as a Satanic "hero of despair" by Brian Murphy, who places *Dracula* between post-Enlightenment disillusionment with the theory of the natural goodness of man and the twentieth-century religious revival typified by G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and W. H. Auden; and Carol Senf's extension of Stephanie Demetrakopoulos's observation that the novel is a conscious response to the "New Woman" of the 1890s.<sup>7</sup>

None of the analyses of *Dracula* in its cultural context rests

necessarily upon the assumption that its author must consciously understand or even deliberately use the cultural terms to be found in his text, and most of the culturally based analyses do not address the question of authorial intention. However, two of them comment on the denial of conscious authorial understanding to Stoker by previous, psychological analyses of the novel. Noting that Phyllis Roth describes both Lucy and Mina as predatory "mother" figures (with the implication that both are signs of Stoker's unadmitted fear of "sexual women"), Carol Senf comments, "It is just possible, however, to assume that Stoker is consciously contrasting the sexually liberated New Woman [the vampire Lucy] with the more traditional woman," Mina (46), and Senf then concludes that Stoker has formed the novel for a conscious purpose: "he tries to show that modern women can combine the best of the traditional and the new when he creates...Mina," with her practical intelligence and her ultimate choice of old-fashioned loyalty to civilized society over indulgence in individualistic self-gratification (49). In response to Wolf's claim that, although Stoker reveals psychic depths in *Dracula*, " 'he tries to avoid knowing what they mean,' " Brian Murphy (whose essay is written as an open letter to Stoker) virtually cries out in protest:

What I find baffling is that anyone who has read your novel would conclude that you were unaware of the sexual implications of the story. (10)

Apparently no letters or similar documents by Stoker or persons close to him have come to light to reveal what he himself thought he was doing in the writing of his novel.<sup>8</sup> His notebooks for the novel survive in the Rosenbach Foundation Library but show only that he worked on it for seven years and devoted considerable study to such subjects as vampirism, Transylvania, and the Whitby area.<sup>9</sup> The practical question raised by recent criticism, however, is not what Stoker's conscious intentions were, or whether unconscious concerns emerge in the novel. The question of conscious or unconscious intention will probably never receive a settled answer. As Jeffrey Spear observes with regard to attempts to find links between John Ruskin's eventually unmistakable insanity and his social commentary, the attempts "reveal more about the critic and his age than about Ruskin. What seems mad to one generation of critics may be prescient to the next" (13, cf. 252n96). Readers of *Dracula* who seek authorial intention look for design, but at present there seems to be considerable prejudice against the likelihood of finding design of a sort that supports the hypothesis of subtle, skillful authorship, together with a corresponding predisposition to find materials in the novel which are "volcanic," "visionary," and sexually "Victorian." The practical question is simply the configuration of the text. Although this design will inevitably depend somewhat on

5. Quoted from Roth, "Suddenly Sexual Women" 120; this essay appears substantially unchanged in Roth's *Bram Stoker* 111-23.

6. Griffin extends Weissman's view, noting that the women are provoked to sexual aggressiveness by their male admirers' "chivalric glorification of womanhood" (461), and Griffin theorizes that Stoker "subconsciously" alludes to menstrual blood (459).

7. See also Johnson for the "New Woman," and for other cultural contexts see Blinderman (Darwinism), Craft (homoeroticism), Fontana (Lombroso), and Hatlein (Marxist class structure).

8. Personal inquiry to Mr. Harry Ludlam and Stoker's lineal heirs leads me to conclude that they possess no material that is pertinent here, nor are such materials indicated in *Catalogue...Including the Library of the Late Bram Stoker*.

9. See Bierman, "The Genesis and Dating of *Dracula*..." and Roth, *Bram Stoker* 91-102 and 145-46n1. For permission to use Stoker's MS notes for *Dracula*, I am indebted to the Phillip H. and A. S. W. Rosenbach Foundation of Philadelphia and its assistant director, Mr. Walter C. Johnson.



readers' presuppositions, I suggest that the language of the novel in fact has far more, and other, design than most of its recent readers' preconceptions have allowed them to see. It repays close reading, or, in the current substitute for that New Critical phrase, it provides not only the pleasures of psychoanalysis and polemical indignation but also the pleasures of a text. Its language resonates with interconnections which create and amplify a theme of desperate, post-Romantic egoism—particularly in the form of rebellious feminism—which the combined analyses by Murphy and Senf have suggested.

One source of the novel's resonance is its structure as a vehicle for psychological allegory. *Dracula* is a novel in the tradition of the novels of Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and Hawthorne. Carl Keppler has aptly called such works "literature of the second self." Julian Moynahan has pointed out in a classic essay on *Great Expectations* that when the adolescent Pip asks for a half-holiday to pursue his dreams of upper-class love and wealth by visiting Miss Havisham, into the novel suddenly pops the Cainlike journeyman Orlick, who sulkily asks for his own half-holiday and remains in the novel to personify Pip's aggressive selfishness until Pip finally attains his moral education. Helene Moglen and others<sup>10</sup> have noted that when Jane Eyre is fresh from the celibate discipline of Lowood School and has just stood on the leads of Mr. Rochester's Thornfield Hall and yearned for passionate life, she hears the low laughter of the maniac in the attic, Bertha Rochester, who remains in the novel as a personification of Jane's own passionate potentiality and its dangers. Keppler usefully notes that the second-self character—the Orlick or Bertha—not only personifies some quality or motivation in the first self—the Pip or Jane—but also, and crucially, the second-self character enters the narrative at just that point when the central character is, or can be supposed to be, feeling or thinking what the second character personifies (12, 196). Readers of Dickens will recall scenes such as the lime-kiln scene near the end of *Great Expectations* or the figurative "explosion" of Uriah Heep by Traddles and Micawber in *David Copperfield*, in which the central character—Pip or David—is vacuously passive while the embattled secondary characters, who represent the separate elements of his inner, mental strife, act out that strife projectively in their own, external confrontation like characters in a medieval morality drama.

Stoker does not seem to have drawn obviously upon Dickens or Brontë but upon Wilkie Collins and Sheridan LeFanu. Along with Collins's conception of a novel as a compendium of first-hand documents, Stoker may well have noted, in *The Woman in White*, a model for Dracula's relationship to Lucy and Mina in Count Fosco's relationship to Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe. Stoker's original but cancelled first chapter, which was posthumously published as "Dracula's Guest," makes it certain that he drew upon LeFanu's Laura and the vampire Carmilla, who embodies Laura's longings in the story "Carmilla" (Ludlam 123, 128). Stoker, however, would have had no need to go to literary precedents for fictions which are based on psychological dissociation and use the method of the literary double or second-self characterization to dramatize it. As the

business manager for Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre company from 1878 to 1903, Stoker saw virtually hundreds of performances of psychological melodramas such as *The Corsican Brothers* and *The Bells* which alternated with revivals of Shakespeare and were the bread and butter of the company (Irving 532, 595).

In an essay in the book *Sexuality and Victorian Literature* (1984), edited by Don Richard Cox, I have shown that the novel *Dracula* is replete with references to the French psychologist Charcot, to dual personality, and to what the novel calls "unconscious cerebration" (*Dracula* 69, 191, 270), and I have argued that the novel's form is largely determined by its presentation of the vampire Count Dracula as a literary double for the unconscious or only partly conscious rebellious egoism experienced first by Lucy and then by Mina in reaction to the constraints and condescension which have been inflicted on them by their society, chiefly by the men around them and chiefly because the thinking of the society is dominated by anachronistic notions of social class and chivalry. Simple, conventional, upper-class Lucy is expected, especially by her class-conscious mother (95, 166), to marry the aristocratic but ineffectual Arthur Holmwood, but Lucy becomes restless and suffers attacks by Dracula. Mina is highly praised in chivalric terms by Dr. Van Helsing, her husband Jonathan, and the other men who gather around Van Helsing to pursue Dracula, but they protectively exclude her from the hunt—"a bitter pill" she reflects as they send her off to bed in Dr. Seward's asylum (242) while they go next door to raid Dracula's principal London hideaway, Carfax. Each woman develops what Van Helsing at one point calls a "dual life" (201)—a conscious, willing conformity to her society and a largely subconscious discontent. After the discontent develops to the stage of strong rebellion, Dracula appears and attacks. He is thus a symbolic double of each woman's rebellious feelings, and the literal vampirism which results from his bite represents the change in personality produced by these feelings. With reference to the women, his masculinity and aristocracy denote the kind of power they confront and want to wield.

Joined to the psychological allegory of Lucy's and Mina's rebellion is a *Bildungsroman* or education-novel structure in which the young men and their mentor, Van Helsing, learn to identify and eradicate their own masculine and aristocratic pride.<sup>11</sup> Dracula serves double duty as a projection of the women's rebellious egoism and of the men's oppressive egoism. As Carol Senf has said, "It is Stoker's genius that Dracula...means different things to different people. ...[T]he key element...[is] his individualism" (47). Ultimately the link between the psychological allegory of female rebellion and the male *Bildungsroman* seems to be the mind of Mina. As soon as the men discover Dracula's attacks upon her, they readmit her to their confidence (290), but this act of respect fails to reverse her vampirism. The signs of her vampirism disappear only after the men pursue Dracula as he flees to Transylvania and slash his throat and heart with knives in the light of the setting sun. As I have argued in the "Dual Life" essay in *Sexuality and Victorian Literature* (35), the pursuit has all the

10. For a recent example, see Maynard 124-26.

11. See Johnson, Byers, and Hennelly, whose view is that the men learn vitality from Dracula.



earmarks of a journey by the men into their own psyches. In Geoffrey Wall's expansive phrase, "Transylvania is Europe's unconscious" (2). During the final pursuit of Dracula upriver toward his castle, Jonathan comments, " 'We seem to be drifting into unknown places and unknown ways; into a whole world of dark and dreadful things' " (357). He and the other men can make the literal journey only by means of the information about Dracula's location which Mina provides when she uses a telepathic link Dracula has established between himself and her by forcing her to drink from the wound he opens in his own chest on one of the occasions when he attacks her in her bedroom at Seward's asylum. She discovers that the link can be used against Dracula if Van Helsing will tap her knowledge by hypnotizing her (311), and Van Helsing notes that she has won "this power to good" by her "suffering" at the hands of Dracula (343). Van Helsing notes, too, that the usefulness of her knowledge depends partly upon his own "volition" (343)—that is, on his own willingness to use hypnosis to see into her mind and discover what she sees. The narrative suggests, then, that the men can locate and eradicate their own oppressive egoism, which has caused Mina's rebellion, only by seeing through the mind of their victim. Their reformation depends upon their volition and her knowledge of the cause of her rebellious feelings.

Now the precise act—Van Helsing calls it a "baptism of blood" (322, 343)—which establishes the telepathic link resonates with connections to earlier scenes. These all contribute to the single implication that, unlike the simple Lucy, Mina not only feels but understands her rebellion. The "baptism of blood" is described from two perspectives—first, Dr. Seward's, just after he and others learn from the injured Renfield that Dracula has entered Seward's asylum, where she is staying. Seward and his allies rush to the Harkers' bedroom and discover Mina

kneeling on the near edge of the bed facing outwards. ...By her side stood...the Count. ...[H]is right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. (281-82)

Subsequently she herself explains that she had yielded willingly to Dracula's bite, but then he scratched a wound in his own bared breast and, she says, "seized my neck and pressed my mouth to the wound, so that I must either suffocate or swallow" (288). This is of course ground on which Freudian interpretation has a field day, and perhaps with perfect justification.<sup>12</sup> The context of the passage, however, is very important. Dracula prefaces his action with the explanation that the act is a punishment because Mina has presumed, he says, to " 'play your brains against mine. You would help those men to hunt me and frustrate me.' " The result of the act will be, he says, that " 'you shall come to my call. When my brain says "Come!" to you, you shall...do my bidding' " (287-88). Dracula aims to punish and control her mind. In forcing her to bend her head, he seems symbolically to be directing the attention of the mind it contains. By forcing her to swallow his blood, now enriched by her earlier submission to him, he forces her to "take in" and assimilate the fact of her willing submission. All of this suggests that Mina's rebellious feelings, personified in

Dracula, are not merely rising to dominate her but are also gaining her intellectual recognition and understanding. Her reason does not necessarily sanction the submission but does identify the rebellious feeling and recognize that when it arises it will control her behavior.

This interpretation meshes with the sexual symbolism of nursing and of fellatio, if the latter is also implied. Dracula appears not only as the personification of Mina's rebellion but also as the force which her rebellion appropriates—that is, the force of the men who are her oppressors. In the symbolic nursing, Dracula as the image of her rebellion teaches her to practice the men's own use of the world around them as what George Eliot in Chapter 21 of *Middlemarch* has called "an udder to feed [their] supreme selves" (156). Although the men have idolized Mina, their chivalry has denied her practical abilities and has promoted the men themselves to the superior worldly role of her protectors. Ironically, their chivalric presumption is an infantile act since it deprives Mina of her potential scope in order that they may enjoy that scope themselves, even while they expect to enjoy her gratitude, too. In the implicit allusion to fellatio, Mina's image of the oppressive men also teaches her to take life, not to give it. Her relation with the world around her will be the self-service that is symbolized by the substitution of alimentation for procreation.

The bending of Mina's neck recalls, first, Dracula's first attack on Lucy, which Mina witnessed in the Whitby parish churchyard on the evening of August 10. In this event, however, Lucy sat on a bench, "half-reclining with her head lying over the back of the seat" (90). There had been no struggle and no "baptism of blood" in addition to Dracula's bite. The implication is that Lucy was an unreflecting victim—at least at this point—as well as a willing one. However, the bending of Mina's neck also recalls Dracula's breaking of the necks of the old Whitby sailor, Mr. Swales, and of Renfield, the zoophagous patient in Seward's asylum. The attack on Swales occurs shortly after he has talked with Lucy and just prior to Dracula's first vampire attack upon her. Similarly Dracula breaks Renfield's neck after Renfield has talked with Mina and between Dracula's first vampire attack on her on September 30 and her "baptism of blood" on October 2. One may not expect complex structures of symbolic characterization in Stoker's novel, but Swales and Renfield seem clearly to function as literary doubles who represent the critical, reflective, reasoning faculty in Lucy and Mina respectively.

Swales enters the novel as a chatty old salt whom Mina and Lucy meet in their walks in the Whitby parish churchyard. Mina immediately describes him as "a very skeptical person" because he scoffs at the local legend that the ghost of a nun who was immured in the local abbey for disobedience is still to be seen there (63). Later, on August 1, Lucy meets him on a day when her nocturnal sleepwalking indicates that she is subconsciously resisting her impending marriage to Arthur and her mother's support of the marriage (64, 71-72). Lucy talks with Swales as she sits on a seat over a slab with an epitaph commemorating George Canon, who is buried underneath. To prove that epitaphs are usually untrue, Swales reveals that the

12. E.g., Bentley 30: "Stoker is describing a symbolic act of fellatio." Cf. Craft 125-26, Griffin 459, and Roth (who adds male castration fear),

"Suddenly Sexual Women" 119-20.



monument was not "erected by a sorrowing mother to her dearly beloved son" who "died, in the hope of a glorious resurrection," as the epitaph claims. Instead, she was a "hell-cat" who insured the life of her sickly son in hopes of profiting by his early death, and he killed himself so as to prevent her from receiving an insurance payment. Lucy's response is revealing: "'Why did you tell us of this? It is my favourite seat, and I cannot leave it'" (66-67). Subsequently Dracula lands at Whitby, on the night of August 7, takes refuge in the grave (240), apparently becomes aware of Lucy when she uses the seat on the morning of August 10, and attacks her in it during the evening of that day. The fact that Swales is "found dead" in the seat in the early morning of the tenth indicates that he has been killed by Dracula as he made his way into, or out of, the grave. Swales's neck has been broken and his face bears "a look of fear and horror" (87). The train of events seems to symbolize an unconscious psychological process going on within Lucy. The events suggest that in her dreams she has been resisting her impending marriage, and this unconscious thought has transformed her unrest to rebellion by making her aware—albeit subconsciously—of the true relationship between herself and her mother. As the rebellion crystallized, however, her reasoning mind has resisted it and then he has been forcibly destroyed by it.

As Swales is to Lucy, so is Renfield in relation to Mina. Early in the novel Renfield appears as a patient in Seward's asylum and is characterized by "selfishness, secrecy, and purpose"—specifically a desire for "life" which leads him to collect and eat insects and birds and makes him, in Seward's diagnosis, "an undeveloped homicidal maniac." He is also very methodical, keeping careful records of his dietary experiments (68-71). Later episodes show that he can be a keen logician and a cool debater (233, 243-247). When Dracula establishes himself at Carfax, Renfield meets and reveres him, apparently because Dracula promises greater feasts of "life" than Renfield has arranged for himself (e.g. 107). Mina meets Renfield shortly after her arrival at the asylum to aid Van Helsing and his young allies in the discovery and destruction of Dracula. Her interaction with Renfield and his behavior from the time of their first meeting on September 30, until her "baptism of blood" on October 2, strongly suggest that he represents the action of her own reason during that period.

After reading about Renfield in Seward's diary, Mina asks to see Renfield and "venture[s]...to lead him to his favourite topic." She has not yet been excluded from the confidence of Van Helsing and the young men, but she has experienced their courtly condescension, and apparently because of this she is interested in Renfield's odd theory of acquiring power. At this point he seems to become a symbol for her thinking about power. If so, then his immediate, direct advice, "[D]on't stay" (233), represents her own foresight—in contrast to Lucy's lack of foresight—that her thoughts may lead to uncontrollable and undesirable emotions. About three hours after this conversation, Van Helsing tells Mina that she is being excluded from the pursuit of Dracula and sends her "to bed" while the men prepare to raid Carfax (242). Although she does not complain openly, she regards the exclusion as a "bitter pill" when it is announced, and she experiences Dracula's first attack upon her

during the night of September 30, while the men are at Carfax. During the next day, October 1, she finds herself "crying like a silly fool" because of the exclusion and resolves to "put a bold face on"—that is, a cheerful face—for Jonathan. "I suppose," she says, "it is one of the lessons that we poor women have to learn" (257). Her discontent continues internally, however, as Jonathan observes a puckering of her forehead while she sleeps on the evening of October 2, "as though [he comments] she thinks even in her sleep" (267-68).

Mina's restless thought seems to be acted out in an expanded form by Renfield. After meeting Mina on September 30, he pleads with Seward to be sent away from the asylum. Apparently Renfield fears that Dracula will ask him for admission to the asylum and Mina. Seward's reply is a clear echo of Van Helsing's banishment of Mina to her bed while the men raid Carfax. Seward tells Renfield, "Get to your bed and try to behave more discreetly" (247). Thwarted by Seward, Renfield then gives in to Dracula's request for admission and his promise of "life" in the form of multitudes of rats, and Dracula drains Mina. On the following day, while Mina bursts into tears, Renfield is troubled by the thought that he may be destroying the souls of the creatures he eats or injuring his own soul, but he is buoyed up by the thought of his powerful "friend" Dracula (268-69). In the afternoon of October 2, Renfield asks to see Mina (259) and discovers that Dracula has "been taking the life out of her" (280). While Mina thinks in her sleep that evening (267), Renfield is resolved to resist Dracula's next entry into the asylum (280). In their confrontation, Renfield suffers what is described variously in the text as a broken back (275) and a broken neck (289), but Stoker's notes for the novel in the Rosenbach Library show that he drew upon precise professional information from his brother, Thornley, who was a prominent Dublin surgeon, for the diagnosis which is stated by Dr. Seward: "the real injury was a depressed fracture of the skull, extending right up through the motor area" (276; cf. Roth, *BS* 100) This resonates perfectly with the "baptism of blood" which Dracula inflicts on Mina for pitting her "brain" against him. That act of neck-bending gave her knowledge without power of resistance. Renfield's injury leaves him, too, with knowledge, but with no motor function. He can, however, inform Seward of Dracula's presence in the asylum, just as, in the book's final episodes, Mina's knowledge enables the men to locate and destroy Dracula despite her powerlessness to resist him herself.

The veritable harmony of bent and broken necks in the novel makes one refrain: the rebellion of the women is a reflex of the men's tyranny, and only through the mind of the intelligent, knowing rebel can the oppressors discover and eradicate their oppression. The motif of bent and broken necks also suggests that the novel's language may resonate with other, as yet unnoted, design.

If, for example, the description of the pursuit of Dracula into Transylvania suggests that "Transylvania is Europe's unconscious" and is, for the men, their own unconscious minds, then perhaps the language of the Transylvanian section at the beginning of the novel makes a similar suggestion. In fact, the opening section is replete with such suggestions. On the way to Dracula's castle, for example, Jonathan notes that he is



"leaving the West and entering the East," where "every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians, as if it were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool" (1,2). As Christopher Craft notes (127), the fact that Jonathan sees "only myself" in his mirror at the castle although Dracula is beside him suggests that Dracula is to be understood as a double of Jonathan (25). Dracula draws upon Jonathan to perfect his command of English speech, geography, and business practices so that in London the Count will be "master...or at least none should be master of me" (20). Meanwhile on his vampire forays beyond the castle he wears Jonathan's clothing so that the local people will attribute the evil deeds to Jonathan (44-45). Finally, as Dracula leaves to become a resident of England, he leaves Jonathan locked in the castle to become a victim of the vampire women and thus a vampire himself. Because of this potentially double transformation, in the regal, predatory Dracula the newly qualified and newly affianced young solicitor seems to be encountering his own intimation of the role of imperious egoism he can choose to play as he begins his vocation and marriage.

A few more words may suffice to suggest the unexplored range of design in *Dracula* which has apparently been neglected because of preconceptions that the novel must be "visionary," "volcanic," or sexually "Victorian." The seemingly "volcanic" quality of the novel is unmistakable in the episode of Jonathan's temptation by the vampire women in the opening section. Jonathan has been thinking of Mina as a housekeeper (1) and a stimulus to his professional ambition (15) and subsequently he thinks of her as "a woman" but in diametrical contrast to "those awful women" who seem to be "devils of the Pit" (53) as they dine on children and are "waiting to suck [his] blood" (39, 40). As every psychological interpretation points out, in the moments of temptation Jonathan is impelled by "burning desire" and repulsed by "deadly fear" (37). He has divided women into devils and angels, but his fear or virtue does not govern his behavior until the morning after the temptation. The agency which prevents the consummation of his desire is Dracula himself with his exclamation, "'This man belongs to me!'" just as Jonathan has slipped into a "languorous ecstasy" of anticipation (38, 39). Jonathan must not become a sensual beast until Dracula has become, as it were, Jonathan—an Englishman with all the native social abilities and business acumen. The pervasive design of the Transylvanian section with which the novel opens has been established by references to the young man at the beginning of his adult career and marriage meditating on the role he will play. Dracula's interference with the temptation suggests that the role symbolized by Dracula—that is, the sophistication of fundamental selfishness, the cultivation of hypocritical urbanity—requires a temporary restraint upon any engrossing but limited satisfaction such as lust. Later, apparently, when egoism has been thoroughly sophisticated and firmly controls the whole character, the urbane egoist will be able to manage mistresses, business, and a revered, repressed wife.

Subsequent events suggest that Jonathan does not "belong" to Dracula but vacillates uncertainly between acceptance and rejection of the total egoism he represents. Jonathan resists the vampire women and clings to his religious faith but flinches

from destroying Dracula in his coffin (51-52) before the two depart for England. When Jonathan escapes to England, he suppresses his memory of the symbolic journey into his own mind, but he encounters Dracula again just after the death of Jonathan's employer and quasi-father, Mr. Hawkins, leaves Jonathan "rich, master of his business," and distraught at the responsibility thrust upon him (157, 171). It remains for Van Helsing, whose wife has very significantly gone totally mad prior to the novel's action (176), to use his own esoteric knowledge of human nature to assure Jonathan of Dracula's reality so that both men, with Mina's help, may advance to the self-knowledge of the final journey into Transylvania. In the context of this quest for sane adulthood, it is quite possible that various seemingly "volcanic" materials in the novel turn out to form a unique and unexpected design, and that Stoker turns out, apparently, to be a keenly perceptive, conscious critic of late-Victorian self-interest.

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## Woman and the Muse: The Lifeblood of Samuel Smiles' Workers\*

William B. Thesing

In her recent and important study *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, Nina Auerbach apparently joins a long line of twentieth-century critics who denigrate the outlook and writings of the much maligned Scottish doctor and social popularizer of the self-help philosophy, Samuel Smiles. She writes: "In the iconographic revolution of the nineteenth century, visions of angels and of women became inseparable. . . . the power of womanhood feeds and is fed by the transcendent attributes of character. Even in its nonliterary sense the word 'character' is endowed with striking incantatory resonance when used by such a popular sage as Samuel Smiles. For Smiles the word resides somewhere between the moral and the numinous, bearing no relation to the 'identity' or 'selfhood' we thirst after today" (192-193).

From this general definition of Smiles' concept of character, she goes on to proclaim its implications for his view of women:

In life as well as literature character is transfiguration, the transcendence of temporal conditions. To have it is earthly grace; to lose it is to be denied salvation. It is suggestive that in Samuel Smiles's *Character*, quasi-religious hymns to this attribute consistently give way to apparently digressive exaltations of noble womanhood. Though he never links womanhood and character explicitly—he seems squeamishly to feel that the two are incompatible—they are associated in the dual focus of his book. Smiles's florid tributes to womanhood may simply be defensive responses to contemporary feminist agitation about woman's right to a life outside the home, yet it may be as well that in his veering between character and womanhood, those two poles of transcendence, he is responding

in a profound if unconscious association to his culture's central myths. . . . For writers like Smiles character is the art of secular beatitude, hallowing the self in its ordinary life. (193-195)

She ends this discussion by referring the reader to the comparison of Madame Tussaud's wax figures that immortalize "divine-demonic humanity without extracting it from our concrete, breathing world" (195).

Although Auerbach's abstract generalizations are compelling and thought-provoking, they do not present the entire story concerning Samuel Smiles' views of women, character, and work. If we examine such works by Smiles as his early periodical essays, *Self-Help* (1859), and *Character* (1872), we find more complexities in both his own and his society's view of the relationship of women to the inspiration and execution of work and invention. Although Auerbach does not discuss the Muse figure in either *Woman and the Demon* or *The Romantic Imprisonment*, this topic has received some recent critical attention, some of it written from a feminist critical perspective. One of the more important articles is Joyce Zonana's "Matthew Arnold and the Muse: The Limits of the Olympian Ideal." Zonana demonstrates that during his career, Arnold came to distinguish two types of Muse figures. Muse Number One represented unearthly beauty or heavenly truth, and ideals. This virginal Muse figure called for evasion of everyday actualities and was a gracious, orderly, and unearthly inspirer. Muse Number Two, or the opposite principle of female inspiration and creative power, was more elemental and passionate.

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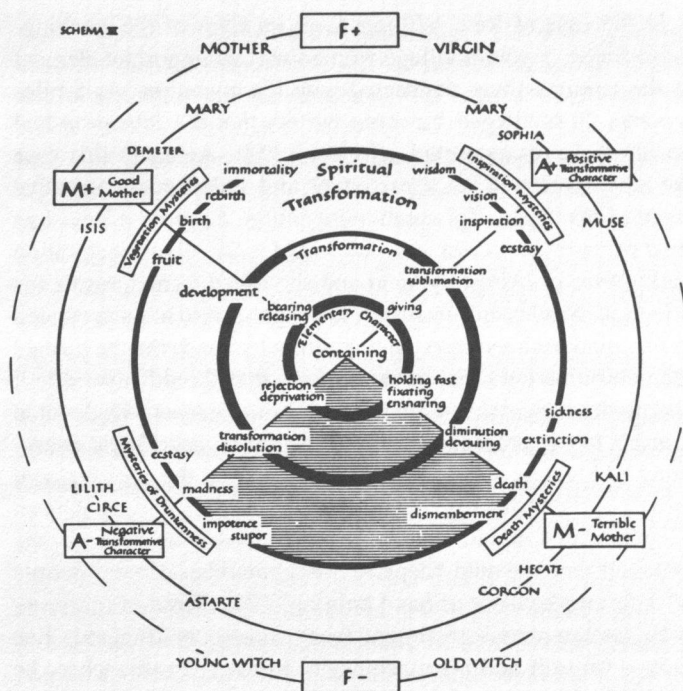


The Muse of humanity was an authentic god of earth attuned to human life's realities. Arnold came to appreciate this Muse figure because it placed an emphasis on pain as an essential aspect of poetic composition. Often in the guise of an aggrieved and avenging figure, it inspired insights concerning human pain and earthy passion; it fostered confrontations with the limitations of human life (59-74). Some of the previous research on the Muse figure that Zonana draws on should be briefly mentioned. She points out that in studies by Walter J. Ong and Erich Neumann, "The conventional image of the male writer drawing power from a female muse suggests a dependence of male consciousness upon female unconsciousness, but the writer always remains separate from his muse" (71). Walter J. Ong in *Fighting for Life* describes his view of the Muse figure: "The human male remains permanently dependent psychologically on the female. . . . He needs not only this initial female ambiance to set him on the road to masculinity but also permanent feminine backing built into his psyche—the mother or the lover or the "muse"—in order to achieve any of his fuller possibilities" (114). In an intriguing, circular chart (see accompanying illustration) Erich Neumann in *The Great Mother* outlines the archetypal poles of transformative character inspired by various Muse figures. As he explains, "The A+ pole of inspiration is the locus of the divine virgins and the Muses, who are aspects of an archetypal, inspirational figure. . . . At the negative pole of Axis A we find the alluring and seductive figures of fatal enchantment" and such figures are linked to pain and distress (80).

What are the implications of these studies of various Muse figures for Samuel Smiles' writings? Can we distinguish clearly between passive Muse figure versus active Muse figure? The importance of the Muse figure—the female imaginative catalyst—can be seen, for example, in numerous case studies or capsule biographies described by Smiles in his best-selling book *Self-Help*, where women serve as both idealistic and practical sources of inspiration that motivate various male figures to seek new ways of building, producing, or living. These women are not denigrated by Smiles; they are rarely depicted in a state of transcendence. Although they sometimes have the qualities that we have come to associate with mystical-magical inspiring female muse figures, they are more often depicted in practical, down-to-earth, help-mate terms as co-creators of key inventions and discoveries in both the nineteenth and earlier centuries. In another sense, they demonstrate their own "selfhoods" through the persistence or shrewd criticisms that they offer to the male inventor-heroes. Several pertinent chapters from *Character* are also relevant. But let us return for a moment to Smiles' early career as a journalist.

Smiles' earliest statement about the nature and function of women's contributions to the Victorian work scene is to be found in an article in the Owenite periodical *The Union* (January, 1843). Here he conveys his early humanitarian sentiments based upon practical knowledge of the subject. Although twentieth-century skeptics could easily accuse him of paternalistic motives, his earnest concern to keep at least a segment of Victorian Britain's population out of the grips of industrialism's jaws is evident in such passages as the following:

In the manufacturing districts especially, the condition of the women



is exceedingly wretched. The factory system, however much it may have added to the wealth of the country, has unquestionably had a most deleterious effect upon the domestic condition of the people. It has invaded the sanctuary of home, and broken up almost all social and family ties. It has torn the wife from the husband, and the children from the parents. Especially has its tendency been to lower the sacred character of woman. The performance of the domestic duties is her proper office in civilized life,—the management of her household,—the rearing and education of her children,—the economising of the family means,—and the supply of the family wants. But the factory tears her from all these duties: homes become no longer homes; children grow up uneducated and entirely neglected; the domestic affections are crushed or blunted, and woman is no longer the gentle sustainer of man. . . . (421)

Although this early emphatic statement by Smiles seems to condemn the typical Victorian woman to a round of unending domestic duties as the angel in the house, what we actually find in some of his later and very popular books such as *Self-Help* and *Character* is a more complex range of participation by women. With only a few exceptions, most of the cases presented in *Self-Help* show the woman in the position of the provocative Muse figure. That is, the women serve as negative influences who nonetheless play significant roles in the "labours, trials, struggles, and achievements" of men. They help spur creativity and discovery; they are women of independent character.

Sir Richard Arkwright's wife serves as a harsh Muse figure. As Smiles reports: "His wife...was impatient at what she conceived to be a wanton waste of time and money, and in a moment of sudden wrath she seized upon and destroyed his models, hoping thus to remove the cause of the family privations. Arkwright was a stubborn and enthusiastic man, and he was provoked beyond measure by this conduct of his wife, from whom he immediately separated" (*Self-Help* 64). Soon after this disengagement, however, Arkwright hit upon the successful plan for constructing his perpetual-motion spinning-machine.



In the case of Rev. William Lee, inventor of the stocking-loom frame, a young village woman was an important element in the circumstances connected with his invention. As Smiles reports, "it is alleged by some writers that the invention had its origin in disappointed affection" (72). Again in this case the woman served as a persistent and independent negative force of inspiration for creative invention. Each time Rev. Lee tried to court the village lass, she would focus all of her attention on knitting stockings by hand and she failed to reciprocate his affection. Smiles tells us that "This slight is said to have created in his mind such an aversion to knitting by hand, that he formed the determination to invent a machine that should supersede it and render it a gainless employment. For three years he devoted himself to the prosecution of the invention, sacrificing everything to his new idea" (72). Lee next sought the approval and encouragement for his invention from another woman—Queen Elizabeth in London. She opposed the machine because she believed that it would "deprive a large number of poor people of their employment of hand knitting" (74). Tired of receiving such contemptuous treatment from women in England, Lee moved himself and his machines to Rouen, France, where he established a successful operation.

The French potter Palissy was another inventor who "fought against stupendous difficulties." Because he was bound to his wife and children, he could not travel to make investigations into new processes of enamelling and glazing earthenware. At home, his wife protested his purchase of numerous earthen pots that were continuously broken into pieces by the heat of a furnace, only to have various compounds spread over them. He worked tirelessly even though "his wife and the neighbors thought him foolishly wasting his means in futile experiments" (99). Grudgingly, she would only bring him "a portion of the scanty morning meal" (98). At a crucial point in his experiments he decided that fuel for his backyard furnace must be obtained at whatever cost: "There remained the household furniture and shelving. A crashing noise was heard in the house; and amidst the screams of his wife and children, who now feared Palissy's reason was giving way, the tables were seized, broken up, and heaved into the furnace" (99). Partly because of his wife's screaming through the town that her poor husband had gone mad, a breakthrough rather than a breakdown soon came for Palissy. "He had at length mastered the secret; for the last great burst of heat had melted the enamel" (99). To perfect his experiments, he moved to a local inn. There he told one of his visitors: "Worst of all the sufferings I had to endure, were the mockeries and persecutions of those of my own household, who were so unreasonable as to expect me to execute work without the means of doing so" (100).

The burning heat of a destructive Muse figure can also be seen in the famous case of John Stuart Mill's maid-servant who accidentally destroyed the manuscript of Thomas Carlyle's first volume of his *French Revolution* (121). Certainly Carlyle learned a lesson in the miraculous powers of the composing process and of perseverance under adversity from that unfortunate incident!

John Flaxman, sculptor, conducted his active work in direct response to a stunning critical warning concerning a woman's negative influence that was delivered to him by Sir Joshua

Reynolds: "So, Flaxman, I am told you are married; if so, sir, I tell you you are ruined for an artist" (187). His independent and intelligent wife, who had herself a refined taste for poetry and art, was informed of Reynolds' remark and she became as determined as her husband to prove it false.

A more elaborate pattern of women serving the function of idealistic and practical sources of inspiration—as passive soul-mates and active help-mates—can be seen in several pertinent chapters from *Character*: "Home Power," "Work," and "Companionship in Marriage."

In Chapter 2, "Home Power," of *Character* Smiles makes his first premise clear: "Home is the first and most important school of character. Home makes the man" (42). What soon becomes evident in this chapter, however, is the powerful influence—both positive and negative—of women on male character and work. If we see women as caged figures in the home, we constrict our outlook too narrowly. We also need to look at their potent and continuing influence on society. Positive, inspirational influence can be seen in the workings of mothers, wives, and even sisters on creative individuals. As Smiles maintains: "In the case of poets, literary men, and artists, the influence of the mother's feeling and taste has doubtless had great effect in directing the genius of their sons" (59). The lives of Gray, Thomson, Scott, Southey, Bulwer, Schiller, and Goethe are cited as examples (59). In a later chapter Smiles sums up the influence of Dorothy Wordsworth on her brother: she "contributed greatly to mould his nature, and open his mind to the influences of poetry" (84). To show that Smiles does not simply offer "exaltations of noble womanhood," is easy: he balances powerful positive instances of feminine influences with equally destructive examples—as in the case of the relationship between Lord Byron's mother and her notorious son (62). In the chapter on "Home Power," Smiles again stresses the importance to the preservation of the Victorian social order for keeping the influence of women's character within the home and out of the factories. Smiles predicts socially disastrous results if women are withdrawn from the home and he praises the "best Victorian philanthropists" for withdrawing women from toiling alongside men in coal-pits, factories, nail-shops, and brick-yards. Where Auerbach sees "apparently digressive" hymns to noble womanhood, it is also possible to see a comprehensive, though conservative, vision of the fabric of Victorian society. Woman's character is a powerful influence in the home if she is at home; education should be made available to her within the domestic setting. "Hence," Smiles argues, "to instruct woman is to instruct man; to elevate her character is to raise his own; to enlarge her mental freedom is to extend and secure that of the whole community. For nations are but the outcomes of homes, and peoples of mothers" (69). On these terms, there is no need or advantage to be gained from a woman "entering into competition with man in the rough work of business and politics" (69). Smiles predicts social decay if women do not exercise their full powers—in both practical and spiritual terms—at home.

No languid angels about the house, Smiles' women interact significantly and work fully with men and children in the home. In Chapter 4 on "Work" Smiles is more specific about the practical everyday business conducted by the housewife: "the



able housewife must necessarily be an efficient woman of business. She must regulate and control the details of her home, keep her expenditure within her means, arrange every thing according to plan and system, and wisely manage and govern those subject to her rule" (110-111). While it is true that he opposed political enfranchisement of women, it is not—as Auerbach implies—a menacing monster on his mind. Quite briefly he states: “Nor is there any reason to believe that the elevation and improvement of women are to be secured by investing them with political power” (71). Woman’s power is at home and from there she is able “to form the character of the whole human race” (71).

In *Woman and the Demon* Auerbach claims that when Smiles discusses woman and character, the words have no relation to the modern concepts of “identity” or “selfhood” (193). She implies that he withholds fulfillment of a woman’s character. But a closer examination of Smiles’ long chapter in *Character* entitled “Companionship in Marriage” shows that these criticisms are not fully warranted. Whereas Auerbach maintains that Smiles “never links womanhood and character explicitly,” we see that he does so extensively in this chapter—albeit with the further partnership link of woman and man in the marital relationship. It is, for example, Alexander Pope and not Smiles (as Auerbach wrongly implies) who says in one of his “Moral Essays” that “most women have no characters at all” (304). Smiles condemns this outlook and makes his own judgment clear: “But Pope was no judge of women....” Smiles’ attitude toward women and work is far more tolerant and progressive than Pope’s—except when he fears that the social order of Great Britain may be threatened by independent women voting or working in factories. Above all, Smiles wanted to preserve the harmony of the Victorian social order. Nevertheless, he is also attuned to the important concept that David J. DeLaura’s two recent essays have focused upon: the idea of *Bildung* or self-culture and development. Smiles writes: “But while the most characteristic qualities of woman are displayed through her sympathies and affections, it is also necessary for her own happiness, as a self-dependent being, to develop and strengthen her character, by due self-culture, self-reliance, and self-control. Happiness...depends on her individual completeness of character” (306).

Approximately one-half of Smiles’ chapter on “Companionship in Marriage” in *Character* is devoted to case histories of husband and wife teams. Again, similar principles and categories apply. A woman’s influence can be most powerful for good or ill. According to Smiles, “A woman of high principles will elevate aims and purposes of her husband—one of low principles will degrade him” (318). The wives studied function in the roles of soul-mates or help-mates. The “soul-mates” are muse figures who inspire creativity, provoke ideas for inventions, prod or catalyze discoveries; the “help-mates” are more down to earth and offer practical, technical, and real-world assistance. Some wives serve both functions. A good example of a soul-mate or passive muse figure is Handel’s wife or DeTocqueville’s English wife. Lady Hamilton, wife of Sir William Hamilton, Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh, serves as a good example of a wife who made active and practical contributions as a help-

mate. Smiles describes the relationship: “He was by nature unmethodical and disorderly, and she supplied him with method and orderliness. His temperament was studious but indolent, while she was active and energetic. She abounded in the qualities which he most lacked. He had the genius, to which her vigorous nature gave the force and impulse” (333). Some of the more interesting pairs include wives of literary figures who serve as both muse and practical guide. Thus, Thomas Hood’s wife was not only a consoler, but also a helper who read and corrected his writings. Lady Napier both encouraged the writings of Sir William Napier and displayed “art and industry” in helping him to complete them. William Blake’s wife—“dark-eyed Kate”—both believed her husband to be the first genius on earth and worked off the impressions of his plates, coloring them beautifully with her own hand (338).

This re-examination of Smiles’ two influential books, *Self-Help* and *Character*, then, might help to correct the extreme rhetorical charge by Nina Auerbach that Smiles consistently elevates women to the ethereal realm of transcendence in order to exclude them—either conveniently or defensively—from the process of invention and production in industrializing Victorian Britain. Through an examination of selected case studies or capsule biographies in his books, we can see that although women often fulfill the traditional role of the Muse, they are not merely seen as angelic catalysts, but as co-partners realistically involved in practical production and discovery. We must grant the limitation that Smiles presents *no* truly independent women inventors and fears the empowerment of women outside the home; nonetheless, he does recognize the full significance of men and women working together in creative, inspiring, and interdependent relationships. Smiles’ view of work and workers as well as the issue of the nature and function of women’s relationship to the Victorian working scene are topics that merit further study.

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## Treasure Island as a Late-Victorian Adults' Novel

David H. Jackson

Two years after the publication of his extremely popular *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), H. Rider Haggard launched a moral attack on French naturalism: "Lewd, and bold, and bare...the heroines of realism dance, with Bacchanalian revelings, across the astonished stage of literature" (177). Haggard's essay, "About Fiction" (1887), typifies the conservative ethos of the revival of romantic fiction led by him and Robert Louis Stevenson. Stevenson, the focus of my essay, is the subtler moralist and more influential figure, but Haggard offers us a direct route to the ideology of what we will call the romance revival.<sup>1</sup>

Haggard discerns three strains of fiction in the 1880's: American naturalism, French naturalism, and English realism. Each, he writes, is at a dead end: American naturalism is a "laboured nothingness," French naturalism "an obscene photograph taken from the life," and English realism "namby pamby nonsense" (177). Like all members of the romance revival, Haggard wants literature to have a morally salutary influence on society. The three varieties of realism he attacks, however, "lower and vitiate the public taste" (173). The age, he says, is low enough without having literary realism drag it any farther down and he therefore calls for a new fiction, one that reaffirms such traditional values as valor, duty, and manliness.

Haggard's argument is not only moral but also aesthetic. The romantic fiction he advocates would, he claims, have a good influence on society and it would make for better works of literary art: "This age is not a romantic age....neither our good nor our evil doing is of an heroic nature, and it is things heroic and their kin and not petty things that best lend themselves to the purposes of the novelist, for by their aid he produces his best effects" (179). The notion that romantic adventure is the ideal subject for fiction runs through arguments in behalf of the romance revival.<sup>2</sup>

Because the romance revival was a conservative literary response to the ideological crisis of late-Victorian England, the reception of *Treasure Island* must be understood in relation to the horizon of literary and moral expectations shared by Haggard, Stevenson, and their many middle-class readers. The romance movement distrusted scientism and deliberately idealized life. We can contrast it to the various realistic movements (in America, France, and England) which welcomed nineteenth-century advances in social and natural science and aimed to tell the unvarnished truth about the human condition. The leaders of this progressive movement included Emile Zola,

William Dean Howells, and George Gissing.

Of the two movements, it was the conservative that seized the imagination of readers in 1883. The British reading public welcomed the cultural nostalgia for traditional values that they saw embodied in *Treasure Island* (1883), *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), and *Kidnapped* (1886). They also welcomed something which has become an interpretive and evaluative problem for current critics, the fact that these and virtually all leading texts of the romance revival were "boys books" of adventure.<sup>3</sup> Although recent critics of the movement like Robert Kiely and Edwin Eigner have not known how to discuss this central feature of the romance revival, the solution is offered by a reception-based approach to the movement.<sup>4</sup> A reception-based approach reveals the romance revival's ideological motivation for appropriating the conventions of children's literature.

Like the other 1880's romance writers, Stevenson sought and attracted a dual audience of boys and adults. His strategic advantage in appealing to adults through a beautifully-crafted "boys' book" was that the reader's attention could be deflected from such "adult" concerns as social values and class relations. Stevenson's theory of romantic fiction for boy-adults envisions the romance as a value-free field for harmless imaginative play. However, his practice reveals an ideological agenda as conservative as, and more effective than, that of Haggard, Hall Caine, and others who explicitly stated the values and goals of the romance revival.

To uncover Stevenson's conservative ideology, we must resist *Treasure Island's* narrative seductiveness. Despite Stevenson's claims that his early romances are amoral and ahistorical, *Treasure Island* is a simplified account of eighteenth-century hierarchical society which Stevenson combines with the reader's personal nostalgia for his or her own childhood. This clever melding of two different nostalgias offers the reader imaginative escape from late-Victorian anxiety at the same time that it celebrates a reactionary and hierarchical social order.

Stevenson's theory of fiction is laid out in a series of essays of the 1880's, most importantly "A Gossip on Romance" (1882) and "A Humble Remonstrance" (1884). Stevenson's program sets out to do no more than depict "the problems of the body and of the practical intelligence, in clean, open-air adventure" (Stevenson 12: 200). Its desired effect on the adult reader is to have him or her "consciously play at being the [child] hero" (12: 200). "Fiction is to the grown man what play is to the

1. There are a number of historical studies of the movement and its conflict with realism. See especially Graham, 62-69; Stone, 50-55; and Lionel Stevenson, 407-410. Volume 4 of René Wellek's *History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950* is unhelpful on romance but very useful on naturalism and realism (14-20, 213-237). A valuable collection of 1880's novel criticism was edited by John Charles Olmsted in 1979.

2. George Saintsbury's essay, "The Present State of the Novel" (1887), presents a typical argument. "Unfortunately [he writes], most of our best proved writers continue to write the novel and not the romance....Thus we do not...get the best things" (417). What makes romances the "best things" is that, unlike novels of manners, their subject matter is universal and unchanging: "But the incidents, and the broad

and poetic features of character on which romance relies, are not matters which change at all" (415).

3. "Serious" critics of the 1880's were also troubled by the "boys' book" premise, as Andrew Lang testifies: "The flutter in the dovecots of culture caused by three or four boys' books is amazing. Culture is saddened at discovering that not only boys and illiterate people, but even critics not wholly illiterate, can be moved by a tale of adventure" (689).

4. Kiely, ignoring evidence that Stevenson saw childhood as the first step in a process of maturation, accuses the author of clinging to a "golden" illusion of childhood (54-55). Eigner, on the other hand, misreads Stevenson's boy-heroes as adults paralyzed by indecision (66).



child" (12: 201), he writes, with no apology for what was even then criticized by realists as a frivolous proposal.

Stevenson describes his concept of "child's play" in an essay of that name (1878), in which child's play is seen as a crude and literal-minded imitation of adult behavior. Children act not out of conscious admiration of what they imitate, but from a lack of imagination. In Stevenson's view, they inhabit a world of "dim sensation" (2: 177); they are surrounded by an adult world which they perceive as "dread irrationality" (2: 181). Most importantly, children are incapable of higher moral thought; they do not understand the abstract reasons for good conduct and need corporal punishment to learn right behavior: "There is nothing in their own tastes and purposes to teach them what we mean by abstract truthfulness" (2: 182). As we will see, this analysis of child behavior is put to work in Stevenson's depiction of the pirates in *Treasure Island* as bad boys.

Stevenson is able to conjure with childhood by virtue of his ability to recreate such seductive aspects of juvenile experience as daydream. His technique for getting adults to play at being children is to evoke memories of childhood and to induce the state of childhood daydreaming. For Stevenson, romantic narrative should "satisfy the nameless longings of the reader, and...obey the ideal laws of the day-dream" (12: 192). At its best, romance can have a seductive pull on the reader's mind. If the seduction succeeds, the reader escapes the dreary world view of the time, a world view reflected in naturalist novels which emphasize, in Stevenson's words, the "mud and iron, cheap desires and cheap fears, that which we are ashamed to remember and that which we are careless whether we forget" (12: 261).

Stevenson's ideological appropriation of childhood and children's literature conventions achieves its height in *Treasure Island*. The rigid social hierarchy which dominates the world of *Treasure Island* can be approached first in relation to setting and then in two less obvious but quite rewarding ways. First, the romance's<sup>5</sup> social philosophy is revealed in Stevenson's ideological use of "childhood." Second, certain aspects of the romance's rhetoric reinforce the scheme of class relations. In particular, Stevenson plays rhetorically with different class pronunciations of the key ideological code word of the novel, "duty."

Let us begin by considering *Treasure Island*'s idealized eighteenth-century setting. The romances's two chief settings, the English countryside and a sea voyage, if anything emphasize the hierarchical and class-biased structure of eighteenth-century social life. The rural setting is centered in the Hall, with its Celtic-named retainers like Tom Redruth, which is headed by Squire Trelawney. The Hall functions as the Olympus of the romance: "the white line of the Hall buildings looked on either hand on great old gardens" (5: 56). The sea setting is centered in the ship, the *Hispaniola*, which is headed by Captain Smollett.

In both settings the premium virtue is duty—unquestioning loyalty to the hierarchy which the authority figure heads. As we will see, Stevenson casts authority figures as "adults," and

those who are lower-class or have rebelled against authority as "children." The chief authority figure in the romance, Squire Trelawney, is deferred to as owner (of the *Hispaniola*) even by the imperious Smollett. Squire Trelawney may be a comic figure, but his buffoonery has no subversive force since the world of the romance has such firm and conservative social values.

*Treasure Island*'s hierarchical class structure is accompanied by a pronounced class bias. The adult Jim's narration occasionally betrays a telling snobbism. Early in the romance, for example, Jim unfavorably compares the rural people who live near the Admiral Benbow with the upper-class Dr. Livesey: "I remember observing the contrast the neat, bright doctor, with his powder as white as snow, and his bright, black eyes, made with the coltish country folk..." (5: 17). Class consciousness also affects characterization: Long John Silver's extraordinary personal qualities are overlooked by Ben Gunn when he explains to Jim how Silver gained ascendancy over the vicious pirate captain, Flint: "Flint...was afraid of none, not he; on'y Silver—Silver was that *genteel*" (5: 166; emphasis mine). Surprisingly, Silver's resourcefulness, ferocity, and courage are not as potent in the world of the romance as his mock gentility.

Seen from a class-biased viewpoint, Long John Silver is typical of the characters of *Treasure Island*. Jim-the-narrator describes all of the lower-class characters of the novel as childish; he likens the dutiful servants from the Hall and the loyal sailors to "good children." Only the Squire, the Captain, and the Doctor (who is also a magistrate) are presented as adults: stern adults to the novel's "bad children," loving adults to the novel's "good children."

Stevenson's ideological use of childhood and adulthood can be analyzed with reference to Philippe Aries' landmark study, *Centuries of Childhood* (1962). As Aries explains, throughout much of history childhood has functioned as a social rather than biological category, and subservient people have been treated and addressed as children (26). Stevenson, by equating rebellious lower-class characters with bad children, implicitly affirms a hierarchical view of society that his conservative reading audience would have found comforting.

The pirates, despite being chronological adults, fall decisively into the category of "bad children." The Squire's retainers and the loyal members of the ship's crew are "good children." However, the categories are not always fixed; a character's behavior may cause him temporarily to change classification. When Dr. Livesey abandons his post at the stockade, for example, he becomes a "bad child" and is reprimanded by the unwaveringly adult Captain Smollett.

Dr. Livesey most obviously plays the role of stern and good adult when, in chapter thirty, he visits the pirates at the stockade to treat their malaria. The doctor employs the same calm, offhand manner that he used at the beginning of the narrative in humiliating Billy Bones, the pirate who had commandeered the Admiral Benbow Inn. The pirates generally become docile when Livesey puts on a paternal, professional manner. They take Livesey's medicine "with really laughable humility, more like *charity school-children* than blood-guilty mutineers and pirates" (5: 275; emphasis mine).

Perhaps the best example of an obedient lower-class character

5. True to Stevenson's practice in his criticism, I will refer to his works of long prose fiction as "romances" rather than "novels."



who functions as a "good boy" is Abraham Gray, the vacillating mutineer Smollett talks into joining the lawful side when they abandon the *Hispaniola*. "Gray...I am leaving this ship, and I order you to follow your captain...I have my watch here in my hand; I give you thirty seconds to join me in" (5: 151). The tone is paternal and the response groveling: "out burst Abraham Gray with a knife-cut on the side of the cheek, and came running to the captain, like a dog to the whistle" (5: 151). A second "good boy" is red-faced Tom, "one of the honest hands" (5: 128). Silver tries to convert Tom to the mutineers' side. But when Tom resists, his virtue is solely a function of his firm sense of duty. "If I die like a dog, I'll die in my dooty," Tom declares, and then is brutally murdered by Silver (5: 129).

The worst of the "bad children" are the unrepentant pirates. Throughout the story they behave irresponsibly, squandering their resources and acting only on impulse. Jim comments in chapter thirty-one on their prodigality with food: "I never in my life saw men so careless of the morrow...Even Silver...had not a word of blame for their recklessness" (5: 283). The pirates show the same imprudence in picking their campsite: "The doctor staked his wig that, camped where they were in the marsh, and unprovided with remedies, the half of them would be on their backs before a week" (5: 173).

Silver, as the novel's "bad boy" *par excellence*, invites analysis in terms of "Child's Play." Silver is incapable of truthfulness—either of executing or of valuing it—and he succeeds only through his clever imitation of "adult" behavior and values. The key to his power is language: he has mastered some of the speech patterns and, more importantly, the ideological code words of the Squire and his lieutenants. This gives him authority in both the "adult" and "child" societies of *Treasure Island*. As one of the mutineers says to Jim Hawkins in explaining Silver's appeal to the buccaneers: "[Silver's] no common man...He had good schooling in his young days, and can speak like a book when so minded" (5: 93).

The word with which Silver most frequently and effectively conjures is the name of the ultimate value in the adult world of *Treasure Island*—duty. Duty cements the social structure of the romance, giving it the ideological rigidity which was so appealing to Stevenson's audience. Smollett, the perfect servant of the Squire and of the feudal hierarchy the Squire heads, introduces himself to his ship's owner by saying simply, "You'll find I do my duty" (5: 87). When Tom Redruth, the Squire's gamekeeper, is fatally wounded by one of the pirates, Smollett intones, "All's well with him; no fear for a hand that's been shot down in his duty to captain and owner. It mayn't be good divinity, but it's a fact" (5: 162). "Owner" here of course refers to the owner of the ship, but the feudal overtones are unmistakable. They are made even more audible by Redruth's dying words. When Trelawney asks Redruth to forgive him for taking him to the tropics to die, Redruth responds, "Would that be respectful like, from me to you, squire? Howsoever, so be it, amen!" (5: 161).

As a "good child," Redruth instinctively understands the meaning of duty, even though he never uses the word and gives no evidence of ever consciously thinking about it. Silver, on the other hand, uses the word constantly, or at least tries

to. In his lower-class mouth, however, the word comes out as "dooty." The orthographic difference reflects the class distinction that in part prevents Silver from being what his gifts qualify him for—a recognized leader. Silver daydreams that he will one day become a member of Parliament, but in fact he is never more than the leader of a mutiny. And even as a pirate captain, he is unrecognized and denied his title by Smollett and the other true authority figures.

Like Smollett, to whom he is deliberately contrasted, Silver introduces himself with the ideological code word in his mouth: "dooty is dooty," he says (5: 79). When the pirates try to depose Silver, their first recourse is to steal his magic word. They will follow the "rules" to dethrone a pirate chief, "as in dooty bound" (5: 265). When, at the end of the narrative, all of Silver's plans have failed, he returns obsequiously to the ruling camp, announcing to Smollett, "Come back to do my dooty, sir" (5: 309).

The adult characters mock Silver's invocation of an ideal of which he is ignorant. When Livesey, out of loyalty to his profession, comes into the pirate camp to treat the malarial buccaneers, he drily remarks, "duty first and pleasure afterward, as you might have said yourself, Silver" (5: 273). Livesey's irony is well-placed, as we see when at the novel's end Silver remonstrates with Livesey for giving medical treatment to his enemies, the pirates. Silver cannot grasp loyalty to anything larger than self-interest. Livesey, whose purpose is only to keep the mutineers alive so that they may be properly hanged by the authorities back home, despairs of enlarging Silver's childish point of view.

Livesey's condescension to Silver, who is the far more appealing and memorable character, would have been reassuring to Stevenson's first readers. This conservative, middle-class audience was prepared to be amused by Silver's mutiny, but they did not care to see him rise to the full height of his potency. Depicting him as a child, as childhood is conceived in "Child's Play," enables Stevenson to give his readers a lovable lower-class rogue who can never endanger the prevailing social order.

There is ample testimony that *Treasure Island* succeeded in captivating adult readers. Various documents, from personal letters to book reviews, show that the romance fulfilled the program Stevenson set out in "A Humble Remonstrance" and "A Gossip on Romance." Many readers of 1883 empathized with the boy-hero and were seductively drawn into the romance's simple view of conservative social hierarchy.

A surprising admirer of Stevenson's romantic art is the premier Anglo-American realist of the period, Henry James. In a noteworthy essay on Stevenson (1888), James analyzes the appeal of *Treasure Island* to the dual audience of men and boys: *Treasure Island*, he writes, "fascinate[s] the mind weary of experience" by giving readers the perspective of "the young reader himself and his state of mind: we seem to read it over his shoulder, with an arm around his neck" (Smith 154). James finds an apt way of describing Stevenson's appropriation of the conventions of children's adventure: "In a word, he is an artist accomplished even to sophistication, whose constant theme is the unsophisticated" (Smith 132).

We would not expect James-the-critic to stray farther from formalism than the nearer shores of psychology. However,



several of his remarks on Stevenson's relation and appeal to his time are revealing. James characterizes the world of 1888 as a time when traditional values and systems of explanation were being questioned. He then presents Stevenson's theory of romance in relation to the times: "He [Stevenson] would say we ought to make believe that the extraordinary is the best part of life, even if it were not, and to do so because the finest feelings—suspense, daring, decision, passion, curiosity, gallantry, eloquence, friendship—were involved in it, and it is of infinite importance that these precious things should not perish" (Smith 152). Himself no radical or even progressive (his cool review of *Nana* makes an interesting contrast with this and other warm writings on Stevenson), James here shows his sympathy with the conservative ideology of *Treasure Island*.

James's article (he calls it a "literary portrait") appeared five years after the publication of *Treasure Island*, but we can see in reviews from 1883 and 1884 the same receptivity to Stevenson's melding of the adult and child audience. An unsigned review in the *Academy*, for example, notes that *Treasure Island* "fascinate[s] the old boy as well as the young," adding that the adult reader "can scarcely fail to share in the anticipations of Jim Hawkins" if he is "a lover of perilous adventures and thrilling situation" (Maixner 129). Writing in the *Saturday Review*, W. E. Henley attests even more strongly to Stevenson's success in addressing his dual audience: "Primarily it is a book for boys, with a boy hero and a string of wonderful adventures. But it is a book for boys that will be delightful for all grown men who have the sentiment of treasure-hunting and are touched with the true spirit of the Spanish Main" (Maixner 132).

A number of reviewers go even farther, saying that the romance is more likely to appeal to adult than boy readers. Boys, Arthur John Butler speculates in the *Athenaeum*, will be put off by the violation of poetic justice when Silver escapes at the end (Maixner 130). The anonymous reviewer for the *Pall Mall Gazette* puts the question even more directly: "will 'Treasure Island' be as popular with boys as it is sure to be with men who retain something of the boy?" (Maixner 138). (The evidence suggests that it was not.<sup>6</sup>) This reviewer also testifies to the powerful impact the romance had on him as a reader: "A book for boys which can keep hardened and elderly reviewers in a state of pleasing excitement and attention is evidently no common Christmas book" (Maixner 138).<sup>7</sup>

This review ends with a blunt suggestion that Stevenson now turn his hand to "a novel for men and women" (Maixner 139). It was to be five years before Stevenson published *The Master of Ballantrae* (1888), his first full-length romance exclusively

for and about adults. He would write two more excellent "boys' books" before then, *Kidnapped* (1886) and *The Black Arrow* (1888). Stevenson's own view of the world had to change before he could release the Charming Rogue, his favorite character type, from the nursery. Long John Silver and Alan Breck Stewart can, as charismatic bad boys, be safely suppressed by the dullest and least potent authority figures. Given that all of the romances for children center in a quest for conventional, middle-class adult identity, it is important to restrain lovably evil figures.<sup>8</sup>

In the romances for adults, however, Stevenson is willing to let his charismatic villains, from James Durie (*The Master of Ballantrae*) to William John Attwater (*The Ebb-Tide: A Trio & Quartette*), honestly challenge the guardians of bourgeois social order. In every case the result (adumbrated by the 1885 short novel, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) is the destruction of conventional authority and, more importantly, the destruction of the bourgeois ideal of a respectable public self. Generally, the representative bourgeois figure, the equivalent to Dr. Livesey and Mr. Rankeillor (*Kidnapped*), is shown to be unloved, neurotic, and ineffectual (e.g., Henry Durie in *The Master of Ballantrae*).

Stevenson died a confirmed critic of the conventional social order he had affirmed in the early romances of children. (His last two completed romances, *The Beach of Falesa* and *The Ebb-Tide: A Trio & Quartette*, are psychological and moral attacks on empire.) He was, as David Thorburn and others have pointed out, the true and central forerunner of the early Conrad.<sup>9</sup> This is the great untold story in Stevenson criticism and also in the history of late-Victorian/early-modern literature. My essay has related another untold story, one, paradoxically, about works (*Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*) among the best-known in our language.

I have shown that *Treasure Island* can be taken neither at face value nor simply as Stevenson asks in his theory of romance. *Treasure Island's* remarkable reception can be understood only by looking beyond the work's fine surface (admired by Vladimir Nabokov, Jorge Luis Borges, and Italo Calvino in addition to Henry James). Underlying the narrative sheen is a reactionary ideological agenda perfectly in keeping with the crude pronouncements of Haggard, Hall Caine, and Stevenson's other colleagues in the romance revival. Their part was baldly to state what the movement was about. Stevenson's part was to embody the romance agenda, but to embody it so artfully that many critics and literary historians have missed it altogether.<sup>10</sup>

6. Robert Leighton, who later edited *Young Folks* (the magazine in which *Treasure Island* appeared), testified that the work "as a serial [was] a comparative failure." Not only did it fail to raise circulation, but the magazine received a number of letters complaining about *Treasure Island* (Swearingen 66).

7. James makes a similar point about *Kidnapped* when he writes, "There would have been a kind of perverse humility in his keeping up the fiction that a production so literary as *Kidnapped* is addressed to immature minds" (Smith 157).

8. My dissertation, "Robert Louis Stevenson and the Romance of Boyhood" (Columbia U, 1981), develops at length the quest for adult identity which unifies Stevenson's romances for children.

9. In a typical passage, Thorburn points out that "the critics of our time have tended to ignore or at best minimize what Conrad's reviewers

understood to be crucial: that the author of *Lord Jim* had a great deal in common with Robert Louis Stevenson" (5). Thorburn is, I believe, the only published critic to draw explicit connections between the later, little-known Stevenson and the Conrad of *Heart of Darkness*: "the escapist elements in Stevenson's work are far from dominant in his later books, several of which anticipate with distinction Conrad's treatment of similar characters and themes" (25). In a footnote to this passage, Thorburn singles out *The Ebb-Tide*, "a dark fable of human weakness... that has not received its due even from Stevenson's sympathetic critics" (25).

10. A book-length manuscript on Stevenson I am currently preparing places his entire career as a romance writer in historical context by focusing, as the present essay has done, on the original reception of his work.



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## Darling Mothers, Devilish Queens: The Divided Woman in Victorian Fantasy

Susan A. Walsh

In 1863, when Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* appeared in volume form, *The Saturday Review* quickly put its finger on an apparent contradiction in the book. "The *Water-Babies*," said the anonymous reviewer, "[was] a child's story really for grown-up people, but nominally for children" (666). By cutting his "shrewd observation" with a vast quantity of "picturesque fancy," Kingsley created a parable of human development whose meaning only adults could fully unpack. Deliberately aimed at a dual audience, *The Water-Babies* helped inaugurate a trend in mid- to late-Victorian publishing which blurred the distinction between mature and juvenile fiction. Once this line was dissolved, the child's idyll, cautionary tale, or nonsense book became open to the discordant strains of adult sensuality, and refracted through its fantastic prism a whole spectrum of Victorian attitudes toward women and sexual relationships.

With Kingsley's *Water-Babies* of course must be joined not only Carroll's books, but also John Ruskin's *Ethics of the Dust*. Issued in early 1866, Ruskin's collection of child dialogues on crystallography was in fact a program piece against female serpentry and self-interest. Even before Kingsley, Carroll, and Ruskin, however, George MacDonald had tested the waters of adult fantasy with *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women*, dated 1858, and later with *Adela Cathcart* (1864) and *Lilith* (1895). MacDonald's first two efforts were commercial failures, suggesting perhaps that while Victorian readers at this point were not quite comfortable with dipping into fantasy works earmarked for adults, they were content enough to dip into the nursery bookshelves when such offerings were ad-

ressed to children. Indeed, much to MacDonald's dismay, the publishers of *Phantastes* purposefully neglected in later editions to specify that the novel was for adults, hoping thereby to tap into a broader market.

Kingsley, Carroll, Ruskin, and MacDonald, as they worked their chosen veins, set up a tension between the archetypal Queen figure, usually of mythic stature, and the journeying youth, whose successful maturation depends upon how well he or she could assimilate the majestic spirit's lessons. By "Queen" I do not mean those ancient femme fatales so ably documented by Nina Auerbach—women such as H. Rider Haggard's Ayesha or MacDonald's Lilith—women whose hunger is gnawingly sexual and whose siren songs tell of dark consumption. Rather, I am speaking of Queens who rule elemental forces in distinctly non-personal ways, Queens whose objects of desire are non-sexual and whose conduct represents a moral system (or anti-system). These Earth-Mothers of Victorian fantasy, Titanias in the root sense, are a direct outgrowth of Romantic longings for the in-dwelling spirit of nature in its succoring, maternal capacity. As such they are also akin to the works of German Romanticists such as Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Goethe's *Faust*, and Tieck's *Der Runenberg* (see Wolff 42-50). In Victorian England, however, when the bosom of the earth takes on fleshly proportions, Wordsworth's nurse, guide, and guardian "of all [our] moral being" becomes a repository of conflicting nineteenth-century feelings about adult female sexuality. In the works of Carroll and Ruskin, this takes the form of an intense fascination with the processes by which young girls transform into true daughters of Eve.



"Come, read me my riddle, each good little man; / if you cannot read it, no grown-up folk can." Thus Kingsley begins his evolutionary tale for the "British boy," anticipating a later confession to F. D. Maurice that *The Water-Babies* was an effort "to make children and grown folks understand that there is a quite miraculous and divine element underlying all physical nature" (Frances Kingsley 2: 137-38). Kingsley's natural theology assumes that what is "miraculous and divine" in the physical universe corresponds in some way with the canons of human behavior. If we accept his premise—and even if we don't—it rapidly becomes apparent that the mythic women directing the underwater world of *The Water-Babies* are rather like their drawing-room counterparts. Freudians, of course, have had a field day exploring the implications of the Fall which initiates the novel's action. (Tom, a blackened chimney sweep, accidentally tumbles down the fireplace flue belonging to little Ellie, a lily-skinned upperclass girl.) But the two sister Queens who preside over Tom and Ellie's sea changes have great social as well as psychological resonance.

The most powerful, Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby, is all softness and invitation, like those celebrated Victorian mothers who made sweeping descents into the nursery, fondled and doted, then disappeared until the next infrequent visit. Arriving regularly on Sundays, Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby presides over a sacrament of love which transforms rough-and-tumble water infants into thumb-sucking babies. Literally overrun by thousands of purring, clinging babies, she suffers the little children to come to her in a somewhat cloying version of the New Testament invitation. Kingsley works upon the cultural myths of Old Maid and Angel by polarizing them even further, for while Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby gives merry, gentle instruction she does not herself oversee the translation of theory into practice. That unpleasant duty belongs to Mrs. Bedonebyasyouid, the retributive arm of the law. Despite her compassion, this withered fairy spends her mornings extracting the teeth of irresponsible physicians and sticking pins into careless nurserymaids. While the water-babies adore her fertile sister as "the most nice, smooth, pussy, cuddly, delicious creature who ever nursed a baby" (121), Mrs. Bedonebyasyouid appears "gnarly" and "scaly," traveling her rounds like a wound-up mechanism. As a particularly hoary version of the barren female she wins even Tom's pity. "People cannot always choose their own profession," Kingsley's narrator explains (120).

Nor, one might add, can they control the iconography that prescribes their roles. For in the 1863 frontispiece Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby poses with hair floating into an aureole, while upraised arm and finger point to the heavens in good mosaic style. Surrounding her sit waterbabies whose sensual little faces indicate they have made gluttons of themselves on her beauty and soft love. As a nurturing spirit she both exercises and is trapped by her generative power. Mother Carey, an even more enigmatic spirit, combines the ancient austerity of Mrs. Bedonebyasyouid with the patient softness of Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby, but she, too, pays a price for fertility. In the farthest reaches of the arctic circle she spins out millions of sea creatures from her marble throne in an amazingly fecund yet utterly immobile way. Though she ap-

pears elsewhere in *The Water-Babies* as a perfectly portable fairy, Tom at first mistakes her for an iceberg in the midst of Peasepool, for the image of female reproduction presented through her suggests a kind of spontaneous, ceaseless birth that is also removed and static. Moreover, like the Victorian angel she personifies, Mother Carey does not simply "make things"; rather, she "[makes] things make themselves" (165), thus fulfilling the highest moral duty of wife and mother.

It is not difficult to see in these dual personifications the division perceived by countless Romantic and Victorian writers within the female figure itself, as gentle monitress on the one hand, and sleepless moral enforcer on the other. If the split made between youthful mother and nasty-tempered governess is not made literally, it occurs figuratively in those mothers perceived by the child as two distinct and separable personalities. This Jekyll and Mrs. Hyde disjunction helps explain the memories Augustus Hare carried into adulthood of his "darling" mother, a woman he loved "passionately" but whose cruel treatment of her adopted son has become legendary in the annals of Victorian autobiography. It also helps account for the perverse sense of fitness we experience when young Mrs. Copperfield's native kindness is matched and thwarted by Miss Murdstone's cold intractability, and enables us to predict long before the fact that Jane Eyre's filial bond with Miss Temple at Lowood school, after the hateful resentment of Mrs. Reed, must by convention be shortlived.

The colossal female figures of *The Water-Babies*—the poor Irish woman, Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby, Mrs. Bedonebyasyouid, Mother Carey—are revealed finally to Tom and Ellie as manifestations of a single primeval spirit whose name they are not yet ready to read in the blazing Earth-Mother's eyes. And neither, given the nineteenth-century stereotypes operative in *The Water-Babies*, is Kingsley ready to permit the unveiling of a fully integrated female power, for her titanic capacity for making and unmaking, transforming and destroying, is carefully limited by the division of labor implicit in the novel. The principal purpose of this "Fairy Tale for a Land Baby," after all, is the education of English boys through good works, Ellie's function being merely to soften Tom's rough moral edges so that the "plucky," "British bulldog" lad may prove himself in the arena of male action. Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby and Mrs. Bedonebyasyouid will not appear to the world with one face "till the coming of the Cocqirgues," in short, the Apocalypse (200).

Near apocalyptic chaos already reigns in Lewis Carroll's Wonderland books, showing what happens when complementary Queens are so dissimilar that no hope of unification exists—when contrary sets of characteristics have become so opposed that reconciliation is no longer a question. It is bad enough, in the *Adventures*, that the Queen of Hearts wishes to chop off Alice's head, the very organ preserving her from the Queen's stupendous irrationality. (In one of her more bizarre mutations Alice almost does lose her head as it literally grows away from her body, illustrating how far removed her intellect is from what her limbs are doing.) It is equally disturbing that the Duchess's method of child-rearing ("Speak roughly to your little boy / And beat him when he sneezes") epitomizes the worst excesses of nursery discipline. But it is far worse for



Alice, though certainly very amusing for us, that the only two *Looking-Glass* models of female behavior open to her are weird metamorphoses of Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid and Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby, namely, the Red and White Queens.

Flightly, ineffectual, and always muddle-headed, the White Queen can read words of one letter; well-meaning, she nevertheless "can't help saying foolish things as a general rule" (226). As soft and amiable angel she requires little more in the way of happiness than kind words and having her hair wrapped in curling papers. By contrast the Red Queen carps, gloats and sulks, and is probably responsible for the phantasmagoric transformation of Alice's coronation party into a terrifying reversal of Darwinian evolution, where legs of mutton and plum puddings dine on human beings. By the end of both *Wonderland* books a beleaguered little Alice has had enough and summarily shatters the dream worlds by withdrawing belief in the system of relationships they espouse—"You're nothing but a pack of cards!"; "I can't stand this any longer!" Even though she recognizes the artificial quality of this maddening disorder, that these games—"You're nothing but a pack of cards!"—are constructs of culture and not of nature, Alice cannot exert control from the outside because the "inside" dictates the terms of what she must control. As a world-spinner she may exercise the creator's prerogative to destroy her fictions but not, ultimately, to invest them with forms other than those provided by nineteenth-century convention. Within these confines, however, she proves her ability to reject such stifling models as the Red and White Queens. But lest we applaud her resurgent power too quickly, it may well be the case, as Tweedledee warns her, that Alice is after all a figment of the Red King's dream.

The girl children of Ruskin's *Ethics of the Dust* are rather transparent creatures of their author's brain. Based upon real-life girls at Winnington Hall, a progressive girls' school Ruskin was fond of visiting, the *Ethics* "birdies" are enthusiastic and tractable pupils. Their avuncular Old Lecturer "of incalculable age" leads them through a series of Socratic dialogues and combines the White Knight's quizzing of Alice with Ruskin's own idiosyncratic moral teaching. The purpose of the *Ethics* was not only to beguile Victorian girls into accepting the notions of right conduct and womanly duty elaborated upon in *Sesame and Lilies*, but also to state in more elementary and temperate language "the principal truths [he] had to teach" about economic and social reform. What simultaneously emerges, however, is an allegory polarizing woman into dual categories of saint/demon, nurturer/devourer or, in Ruskin's own lexicon, weaver/moth, bird/serpent.

Though twin mythic deities—the Egyptian Neith and the Catholic St. Barbara—show up in the dialogues as positive and negative role models, Ruskin's deepest fears for his girl children are couched in allegory. In the opening sequence of "The Valley of Diamonds," young Isabel reports that during the afternoon's make-believe session she and Florrie had become lost in Sindbad's glittering valley, having sneaked aboard its guardian eagle. As the Old Lecturer appropriates their tale, however, the story from the *Arabian Nights* quickly takes a Dantean turn. There is a real Valley of Diamonds quite different from Sindbad's, the Lecturer informs his skeptical audience;

traversed by a river of thick, red blood, it is strewn with precious gems which must be swept off the paths in blinding heaps. Travellers approach the entrance by a "great broad way," obviously the archetypal sinners' way, and the very rocks are strangled by strange, gourd-bearing vines.

The gourds, if you cut them, are red, with black seeds, like water-melons, and look ever so nice; and the people of the place make a red pottage of them: but you must take care not to eat any of it if you ever want to leave the valley....Then the wild vines have clusters of the colour of amber; and the people of the country say they are the grape of Eschol; and sweeter than honey; but indeed, if anybody else tastes them, they are like gall. (18: 213)

This is an inverted paradise in the best Bunyan tradition, a Blakean inversion of the ideal vineyard Ruskin had described at the close of "Of Queen's Gardens." Instead of "tender grapes" protected by angel keepers, here are ghastly, blood-red gourds made into a deadly banquet, hearkening back not only to Eve's forbidden fruit but also to the pomegranate that sentenced Persephone to her wintry entombment. The *Ethics* children—"young daughters of Eve" as Ruskin elsewhere calls them—may either fulfill their housewifely function as givers of wholesome bread, or join in the grotesque repast of sensuous but bitter gourds.

The rich red pottage, too, recalls nothing so much as the orchard fruits pressed upon Laura and Lizzie in "Goblin Market," for Ruskin knew as well as Christina Rossetti did that the price of not securing an angel in the house was to suffer goblins in the market, with all the adult sexuality and animalistic desire that implies. Indeed, in this allegory of sexual development the thick red river that "isn't all water" is a figure for the menstrual flow held so abhorrent by Victorian culture, suggesting that any sexual maturation is a perverse violation of femaleness, perceived essentially as a non-sensual, static condition. By presenting thoroughly domesticated children in *The Ethics of the Dust*, Ruskin hoped to create a portrait of static girlhood which controverted the fact that in real life the Winnington girls were always transforming into something else. What that metamorphosis might be is clearly indicated as the allegory progresses.

Great forests of mulberry trees blanket the hills, each tree filled with silkworms who spin and munch the leaves "so loud that it is like mills at work." The forest berries are "the blackest you ever saw," and stain the grass and river a deep red that can never be cleansed:

the trees are twisted, as if in pain, like old olive branches; and their leaves are dark. And it is in these forests that the serpents are.... They have fine crimson crests, and they are wreathed about the wild branches, one in every tree, nearly; and they are singing serpents, for the serpents are, in this forest, what birds are in ours. (18: 213-14)

Just as the *Ethics* "birdies" may one day transform into insect weavers who eat and spin themselves to death, they may become crested serpents and end, finally, as earthly equivalents of Dante's suicides.<sup>1</sup> Though Ruskin wished to prevent such

1. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, it might be noted, Alice has difficulty defending herself against the accusation levelled by a high-fly-



confusions of identity in *The Ethics of the Dust*, he could not help imaginatively suggesting the serpentine "strength of the base element" in every little girl.

With George MacDonald comes a writer justly praised for his mythopoetic genius, though he was at first undervalued by contemporary reviewers. Remarkably, where Kingsley, Carroll, and Ruskin shrank from looking hard at the pubescent female, MacDonald stressed that women must not be expected to remain in a state of perpetual innocence—indeed, that girlhood should not be prolonged a moment longer than is naturally fit. As the heroine of "The Light Princess" discovers, after spending a lifetime literally and figuratively afloat, a girl must gain her gravity to be of use to others, even though its acquisition is apt to be painful and unpleasant. C. S. Lewis marvelled at MacDonald's ability to "shock us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives," as well as his habit of disturbing the "oldest certainties" (Introduction 10-11). One of the "uncertainties" held up for reexamination in *Phantastes* is the Earth-Mother archetype and, incidentally, the young woman's initiation into adulthood. MacDonald rethinks Victorian attitudes toward these types with a psychological integrity lacking in the more rational mythos of Lewis's *Perelandra* series. For while we are never in any doubt as to where Ransom is going or the redemptive apotheosis he will achieve, the "pathless" hero of MacDonald's work enters into fairy relationships that are sexually ambiguous and far less programmatic. For Anodos the "mother" in many of her mysterious incarnations is an object of mixed desire, offering both maternal comfort and sexual confirmation of her "son's" masculinity. (The novel begins when a beautiful woman pops out of his father's writing desk and, when Anodos moves to embrace her, cautions that "a man must not fall in love with his grandmother, you know" [18]).

The implications of the liaisons Anodos periodically enters into contradict what we would expect following a strictly Christian interpretation, or even a secular Victorian one. The action of *Phantastes* is far too involved to rehearse here, but one or two brief observations may give the flavor of the whole. First, Anodos through the course of his sojourn learns the lesson of self-immolation, but at the cost of great sexual frustration as he twice liberates and twice loses the white lady of his dreams. His erotic, lustful responses to her beauty break the charms that bind her, but instead of working to his romantic advantage they only ready her for physical union with Sir Percival, who possesses masculine good sense but a limited imagination. Likewise, when Anodos meets a lovely child "who seemed a woman" bearing a pure, crystal globe that he "must not touch," or, if so, then "very gently," his dark, shadow-self urges him to wrest it from her forcibly, and in their struggle the globe "vibrates," "heaves," and finally bursts, leaving the child-woman inconsolable (68-69). This pantomime of sexual violation caused by Anodos' base appetite is later revealed to have brought the maiden great good, for she may now travel the countryside like Browning's Pippa, liberating trapped souls with music of her own making. Sexual awakening at dishonorable hands is far preferable to a life where physical union is

impossible, as further illustrated by the inhabitants of a shining planet Anodos reads about in the fairy palace. On that distant world the fictions invented by prudish Victorian parents have come true: babies are not born but found in cabbage patches; "the men alone have arms; the women have only wings" (85). But, tragically, when young men and women suffer an insatiable longing for one another, the only consummation they can achieve is through self-willed death.

The two examples above, however, show a clash of contradictory impulses working within *Phantastes*. The rape of the globe girl does indeed catapult her out of self-gratification into a kind of troubadour ministry, but only by casting her in the role of female do-gooder, a stereotype handily suited for controlling the floodgates opened by sexual initiation. Such Florence Nightingales, as Mary Ellmann long ago observed, ideally "[rise] from the marriage bed dedicated to the happiness of others" (103). But whereas the song maiden seems to validate the sexual attitudes of MacDonald's day, her winged counterparts on the shining planet challenge Victorian insistence upon the sublimation or denial of adult female desire. As the tale's narrator awkwardly explains the processes of human reproduction to the planet's curious inhabitants, the more prudish females fold their wings in displeasure. We are not to approve of this reaction, however, for MacDonald directs our sympathies to a solitary figure who walks away with glowing eyes. Later discovered "dead beneath a withered tree"—fit emblem of what has been stunted within her—she had been "seized" and "devoured" by an "indescribable longing" (86). Perhaps, the narrator speculates, such seekers are reborn as human children; the irony of this reincarnation, of course, is that the Victorian world does not differ from their own. Even though in much of *Phantastes* MacDonald seems to subscribe to contemporary notions of womanhood, his fantasy works often subvert visions of passive chastity. For as the shining planet reveals, to thwart physical passion in either sex is to crush the human spirit in both, far too high a price to pay for turning women's bodies into temples and their thoughts towards rarified love.

As Auerbach reminds us in *Woman and the Demon*, "it is virtually impossible to distinguish 'official' from 'subversive' visions of [nineteenth-century] womanhood" (186), since the impulse to sublimate fuels the desire to chart new avenues of power, and the creation of new fictions of ascendancy only exacerbates the desire to suppress. Though these tensions are played out in works of both sexes, I believe that male authors of the first stamp such as Kingsley, Carroll, Ruskin, and MacDonald turn to fantasy for at least two reasons. First, though they would deny having written doctrinaire or didactic books, the fact remains that *The Water-Babies*, the Alice books, *The Ethics of the Dust*, *Phantastes*, *At the Back of the North Wind*, the Curdie books—all seek to socialize as well as entertain the child reader. The categories they provide for the ordering of experience are not motivationally innocent or ideologically neutral. Second, while the fairy tale warns against such forbidden pleasures as disobedience, willfulness, and gluttony, our delight in such fantasies depends upon the salacious quality of their "badness." This makes the genre powerfully attractive to

ing pigeon that she is a serpent. Since both snakes and humans eat eggs, the pigeon's question—"What does it matter...whether you're a little girl

or a serpent?"—is not an idle one, and a challenge to which Alice cannot make a satisfactory reply (44-45).



Victorian authors searching for ways to displace the more frightening aspects of female sexuality—aspects that could be hinted at in social treatises, or even permitted to erupt in the Bertha Masons of fiction, but could be given freest scope only in a format that by nature explores the extreme limits of human behavior. The fairy tale perfectly fits the bill. For where wildness is a virtue, in addition to a generic “given,” adults may thrill with lascivious delight when Wonderland chaos presents what is forbidden yet courted, feared yet desired. In such moments of release, it is off with everybody’s heads. Of course, the archetypal figures with the greatest potential for social disruption, like the Queen of Hearts, are carefully reeled in in the end. But during those fantastic spots of time when the shackles of convention are loosed, the fantasy tale’s symbolic vocabulary easily accommodates what the conscious mind will not. Should author or reader become distressed and wish to raise the barriers again, he or she has only to recall Kingsley’s disclaimer at the end of *The Water-Babies*: “This is all a fairytale, and only fun and pretence; and, therefore, you are not to believe a word of it, even if it is true” (388).

## Christina Rossetti’s *Christian Year*: Comfort for “the weary heart”

Diane D’Amico

Biographers have often noted that Christina Rossetti as a devout Anglican and follower of the Tractarian Movement was influenced by the religious views of John Keble. However, little attention has been given to her response to Keble’s most popular volume, *The Christian Year*, a collection of devotional poetry structured according to the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>1</sup> Such an oversight is due in part to William Michael Rossetti’s comment that his sister “thought *nothing* of Keble as a poet” (Bell 373). Such a definitive statement on William Michael’s part has encouraged biographers either to neglect commenting on Keble’s influence or to conclude as Georgina Battiscombe does in her recent biography that Christina Rossetti “did not admire” the work of John Keble (180). However, among the books once owned by Rossetti is an 1837 edition of *The Christian Year*, the condition of which indicates that it was read often over several years and that it was read carefully: in the table of contents, the titles of several poems have been marked with small plus-like crosses<sup>2</sup>, the poems themselves have been illustrated in the top margins, numerous stanzas have been

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marked with verticle lines in the left margins, occasionally individual lines have been underscored, any suspected printer’s error has been corrected, and finally the poem “‘Come and See’” has been copied into the once blank pages at the end of the volume. A close examination of this marginalia indicates that although Rossetti may not have chosen Keble’s poetry as a model for her own, she did turn to *The Christian Year* for spiritual comfort and guidance.

Rossetti’s copy of *The Christian Year*, the 16th edition of that volume, belonged first to her sister Maria. On the inside cover, one finds the following inscription: “Maria Francesca Rossetti from Aunt Charlotte,” dated “February 17, 1839.” (February 17th was Maria’s birthday.) Below this date there is the following note initialled by William Michael: “From Christina’s books illustrated by her.”<sup>3</sup> Although there is no date to indicate when the book passed from Maria to Christina (perhaps this occurred when Maria entered the All Saints’ sisterhood in 1873), the existence of the illustrations suggests that Christina Rossetti was reading *The Christian Year* at least by the late 1840s, for during that time she began to show an interest in developing any artistic talent she might have had and in using that talent to illustrate poetry. Around 1848 she illustrated a copy of her own first volume of poetry, *Verses* (1847), and shortly thereafter attended drawing classes given by Ford Madox Brown (Bell 17-18).

1. See G. B. Tennyson for a thorough examination of Keble as a devotional poet and the influence of *The Christian Year* on the Victorian period.

2. In the table of contents, the following titles have a small + beside them: “Morning,” “Evening,” “Second Sunday in Advent,” “Fourth Sunday in Advent,” “Second Sunday after Christmas,” “Second Sunday after Epiphany,” “Septuagesima Sunday,” “Ash-Wednesday,” “Fourth Sunday in Lent,” “Sunday Next before Easter,” “Monday before Easter,” “Tuesday before Easter,” “Wednesday before Easter,” “Good Friday,” “Easter Eve,” “Easter Day,” “Ascension Day,” “Sunday after Ascension

Day,” “Eleventh Sunday after Trinity,” “Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity,” “Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity,” “St. Matthias’ Day,” “Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” “St. Philip and St. James’s Day,” “St. Peter’s Day,” “St. James the Apostle,” “Holy Communion,” “Confirmation,” “Commination,” “Gunpowder Treason,” “Ordination.”

3. Rossetti’s copy of *The Christian Year* is privately owned by Susan Rossetti Plowden. I should like to thank Mrs. Plowden for allowing me to examine it.



William Michael Rossetti describes his sister's illustrations to *Verses* as "slight and amateurish—one might even say childish" (464). Rossetti's illustrations for Keble, done in pencil and appearing near the title of each poem in a space approximately 2" x 3", could certainly be described as child-like. A sun is represented by a circle with lines darting from it. A full-moon is a simple circle. Man-made dwellings are box-like structures with turrets at the top, making the effect rather castle-like. The human figures, although not so amateurish as to be stick-like, are all very similar. There are no distinguishing facial features, and the length of hair and type of dress are the major indications as to whether a figure is male or female: women wear long dresses and have long hair; and the men, dressed in tunic-like or pant-like garments, have short hair and beards. Overall, the style of these illustrations is rather primitive. However, despite this lack of artistic sophistication, they are significant: not only do they offer proof of Rossetti's reading and responding to Keble's poetry, but also they provide insight into Rossetti's own developing religious vision.

When we compare each illustration to the specific poem with which it is associated, we find that Rossetti draws on just a line or two, or at most a stanza, for her inspiration. Her illustration for "Advent Sunday" (see figure 1), four angels in a



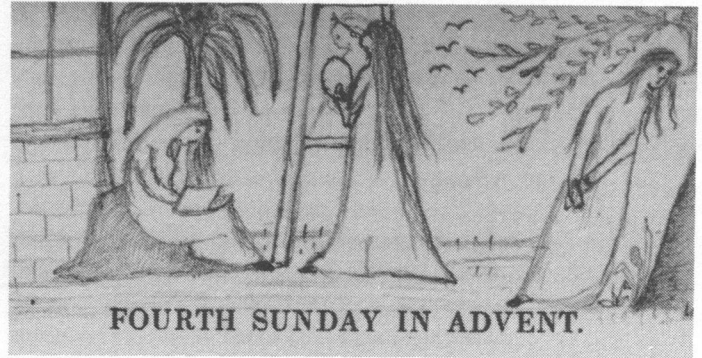
circle blowing trumpets, has for its source the first line of the poem: "Awake—again the Gospel-trump is blown—." The illustration for "Third Sunday in Advent" (see figure 2), a full moon



over a lake, can be linked to stanza three, which describes the "Paschal moon above" the "lake's still face." We can conclude that when reading Keble's text with the intention of illustrating it, Rossetti was consciously drawing on specific images employed by Keble. Yet if we examine the body of illustrations as a whole, we shall find recurring image patterns have far more in common with Rossetti's own poetry than with Keble's. We find roads leading uphill to heaven, crowns to be won, crescent moons and stars, and a predominant use of the female figure. The roads suggest Rossetti's own view of earthly existence as an up-hill journey towards God and Paradise. The

crowns, moons, stars, and recurring female image point to Rossetti's own developing apocalyptic vision, a vision that would eventually come to focus on the figure of Christ as Bridegroom and the soul as his Bride.

This repeated use of the feminine image offers further evidence that Rossetti was reading Keble subjectively; in other words, she read, responding to, if not looking for, what in the poetry of *The Christian Year* would serve to mirror her own hopes and fears. Often when we would expect to see a male figure as the subject of an illustration, we find a woman. For example, in "Fourth Sunday in Advent," although the sex of the speaker is not specifically designated as male, the use of the first-person pronoun would suggest to most readers a male speaker since Keble is the author. Rossetti has drawn three women to represent the actions of Keble's speaker: one woman reads, while another paints and a third leans against a tree, apparently listening (see figure 3). Each represents the person



in the poem who speaks of not being able to read, paint or hear the sights and sounds of heaven in the natural world around him. For "Ash Wednesday" (see figure 4), Rossetti has drawn



four women, praying before an altar to illustrate the lines from the fourth stanza: "Then let the grief, the shame, the sin, / Before the mercy-seat be thrown." In the poem "First Sunday in Lent" Keble clearly identifies the sinner who has some difficulty renouncing earth and following the angels to heaven, as male ("Let the sinner lose his soul at ease"), whereas the one figure Rossetti has set apart from those climbing the steep road to heaven is decidedly more feminine than masculine: the hair is long, and the clothing resembles a long shift or gown (see figure 5). Furthermore, when we read the poem, it becomes





clear the source of the inspiration for this pencil sketch arises far more from Rossetti's subjective experience than it does from the tone or theme of Keble's poem.

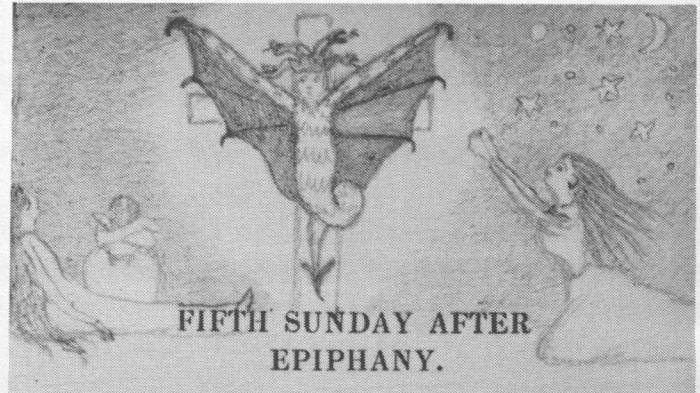
Although in the last line, Keble does admonish his readers not to cling to earth ("who rest, presume, who turn to look are lost"), the overall tone of the poem is both hopeful and comforting. We are told that angels work on earth, helping us to "check the wandering eye." Moreover, Keble assures us that God is merciful, for often he will allow us to "wean" our hearts from earth before the time of final judgment. God's mercy holds back the Angel of Wrath. Therefore, although Keble does invoke the image of Lot's wife in the reference to looking back, the focus of the poem is not the lost woman unable to renounce the things of the earth. Rossetti's illustration, however, does emphasize the plight of the lost soul. The isolated figure, placed near a house to the left, looks straight out from the page as if looking directly at the reader. She is not even looking at the road to heaven. Those being led by angels up that road are on the far right side of the page. Although we see hope for them, their presence actually accents the figure's isolation: so many will be allowed into the New Jerusalem; only this lone woman has failed to "win a crown."

This illustration is particularly reminiscent of Rossetti's own poetry. Throughout her poetic career, in both secular and devotional work, we find the recurring image of the individual alone in a barren spot. In the ghost ballads, such as "Shut Out" and "A Chilly Night," we hear the cries of a lonely soul in exile: "So now I sit here quite alone blinded with tears" (Crump 1:57). In the poems of secular love, poems of those who have loved too soon with a summer love, the speakers describe themselves as "silly sheep benighted from the fold" ("From Sunset to Star Rise" Crump 1:191), as sitting "beneath a comfortless cold moon" ("Daughter of Eve" Crump 1:208-09). When we turn to poems Rossetti designated as devotional, it is not unusual to hear a similar voice of despair: "My sun has set, I dwell / In darkness as a dead man out of sight" ("Despised and Rejected" Crump 1:179). In the penultimate sonnet of the *Later Life* sequence, the speaker imagines herself on her death bed, unable to be comforted by those around her for she fears damnation: "(Alas! no saint rejoicing on her bed), / May miss the goal at last, may miss a crown" (Crump 2: 150). Even in the poems that look forward to the resurrection, we can sometimes hear the same mournful tones of a woman alone. In "Marvel of marvels if I myself should behold," the speaker remembers those she has loved, but she herself is now alone. She believes in God; nevertheless she is alone: "Cold it is, O my King, how cold alone on the world" (Crump 2: 299). Illustrating Keble's "First Sunday in Lent" offered Rossetti as a young woman the opportunity for the visual expression of what would become one of her major poetic themes, the soul isolated and in desperate need of God's saving love.

Two other illustrations are especially striking for what they

reveal to us of this selective and rather personal reading of Keble's poetry on the part of Rossetti. In both cases, they indicate to us the subject of the poem that Rossetti found the most compelling and in neither case is it the subject upon which Keble places major emphasis.

For Keble's "Fifth Sunday After Epiphany," (see figure 6)



Rossetti has drawn three female figures, all in darkness, and a demonic figure that appears to be hanging on the Cross at the center. The two women to the left of the Cross appear overcome by sin, while the one to the right, with the four stars and crescent moon above her (most likely representative of the Church Militant<sup>4</sup>), prays to or pleads with the figure on the Cross, perhaps for the sake of the lost souls to the left. The demonic figure makes this illustration the most striking and startling to be found in Rossetti's *Christian Year*, for at first glance it appears she has placed Satan where we would expect to see the dying Christ. However, such a displacement of Christ and elevation of Satan mocks Christ's suffering and is therefore so out of keeping with Rossetti's very Christ-centered faith that a closer look is demanded. The epigraph from Isaiah 59, chosen by Keble to introduce the poem, suggests a more acceptable interpretation for a Rossetti illustration: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that is cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that is cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God."

Possibly Rossetti intends the dragon-serpent with the human face and medusa-like hair to be viewed as an embodiment of human sin, sin that blocks out the saving power of the Cross; in other words, this figure with its bat-like wings is hovering between the light of the Cross and the three human figures. Rossetti has not shaded the area around this demonic figure, only around the three women; thus we can conclude the saving light of the Cross is still there. Human beings could see that light if they would renounce sin. Although this illustration reflects far more of Rossetti's vision than Keble's, two lines of the "Fifth Sunday" do support this interpretation: "Sin only hides the genial ray, / And round the Cross, makes night of day." Since the Cross does remain in the lighted area, suggesting that Christ's presence is still there, another interpretation

4. For Rossetti's interpretation of the emblematic significance of the moon and its phases, see her devotional work *Seek and Find* 187-191, and *The Face of the Deep* 242. Consistently, Rossetti sees the phases of the crescent-moon as symbolizing temporal existence with all its change and instability; however, a full moon represents the end of change, the final achieving of stability and permanence. Furthermore, she associates

the moon with the Church: "Because the sun sets forth Christ, the moon which is that sun's mirror and follower cannot but set forth the Church" (*The Face of the Deep* 215). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that in these illustrations by Rossetti, the woman with the crescent moon represents the Church Militant.



is also possible. Rossetti may be depicting Christ as the suffering servant of Isaiah, taking on the world's iniquities so that fallen human nature might be saved.<sup>5</sup> One line in Keble's poem, referring to the "One who bore out shame" would support this reading.

Before a more thorough and definitive reading of Rossetti's intentions can be offered, extensive analysis of her religious imagery needs to be done. Since almost half of her work is devotional in nature, there is much to examine; however, at this stage we can conclude that the illustration's focus on human iniquity and the darkness of sin belongs more to Rossetti than Keble. "The Fifth Sunday After Epiphany," although sin is part of its theme, primarily offers a comforting message: the poem assures us that if we renounce sin, the "world" that "enthalls" and "traitor Sense," and follow Christ's ways, we shall find peace and become intercessors for others, "earn[ing] / For fallen souls some healing breath." However, when we turn to Rossetti's drawing, whether we see the dragon-serpent of Rossetti's illustration as Christ bearing our sin or as a representation of our sin, the emphasis on sin's power to damn the soul remains the illustration's primary theme. All three women are in darkness, and the demonic figure dominates the scene. Furthermore, the imagery of serpent's body and Medusa's hair is Rossetti's invention, so to speak. Nothing in Keble's poem depicts such a demonic figure. (Rossetti's own poem "The World" [Crump 1:77] with its images of "subtle serpents sliding in her hair," "pushing horns," and "cloven feet" seems a more appropriate poetic companion piece for this illustration than does Keble's poem.<sup>6</sup>)

This emphasis on the power of sin to destroy the soul is not unusual for Rossetti. She wrote in *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* that one of the most "dreadful" of biblical texts is Matthew 25: 41: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" (38). Christ had said that not all would be saved, and as disturbing and even horrifying as this thought was to her, Rossetti never doubted the reality of damnation. Those who had "feasted with Satan" in this world would inevitably be "excluded from the land of blessed life everlasting" (Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep* 474). Rossetti was quite capable of writing in vivid detail of the lost soul "shut up as in a grave where the worm dieth not, and where the whole congregation of the defiled dead being dead yet cannot die" (*The Face of the Deep* 550). Nevertheless, nowhere in either prose or poetry have I found an image as strikingly original as this of Sin blocking the vision of the Cross (or of Christ clothed with human sin). It seems that Keble's allusion to the darkness at the time of Christ's death as "sin hid[ing] the genial ray" inspired Rossetti to depict, early in her career, what was, perhaps, her strongest fear, her fear that sin could hide God's face: a sinner might look to the Cross, but if unable to repent remain in darkness.

When we turn to Rossetti's illustration of "Septuagesima Sunday," we find the visual complement to this image of fear: we see a woman with a crescent moon above her head, hastening up a hill to Christ who waits for her with open arms (see figure



7). About Christ, there are two semi-circles of stars, indicating the stanza Rossetti was in part attempting to illustrate:

The Saviour lends the light and heat  
That crowns His holy hill;  
The saints, like stars, around His seat  
Perform their courses still.

However, these stars at the top of the "holy hill" are the only clear connection between Rossetti's illustration and the poem. "Septuagesima Sunday" is primarily a meditation upon seeing God in Nature: "that book, to show / How God Himself is found." Keble concludes with a prayer that we "read thee [God] everywhere." Throughout the poem, in fact, Keble is stressing the point that we see God while still on earth by seeing him in his creation, whereas Rossetti's illustration depicts nothing of an earthly or natural setting, but rather the journey away from earth towards Christ, the Bridegroom of Souls, who waits to embrace his beloved Bride. As mentioned earlier, such Bride/Bridegroom imagery plays a major role in Rossetti's own poetry. This illustration could easily serve to accompany "The Vigil of St. Bartholomew," which speaks of "tread[ing] the uphill track to Paradise" (Crump 2: 234) or "Antipas," which concludes with the desire to be "Wishless in the sanctuary of Christ's embrace" (Crump 2: 283).

When we examine the content of the lines that Rossetti marked, both the lines underscored and the stanzas marked in the margin, we find further evidence that Rossetti was reading Keble, responding most strongly to expressions that captured or touched upon her own hopes and fears.<sup>7</sup> There is no biographical evidence to indicate when these markings were made; however, I believe they were made if not considerably later than the illustrations, at least during a different reading, for rarely do the marked lines and the lines that can be most closely linked to the illustrations coincide. What is most striking about the lines Rossetti chose to underline (there are not many; 63 in the whole volume) is the number of times these lines focus on the subject of the "weary heart," the heart that is often vain and willful, longing to see God, but still clinging to earth. Often the only line underscored in a poem will be the one addressing the heart that is struggling against God. For example, the only words marked in "Second Sunday in Lent" are "whom [God] here she would not learn to love." The only line noted in "Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity" is line 48: "And

5. I would like to thank Dr. Charles B. Ketcham, Professor of Religious Studies at Allegheny College, for suggesting this interpretation to me.  
6. See my article "A Possible Source for Christina Rossetti's World-Woman" for further discussion of the demonic imagery.

7. Although William Michael Rossetti's note on the inside cover does not indicate that Christina Rossetti is responsible for these underlinings and marginal marks, the content of the lines and stanzas marked strongly suggests that she is.



fearing most his own vain heart." One line is marked in "Third Sunday after Epiphany": "It shames the weary heart to feel itself alone." Perhaps the line most representative of Rossetti's own spiritual struggle can be found in "Seventh Sunday after Trinity" where she has marked line 54: "The curse of lawless hearts, the joy of self-control."

Throughout her life, Rossetti felt herself to be struggling to make her will and God's the same. Her temperament was such that often she had difficulty accepting the limits placed upon her, the "day of quietness and of sitting still," the "pared down and subdued life" (Rossetti, *Called to Be Saints* 435). God's purpose was to save, yet the individual self could "frustrate His gracious purpose" by choosing self over God; therefore, "self-conquest" must be achieved if the soul was to be saved (Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep* 519). In his "Advertisement," a sort of preface, in the 1837 edition, Keble speaks of the need to achieve "a sober standard of feeling in matters of practical religion" (iii). He notes that often "the very tempers which most require such discipline, [set] themselves, in general, most decidedly against it" (iii). He hopes that reading *The Christian Year* will assist the reader in "bringing his own thoughts and feelings into more entire unison with those recommended and exemplified in the Prayer Book" (iv). Significantly, the only marginal mark made in this preface is a small line in the right margin beside the lines speaking of undisciplined tempers. When we examine the marginal lines (lines beside whole stanzas and lines beside only parts of stanzas), we shall find patterns forming that indicate Rossetti was following Keble's advice in that she was using *The Christian Year* to assist her in making her "thoughts and feelings" conform to the dictates of her faith.

The most obvious distinction between marked and unmarked stanzas is that the marked ones could all be spoken by Rossetti herself. In other words, lines that refer to a particular person or to circumstances that would not have applied to Rossetti are not marked. For example, in the first stanza of "Monday before Easter" Rossetti has drawn a line beside only the last two lines of the four: "So evermore, by Faith's undying glow, / We own the Crucified in weal and woe." The first two lines spoken by Andromache are not marked. In the first stanza of "Fourth Sunday after Easter," the lines pertaining to the mother with a young child are not noted; however, Rossetti has marked lines 1-2: "My Saviour, can it ever be / That I should gain by losing Thee," lines that Rossetti could easily apply to herself. In "Ordination," she has noted only the last two stanzas, stanzas expressing what any soul "tired" with the "fearful war within" might utter; all that refers specifically to the ordaining of priests is not marked.

This personal-selection process of singling out lines relevant to her own thoughts and feelings becomes even more apparent if we excerpt all that Rossetti has marked in one particular poem and examine those selections as a separate piece. We shall find that a certain coherence is maintained. It is as if Rossetti is forming her own prayers out of Keble's poems. In "Fourth Sunday in Advent," a fifteen-stanza poem, Rossetti has marked only stanzas six through nine:

But patience! there may come a time  
When these dull ears shall scan aright

Strains that outring Earth's drowsy chime,  
As Heaven outshines the taper's light.

These eyes, that dazzled now and weak,  
At glancing motes in sunshine wink,  
Shall see the King's full glory break,  
Nor from the blissful vision shrink:

In fearless love and hope uncloyed  
For ever on that ocean bright  
Empowered to gaze; and undestroyed,  
Deeper and deeper plunge in light.

Though scarcely now their laggard glance  
Reach to an arrow's flight, that day  
They shall behold, and not in trance  
The region "very far away."

The voice of the soul happily anticipating the paradise to come can be heard in much of Rossetti's own devotional work:

I hope to see these things [the flowers of Paradise] again,  
But not as once in dreams by night;  
To see them with my very sight.

(Crump, "Paradise" 1:222)

As a religious poet, Rossetti too was drawn to the biblical promise that one day weak human eyes would see "face to face":

Up, O Hearts! to know him in the joy of rest;  
Where no darkness more shall hide him from our sight,  
Where we shall be love with love, and light with light,  
Worshipping our God together face to face"

(Crump, "Antipas" 2: 283)

In Keble's "Second Sunday after Christmas," Rossetti has marked lines 5-8 of stanza five and all of stanza seven and eight. Together these selections form a coherent poem in which the willful heart recognizing Christ's human suffering, asks for his comfort in the "trial hour of woes."

Till left awhile with Thee alone  
The wilful heart be fain to own  
That He, by whom our bright hours shone,  
Our darkness best may rule.

Thou, who did sit on Jacob's well  
The weary hour of noon,  
The languid pulses Thou canst tell,  
The nerveless spirit tune.  
Thou from Whose cross in anguish burst  
The cry that owned Thy dying thirst,  
To Thee we turn, our Last and First,  
Our Sun and soothing Moon.

From darkness, here, and dreariness  
We ask not full repose,  
Only be Thou at hand, to bless  
Our trial hour of woes.  
Is not the pilgrim's toil o'erpaid  
By the clear rill and palmy shade?  
And see we not, up Earth's dark glade,  
The gate of Heaven unclose?



One finds this form of "prayer-making" on Rossetti's part throughout her copy of *The Christian Year*. There are only twelve poems she left totally unmarked.<sup>8</sup>

After two of the poems, "Second Sunday in Lent," and "Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity," there are indications that lines of either prose or poetry were written in pencil and later erased; unfortunately, what remains is totally illegible. But a few single words written here and there in the left margins are still quite clear. Apparently, no one felt they had to be erased. In most cases, they merely indicate where Rossetti suspected a printer's error. For example in line 43 of "St. John Baptist's Day,"—"Were is the lore the Baptist taught"—"Were" is crossed out and "Where" written in the margin. However, one of these marginal notations is extremely significant for it tells us that Rossetti was reading Keble's *Christian Year* well beyond the time of late adolescence. In Rossetti's 1837 edition, the thirteenth stanza of "Gunpowder Treason" reads as follows:

Oh, come to our Communion Feast:  
There present, in the heart  
Not in the hands, th' eternal Priest  
Will His true self impart.—

Rossetti has crossed out the word "Not" and in the margin written "As." This does not indicate a printer's error, but a revision Keble himself authorized on his deathbed in 1866. Battiscombe points out in her biography of Keble that he approved this change in words "in order to make clear that he was not denying the doctrine of the Real Presence" (111). Obviously, Rossetti's making a note of this revision in her personal copy indicates that she found such a change in wording acceptable (some Anglicans found the change made the poem too similar to Roman Catholic doctrine and preferred to use earlier editions), and that she was reading in *The Christian Year* sometime after 1866, by which time she was at least 36 years old.

There is another piece of evidence in Rossetti's copy of *The Christian Year* that contributes further to our concluding she used this volume as a prayer book beyond her teenage years. She copied onto the once blank pages at the back of the book the poem "Come and See," noting at the bottom of the page that it was "by the Author of 'Three Waking.'" *The Three Wakings with Hymns and Songs* is a volume of poetry by Elizabeth Rundle Charles, published anonymously in 1859. "Come and See" first appeared in that volume. The poem itself is a rather mediocre religious verse; nevertheless, its presence in this volume of Keble is significant. Since Rossetti took the time to copy this poem into a volume that would give her easy access to it, we can conclude she found the poem of value. Most likely she was attracted to its message. The poem is a dialogue between the soul asking, "Master, where abidest Thou?" and Christ answering, "Come and see." The poem concludes with the image of the "enfranchised Bride" being called home to paradise:

Christian! tell it to thy brother,

From life's dawning till its end;  
Every hand may clasp another,  
And the loneliest bring a friend;  
Till the veil is drawn aside,  
And from where her home shall be  
Burst upon the enfranchised Bride  
The triumphant "Come and see!"

As noted earlier, much of Rossetti's own religious poetry is apocalyptic in both tone and image. It is probable that she was drawn to Charles' poem because its emphasis on the final union with God in heaven coincided with her own intense longing for spiritual fulfillment, not because she found in its form evidence of poetic power. It seems Rossetti was able to read religious poetry separating the value of the message from the quality of its form.

This brings us once again to William Michael's comment that his sister thought "nothing of Keble as a poet." After a close examination of Christina Rossetti's personal copy of *The Christian Year*, we can see that her brother's assessment needs to be qualified. Rossetti may not have turned to Keble for poetic guidance, but she certainly turned to his verse for spiritual comfort. Furthermore, although she may not have consciously consulted *The Christian Year* for models of poetic form and structure, the lines underscored and the stanzas marked indicate she found numerous examples of how poetry could be prayer. In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti's commentary on the Book of Revelation, she quotes from Keble's "Easter Eve." When commenting on the significance of the color green, she writes: "Green seems the colour both of hope and of rest: of hope because of sweet ever-renewed spring verdure; of rest because of the refreshing repose green affords to strained sight. Completed hope, completed rest, are celestial, not terrestrial.

'...Look up and sing  
In hope of promised spring.'

(152-153)

*The Face of the Deep* was published in 1892; Rossetti died in 1894. Thus not long before her death, the language of Keble's poetry was still in her mind, the power of its message still providing hope. Any further assessment of Keble's influence on Rossetti will have to consider the role *The Christian Year* played in her spiritual life and specifically in her prayer-making.

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## Light on Some George Eliot Metaphors: Seeing Things in Their True Colors

Selma B. Brody

In George Eliot's novels, the scientific link between color and light is often used to stand for the way in which enlightenment (an inward light) colors and transforms that which it illuminates. The way things are colored by the light falling upon them is a phenomenon of physical optics which Eliot learned in her early science reading. As was already her habit, she put her new learning to use at once in a metaphor:<sup>1</sup>

[S]ome human beings have the odious power of contaminating the very images that are enshrined in our soul's arcana, their baleful touch has the same effect as would a uniformity in the rays of light—it turns all objects to pale lead color. (*Letters* 1:71)

She had begun to study physics a few months earlier: a letter mentions "a state of head that calls for four leeches before I can attack Mrs. Somerville's Connection of the Physical Sciences" (*Letters* 1:56, 23 June 1840).<sup>2</sup> From Somerville she learned that colors can only be seen if the requisite colors are present in the illuminating light:

Of the quantity of light that is incident on any...substance...much the greater portion is absorbed by the body. Bodies that reflect all the colours in their natural proportions appear white, those that absorb them all seem black; but most substances...reflect some colours and absorb the rest. A violet reflects the violet rays alone of the light falling upon it and absorbs the others. . . . Yellow cloth reflects the yellow rays most abundantly, and blue cloth those that are blue. Consequently, colour is not a property of matter, but arises from the action of matter upon light. (183)

There is very likelihood that these words, quoted from the 10th edition, are the same words which Eliot read. Almost the same paragraph appears in the first edition (section 20). If, as is probable, she was using the latest edition (the fifth of the nine editions in Somerville's lifetime), it did not differ from later editions in the treatment of light and color (see Patterson).

1. For Eliot's use of scientific imagery in her later novels see, for example, Shuttleworth, Levine, and Miller. Cross pointed out that "the tendency to draw illustrations from science" was already present in 1839 (1:44).
2. Mary Fairfax Somerville (1780-1872), the distinguished Scottish astronomer after whom an Oxford college was named, wrote texts which played an important part in the progress of British science by making the latest discoveries of continental scientists available.
3. Scientific allusions which are based on this early study are frequent in

What she studied in Somerville's textbook on the physical sciences, Eliot appears to have learned well and long remembered, and several metaphors in the novels stem from this early study of optics. (In point of fact, most of the allusions to physical science and mathematics in Eliot's writing are traceable to her solitary reading at Griff in the years 1838-41 and her continuing self-education before she went to London; the main lines can be followed from her letters.<sup>3</sup>)

A straightforward example of the optical principle just quoted is the dimming of colors in twilight and their extinction at night (when all cats are gray). In the last chapter of *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie sets out at night across the flood. At first, she can barely see outlines; as the night lifts, there is the "slowly defining blackness of objects above the glassy dark." Toward dawn, "colour awakens," and she can "discern the tints of the trees" and the red roof of the mill. Inward and outward lights are matched for Maggie in this chapter, which begins in darkness, in tortured conflict with her conscience, and ends in the full light of Maggie's reconciliation with Tom and the apotheosis of their death together.

Another variant is employed in *Felix Holt, the Radical*. It is the phenomenon that a very bright color makes the light falling on it appear enhanced. It is an optical illusion, a case of transference, based on our expectation that bright colors result from strong lighting. Thus, to Mrs. Transome on a tranquil autumn day: "the light seemed more glorious because of the reddened and golden trees" (*Works* 10:116, ch. 8). She has been waiting alone in her garden for Mr. Jardyn; there follows a brief and desolating interview; afterward, her perception has altered: "Mrs. Transome shivered as she stood all alone: all about her, where there had once been brightness and warmth, there were white ashes, and the sunshine looked dreary as it fell on them" (10: 120; ch. 9).

What has changed? The sun is just as strong as before, the trees are just as brilliant in their autumn foliage. But Mrs.

Eliot's review articles. Three metaphors from her review of Tennyson's *Maud*, for example, compare feeling crystallized into poetry with carbon transformed into diamond; speak of lines of poetry which "eat themselves in with phosphoric eagerness into our memory;" and compare the judgment of the public with "that optical law by which an insignificant object, if near, excludes very great and glorious things that lie in the distance" (*Westminster Review*, Oct. 1855; in *Essays* 191-3).



Transome no longer sees their leaves. In her sadness, her glance is no longer upward but is directed toward the ground where the gardeners have left an ashy residue. It is the only thing she sees, and its dull surface robs the sunlight of its brilliance. The change from one displaced perception of the light to another follows her mood-shift; her inward light is projected on the outward light.

As Barbara Hardy has pointed out, the moment of disenchantment is an occurrence of some importance in many of Eliot's novels ("Moment"). It is often characterized as a shift in the light; dreams and illusions are said to belong to the misty dawn, and reality takes shape as the light strengthens. We are all aware of the literal truth embodied: things are seen in their true colors only in full daylight, and a prudent seamstress will match her thread to a swatch by the clear and truthful light of noon. The literal and figurative changes are combined thus for Will Ladislav, balked of his meeting with Dorothea at Lowick church, and newly aware that Casaubon will prevent future meetings:

Will walked out after them, but they went on towards the little gate leading out of the churchyard into the shrubbery, never looking round.

It was impossible for him to follow them, and he could only walk sadly at mid-day along the same road which he had trodden hopefully in the morning. The lights were all changed for him both without and within. (347, ch. 47)

The paradigm of this image of enlightenment and disillusion is the expression of poor Dorothea's honeymoon experience. As "that new real future which was replacing the imaginary" grew with the slow tarnishing of Casaubon's image, her disenchantment became irreversible: "whatever else had remained the same, the light had changed, and you cannot find the pearly dawn at noonday" (145; ch. 20).

Eliot asks the "crushing question," *is Casaubon unchanged? Was he not as learned as before? "Had his sentiments become less laudable?...or his ability to state not only a theory but the names of those who held it...?"* In answer, there is the suggestion that the act of observation may in itself change the object observed. (This has twentieth-century overtones: in the microscopic realm of particle physics, it is a basic tenet of Quantum Mechanics. In the Dorothea-Casaubon relationship, it is a veritable Uncertainty Principle for human interactions.)<sup>4</sup> Casaubon's disappointing marriage has perhaps changed him by bringing him under Dorothea's constant scrutiny, which is frightening him and driving him further inward upon himself. It has been unexpected; he had with some justification anticipated that his "abundant pen-scratchings and amplitude of paper" would be accepted by a young bride "with the uncritical awe of an elegant-minded canary-bird." Instead, Dorothea "seemed to present herself as a spy, watching everything with a malign power of inference" (149; ch. 20). On the other hand, Dorothea finds it impossible to keep her eyes closed against the light. Back in England again, and "not heeding that she

was in the dazzling sun-rays," she watches herself watching him:

[Dorothea] sat and saw as in one glance all the paths of her young hope which she should never find again. And just as clearly in the miserable light she saw her own and her husband's solitude—how they walked apart so that she was obliged to survey him. If he had drawn her towards him, she would never have surveyed him—never have said, "Is he worth living for?" but would have felt him simply as a part of her own life. (312; ch. 42)

Sunlight stands for the disillusion which comes with experience. But overriding all experience, the light of day stands for the forces of life too. The daylight which brings death to Maggie is also the "life-nourishing day" toward which she turns with "the leap of natural longing" in response to Stephen's passionate letter (*Works* 6, *The Mill on the Floss* 357; bk. 7, ch. 5). Gwendolen, delivered from her deepest troubles by Grandcourt's death, begins to break out of her "inward darkness" into the "ordinary good of existence": "Does one who has been all but lost in a pit of darkness complain of the sweet air and the daylight?" (*Works* 17, *Daniel Deronda* 800; ch. 69).

When transformed by Eliot's mature powers, the metaphor (*Letters* 1: 71) with which these notes began becomes a suitable image to conclude our list. Its essence is that each of us sheds a particular light; in one case it is beneficent, in another it is withering. The quality of this light is an aspect of each individual persona.<sup>5</sup> It is sometimes described as an inward light, and sometimes as radiating: "The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the light for us; we begin to see things in their larger, quieter masses." Dorothea sheds such a light on Lydgate, who receives from her the first testament of belief in him from any source since his disgrace; in its glow he begins to take heart (558; ch. 76). When we perceive the power of her ardor, we mourn for Casaubon, who has cut himself off from its light. We mourn as well for Dorothea, in Casaubon's shadow, a shade so cold that it can extinguish even the glories of Raphael's frescos, and quench his young bride's hope "that if she knew more about them, the world would be joyously illuminated for her." Instead, "her husband's way of commenting on them had begun to affect her with a sort of mental shiver" (146; ch. 20).

The force of that individual inner light is of paramount importance in any creative process: in Eliot's own literary art, in science, or in scholarship. As Ladislav admonishes his painter friend Naumann: "After all, the true seeing is within; and painting stares at you with an insistent imperfection...As if a woman were a mere coloured superficies" (142; ch. 19). That is Eliot speaking. In science too, the true seeing is within; to Lydgate the source of scientific understanding is the inward light of a refined imagination which can reveal:

subtle actions inaccessible by any sort of lens, but tracked in that outer darkness through long pathways of necessary sequence by the inward light which is the last refinement of Energy, capable of

4. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle states that the ultimate limit to what we can observe of matter is the disturbance which the light we use to see by produces in the object observed, so that we can never tell what was its state before we disturbed it (172).

5. How George Eliot's emphasis on particularities fits the Victorian aesthetic is treated in Christ 77. See also Hardy, "The Surface of the Novel," 37-42.



bathing even the ethereal atoms in its ideally illuminated space."  
(122; ch. 16)

How different for Casaubon! In his faltering scholarship, this inward light is replaced by a sterile cluttered dimness, a condition "fixed and unchangeable as bone" in him:

Poor Mr. Casaubon himself was lost among small closets and winding stairs, and in an agitated dimness..., easily lost sight of any purpose which had prompted him to these labours. With his taper stuck before him he forgot the absence of windows, and in bitter manuscript remarks on other men's notions about the solar deities, he had become indifferent to the sunlight." (147; ch. 20)

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## The Religious Poetry of Ernest Dowson

Joseph S. Salemi

The poet Ernest Dowson once declared that his childhood was a "pagan" one, devoid of either religious sentiment or systematic doctrinal formation. Apart from the old French priest who taught him the rudiments of Latin when he was a boy, Dowson had no contact with the representatives of the Church, nor were his parents active adherents of any sect. Unlike his near contemporary Edmund Gosse, for whom narrow parental views on religion were a stifling and onerous inheritance, Dowson seems to have undergone none of the interior torment that stems from consciousness of sin, or of the conflict between faith and doubt. In fact, whatever pain Dowson suffered in the later years of his brief life—and he suffered a good deal—none of it appears to have been of the tumultuous and desolating sort that marks genuine religious struggle. Dowson's life shows neither Bunyanesque torment of conscience nor the mystic's "dark night of the soul." Instead—if his poetry and letters are trustworthy evidence—we find only the elegant languor of *fin de siècle* decadence. The emotion Dowson expresses in his verse (like everything else) is mannered, balanced, and so transfigured by art that it has become an exquisite artifact rather than a cry of anguish. In place of a believable pain we find in Dowson a wistful weariness—the progress of a soul that was to lose itself to the insidious temptations of lethargy and alcoholism.

Such a life seems hardly the stuff of sainthood—yet Ernest Dowson produced several religious lyrics of the highest order.

These poems are not favored today for a variety of reasons. First, they run contrary to prevailing notions of art as a secular substitute for religious experience. Dowson's lyrics are art in the service of religion, and for that reason they make many modern readers uncomfortable. Second, the poems are almost all specifically Catholic in both imagery and subject matter, and hence limited in their appeal. Third, they are the poems of a professed believer—Dowson accepted the dogmatic basis for the religious practices and experiences he described, and he described them with complete conviction. Fourth, a good many moralists, well aware of the irregularities of Dowson's personal life, are all too willing to dismiss his religious lyrics as so much hypocritical posturing. Finally, there are even some religious believers who have reservations about these poems. Since the lyrics are powerful evocations of mood *via* a language heavy with ritual associations, they create a sort of religious nostalgia rather than the difficult conditions for man's approach to divinity. To some earnestly inclined believers, such a procedure is easy and superficial, and irrelevant to the real tasks of prayer and meditation.

Nevertheless, these lyrics still reward a careful reader. They are, like nearly all of Dowson's work, perfectly fashioned gems of English poetry. They transcend pietistic sentiment by their sheer craft, and their almost palpable imagery. In fact, it is in this very dependence on vivid images that the poems reveal a peculiarly Roman Catholic signature—they presuppose a re-



ligious tradition wherein the arousal of devotion is intimately linked with visual and aural stimuli. Traditional Roman Catholic practices stress the importance of sense-impressions in fostering a pious disposition in the soul. From the wealth of iconography in its churches to the "mental representations" that precede meditation in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola, Catholicism has always favored the corporal as the first step to the spiritual. Dowson's religious poems are instances of this Catholic tendency to couch its religious appeal in enticements to the senses—Gregorian chant, stained glass, incense, vestments, and liturgical drama.

Dowson's most overtly religious poems are those that deal with monastic renunciation of the world, or that contrast cloistered peace with worldly turmoil. His poem "Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration"<sup>1</sup> is a case in point. Dowson describes an order of nuns (either the Ursulines or the Carmelites) whose prime responsibility is to maintain an unending vigil before the sacrament of the altar. The nuns have no other purpose in life except to pray and watch, turning their nights and days, as he says, "Into a long, returning rosary." The poem, like all of Dowson's pieces that specifically address the religious life, makes a sundering division between the world and the cloister. The nuns "heed not time," having entered a monastic existence whose analogue is eternity. Their choice has been to "put away desire," to reject the transitory delights of the world, and to embrace an asceticism that rebukes human vanity. This sequestered life of religious vigil is all-consuming; according to Dowson, the nuns "heed no voices in their dream of prayer." What do they receive in return for such sacrifice? Dowson's answer is quite specific: the nuns have "serene insight / Of the illuminating dawn to be," and they enjoy "rest." This double reward will appear again in Dowson's religious poems—the votaries of the cloister gain the certainty of faith, and the mental repose that comes with the total renunciation of worldly desires. Twice in this poem he uses the phrase "Calm, sad, secure" to describe the nuns, and the words are instructive: the nuns have attained an external stability that allows them interior equanimity and self-possession. It is easy to misread the word *sad* here, taking it to mean "sorrowful" or "melancholic." I believe Dowson wishes us to understand *sad* in its primitive sense of *weighty*, *grave*, or *serious*.<sup>2</sup> The nuns have embraced a way of life whose foundations are substantial, as opposed to the flimsy underpinnings of the frivolous world they have renounced. And Dowson's emphasis is on the peace and repose of that solidly grounded way of life; he describes a religious state whose main attraction is its value as an anodyne for the turmoil and trouble of mundane existence.

This contrast is even starker in his poem "Benedictio Domini." Here Dowson juxtaposes the peaceful interior of a London church with the noisy chaos of the street outside. The imagery is striking in its implicit accusation of the world's raucous profanity:

Without, the sullen noises of the street!  
The voice of London, inarticulate,

Hoarse and blaspheming, surges in to meet  
The silent blessing of the Immaculate.

The counterpoint of external noise and internal silence is most prominent here. The entire atmosphere of the poem presents the church as a place of refuge, a haven of peace in the midst of London's maddening noise. Within the church is the balm that assuages those tormented by profane London: through its "incense-laden air," says Dowson, there sounds only "The admonition of a silver bell." Dowson describes this silence as "strange," probably because it is so unexpected in a world filled with roaring passions and blasphemies. After an old priest elevates the Host—that point in the Mass which calls for the most profound and respectful silence—Dowson ends his poem by asking "When shall men cease to suffer and desire?" The question is purely rhetorical, for the entire poem has prepared us to give one answer: Men shall cease to suffer and desire only when they enter the church, literally and figuratively. Of course, physical death also puts an end to pain and concupiscence, but Dowson's poem is more concerned with the simulacrum of death that a monastic renunciation of the world entails.

The parallel of physical death and the religious life is implicit in the poem "Extreme Unction." Here Dowson describes the anointing of a dying man with holy oil. All the now stricken senses (eyes, lips, feet) are touched with the sacramental unction, and the former activity and motion of the body's limbs are contrasted with their present immobility. But there is an advantage to this failure of the senses. Dowson says that now they are "From troublous sights and sounds set free." He imagines that this enforced break with the world prepares the senses for their transformation into organs of a new and a healed perception—one that is free from the bonds of physical sensuality:

The feet that lately ran so fast  
To meet desire, are soothingly sealed;  
The eyes, that were so often cast  
On vanity, are touched and healed.

This healing leads in turn to a perception that is ultimately only bought with death:

Yet, when the walls of flesh grow weak,  
In such an hour, it well may be,  
Through mist and darkness, light will break,  
And each anointed sense will see.

"Extreme Unction" is clearly written from the imagined standpoint of the layman, for the poem promises to those uninitiated into the monastic life the same level of awareness attained by the monk, but only at the cost of death. Dowson, of course, may be alluding to the Pauline commonplace that states "For now we see through a glass, darkly: but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Yet the testimony of other poems indicates that for him the monastic vocation provides a

1. All quotations are from *The Poems of Ernest Dowson* (London and New York: John Lane, 1905). There is a modern critical edition by Mark Longaker, *The Poems of Ernest Dowson* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania

P, 1962).

2. See the fourth definition of *sad* in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 8, pt. 2, p. 20.



fore-glimpse, as it were, of the vision that most of us come to *via* death. Consider, for example, the poem "Carthusians," which praises one of the most rigorously ascetic of Catholic religious orders. The first quatrain asks:

Through what long heaviness, assayed in what strange fire,  
Have these white monks been brought into the way of peace,  
Despising the world's wisdom and the world's desire,  
Which from the body of this death bring no release?

To be sure, the world can bring no such release from "the body of this death"—that is, from physical mortality and its concomitant troubles. But the monastery can, for by being dead to the world, the Carthusians attain a semblance of freedom from ordinary mortality and its limitations, a semblance that manifests itself in the quiet and tranquillity of their rule:

Within their austere walls no voices penetrate;  
A sacred silence only, as of death, obtains;  
Nothing finds entry here of loud or passionate;  
This quiet is the exceeding profit of their pains.

Later on in the poem, Dowson describes the attitude toward death of those of us outside monastic walls—for us, death is a lurking threat that no one dares look upon; he is the ignored presence that our laughter, our loves, and even our art itself temporarily keep from our view:

We fling up flowers and laugh, we laugh across the wine;  
With wine we dull our souls and careful strains of art;  
Our cups are polished skulls round which the roses twine:  
None dares to look at Death who leers and lurks apart.

Contrast this attitude with that of the Carthusians, who are "Deserting vanity for the more perfect way, / The sweeter service of the most dolorous Cross." Dowson here suggests a kind of paradoxical pleasure in pain that comes from acceptance of Christ's suffering *via* monastic renunciation. The antithetical placement of "sweeter service" and "most dolorous Cross" is arresting—it suggests that the freely chosen "death" of the monastery has rewards and pleasures equal (or at least analogous) to those offered by the world.

This same curious conflation of joy and death is most obvious in one of Dowson's loveliest lyrics, "Beata Solitudo." The title means "blessed solitude," and the poem can be read as an address to a beloved person, wherein the speaker adverts to a secret place of silence and oblivion where both of them can rest, apart from the world. But if the poem is so read, then it takes on a decidedly morbid tone, for even the most cursory reading of "Beata Solitudo" will show that the state Dowson describes is very like death itself. He calls it "a land of Silence / Where pale stars shine." He speaks of it as a "silent valley...Where all the voices / Of humankind / Are left behind." This is hardly the sort of rendezvous spot that would appeal to an importuned lover. But if "Beata Solitudo" is read (as its title, I believe, urges us to read it) as an oblique invitation to some sort of ascetic renunciation, then such difficulties disappear. The speaker is addressing his listener not in amorous longing, but in religious appeal. Of course, Dowson's lyric is an instance of the common Romantic-Decadent desire to escape

the quotidian; it echoes the answer that Baudelaire's soul gave when asked where she desired to dwell:

*N'importe où! pourvu que ce soit hors de ce monde!*

But Dowson has conjoined the Romantic commonplace of escape from the world with his own strong attraction to the *mythos* of monastic solitude.

My reading of "Beata Solitudo" is strengthened by contrast with another love lyric, "Amor Profanus." In this poem the speaker imagines a future where he and his beloved are bloodless and speechless shades in the land of the dead. The poem paints an afterlife of pagan hopelessness—one where the ghosts of the departed living are empty shadows without joy or redemption. The poem ends with a *carpe diem* appeal, a call to sensual indulgence in the face of impending death. The "love" in this piece is rightly called profane, because it carries no hint of redemption—it offers no escape from the grave, no transcendent option. "Amor Profanus" is Dowson at his most pagan, but the fact that he uses the word *profane* in his poem's title means that he can imagine a higher and sacred love, one not encompassed by the bounds of this world.

The problem, of course, is that *all* worldly loves are, from the strictly religious point of view, transient and vain. It would seem that a poet who is drawn to Christian monastic values must be ambivalent, at best, to profane attachments. Yet Dowson is preeminently a lyric poet of amatory themes, despite his praise of the religious life. These two contradictory impulses face each other squarely in his poem "Vain Resolves." Here Dowson describes an unrequited love that has turned to despair, bitterness, and finally a motivation to solitude and prayer. The speaker states his intention of forgetting his beloved's beauty, and the ashes of the past. Of course, the resolve is futile—one passing glance from the object of his desire rekindles his smouldering passion. And in fact Dowson is quite predictable when it comes to a choice between love and religious resignation. Love will always win; indeed, it seems to be a sign of love's strength and genuine force that lovers are oblivious of all other demands, including those of religion. The point is made quite explicit in Dowson's poem "Impenitentia Ultima." In this piece (the title of which means "final impenitence"), the imagined situation is a lover's deathbed, where he asks God for one final boon before death and a presumed damnation for a sensual and profligate life. The dying lover requests one hour in his love's presence, to see her and hear her voice, and to be comforted by her. With a cocky insouciance the lover addresses these words to his Maker:

Before the ruining waters fall and my life be carried under,  
And Thine anger cleave me through as a child cuts down a flower,  
I will praise Thee, Lord, in Hell, while my limbs are racked asunder,  
For the last sad sight of her face and the little grace of an hour.

What are we to make of this easy dismissal of salvation, so casual in its nonchalance? If they were the words of a Romantic hero, they might have a kind of Promethean splendor about them. But the way Dowson writes them, they seem playful rather than serious, as if the momentous issue of a final deathbed impenitence were merely matter for a wasteful, cavalier ges-



ture. "Impenitentia Ultima" tells us much about Dowson's personality as a poet, and how his religious inclinations (for I think we must call them that, rather than "beliefs,") tended to express themselves in his poetry. Dowson's primary concern in all the lyrics we have been considering here was not actual religious experience, but rather *intensity of feeling* as it expresses itself through traditional religious imagery. Hence the superficial nature of his religious poems: they are evocations of mood and atmosphere rather than the genuine explorations of religious feeling that one finds, say, in George Herbert's *The Temple*. He was attracted to the surface manifestations of the religious life—its trappings and visible signs—but not to its intellectual rigor, nor to the spiritual conflicts that actually accompany commitment to such a life.

Dowson's religious poetry, therefore, should not be taken as representative of any real religious vocation, but rather as a collection of images most resonant of that vocation's nature. Is such poetry "false"? Only if we are prepared to admit that poetic feigning is always a betrayal of reality, which of course it is not. Poetry—and especially the lyric poetry of which Dowson was a supreme master—is purposely evocative rather than representative. It summons up images that are the simulacra

of actual experience, and manipulates those images to stir our emotions. It is precisely this "image-making" force that marks Dowson's poems as so Catholic—they create the sensual conditions for a religious response. If that response is not forthcoming in modern readers, the poems still stand as monuments to an aesthetic impulse, just as cathedrals do for unbelievers.

Still, these lyrics are only a small part of Dowson's *oeuvre*. They represent a minor chord in his poetic voice. We must remember that Dowson was above all a lyric poet of love. When he wrote on religious subjects, the intensity of that lyric voice was transferred to themes not quite congenial to it: a heightened sense of self-denial, suffering and solitude, separation from the world. Of course, lyric poetry has always dealt with sorrow, but it does not usually deal with the *voluntary* and *chosen* sorrow that is a necessary concomitant to the sort of monastic life Dowson praises. And yet perhaps it is this very internal discordance—the rhetoric of love's indulgence made to sing the praises of asceticism—that makes Dowson's religious poetry unique, and worthy of reconsideration.

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## The Narrative Experimentalism of Tennyson's "Sea Dreams"

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In the late fifties and throughout the sixties, the middle decades of his poetic career, Tennyson wrote mostly narrative poems. He finished the first four *Idylls of the King* in 1858, and in 1868 he wrote "The Holy Grail" idyll, the "poetic breakthrough" that enabled him to complete his major narrative poem during the early seventies (Buckler 52). Between 1858 and 1868, when he could not continue with *Idylls*, Tennyson wrote or revised a number of monologues and verse stories that contributed considerably to his development as a narrative poet. Yet besides discussing the style of "Enoch Arden," the title poem of the poet's 1864 volume, and showing sporadic interest in "Lucretius" as an answer to the "fleshly school" of poetry, Tennyson's commentators have shown little interest in this important period of composition, a result of their own disappointment with the creative decisions Tennyson made in his middle and later years. Tennyson's work with narrative was not a "flagrant misjudgment" of his "purely lyrical" talent (Golfing 266); indeed, Tennyson was never a "purely lyrical" poet, and as John Rosenberg has said, the facile distinction between lyric and narrative in Tennyson's poetry "no longer satisfies" (303).

"Sea Dreams," which Tennyson published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1860 and then with two other verse narratives—"Enoch Arden" and "Aylmer's Field"—in 1864,<sup>1</sup> is a fascinating blend of narrative, dramatic, and lyric forms. The experimental

character of "Sea Dreams" indicates that Tennyson was working through narrative issues important to his later development, particularly in relation to his use of the term "parabolic drift" (*Memoir* 2: 127). "Sea Dreams" is a deceptively simple poem, possessing, as the Biblical parables do, a dormant complexity, reserved, so to speak, for those who are interested in the process by which meaning is determined. It is a dialogue-story in which a contemporary couple tries to come to terms with their unfortunate situation by coming to terms with their dream narratives. Fascinated himself by the technique and psychology of dreams (C. Tennyson 230; Colley 121-8), Tennyson depicts the couple as they determine the meaning of their dream stories, a process that exposes not only the hidden relationship between storyteller and story, between personality and event, but the interpretive encounter implicit in every storytelling. Indeed, rather than a statement of faith in the domestic order,<sup>2</sup> "Sea Dreams" is a highly innovative exploration of the circumstances and consequences of narration.

The couple of the poem is in flight from the "great-factored city gloom" (5). On the surface, their distress is financial, the result of a foolish investment in "strange shares in some Peruvian mine" (15). But they have been deeply injured by life itself, as their dream stories reveal; they have not been able to escape the emotional and psychological turbulence they hoped to leave behind. External stimuli—the world—even interrupt and

1. Tennyson wrote "Sea Dreams" late in 1857 and revised the poem in 1858 and before republication in 1864. I have used the text from the Ricks edition throughout and include line numbers after all quotations.

2. For the argument that Tennyson's world view is "essentially domicentric rather than egocentric," see Fredeman.



alter the development of their dreams: what was for the husband a pleasurable dream experience becomes, with the accidental breaking of a medicine glass, a picture of destruction; the wife's detached vision of harmonious ebb and flow becomes personally threatening with the intrusion of her child's cry. For the couple, escape from the pressures of city life is delusory, as delusory as their interpretive effort to disguise the deep significance of their dream stories. At the end of "Sea Dreams," the couple agrees to let their differences be, but they do not truly connect or achieve peace of mind. Indeed, their fundamental conflict, as exposed by the inner reality of the poem—by the dreams—is never resolved.

It is by blending genres in "Sea Dreams"<sup>3</sup> that Tennyson provides the reader with both an intimate picture of the couple (we observe the give-and-take of their late-night pillow talk) and a more detached one (we are told what has happened before they speak). In the narrative introduction, an unidentified speaker gives in fifty-nine lines the essentials of the couple's situation and an account of their first full day of retreat from the city. They are sensitive creatures, it is suggested, he "a city clerk, but gently born and bred" (1), she an "unknown artist's orphan child" (2); the wife maintains "a tender Christian hope" (41), but the husband often darkens "as he curse[s] his credulousness" (13). Having arrived from the city at the close of the previous day, the couple awake by the sea on the Sabbath; they hear the blustering sermon of "a heated pulpiter" (20); after frolicking by the sea during the day, they retire for the night, and the husband meets with silence his wife's petitions to forgive the man who cheated them. Finally, they sleep but are disturbed by the "full tide" and the "ground swell" (50, 51) that crashes noisily on the coast. Both husband and wife have dreamed, the narrator reports, and his description of the night sea at work, which concludes the introductory section of the poem, characterizes the work of the unconscious mind:

But while the two were sleeping, a full tide  
Rose with ground-swell, which, on the foremost rocks  
Touching, upjetted in spirits of wild sea-smoke,  
And scaled in sheets of wasteful foam, and fell  
In vast sea-cataracts—ever and anon  
Dead claps of thunder from within the cliffs  
Heard through the living roar. (50-56)

Thus the narrator sets the scene for the characters' accounts of their dreams, which they give in the course of their dialogue-discussion. The narrator makes the necessary narrative links ("she said," "he said," "said the good wife," etc.), but until the end when the narrator intrudes once more to close the frame of the poem, "Sea Dreams" is an extended debate (210 lines) between husband and wife.

This does not mean, however, that "Sea Dreams" is predominantly dramatic in character; the dreams related by the characters are themselves narrative accounts. The dramatic dialogue constitutes an inner frame, circumscribing the dream stories, and the poem begins to examine the conflicts of the unconscious mind. Tennyson has created the illusion formalis-

tically that character is being expressed or revealed at a deeper level. On the surface, the couple's discussion is all that happens in the poem, and the plot turns simply upon the fact that the wife knows throughout the dialogue that the man who ruined them is already dead, a fact that the overall narrator conveniently keeps from the reader during the introduction. But the dream narratives and interpretations are provided as clues to the secret workings of the characters' minds, to their motives, interests, and psychological conditions. Indeed, the husband and wife debate the significance of each dream story, and even though their attempts at interpretation are either misguided or incomplete, their serious attention to the process by which meaning is determined makes interpretation a central issue of the poem.

The husband of "Sea Dreams" is obsessed with their financial situation, the wife with their spiritual salvation, and they interpret life and their dreams accordingly. They read their dreams as abstract renderings of their respective value systems rather than as the "ground swell" of personality. They tend to be literal-minded, to interpret their dreams too allegorically, and are in fact trapped by their own misprision, not knowing the degree to which the "teller" of a dream is the "told-of." But from outside the inner frame of the poem, from a detached perspective, the reader is better positioned to find the secrets of personality embedded in the dream stories of "Sea Dreams"; indeed, the emphasis on interpretation in the poem invites the reader to judge the dreamers' capacity to understand the stories they tell.

The husband dreams, first, that he is carried "from out the boundless outer deep" (86) and into "those dark caves that run beneath the cliffs" (88). Finding only a "landward exit" (94), he sees "a giant woman" (96) "all over earthy" (97) and recalls,

"then out I slipt  
Into a land all sun and blossom, trees  
As high as heaven, and every bird that sings." (98-100)

In the second part of his dream, the husband continues his journey on the land, but the events apparently are directly connected to his financial distress. Wondering about the woman's great strength, he is told, " 'It came...by working in the mines!' " (110). He asks about his shares, but she only shakes her head and leads him up a mountain path shaped by her own foot, and there he sees

"a fleet of glass,  
That seemed a fleet of jewels under me,  
Sailing along before a gloomy cloud  
That not one moment ceased to thunder, past  
In sunshine: right across its track there lay,  
Down in the water, a long reef of gold,  
Or what seemed gold." (118-124)

The jeweled navy crashes on the golden reef despite the sleeper's signal to warn it off.

The husband follows his account with an interpretation, his

tation and lack of narrative connections in the idyll" (23). But Pattison restricts narrative as a literary form when he equates it with plot (54).

3. Theocritus (*Idyll XXI*), Tennyson's classical source for "Sea Dreams," also blends genres. Robert Pattison discusses the formal eclecticism of the idyll form in *Tennyson and Tradition*, noting that there is "fragmen-



attempt to put the dream material in sensible relation to his life experience:

"Now I see  
My dream was Life; the woman honest Work;  
And my poor venture but a fleet of glass  
Wrecked on a reef of visionary gold." (132-135)

His wife disagrees, arguing that the fall of the medicine glass triggered and interrupted the dream (" 'A trifle makes a dream, a trifle breaks,' " she says [140]), but the husband, agonized by the threat of financial destruction (the narrator said in the opening section that he awoke crying, " 'A wreck, a wreck!' " [591]), produces further evidence for his position:

"No trifle," groaned the husband; "yesterday  
I met him suddenly in the street, and asked  
That which I asked the woman in my dreams." (141-143)

The husband's dream narrative is a realistic representation of dream experience, but the couple's interpretations are inadequate. According to Freud, external stimuli can cause dreams, as the wife claims, but do so rarely compared to psychical stimuli. Only language actually spoken is incorporated into dreams, as the husband indicates, but it is usually displaced and its significance altered. The symbols of the dream form a logical pattern, but the couple does not recognize how such a pattern reveals human desire (Freud 2: 160).

The husband's dream suggests his wish, in the first part, to return to the protection of the womb, to be un-born into the receptacle of feminine security. In the second sequence, sexual desires compromise the dreamer's desire for mothering. Freud would link jewels and ships with the uterus again, and their wreck on the phallic golden reef with the desire for sexual union. It is impossible to establish the full implications of the husband's dream since that depends upon the dreamer's associations, and few are provided, but we do know that he has no idea of or suppresses any sense of his dream's symbolic value. In fact, his interpretation replaces the content of the dream as a whole "by another content which is intelligible and in certain respects analogous to the original one" but does not account for its psychical cause (Freud 2: 96-97). The dreamer treats his dream as an allegory for his worldly situation rather than as the symbolic representation of a "fulfillment of a wish." At the deepest level, his dream is about himself in relation to his wife and not about his financial condition.

Freud, of course, was not available to Tennyson, but the poet provides the reader access to a similar realization about the husband's inner conflict in at least two other ways. First, the husband's ambiguous relationship to his wife is inherent in the picture given at the close of the poem. Domestic unity is the result of physical compromise: when the narrator closes the frame of the poem, he describes the wife,

half turned round from him she loved,  
Left him one hand, and reaching through the night  
Her other, found (for it was close beside)

And half-embraced the basket cradle-head  
With one soft arm, which, like the pliant bough  
That moving moves the nest and nestling, swayed  
The cradle, while she sang this baby song. (274-80)

Positioned as half mother, half wife, the woman plays the double role that the husband depicts for her in his dream experience. There, however, as dreamer, he plays the role of both husband and child. Moreover, the song that follows the description of this scene—

What does little birdie say  
In her nest at peep of day?  
Let me fly, says little birdie,  
Mother, let me fly away (281-284)

—is a reversal of the husband's desire to return to intra-uterine life. Children, naive about the harsh realities of the world, wish naturally to leave the protection of the "nest" and try their "little wings." The husband, wounded by his own "credulousness" (13), expresses in his dream the desire to return to safety.

Second, Tennyson provides a more oblique clue for interpreting the husband's dream narrative, one that requires the reader to consider the nature of parable and parable interpretation. When the wife claims, in her pragmatic fashion, that her dream was also the result of an external stimulus (" 'the crying of a child' " [241]), the husband replies,

"Child? No!" said he, "but this tide's roar and his  
Our Boanerges with his threats of doom,  
And Loud-lung'd Antibabylonianisms  
(Although I grant but little music there)  
Went both to make your dream." (242-246)

The husband refers to the heavy-handed "heated pulpiter" who preached Apocalyptic destruction that very morning, and with the term Boanerges he alludes to Mark 3,<sup>4</sup> a text that includes an account of Christ teaching in parables. Boanerges, "the sons of thunder," is the epithet given to John and James by Jesus when he establishes the community of the twelve. Jesus withdraws from the city to the sea in an attempt to escape destruction, like the couple of "Sea Dreams," but retreat from the pressures of his ministry is denied him. The multitudes follow, threaten to crush him, and proclaim him the Son of God even though "he strictly ordered them not to make him known" (Mark 3.12). After choosing his apostles, Jesus tells the only Gospel parable about himself, the parable about Satan casting out Satan. Accused of being possessed by the prince of demons, he says,

"How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." (23-25)

The parable has relevance for the "house" that the man, wife, and child of "Sea Dreams" comprise: according to the simple plot of the poem, the husband's refusal to forgive their enemy

different things to different people" (23).

4. In *The Genesis of Secrecy*, Frank Kermode considers the Markan parables as evidence that "narratives mean more and other than they say, and mean



disrupts and divides them. Jesus's promise, as the parable continues, that "all sins will be forgiven the sons of men" makes the application of the parable even more suitable.

More penetrating, however, is the formal relevance of this allusion to the Markan Gospel. The dreamer's unconscious mind finds a way to get the truth out, and his conscious mind a way to avoid it. The husband allegorizes what is essentially a parabolic dream experience; he does not realize that, like parables, dreams require a holistic interpretation, understanding of the whole story, and in this respect, his interpretation—an attempt to find sensible equivalents for individual segments of his dream—is clearly inadequate.

Critics of the Biblical parables have recently pointed out the referential division inherent in parable wherein, according to a structuralist model, the first order referent is "directly supplied within the conventional code of language" (Wittig 85); but the second is only implicit and depends on the beliefs and values of the perceiver, giving to parable a dynamic, fluid, and energizing indeterminacy. Dreams are similarly structured. In Biblical parable, of course, understanding depends on the interpreter's knowledge of the affinity between the natural order of things and the spiritual order; in dream, access to meaning is based on the affinity between the manifest content of the dream and the latent content. Yet both dreams and parables are sharply focused, the former combining and condensing a variety of material into a unity that disguises a single plea or wish, the latter presenting a single point of comparison.<sup>5</sup> Both are misunderstood or compromised interpretively, as the husband demonstrates, by imposing ideational equivalents on concrete imagery. In short, dreams and parables are often treated as allegories, each of their terms treated as cryptograms for individual ideas rather than as self-contained aesthetic formulations that relate to the world outside them only as a whole, and this has tended to further disguise rather than reveal meaning (Freud 2: 97; Dodd 11). Moreover, the transaction or agreement between tale (or teller) and listener, the exchange between text (or teller) and interpreter, shapes the meaning of both dream and parable. In this regard, the text does not create one particular meaning but rather the "conditions under which the creation of meaning can be defined and examined by each individual perceiver" (Wittig 95). As Tennyson said of his own *Idylls of the King*, "I hate to be tied down to say, *This means that*, because the thought within the image is much more than any one interpretation" (*Memoir* 2: 127).

The dialogue in "Sea Dreams," then, is the characters' failed search for the parabolic truth of their dreams; that search is the real subject of the poem. The couple faces the challenge of discovering the secret of their dreams, and the first step in the process is telling. The simple act of recounting the dreams should have a "liberating effect not achievable in the act of dreaming" (Zambrano 191). To tell is to move the dream experience from the unconscious to the conscious—a risky but necessary process—to begin a dialogue, to assume a position outside the closed experience of the dream and outside to an extent the confines of the self. But even though Tennyson has the characters of "Sea Dreams" participate—as storytellers—in

their own recreation, he has severely limited their ability to understand the process through which they pass. The close of the poem suggests only the slightest advance in self-realization: because they have exchanged their dream stories, the husband and wife are perhaps closer than when they were "silenced by that silence" (46) at the opening of the poem. But in the end, the narrator simply juxtaposes one last time the voices of the man and woman:

"She [the baby] sleeps: let us too, let all evil, sleep.

He [the thief] sleeps—another sleep than ours.

He can do more wrong; forgive him, dear,

And I shall sleep the sounder!"

Then the man,

"His deeds yet live, the worst is yet to come.

Yet let your sleep for this one night be sound:

I do forgive him!"

"Thanks, my love," she said,

Your own will be the sweeter," and they slept. (297-304)

The man's concession at the close of "Sea Dreams" strikes an ominous rather than tranquil note.

In "Sea Dreams," the characters' effort to find coherence and significance in the dream stories they tell is an analogue for Tennyson's persistent reevaluation of the place narrative should occupy in his art. Indeed, between 1858 and 1868, Tennyson addressed creatively many of the formal and theoretical issues discussed by recent critics of narrative. Frank Kermode, for instance, has lately used parable (and the interpretive encounter implicit in it) as a model for the special power of narrative to both engage and exclude an audience, to both reveal and conceal the truth. In response to the tendency to determine one-to-one equivalents for the images, characters, and events in "The Holy Grail," Tennyson described the narrative method of the poem as one of "parabolic drift" (*Memoir* 2: 127). He knew that a story is more than a sequence of events—that it is a "telling," an event itself that is "at once central and peripheral to the experience of the story" (Hawthorn vii) and inseparable from the meaning conveyed. As an artist, Tennyson was always seriously interested in the relationship of poetry to truth, and in the middle of his career he examined that relationship with narrative experiments like "Sea Dreams." In 1892, the year of Tennyson's death, Yeats reviewed Tennyson's last volume of poetry and claimed that all poets of the nineteenth century had been "heavily handicapped by being born in a lyrical age" (251). Tennyson came to know as much, and even though he did not lose interest in the depths of personality, he began to emphasize in his middle years, as he had not before, the circumstances and consequences of narration.

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5. That parables present a single point of comparison is the subject of some discussion among Biblical scholars. See Tolbert (17) and Via (10).



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## Merlin In Victorian Poetry: A Jungian Analysis

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Referring to Merlin's appearance in the Middle Ages, Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz express surprise at the fact that a mere "literary creation...should suddenly have achieved tremendous fame and been responsible for such a vast amount of literature." When such a thing happens, they go on, "it is obvious, from the psychological point of view, that it is a case of the breakthrough of an archetypal image which represents an intensively constellated psychic content" (349-350).

In nineteenth-century Britain we see a similar breakthrough with the reemergence of not only Merlin but the whole Arthurian legend. From the Jungian point of view, however, the Romantic era was not yet in need of the great compensatory power the Arthurian archetypes and Merlin in particular would provide.<sup>1</sup>

Such a need arose during the Victorian period, when doubts about the supernatural became widespread and Arthurian legend once again enjoyed a reputation based upon artistic interest as opposed to historical, political, astrological, or satiric interest. In the work of Tennyson and Swinburne, treatments of the legend became what C. G. Jung terms "visionary," work "that derives its existence from the hinterland of man's mind, as if it had emerged from the abyss of prehuman ages, or from a superhuman world of contrasting light and darkness" (*The Spirit* 89-90), work, in other words, that comes from the collective unconscious and thus has more than a merely personal meaning. Such work compensates for contemporary psychic imbalance, addressing, either by negative or positive example, the need for psychic wholeness, what Jung terms individuation.

Though literal belief in Merlin was unlikely, he compensated, in a Jungian sense, for contemporary doubts about the supernatural, as well as for Victorian prudishness. As the archetypal

Wise Old Man, he symbolized the whole person—the Self. The story of Merlin's enchantment and imprisonment by a woman especially interested Victorian writers, and whether they treated Merlin's fate as positive or negative suggests how comfortable the major poets were with the psychic tensions of the age.

Matthew Arnold's treatment of Merlin, unlike those by Tennyson and Swinburne, falls into the "psychological" mode, a work "drawn from man's conscious life." In psychological poems there is no "obscurity...for they fully explain themselves in their own terms" (*The Spirit* 89). Using Merlin briefly in his *Tristram and Iseult* (1852), Arnold has the injured Iseult of Brittany tell her children the story of Merlin's enchantment by "Vivian," "that false fay, his [Merlin's] friend, / On her white palfrey" (147). Arnold follows the Vulgate *Merlin*, except that the unhappy Iseult (who "seems one dying in a mask of youth," [151]) gives Vivian the same motives, and in the same words, as Malory's Nymue:

And in that daisied circle, as men say,  
Is Merlin prisoner till the judgment-day;  
But she herself whither she will can rove—  
For she was *passing weary* of his love. (156, italics mine)

Iseult no doubt identifies herself with Merlin, who has also been betrayed in love. But Arnold adds little to the legend, and his version appeals more to the conscious than to the unconscious mind.

Elsewhere I have maintained that Algernon Charles Swinburne's best poem is *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882). It is also the most psychologically satisfying of Swinburne's poems because in it both Tristram and Iseult achieve psychic wholeness or "the archetypal Self" (Snider 371). In the same poem Merlin, through union with the anima (symbolized by Nimue), achieves a wholeness emblematic of the wholeness Tristram achieves with Iseult. The poem is "visionary" because it compensated for contemporary psychic imbalance, most obvious in Victorian attitudes toward sex. *The Saturday Review*, for example, objected to the "low intrigue" in the poem; and *The Spectator*

1. John Veitch (1820-1894), an obscure poet and professor of logic and rhetoric at the University of Glasgow, best known for his *The History and Poetry of the Scottish Border: Their Main Features and Relations* (1878), wrote about Merlin in that book and in *Merlin and Other Poems*

(1889). Veitch's pantheistic and rather pedantic work lacked wide appeal and is, both from the literary and the psychological points of view, of little interest.



complained that Swinburne "paints the sensual appetite with a redundancy and excess that excite disgust" (Quoted in Hyder 196-197).

Merlin appears in Swinburne's *Tristram* as a figure from the past. Tristram and his lover, Iseult of Ireland, are reminiscing about Camelot's past, and Iseult brings up the story of Merlin, the "great good wizard," and "Nimue." Both Tristram and Iseult recount how Merlin "Takes his strange rest at heart of slumberland...in green Broceliande..." (Swinburne 106). As Margaret J. C. Reid points out, Swinburne uses this tale "to give expression to his own pantheistic philosophy" (80). Merlin's fate is, therefore, a "guerdon gentler far than all men's fate," for Merlin has the comfort of nature and the four seasons (Swinburne 106-107).<sup>2</sup> Yet Merlin symbolizes something far more complex than Swinburne intended: with Nimue he symbolizes a psychic whole, an individuated person. Just as Tristram and Iseult together form a psychic union, so do Merlin and Nimue:

Yea, heart in heart is molten, hers and his,  
Into the world's heart and the soul that is  
Beyond or sense or vision; and their breath  
Stirs the soft springs of deathless life and death,  
Death that bears life, and change that brings forth seed  
Of life to death and death to life indeed,  
As blood recircling through the unsounded veins  
Of earth and heaven with all their joys and pains. (107-108)

When Tristram himself is about to die, he recalls again the story of Merlin, who "with soft live breath / Takes always all the deep delight of death, / Through love's gift of a woman..." (153). Though he does not know it, Tristram himself will share the same fate with his lover, Iseult.

Only Swinburne among Victorian poets makes the story of Merlin's enchantment by a woman entirely positive, as well he should, for on the psychological level Nimue is the feminine in Merlin's psyche. As Jung puts it, referring to a different story, "the hero has been wafted out of the profane world through his encounter with the anima, like Merlin by his fairy...he is like one caught in a marvellous dream, viewing the world through a veil of mist" (*The Archetypes* 245). Heinrich Zimmer in this century also views Merlin's enchantment positively: "Merlin withdraws...into the power that is himself. It only looks as though he had succumbed to it" (197).

Although in *Tristram of Lyonesse* Swinburne concentrates on the one aspect of Merlin's story, Swinburne's *The Tale of Balen* (1896) presents the traditional prophet-adviser, who helps Arthur, as well as Balen and Balan. Merlin is not prominent in either poem, yet he remains a compensatory figure who, in the words of Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, "holds open the approaches to the divine-animal substrata of the psyche" (366). Collectively, Victorian society had become too one-sided, gravitating toward the secular as opposed to the

spiritual. Archetypal figures such as Merlin helped balance this one-sidedness, even though no major poet grappled with the medieval story of his being conceived by a devil and a saintly woman (Tennyson's Merlin merely says, "Envy call[ed] me Devil's son," ["Merlin and Vivien" 495]).

In "Merlin and Vivien," Tennyson draws on Malory, as he did in "The Coming of Arthur," but he changes and broadens the tale significantly.<sup>3</sup> "Merlin and Vivien" was written in 1856 and is the first idyll as such of the *Idylls of the King* that Tennyson wrote (Baum 178). The poem was made available to the public, after an 1857 private printing, in 1859, along with three other idylls: "Enid," "Elaine," and "Guinevere" (Marshall 136-137). Paul F. Baum comments on the contemporary reception given to "Merlin and Vivien":

[Benjamin] Jowett liked it best and called it "the naughty one"; and there can be little doubt that Tennyson's poetical handling of the seduction scene gave satisfaction to many other readers. Victorian reticence had here successfully, for a moment, raised the veil. (178)

Tennyson's picture of the licentious Vivien must have had a great unconscious, compensatory appeal to a people who counted it a virtue to repress their sensual, "evil" urges. Had the seduction ended positively, as in Swinburne's version, the reaction might not have been so warm, although the unconscious attraction would have been similar. The fact that all three major poets—Arnold, Swinburne, and Tennyson—chose to focus on Merlin's seduction demonstrates the collective appeal of the story. Despite Merlin's reputation as a wise magician, he is subject to the wiles of the flesh.

Vivien is usually considered entirely evil (Marshall says she is "represented as the non-repentant evil woman" 141), but Douglas W. Cooper rightfully qualifies this judgment:

True, Tennyson's pen has drawn her in acid. But it has also shown her as a kind of failure. She is unfulfilled, love frustrate...Further, he pictures her physicality...as somehow a needed opposite to Merlin...Together they almost seem to form a mute whole, the one complementing the other....(109)

Cooper writes from a Jungian perspective, and clearly the problem Merlin—and all of Camelot—faces is how to accommodate the contrasexual in all its negative and positive aspects. Merlin and Vivien should have made a whole—as they do in Swinburne. Because they do not, the idyll ends with defeat. Trapped inside the oak tree, Merlin "lay as dead, / And lost to life and use and name and fame" (Tennyson 368).

Tennyson characterizes the mage of Arthur's court as "the most famous man of all those times, / Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts, / Had built the King his havens, ships, and halls, / Was also Bard, and knew the starry heavens; / The people called him Wizard..." (356). Merlin in the *Idylls of the King* is, then, as I have indicated, much the same Merlin found

2. More recently, David G. Riede has called *Tristram* "a myth of the creative poet" (191). Recognizing that Swinburne "confronted the crucial problems of the late nineteenth century as directly as any of his contemporaries" (217), Riede, referring to *Tristram*, says "Swinburne's final poetic creed, though hopeful, is no facile optimism but a call for unblinking acceptance of death and pain and continual strife to live intensely and create continu-

ally" (213).

3. Gordon Haight convincingly asserts, however, that "the version...closest to Tennyson's idyll is found in the Vulgate *Merlin*," which Tennyson could have read in Robert Southey's notes to his 1817 edition of Malory (551-552).



in the *Morte d'Arthur*. But unlike Malory, who has Merlin pursuing Nymue, Tennyson makes Vivien the temptress—the negative anima—who eventually ensnares Merlin. When this happens, Merlin is in a very real sense anima-possessed. And Vivien fits Jung's description of the anima in possession of a man: she is "fickle, capricious, moody, uncontrolled and emotional...gifted with daemonic intuitions, ruthless, malicious, untruthful, bitchy, double-faced, and mystical" (*The Archetypes* 124).

After Vivien initially beguiles him, Merlin "at times / Would flatter his own wish in age for love, / And half believe her true" (356). Then a "great melancholy" falls upon him, and he crosses the English Channel to enter the "wild woods of Broceliande." Symbolically, he is in the realm of the unconscious. Vivien follows him, and there in the forest she successfully subdues him. That she is indeed a temptress Tennyson leaves no doubt. She is described as snake-like, and Merlin himself alludes to the Edenic myth, further evidence that we are dealing here with archetypal issues, with the problem of opposites. When Vivien asks to be taught the "charm" which "so taught will charm us both to rest" (358), he says it was a mistake to have mentioned the charm to her:

"Too much I trusted when I told you that  
And stirr'd this vice in you which ruin'd man  
Thro' woman the first hour..." (359)

The drama here is nothing less than a reenactment of the primal split, and as such it mirrors the split in the Victorian psyche. No where else does Vivien appear so vicious as she does in "Merlin and Vivien." Part of her motivation is that both her parents died from war against Arthur. But another part is that, as Cooper suggests, she is frustrated in love. On a deeper level, however, Tennyson unconsciously reflects the frustrations of his age.

Vivien pursues her goal ruthlessly, using all the traditional "feminine" weapons, including a sharp and a soft tongue and tears. She sings a song, the message of which is " 'trust me not at all or all in all' " (359), and Merlin "half believed her true, / So tender was her voice, so fair her face, / So sweetly gleam'd her eyes behind her tears..." (359). But it takes a storm finally to make her plans work. She declares that if she has "schemed against thy peace...May yon just heaven, that darkens o'er me, send / One flash, that, missing all things else, may make / My scheming brain a cinder, if I lie" (367). Heaven immediately sends such a flash which sends her clinging to Merlin, swearing her love to him. Here is an example of what Jung calls "synchronicity," "the simultaneous occurrence of two meaningfully but not causally connected events" (*The Structure* 441). And the incident is Merlin's last warning; wearily, not unlike Malory's Nymue, he succumbs and is imprisoned in the "hollow oak" (368). Ironically, the oak tree symbolizes, according to J.E. Cirlot, "strength and long life" (227). And the tree itself, according to Jung, has a "bisexual character" (*Symbols* 221); so that had there been real love between Merlin and Vivien the denouement might have been positive, a successful joining of opposites as in Swinburne's version of the tale. Tennyson's purpose, however, is different. His is a cautionary

tale, thus perhaps all the more attractive to his Victorian readers. Tennyson mirrors more than he compensates for the contemporary psychic split.

Merlin remained attractive to Tennyson throughout his life. In 1852 he had used Merlin as a pen name when he contributed verses to *The Examiner* (Luce 424). Toward the end of his life, after a very serious illness, Tennyson wrote "Merlin and the Gleam" (1889), about which the poet's son, Hallam, writes:

For those who cared to know about his literary history he wrote "Merlin and the Gleam." From his boyhood he had felt the magic of Merlin—that spirit of poetry—which bade him know his power and follow throughout his work a pure and high ideal, with a simple and single devotedness and a desire to ennoble the life of the world, and which helped him through doubts and difficulties to "endure as seeing him who is invisible." (1:xii)

Later Hallam tells us his father said that the Gleam " 'signifies in my poem the higher poetic imagination' " (2: 366).

Tennyson, then, identified himself with Merlin throughout his life, choosing the ancient British bard and seer as the subject of the poem that recounts his own literary career. Tennyson's identification with Merlin is not at all surprising from the psychological perspective. As one of the Victorian prophet figures, Tennyson had a real life role not unlike Merlin's role during the Middle Ages. Heinrich Zimmer has written that Merlin symbolizes "the magician as teacher and guide of souls. He is comparable...to the *guru*..." (181). The same could be written about Tennyson, the great Poet Laureate. The irony is, of course, he did indeed have those "doubts and difficulties" his son refers to—all the more reason he should be drawn to Merlin, an archetypal symbol of the Self, the wizard who set up the Round Table, itself a symbol of wholeness (see *The Grail Legend* 373 and 399). "Merlin and the Gleam" shows Tennyson's growth as a poet. No longer mirroring the contemporary failure to join psychic opposites, he held up a symbol of the individuated Self, quite a different Merlin from the one in the *Idylls*.

In this final commemorative poem Tennyson follows precisely the rhythms of some old Welsh poems (Haight 558). "Merlin and the Gleam" is thus a link to the past and a looking forward to the "boundless Ocean" (Alfred, Lord Tennyson 808; st. VIII, 1. 23). The speaker addresses a young Mariner:

O young Mariner,  
You from the haven  
Under the sea-cliff,  
You that are watching  
The gray Magician  
With eyes of wonder,  
I am Merlin,  
And I am dying,  
I am Merlin  
Who follow The Gleam. (st. 1)

The poet then retells his career, albeit not exactly chronologically, ending by exhorting the young Mariner to:

Call your companions,  
Launch your vessel,



And crowd your canvas,  
And, ere it vanishes  
Over the margin,  
After it, follow it,  
Follow The Gleam. (st. IX, ll. 6-12)

The penultimate stanza had ended:

There on the border  
Of boundless Ocean,  
And all but in Heaven  
Hovers The Gleam. (st. VIII, ll. 22-25)

About this passage, Jerome H. Buckley comments with insight:

Like "the great deep" in the *Idylls*, the "boundless Ocean" is thus both source and destination, the unknown sea from which the singer has come and to which he now returns, and all the while the eternity that encompasses the island of time across which he has traveled. (242)

It is a journey to completion of the Self. As the final stanza shows, the speaker exhorts the young mariner to follow the same course—an archetypal journey from and back to the maternal sea, symbol of the unconscious, where all opposites are ultimately joined. Whether Tennyson personally achieved individuation is beside the point: publicly he had assumed the role of the Wise Old Man (as in Jung's definition, "the personification of meaning and spirit," [*Symbols* 332]); and as I have indicated it is no wonder he identified with Merlin, the Wise Old Man of Arthur's court.

Tennyson identified the Gleam with Nymue or Vivien (Hallam Tennyson 2: 366), but obviously not the Vivien he created in the *Idylls* (see Haight 559-560). If, however, the Gleam represents the "higher poetic imagination," then it must encompass both good and evil. As we have seen, Vivien is evil, though not entirely so. Tennyson's Gleam is pure, yet it too encounters the "shadow" of stanza VII, where Tennyson recalls Arthur Hallam's death, which inspired the highest poetic achievement. So out of evil comes the good: "No longer a shadow, / But clothed with The Gleam" (ll. 19-20). If Tennyson is a great poet, an embodiment himself of the archetypal Wise Old Man, it is in part because he grappled with the questions of good versus evil, faith versus doubt and came to his own rather tentative conclusion: "I hope to see my Pilot face to face" ("Crossing the Bar," A. Tennyson 831). That Tennyson should recount his literary career by identifying himself with Merlin, the son of a devil and a virgin, is ultimately quite appropriate. Symbolically, the opposites have been united, at least for Tennyson's vast public.

As the nineteenth century became increasingly secular, serious writers, as well as visual artists, turned for their inspiration to the supernatural, reviving interest in Merlin and Arthurian legend, an interest that has continued throughout the twentieth century (see Spivack). Merlin's "legacy," as Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz write, "is a symbol of the Self...[yet]

it is only now that those premonitory intimations of the unconscious which are incarnated in the figure of Merlin—namely the task of the realization of the Self—are appearing, to penetrate into the consciousness of our own age" (399). If that is true, the roots of contemporary interest in Merlin and Arthurian legend are grounded in the nineteenth century, and in the *Idylls of the King* especially, just as the roots of Tennyson's (and Arnold's and Swinburne's) work extend back to the Middle Ages in the work of Thomas Malory, Robert de Boron, and Geoffrey of Monmouth.

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# What the Dead Are Doing Underground: Hades and Heaven in the Writings of Christina Rossetti

Linda E. Marshall

"What do you do there, underground,  
In the dark hollow? I'm fain to follow.  
What do you do there?—what have you found?"—  
Christina Rossetti, "The Ghost's Petition."

It always seems to me that as she had read Leopardi and Baudelaire, the thought of death had for her the same fascination; only it is not the fascination of attraction, as with the one, nor repulsion, as with the other, but of interest, sad but scarcely unquiet interest in what the dead are doing underground, in their memories, if memory they have, of the world they have left.

Arthur Symons, "The Rossettis."

What the dead are doing underground and what consciousness they possess are subjects of abiding interest in the writings of Christina Rossetti. That the dead are sleeping, only sleeping, her typical characterization of their state, may involve varying degrees and kinds of postmortem awareness, but Jerome McGann has nevertheless concluded that "unquestionably" she subscribed to the doctrine of soul sleep, or psychopannychy, the idea that the soul is suspended in profound unconsciousness from death until doomsday. Because McGann identifies soul sleep as a premillennarian doctrine, supposedly originating with sixteenth-century Anabaptists, he links—without foundation—soul sleep with nineteenth-century premillennarianism, and with allegedly unorthodox belief in a waiting period between death and Judgment. Thus he finds Rossetti's religious poetry historically marked and limited by its premillennarian poetics, yet at the same time transcendent in its ability to rehearse for us intimately the differences of the past, particularly the discontinuities of Christian belief. But if historicist awareness is to revitalize critical estimation of Christina Rossetti's poetry, then it is important to establish for her sleeping dead and for her Adventism a deeper basis than mid-Victorian premillennarianism, which in any case was not associated with the doctrine of psychopannychy. Though Christina Rossetti did believe in a suspensive interim between death and the Second Advent, such a belief is accommodated in Anglican eschatology; and though Christ's Second Coming was indeed the great event towards which her vision turned (see Waller), her patient and intensely inward attendance on apocalypse ignored premillennarian computations of the last days.

The question of what the dead are doing underground has to do with the state of the soul between the death of the body and the resurrection at the last day. As Richard Whately, the Oxford "Noetic" and future Archbishop of Dublin, observed, Scripture is not explicit about this interval (*A View* 43); he and a number of Anglicans in the nineteenth century were concerned with what might be known, on the basis of revelation and tradition, about what was called "the intermediate state of the soul," or, more Scripturally, Hades.<sup>1</sup> The intermediate state of the soul might best be termed an eschatological option within the Church of England, which, unlike the Roman Catholic Church or those Protestant denominations adhering to the formula of the Westminster Confession of Faith, never required its members to believe that after death the souls of the just were dispatched immediately to heaven, and those of the wicked straight to hell.<sup>2</sup> True, the Roman Church reserved purgatory as an interim for the salvageable, but rewards and punishments in clear cases were otherwise meant to be prompt. While traditional Anglican theology does not countenance purgatory, it does, in harmony with many of the Fathers, propose Hades, where the soul between death and doomsday may rest in Paradise (distinguished from Heaven, the New Jerusalem) or suffer a foretaste of hell. Hades provides the "antepast," as Mrs. Rossetti's favorite author Jeremy Taylor wittily preached, to the main and final course of Judgment ("A Funeral Sermon," preached Sept. 28, 1657, 8: 557). Equally *ben trovato* is Christina Rossetti's likening of Hades to a "pound" (*The Face of the Deep* 473), psychical internment prior to reclamation by the Owner or to destruction. From her devotional prose and poetry can be elicited a typical and traditional Anglican answer to the question of what the dead are doing underground: while their bodies decay, their souls enter Hades to await the Second Advent, Resurrection, and Judgment.

In Christina Rossetti's devotional writings, Hades—"the coffin of mortality, the cradle of immortality"—is "the intermediate abode" between death and judgment, and "includes Paradise" as one of its two regions. (*The Face of The Deep* 206). About the one region of fire and "inextinguishable thirst" where Dives suffers,<sup>3</sup> Rossetti like the Fathers and Anglo-catholic commentators has little to say, but of Paradise, the bosom of Abraham,

1. In England, controversy over the intermediate state of the soul goes back to the early eighteenth century. The point at issue was whether or not the soul was mortal and died with the body, and thus whether the soul "slept" or remained conscious until the reconstitution of the whole person at the General Resurrection. Notoriously, Henry Dodwell went to the extent of maintaining that only those baptized in the Church of England would awake from the sleep of death. Generally, however, those espousing the doctrine of soul sleep believed in eternal life through Christ and in the resurrection of the body, but that since the soul is inextricably bound up with the body, both effectively perish until restored by Christ on Judgment Day. That Joseph Priestley so reconciled his philosophical "materialism" and his faith is indicative of the rationalist or scientific or anti-platonic bias of the psychopannychians, a bias that held true in the nineteenth

century. See Alger, 430-31, 502-03.

2. Not until the Council of Florence, 1439, was this question settled infallibly by the Roman Church. Even that archfoe of heretics, Pope John XXII, had preached that in his personal opinion, the just would have to wait for the Day of Judgment in order to enjoy the beatific vision, an error condemned by the University of Paris in 1333 and rectified by John's successor in the bull *Benedictus Deus*, 1336. The Westminster Confession of Faith was published in 1647.

3. "Son, remember," 1. 13, Var. ed. 2: 325. For Rossetti poems published from 1862 (*Goblin Market and Other Poems*) to 1893 (*Verses*), I refer to Vols. 1 and 2 of the Variorum Edition; other citations to Rossetti's Poetry are from *Poetical Works*.



her works are full. This is Eden regained, garden of hope,<sup>4</sup> situated beyond the sea of death<sup>5</sup> at Heaven's gate.<sup>6</sup> Here, in "God's Acre,"<sup>7</sup> there is perpetual twilight;<sup>8</sup> time is not marked by night or day, nor are there seasonal turns of heat or cold.<sup>9</sup> In the peace and quiet of Paradise,<sup>10</sup> souls rest and are refreshed<sup>11</sup> (such solace is the *refrigerium Paradisi* foreseen by early Christians) (Mohrmann 123-32), free from earth's fear, risk, pain and desire.<sup>12</sup> Millions here are penned, a great flock safe in Paradise,<sup>13</sup> eagerly awaiting the dawn of the Second Advent.<sup>14</sup> These crowned saints in their white robes sing and rejoice with angels;<sup>15</sup> lovers and family members unite;<sup>16</sup> Christ, though not yet seen face to face, embraces his beloved.<sup>17</sup> The Paradisal rest "accords the chimes" of earth and Heaven-to-come,<sup>18</sup> just as twilight blends night and day. It may be that the saints, "brimful of love," watch and pray for the living;<sup>19</sup> but we should not try, with our weak faith, to summon them to us: "This separation to them is not grievous, and for us it is safe."<sup>20</sup>

Such projections of Paradise are in accord with those found, for example, in the sermons of John Henry Newman, sometime vicar of St. Mary's,<sup>21</sup> or of the Bishop of Lincoln, Wordsworth's nephew. To believe in a waiting period between death and Judgment did not identify one as a premillennarian, as McGann suggests, but as an Anglican, possibly but by no means inevitably High. Several writers in the nineteenth century, following Jeremy Taylor's learned and eloquent repossession of Hades for the Church of England, traced the concept of the intermediate state back to the Fathers and before, to the Jewish apocalypses and to certain New Testament cruxes, and pointed out its liturgical embodiment in the Burial Service (see Charles, Luckock, and Plumptre). With the revival of patristic studies and the Tractarian return to the authority of the early Church, Hades-which-includes-Paradise unfolded itself again to the devout imagination. For those who had "a vivid sense of the intermediate state" ("An Introduction to the Burial Ser-

vice" 475), Hades allowed for prayers for, if not to the dead, without capitulating to the more recent invention of purgatory, yet preserving catholic tradition and respecting the wishes of the living. And for those who cherished "the wider hope," Hades made possible the postmortem evangelizing of heathen domestic and foreign, so that all might have the opportunity of being saved; after this, the Judgment (Plumptre, ch. 6, 7).

Most Anglican writers about Paradise were careful to make two points about the intermediate state: that it had nothing to do with purgatory (Newman, "The Intermediate State" 371-72, Plumptre ch. 10, Luckock ch. 8), and that falling asleep in Jesus did not imply the doctrine of soul sleep (Wordsworth 20, Luckock ch. 5, Plumptre 396-99). "Romanizing Protestants" were indeed suspected of embracing both "portentous errors,"<sup>22</sup> but the theologian E. H. Plumptre, Dean of Wells, Biblical and Greek scholar, Dantist and poet, dismissed these imputations, and on the question of soul sleep in particular insisted that "Nothing in Scripture suggests the thought of a suspension of conscious existence at the moment of death." Though Scripture speaks of death as sleep (e.g., John 11.13, 1 Cor. 15.18, 1 Thess. 4.14,15), this is customary and natural language, and "even within the limits of our experience sleep is a modification, not a suspension, of the continuity of consciousness. And the word, as used by Christian writers, does not imply more than such a modification" (396-97). Soul sleep, the dreamless blank in consciousness after death—indeed the virtual extinction of the person entirely—has always been condemned by the Roman and English churches, Plumptre points out, as a materialist heresy, because it implies the soul is incapable of conscious existence apart from the body (398-99). Originating long before Luther's time and the Anabaptists' (the period to which McGann assigns its first manifestation), the heresy of the *psychopannychii* was not necessarily an adjunct of premillennarianism, but more generally a rejection of platonizing tendencies at work within the Church from early

4. "That Eden of earth's sunrise..." 2: 220; "God's Acre" 2: 319; "The Flowers appear on the Earth" 2: 319-20.  
 5. "One Day" 1: 133-34; "They lie at rest, our blessed dead" 2: 306; "Doeth well...doeth better" 2: 315.  
 6. "Paradise" 1: 221-22; "What good shall my life do me?" 2: 294.  
 7. "Sexagesima" 2: 219; "Slain in their high places..." 2: 286; "God's Acre" 2: 319.  
 8. "Sexagesima" ["night that is not night," 1. 12] 2: 219; "As thy days, so shall thy strength be" 2: 304; "The Flowers appear on the Earth" ["Where night and morning meet]" 1. 12] 2: 319-20; "Thro' burden and heat of the day" 2: 330; cf. "Song" ("When I am dead, my dearest") l: 58 (W. M. Rossetti remarked that this poem revealed Christina's uncertainty about "recognition" in the intermediate state; see Bell, 211); "Rest" ["Darkness more clear than noon-day," 1. 9] 1: 60; "I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes Unto the Hills" ["We rest in Jesus, / Where is not day nor night," 11. 11-12] 1: 224.  
 9. "That where I am, there ye may be also" 2: 309.  
 10. "After this the Judgment" 1: 184; "Whither the Tribes go up, even the Tribes of the Lord" 2: 298, *et passim*.  
 11. "They lie at rest, our blessed dead" 2: 306; "Thro' burden and heat of the day" 2: 330; *et passim*.  
 12. "Life and Death" 1: 155; "Antipas" 2: 283.  
 13. "Behold a Shaking" [2. "Blessed be that flock safe penned in Paradise," 1. 1] 2: 157. Although the first sonnet speaks of the Resurrection, the second refers to the resting dead and the living, both of whom are "tending toward the prize" (2. 1. 4).

14. "Sweetness of rest when Thou sheddest rest" 2: 334; "Our life is long..." 2: 301.  
 15. "Let them rejoice in their beds" 2: 286; "Whither the Tribes go up,..." 2: 298; "Our life is long..." 2: 301.  
 16. "One Day" 1: 133-34; "Saints and Angels" 1: 229; *et passim*.  
 17. "Antipas" 2: 283.  
 18. "Earth has clear call of earthly bells" 2: 265.  
 19. *Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets*, Sonnet 28 2: 150; "Our mothers, lovely women pitiful" 2: 292; "Dear Angels and dear disembodied Saints" 2: 293.  
 20. *The Face of the Deep* 44; cf. "Who would wish back the Saints...?" 2: 309. In his *Golden Treasury* selection of Christina Rossetti's poems (ix) W. M. Rossetti remarks *à propos* his grouping of "Dream Land," "Rest," and "Sleeping at Last" under the heading "The Aspiration After Rest": "Christina's poems contemplate (in accordance with a dominant form of Christian belief) an 'intermediate state' of perfect rest and inchoate beatific vision before the day of judgment and the resurrection of the body and sanctification in heaven."  
 21. "Sermon XXV. The Intermediate State," *Parochial and Plain Sermons* 3: 367-387. Cf. the poem "Waiting for the Morning" (written in 1835), in *Verses on Various Occasions* 210-11.  
 22. Alexander, 392-98. Professor of ecclesiastical history and church government at the Princeton Theological Seminary, Alexander proved Luckock's point that Presbyterians "in their dread of Purgatory...obliterated Paradise" (18).



days.<sup>23</sup>

The doctrine of soul sleep nevertheless was, in modified form, revived in the nineteenth century, but more notably by rationalist, scientific, or anti-patristic Anglican writers than by premillennarians, who were much more concerned with prophetic chronologies and signs of the times than with individual psychology. Indeed, Viscount Mandeville, a Church of England premillennialist, held that there was no intermediate state at all, much less one of profound dormancy.<sup>24</sup> The "high and dry" Archbishop Whately, certainly opposed both to premillennarianism and, eventually, to the Tractarian Movement, (*A View* 168-91, *Essays* 3-11) examined Scriptural evidence for and against consciousness in the intermediate state and leant, with the assistance of much-invoked Reason, towards unconsciousness. Nevertheless, Scripture does not positively authorize either view, he concluded, and a good Christian may hold one or the other, "provided he do not censure as heretical such as may differ from him on this point" (*A View* 102). Whately deals ingeniously with what might be imagined as "the long and dreary interval...between death and the Day of Judgment," if one supposed the soul slept throughout: "Reason tells us (the moment we consider the subject), that a long and a short space of time are exactly the same to a person who is insensible." Though the living mark time, "to the party concerned there is *no* interval whatever"; the next moment after that party closes his eyes in death, the last trumpet sounds (*A View* 95). "And when she wakes she will not think it long".<sup>25</sup> Christina Rossetti frequently, and particularly in her earlier poetry, seems to follow Archbishop Whately's preferred alternative of profound and timeless insensibility during the intermediate state, yet elsewhere she imagines the more conscious Paradise of Whately's Oxford protégé, John Henry Newman.

Isaac Taylor, like Richard Whately, was uncompromising in his belief in the inspired testimony of Scripture, but his speculations about the future state were assisted by science rather than by Reason. His *Physical Theory of Another Life*, which so moved persons as diverse as Henry Crabb Robinson (2: 273, 278-79) and George Eliot (1:93)<sup>26</sup> is more concerned with the wonders of the resurrection body than with the psychology of the intermediate state; but Taylor, despite his family background members of the Church of England, did believe in such a "transition state," one "not of unconsciousness indeed, but of comparative inaction, or of suspended energy." During this secluded "chrysalis period of the soul," there may be moral growth (unimpeded by "the urgent impulses of animal life") and no consciousness, probably, of the passage of time (*Physical Theory* 268-69). Although for Taylor the intermediate state was not one of insensibility, neither was it as active as the Paradieses of some High Church or Origenist divines, who postulated a busy community life indeed. What is most striking about Isaac Taylor's conjectural intermediate state is the proposal that the dead may so yearn after their lost corporeity that they may break through to the living world. Though ghosts

are in most cases traceable to their perceivers' diseased mental or physical states, Taylor acknowledges, they are phenomena which cannot always be explained away; such undismissable hauntings are the materials of science and of revelation, as the Bible teaches that there is "the human crowd, and the extra human crowd" (*Physical Theory* 270-75). The idea that ghosts are visitors from the intermediate abode has obvious relevance to many of Christina Rossetti's poems; the Bishop of Durham, B. F. Westcott, considered that her poems about problematic confrontations between the living and the dead comprised one of the two main groups of her work which revealed the nature and development of her poetry (19-21). Whether she knew Isaac Taylor's *Physical Theory* or not is unclear: she would have been acquainted with his Blake-like engravings praised by Dante Gabriel (Gilchrist 1: 425-26), but she, like both her brothers, might have been uncertain (see *Rossetti Papers* 362-63) about the many accomplishments of this wonderful man, best known as the author of *The Natural History of Enthusiasm*—artist, patristic scholar, translator, historian, analyst of religious mentality, inventor of the beer tap. Amongst his writings is a learned critique of the doctrines of the Oxford Tracts, showing that the Tractarian return to the nicene church was not one to apostolical Christianity, but to a church already corrupted by allegoresis, asceticism, ritualism, and the degradation of women. His extensive analysis of the attraction of what he calls "the soofeeism of the nicene age" for "minds of a lofty structure, abstractive, meditative, and especially *imaginative*, and conjoined with a temper reserved, haughty, and austere, even if submissive and obsequious" (those on whom *The Imitation of Christ* has maximum impact, for example) (*Ancient Christianity* 1:202, 541, 368f.), might make one wish the Rossettis had been more familiar with the extent of Isaac Taylor's work.

Taylor's motto "NOT THE FATHERS; BUT THE REFORMERS" (*Ancient Christianity* 2 [1842]:20) is re-echoed in the work of a rather obscure Church of England clergyman, Henry Constable, whose *Hades; or the Intermediate State of Man* denounces those "philosophizing Jews" and "Platonizing divines" who dreamt of the soul's continuing conscious life after death in Abraham's bosom or Paradise. Hades is the grave, and the grave only, he argues, since "The *psyche* of man is mortal, and dies in the case of every man." The person is destroyed utterly by the dissolution of body and soul, to be reunited by God's will at the resurrection; meanwhile, the soul "sleeps"—that is, death erases consciousness entirely. Like Whately, he reasons that "death, being a deep, unbroken sleep, has no perceptible duration" and that belief in the sleep of death makes resurrection very near, occurring in the twinkling of an eye. "To the pale sleeper there has been no waiting, no weariness, no time." Hades, then, does not include Paradise, but is buried in the dirt of this earth. Prayers for the dead rotting in the deepest sleep of all are of no avail, and the aim of "modern Origenists...[to] convert Hades into a land of

23. Significantly, Origen was the first to combat the heresy in its most extreme form. See Hagenbach, 1; 2: 392; 3: 226-28; Delitzsch 490-99.

24. Mandeville, 228-33. Viscount Mandeville attended Henry Drummond's 1826 Albury Conference, along with William Dodsworth, James Hatley Frere, and others, whose conversations were reproduced in Drummond.

See Froom 3: 276.

25. "Rest," 1. 14. Var. ed. 1: 61.

26. Eliot was also impressed by Taylor's *Ancient Christianity and the Oxford Tracts* (see *infra*); *Letters* 1: 63-64.



evangelisation" has no Scripture to recommend it. Convinced of the Scriptural basis for his argument, Constable nevertheless acknowledges that "the general current of patristic opinion is against us," and that he will no doubt be dismissed as a materialist for refusing to countenance the soul's conscious existence independent of the body (53, 63, 50, 122, 129, 131, 163).

Within the Church of England, the range of speculation concerning the nature of the intermediate state was broad. At the higher and "wider" end of the spectrum is Hades-which-includes-Paradise, where saints rest and are refreshed, meet old friends and family members, become acquainted with persons of other times and places, increase in religious illumination and in knowledge of the natural and social sciences, evangelize the heathen, perhaps keep track of earthly events and pray for us (Plumptre 404-12). At the grassroots end, so to speak, Hades is the grave; the person is extinct; the soul sleeps in profound unconsciousness. Somewhere between is Isaac Taylor's "transition state," which allows for some awareness, and for ghosts. Although Christina Rossetti's later devotional writings clearly present the Paradise of Anglo-catholic tradition, her representations of the intermediate state and the degree of consciousness therein do vary considerably throughout her work, as did opinions about Hades within her church. There are even some poems, written in her twenties but not published during her lifetime, which represent death as complete stasis, as an eternal sleep from which there is no awakening: such a view she labels "from the antique."<sup>27</sup>

Because of the difficulty in dating precisely Rossetti's later work, and because of the way she cannibalized, edited, and recycled manuscript poems, a chronological charting of various developments in her treatment of death and the intermediate state is perhaps not feasible, but certain generalizations can be made. That her devotional prose and *Verses* portray the High Church Paradise has already been suggested. While such a Paradise is glimpsed in earlier poems (notably, "Paradise," 1854),<sup>28</sup> for the most part the poems of the late 1840s and 1850s imagine the intermediate state as one of sleep or minimal, dreamy awareness, sometimes a bleakly coveted respite from an exacerbated consciousness.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, there are poems from this period which attribute to the newly dead a startling clarity of insight into the world just relinquished, as if only after death such cool analysis is available.<sup>30</sup> Whether one sees the intermediate state as withdrawal of consciousness or the heightening of it, perhaps the same point is made: life is neither sweet nor good, and to die is the best criticism of it. A kind of crisis is reached in the poems of 1858, particularly in "The Convent Threshold" and "Uphill," after which gradually emerges a more peaceful and humanized vision of the intermediate state, more the anteroom to Heaven than the exit from hell-on-earth, and a place where the soul is lovingly aware both of the living and the gathered dead. The theme of human

relationships here and beyond is worked out in a series of ghost-poems written in the latter half of the 1850s and the first half of the 1860s; the dead haunt the oblivious living, and the living summon the dead from their oblivion.<sup>31</sup> Eventually, however, the dead rest undisturbed; they may watch us but we must not petition them. Christina Rossetti seems slowly to turn from the idea of death as withdrawal from or suspension of consciousness, and as isolation from human relationships, to death as entry to Paradise, where continuing consciousness affirms enduring human love and strengthens the individual's personal relationship to a loving God.

The concept of the intermediate state, fundamental to Christina Rossetti's subjective eschatology, has little to do with premillennarianism. If she appears to subscribe to a doctrine, soul sleep, that historically was sometimes associated with premillennarianism (though not in the nineteenth century), she had scant interest in or knowledge of the prophecies concerning the last days: "the whole subject is beyond me," she admits in her commentary on the Apocalypse, and characteristically points out that "ignorance of the historical drift of prophecy may on occasion turn to a humble but genuine profit," that of turning the eye inward (*Face of The Deep* 342, 396). The Apocalypse, thus humbly scanned, yields the lesson Maria Rossetti had suggested it contained: patience ("Pretatory Note," *Face of the Deep* 7). Rooted not only etymologically in passivity and suffering, patience "preoccupies the soul with a sort of satisfaction which suppresses insatiable craving, vain endeavour, rebellious desire"; it is the "tedious, indomitable grace" (*Face of The Deep* 117, 68) not only centering Christina Rossetti's reading of the Apocalypse, but also informing the visionary time of her poetry, in which the perspective on last things is directly related to her ruling themes of "hope deferred" and "self-postponement" (see Blake 3-25). Full life, true love, and glorified identity await Christ's Second Coming. Until then, Rossetti's speakers, tediously and indomitably patient, cry out "How long, O Lord?"

Rossetti's eschatology is deeply implicated in what she accepted as Eve's legacy to woman—weakness, shame, and the "sentence" of unactable "desire," "the assigned object of her desire being such that satisfaction must depend not upon herself, but one stronger than she, who might grant or might deny." Yet women who do not attain their heart's desire are "no losers if they exchange desire for aspiration, the corruptible for the incorruptible" (*Face of The Deep* 310-11): desire for the fruits of this world is transformed to desire for delayed fruition in the next, so that patience (suffering, enduring, waiting) is a kind of homeopathy of desire, a bitter drink ("tedious") making sweet and fortifying ("indomitable") the drive towards fulfillment. Because of woman's situation in the world, in which the will to knowledge, power, satisfaction of desire—the active means to selfhood, in short—are denied, the daughters of Eve must suppress their cravings and rebelliousness (symbolized

27. "From the Antique," *Poetical Works* 304; "From the Antique," *Poetical Works* 312-13; and perhaps "Cobwebs," *Poetical Works* 317-18, depicting a kind of Old Testament Hades or Sheol; cf. "Christian and Jew. A Dialogue," Var. ed. 1: 72-74, written on the same day, July 9, 1858, as "A Convent Threshold."

28. Var. ed. 1: 221-22.

29. E.g., "Dream-land," 1: 27; "Life Hidden" *Poetical Works* 294; "Fata

Morgana" 1: 49-50; "Sound Sleep" 1: 57; "Song" ("When I am dead, my dearest") 1: 58; "Rest" 1: 60.

30. "After Death" 1: 37-38; "At Home" 1: 28; in "Wife to Husband" 1: 54-55, the cool summation immediately precedes death.

31. E.g., "At Home" 1: 28; "The Hour and the Ghost" 1: 40-42; "The Poor Ghost" 1: 120-21; "The Ghost's Petition" 1: 145-47; "A Chilly Night," *Poetical Works* 321-22.



in the "obscene woman," the World,<sup>32</sup> and hunger instead after Heaven's repletion, available only when Christ comes again. Then Eve and all our mothers will stand at the Throne of God, as Mary Magdalene stood by the Cross. Esther's crown foreshadows our crowns of glory (*Face of the Deep* 310-11, 364). Deferral on this grand scale makes the steeled passivity of patience essential to gratification and hope: "To let go patience would entail forfeit of both praise and promise." (*Face of the Deep* 68). In the poetic eschatology of Christina Rossetti, patient self-postponement, taking the lowest place, is the means to glory; death begins the process of moving closer to both praise and promise.

That transition is memorably pictured in "A Soul" (*Poetical Works* 311), wherein a woman at the moment of death (like Cleopatra's, and like the martyrs' Rossetti writes of elsewhere, a self-chosen victory over the world's "Roman sway") gazes steadfastly past "the shadowy land," Hades, towards "the land of day." Transfixed and transfixing in her deathly whiteness, she stands like a pale statue, like a pale beacon, a monument or rigid corpse terrifyingly "nerved" and "athirst," "Indomitable in her feebleness." Her *rigor mortis* is galvanic with the concentration of will towards the distant glory. If here Rossetti carves the image of desire transformed to patient aspiration, in "The Lowest Room" (Var. Ed. 1:200-07) she sets forth the dynamics of the thirst for apocalypse. The narrator, dwindling in "souring discontent" beside her golden sister, transposes her desire for Homeric beauty, intensity, and heroism in this world to expectation of pre-eminence when the Archangelic trumpet sounds. Having learned her "lifelong lesson"—"Not to be first"—the watchful, solitary speaker accepts her "lot in life" with grim satisfaction:

So now in patience I possess  
My soul year after tedious year,  
Content to take the lowest place,  
The place assigned me here.

The suppression of self is, however, clearly only in deference to the little worth "assigned" her "here"; what sustains this deference is deferral, not renunciation of self. Possessing the soul in patience is a means of self-possession, of holding the self in reserve. Closing with a heart-lifting anticipation of the Second Coming—

When all deep secrets shall be shown,  
And many last be first.—

the poem leaves no doubt of the narrator's self-vindicating hope of apocalyptic triumph. Far from eliminating the drive towards heroic self-assertion, subordination intensifies it, re-

tracting the speaker's "muscularity" (distasteful to Dante Gabriel)<sup>33</sup> in preparation for the more ambitious apocalyptic leap. "Crouch lowest to spring highest" (*The Face of The Deep* 420), Christina Rossetti counsels, the athlete of self-postponement.

Though she declined to support Women's Rights because she thought the cause at odds with Biblical teaching, Rossetti's own reading of the Book of Revelation reveals a kind of apocalyptic feminism far surpassing the mundane claims of her friends. The woman crowned with the sun in 12.1 is traditionally understood as the Church, an interpretation which Rossetti duly supplies, but she develops at length the novel idea that the figure is woman herself, at last made equal with men and angels: "from the lowest place she has gone up higher." Love of Christ, "the pattern and text-book of patience," sets weak woman "triumphantly erect" (*Face of The Deep* 116, 310)<sup>34</sup> and not least because "the feminine lot copies very closely Christ's voluntarily assumed position" on earth (*Seek and Find* 30). As Christ's weakness was the triumph of his strength, so woman's proof of superiority is keeping strength in abeyance (*Face of The Deep* 409-10).

Rest in Hades, glorification in Heaven: Rossetti's eschatological programme of deferral wearily recognizes the "doubly blank"<sup>35</sup> lot of woman in the world and compacts from imposed passivity indomitable, watchful strength. Although the particular emphases of her Christian belief mark her poetry as the work of a woman perhaps too deeply impressed with Tractarian revival of the "soofeeism of the nicene age," and with her assignment to the inferior place to which both the Fathers and her patriarchal society confined the daughters of Eve, her "correct" religious and social attitudes are tensed with a "self-respect" making her "Deep at [her] deepest, strong and free."<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, her ineffaceable sense of selfhood—"I am Christina Rossetti" (see Woolf 237-44)—is comparable to divine being: "Concerning Himself God Almighty proclaimed of old: 'I AM THAT I AM,' and man's inherent feeling of personality seems in some sort to attest and correspond to this revelation: I who am myself cannot but be myself....I may loathe myself or be amazed at myself, but I cannot unself myself for ever and ever" (*Face of The Deep* 47). Virginia Woolf recognized the indivisible nucleus of Rossetti's sense of self and the source of her art; but, not surprisingly, few including her own brothers, have been able to reconcile the pew-opener with the poet. Though the "green volume" of her poetry was an object of disinterest for New Critical gentlemen in the year of her centenary, the Common Reader and no doubt many mute and inglorious "excellent women" were on hand to admire the "complex song" produced by a poet with the dark, hard kernel of religion at the centre of her being.<sup>37</sup>

32. *Face of the Deep* 357, 400; cf. "The World," 1: 76-77.

33. Dante Gabriel thought the poem tainted by Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "modern vicious style" of "falsetto muscularity," and "utterly foreign to [Christina's] primary impulses"—not so foreign, however, that she should not henceforth "rigidly keep guard" against it. Clearly he was disturbed by the narrator's "souring discontent" and its transformations, but William Michael rather obtusely commented that the speaker's "final acceptance...of a subordinate and bedimmed position" completely reversed any possible "muscularity." See *Poetical Works*, Notes 460-61.

34. Rossetti's apocalyptic feminism might not have been of much practical

use to the cause, but even Christabel Pankhurst eventually regarded the suffrage campaign as a time of childish dreaming, and thought that the only solution to the world's ills was the imminent Second Coming (Pankhurst 43).

35. "From the Antique" ("It's a weary life, it is, she said"), *Poetical Works* 312-13.

36. "Enrica, 1865," Var. ed. 1: 193-94.

37. Woolf 239-44; cf. Pym, ch. 5: 39-40. McGann notices New Critical neglect of Christina Rossetti, and suggests several reasons for it.



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## Framing Wilde

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An off-hand list of the figures who obviously count these days in the undermining of a simple view of representation—say, Saussure, Heidegger, Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, Althusser—suggests the extent to which Anglo-American criticism has been swamped by a continental tradition, one in turn inspired by such nineteenth-century continental giants as Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. But if such be the mainstream of contemporary theory, this is not to deny the existence of a native English tributary that has had its influence. That nineteenth-century English line, to simplify, goes from Arnold to Pater to Wilde. “To see the object as in itself it really is,” Arnold tells us is the Function of Criticism at mid-century, as if the Kantian “thing in itself,” what Arnold’s contemporary Henry James called the Real Thing were readily accessible to perception. But already in the Victorian heyday of a belief in “disinterestedness” or “objectivity,” in the possibility of unmediated vision for either the empiricist or the idealist, Arnold’s famous dictum deconstructs itself by a self-framing—by a redundancy (“in itself,” “as it really is”) that betrays cognitive uncertainty. It is thus but a short step to Pater’s qualification in *The Renaissance* that the function of criticism is to know one’s impression of the object as it really is (since the “thick wall of personality” will cut off an unobstructed view of the object)—and an even shorter distance to the full Wildean reversal in “The Critic as Artist” to the effect that “The highest Criticism...is more creative than creation, and the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not” (*Artist as Critic* 369). Wilde’s pivotal role in the critical tradition, his true importance for us today, resides in that single sentence—in his *English* assertion that criticism is neither subordinate to creation nor even mimetic of the aesthetic object that is its apparent occasion. “To the critic,” continues Wilde’s spokesman Gilbert in the same speech from which I have quoted, “the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of one’s own, that need not necessarily bear any obvious resemblance to the thing it criticizes.” As Pater had framed Arnold’s key sentence, so Wilde had stepped back to frame the sentences of both his predecessors, but especially that of Arnold.

It is this act of critical framing, the engine of Wilde’s aggressive wit, that I would like to examine, for it is that process which makes him our contemporary. As Mary Ann Caws has recently demonstrated in *Reading Frames in Modern Fiction*, her study of the novel from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf, a concern for conceptual framing and meta-framing is a homology—may even be *the* most resonant homology—that cuts across literary theory, art history, psychology, sociology, the history of science, indeed, all of the human sciences these days. And the effect of such framing is to undercut in all of them a binary opposition of form and content, of surface and substance, of what Gombrich has usefully distinguished as “frame” and “fill.” Differentiating “pre-modernist” from “modernist” texts, Caws suggests that in the former certain passages generally frame or stress an “inner” substance or field under investigation, while the principal texts of modernism (particularly the novels of

James, Proust, and Woolf) emphasize the very act of framing as it calls attention above all to itself, scanning the surface frames rather than what they include “beneath” or “within” themselves. It is my contention that such a concentration upon the outer frame was forecast by Wilde’s own attack upon depth analysis—or at any rate by his systematic transvaluation of various Victorian hierarchies—those of earnestness over acting, of the natural over the artificial, and, preeminently, of substance over surface. “I am on bad terms with Nature; I see in her neither intellect nor passion—the only two things that make surfaces possible” (letter to H.C. Pollitt [1898] in *Letters* 774), said Wilde, for whom the survey of life’s surface was the essential aesthetic project. What existed below the surface sign was at best problematic and most likely impervious to representation. He did of course admit that the sign—the word, the image, the portrait—might stand for something else, that it might approach the condition of symbol. But the attempt to explicate that symbolic meaning he thought both an epistemological and moral mistake. “All art is at once surface and symbol,” one of the opening epigrams of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has it. But the two sentences that follow insist upon the priority of surface: “Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril” (viii).

Although Wilde’s dramas, novels, and critical essays all demonstrate the importance of making do with surfaces, with the “Truth of Masks,” “The Portrait of Mr. W. H.” from the critical volume *Intentions* may do as well as any of them as a paradigm for Wilde’s exploration of the “intentionality” of a text’s surface. The narrative of this homosexual romance disguised as a tale of literary detection begins with a discussion of literary forgeries. The narrator, an unnamed young aesthete, tells his friend and interlocuter Erskine that such forgeries “are merely the result of an artistic desire for perfect representation.” If we agree that we have no right to object to the conditions under which an artist chooses to present his work and regard art as “a mode of acting, an attempt to realize one’s own personality on some imaginative plane out of the reach of the trammeling accidents and limitations of real life,” then “to censure an artist for forgery was to confuse an ethical with an aesthetical problem” (152).

The impulse to forge in both the honorific and pejorative senses of that word arises out of a desire for origination, of a passion by the writer to render his subject first—to forge in the smithy of *his* soul rather than to frame the utterance of a predecessor (as I have thus framed Joyce’s). The forger—again, in both senses—claims to be giving his audience a direct expression of personality, his “perfect representation” of the world’s object as in itself it really is—or in the case of Mr. W. H.—was, an artifact bathed in what Walter Benjamin called its authenticating aura (217-51). In contrast, the framer not only admits the layered and derivative quality of his utterance but flaunts it in quotation or, as with Wilde, allusive transvaluation. Forgery and framing thus apparently stand in an inverse relationship to each other. The artist either frames or forges, and while the framer who more or less explicitly acknowledges his source seems honest (though, as we shall see by the end of my argument, “seems” is the operative word here), the forger, like his brother the plagiarist, seems to be involved in a morally



reprehensible act. But "the fact of a man being [a forger or] a poisoner is nothing against his prose," Wilde had averred in "Pen Pencil and Poison" (339), an essay in *Intentions*, a defense of the writer Thomas Griffiths Wainwright, who had been both. At any rate, the opening generalization of "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." concerning the equivocal nature of forgery stands as an aesthetic principle which the story examines by way of recursive frames. For it's the work of art at a remove, the imagistic portrait framed by the story of a portrait (as the imagistic picture of Dorian Gray is framed by its textual frame) that exemplifies Wilde's paradoxical principles of representation.

The opening discussion of forgery in "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." leads Erskine to show the narrator a painting done of a young man in Elizabethan dress. That portrait, we learn, is the "proof" of a theory fashioned by a young friend of Erskine's, Cyril Graham, which identifies the inspiration of Shakespeare's sonnets as a boy actor named Willie Hughes. Cyril, whose beauty turns out to equal that of Willie in the portrait, has devised a story of Shakespeare's relations with the young actor, with the rival poet (identified as Marlowe), and with the Dark Lady, which constitutes the essential narrative within the outer narrative.

At the beginning of that outer framing tale, Cyril Graham is already dead, a modern Chatterton who had had the "Elizabethan" portrait forged in order to support his Willie Hughes theory and then in despair at his friend Erskine's skepticism had killed himself as a final attempt at persuasion. We learn that Cyril, like Willie Hughes, was "wonderfully handsome," and that he had been an actor in his Oxford days, taking young women's parts and having had his special triumph as Rosalind in *As You Like It*. The dead Cyril, that is, has become the double of the Willie Hughes he invented, and the outer framing plot is basically an account of the phases of Erskine and the narrator's belief and disbelief, a "dance of shifting credence,"<sup>1</sup> in Cyril's theory. For Erskine, on discovering that Cyril had had the portrait forged, loses *his* belief and falls away from him, but the narrator for whom the "wonderful portrait [has] already begun to have a strange fascination" is converted and devotes himself to a careful study of the sonnets. He then reconverts Erskine to belief but in the course of doing so loses his own conviction. In the story's final act of metaframing Erskine attempts to reconvert the now skeptical narrator by means of a letter, written from Cannes, in which he explains that he has decided to follow Cyril Graham in giving his life for the theory and to atone for the skepticism that had driven Cyril to his death. The narrator rushes to Cannes, finds that Erskine is indeed dead, but soon learns that he has died not by his own hand but of consumption. Erskine's attempt to forge (in both senses) his own suicide has failed, but he has won the narrator over, bequeathing to him the portrait of Willie Hughes in which the narrator, in the story's final turn of the screw, now "believes." "There really is a great deal to be said for the Willie Hughes theory of Shakespeare's Sonnets," the narrator affirms in the story's closing sentence (220) as he

attempts to tease the reader into belief.

In thus retelling the plot, I have intentionally stressed an absurdist quality that is easy to miss because of a life-and-death seriousness of narrative tone, especially in the opening didactic generalizations about forgery and representation. For in this tale of a forgery that for Wilde expresses "the artistic desire for perfect representation," we can see his parodic examination of the death instinct behind such a desire. In that sense, I see this tale as a comic pendant to an earnest "Lady of Shalott," or at least my sense of that Tennyson poem. In two recent essays on that work as a paradigm of what is being done with representation theory these days in the criticism of Victorian poetry, I cited Geoffrey Hartman's Lacanian reading of the Lady's passion for direct, unmediated contact with the world's substance, her unwillingness to rest outside of the frame and within mere surface representation, as *the* single best poetic expression of "a Western desire for reality-mastery as aggressive and fatal as Freud's death instinct" (8). "I am half-sick of shadows," says the Lady and thus turns from her mirror of representation to the supposed reality of Lancelot, an attempt at advent which turns out to be suicidal. Wilde had given his own cautionary version of that desire in Sybil Vane, the music hall actress in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. "My love, my love! Prince Charming, Prince of Life. I have grown sick of shadows. You are more to me than life can ever be," she says to Dorian, echoing Tennyson's Lady very directly, as she (Sybil Vane) prepares to descend from her theatrical heights of represented life into the Real Thing, a descent that precipitates *her* suicide. ("Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril," as both the Lady of Shalott and Sybil Vane learn.)<sup>2</sup> In the forged suicides of "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," we may have a further exemplification of the death instinct that Hartman has defined—but in a comic register. As Shakespeare's, Willie Hughes', and Cyril Graham's Rosalind might have said, "Men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for a literary theory." That is, Wilde undoubtedly feels that it is important to be earnest about first critical principles, and critics have taken quite seriously this tale of young aesthetes willing to put their lives on the line for a theory of homosexual love generated by an actor (Sybil Vane no longer disguised as a woman). But the story's domino effect of suicides reminds us (or at least me) of nothing so much as the mass suicides caused by the illusiveness of another theatrical performer, Zuleika Dobson.

In striving to reach the imaginative plane out of the reach of life's vagaries, the Wilde artist does erect a series of comic frames in *mis en abyme* fashion, and we are meant to admire the elaboration of textual forgery piled upon forgery by which this occurs. (One might at this point mention that the Mr. W. H. theory is itself a plagiarism by Wilde, having first been advanced in 1766 by the Shakespearean scholar Thomas Tyrwhitt and then incorporated into Malone's 1780 edition of the *Poems of Shakespeare*. Moreover, in the *Woman's World* of September 1888 Wilde had edited an article by Amy Strachey entitled "The Child Players of the Elizabethan Age," from

1. The phrase is G. Robert Stange's from an unpublished manuscript on the prizing of the Artificial over the Natural in nineteenth-century aesthetics, to which my own formulations are indebted.

2. For a fuller comparison of the Lady of Shalott and Sybil Vane, see Joseph, *Tennysonian Love: The Strange Diagonal* 49-50.



which he had borrowed significantly [see Gagnier 41]). But the ultimate pathos of Wilde's life and work, two texts inseparable from one another, is the revenge of Nature upon the artist who would escape "the trammeling accidents and limitations of life" into the redoubt of art. "Nature has good intentions, of course, but...she cannot carry them out," says Wilde in "The Decay of Lying," (291) the first essay in *Intentions*—and if that volume has any single thesis, it is the subordination of Nature's "purposes" to those of the artist. If Nature's intentions seem relatively clear, the artist's are oblique and layered, entailing a frame-within-a-frame crystallization that evades a gross reality, a nuanced textualization of life that "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." demonstrates to perfection. At the most complex of meta-frames that the artist's imagination can achieve, he sits forging an artifice of freedom to the very edge of belief but never quite passing over as he asserts his control over his layered fiction. And to whatever depth he goes, he will always remain on the surface and on the frame.

But of course Nature will have its answer—and one which reminds the artist that his assertion of control over his texts is a delusion, since there will always be unanticipated meta-frames of more and less hostile readers proliferating beyond his intention's outer-most edge—hostile at the very least in the Derridean sense that all inscription and re-inscription is aggressive (see Derrida 101-40). At the outset of this paper I provisionally set up a "criminal" forgery and an "honest" framing in opposition, but I would now like to suggest that they move toward each other as problematic moral categories. For if forgery may be ethically defended (and "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." undertakes precisely such a defense) frames approach the condition of the criminal frame-up—and nowhere more so than in the practice of literary criticism. For the framer of the Wildean critic's frame, the "critic as artist's" critic, as it were, always has a greater cognitive leverage that comes from his vantage point of belatedness, a degree of control that he can—and frequently does—use for *his* skeptical purposes. Hoist by his own critical petard, the exhibitionist framer of the clever paradox becomes the victimized framee of other people's voyeuristic frames.

Let me by way of illustration close with a parable of such critical revenge that Wilde came to know through the circulation of a purloined letter (in Lacan's sense) that he had sent to Alfred Douglas. As he recalls that circulation for Douglas in *De Profundis*,

You send me a nice poem, of the undergraduate school of verse, for my approval: I reply by a letter of fantastic literary conceits....Look at the history of that letter! It passes from you into

the hands of a loathsome companion: from him to a gang of blackmailers; copies of it are sent about London to my friends, and to the manager of the theatre where my work is being performed: every construction but the right one is put on it: Society is thrilled with the absurd rumours that I have had to pay a huge sum of money for having written an infamous letter to you: this forms the basis of your father's worst attack: I produce the original letter myself in Court to show *what it really is*; it is denounced by your father's counsel as a revolting and insidious attempt to corrupt Innocence: ultimately it forms part of a criminal charge: the Crown takes it up: the Judge sums up on it with little learning and much morality: I go to prison for it at last. That is the result of writing you a charming letter. (34-35, italics added)

In our post-Wildean theories, we may be asked to believe that the function of criticism is to see the object, the "original letter," as what in itself it really is not. But we instinctively rebel when *our* charming texts are so purloined and then misprisoned, when they elude our intentions. For Wilde at any rate the return of Nature against the Text has an appropriately ironic and unintended Arnoldian ring to it, as he produces the original letter in the Court of history in the naive attempt to show what it "*really is*." Arnold has the latest frame after all.

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## Books Received

- British Poetry and Prose 1870-1905*. Ed. Ian Fletcher. Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 1987. [lviii] + 497. £ 19.50 (cloth), £ 7.95 (paper). Includes selections from some 61 authors as well as a 35 pp. introduction, suggestions for further reading, a 22 pp. biographical index, and a chronology.
- Emeljanow, Victor. *Victorian Popular Dramatists*. Twayne's English Author's Series 440. Boston: Twayne, 1987. [xii] + 181. \$24.95. Includes chapters on "Dramatic Forms and their Theatrical Context," Douglas Jerrold, Tom Taylor, Thomas William Robertson, and Henry Arthur Jones.
- Fryckstedt, Monica Correa. *Geraldine Jewsbury's "Athenaeum" Reviews: A Mirror of Mid-Victorian Attitudes to Fiction*. Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia 61. Uppsala: The Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 1986. Pp. 163. Sek 110. Short chapters: "The Mid-Victorian Novel," "Mid-Victorian Reviewing, the *Athenaeum* and Geraldine Jewsbury," "Morality and Fiction," "Realism, Plot, Characterisation and Subject Matter," "Some Major Novelists: Trollope, George Eliot, Collins and Meredith," "The Domestic Fifties," and "The Wicked Sixties," as well as a checklist of the hundreds of Jewsbury's reviews in the *Athenaeum*.
- Harding, Joan N. *From Fox How to Fairy Hill: A Study of Matthew Arnold's In-laws with Special Reference to the Bensons of Fairy Hill, Gower, South Wales*. Cowbridge and Bridgend: D. Brown and Sons, 1986. Pp. 83. £ 7.95 "This book has something quite new to tell us about Arnold's affiliations with South Wales through his wife's family and their widespread connections. I have learned a lot from it about the varied life of those gifted Victorians and their contributions to the age in so many fields" (A.L. Rowse, "Introduction" [5]).
- Hawthorn, Jeremy. *Bleak House*. The Critics Debate Series. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1987. Pp. 93. \$22.50. (cloth), \$7.95 (paper). "The reader should know something of my own critical position. My personal bias is towards seeing literary works—and critical treatments of them—in their social and historical contexts, and if I were forced to characterise my position very simply then I would call myself a Marxist critic" (12).
- Hornback, Bert G. *Great Expectations: A Novel of Friendship*. Twayne's Masterwork Studies 6. Boston: Twayne, 1987. Pp. xiii + 152. \$17.95. "This book began with an invitation and an expectation. I was invited to write a book on *Great Expectations*, and expected to write it for serious students of the novel, avoiding as I did so 'critical jargon' and all of that stuff called theory of criticism. I was delighted at the invitation—and I hope I have fulfilled the expectation" (ix).
- Kanner, Barbara. *Women in English Social History 1800-1914: A Guide to Research*. Vol. 3 *Autobiographical Writings*. New York & London: Garland, 1987. 3 vols. 1987-. Pp. 215. \$30.00. 776 entries rather unevenly done; some are annotated, others not. A 38pp intro. which includes more than 100 of the 776 entries, dealing with women and with autobiography in general.
- Lightman, Bernard. *The Origins of Agnosticism: Victorian Unbelief and the Limits of Knowledge*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1987. Pp. x + 249. \$29.50. "If we look carefully into the sources of the agnostics' stress on the limits of knowledge, we will find ourselves face to face with the strange discovery that agnosticism owes a profound debt to an epistemological position put forward by a number of ardent Christian thinkers. This is more than a quirk of intellectual history; it points to the religious origins of agnosticism" (5).
- Palmegiano, E. M. *The British Empire in the Victorian Press, 1832-1867: A Bibliography*. New York & London: Garland, 1987. Pp. xviii + 234. \$40.00. Includes 2859 entries, a 7 pp. preface, a 57 pp. introduction and a checklist of 36 journals publishing material on the British Empire.
- Peters, Catherine. *Thackeray's Universe: Shifting Worlds of Imagination and Reality*. London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987. Pp. xi + 292. £ 12.95 "[T]he twentieth-century critical theories that have proposed a complete schism between writer and work are hard to apply to a novelist who quarried his own life for the impressive edifices of the novels; they lead to other kinds of distortion. The problem is to keep a balance; to identify the raw materials, but to be aware that the finished work is a work of art, and not a covert autobiography. This study attempts such a balance..." (ix).
- The Poetry of Sordello*. Ed. and trans. James J. Wilhelm. Garland Library of Medieval Literature 42, series A. New York & London: Garland, 1987. Pp. xl + 256. \$37.00. Includes the texts and translations of some 43 poems by this 13th-century poet, who influenced Dante, Browning and Pound.
- The Pre-Raphaelites*. Ed. Jerome H. Buckley. Chicago: Academy Chicago Press, 1987. Pp. xxvii + 514. \$10.95 (paper). An "expanded, updated edition of the standard anthology first published in 1968."
- Roberts, Sir Charles G. D. *The Collected Poems of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts: A Critical Edition*. Ed. Desmond Pacey. Wolfville, Nova Scotia: Wombat Press, 1985. Pp. xxii + 672. \$49.50. Almost 400 poems written between 1880 and 1943 by this Canadian poet.
- Studies in Prose Literature*. Ed. Joy Hooton. Department of English Occasional Paper No. 5. Duntroon, New South Wales: University of New South Wales, 1985. Pp. 79. Includes "*Daniel Deronda: A Case Study of Creative Schizophrenia*" and "*Pegasus in Harness: The Writer as Man of Business*" (about Thackeray's handling of his finances.)
- Wright, Terence. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. The Critics Debate Series. Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press, 1987. Pp. xii + 84. \$22.50 (cloth), \$7.95 (paper). "Is the novel... 'causative' or 'affective'? I hope to give some answer to this central question in the 'Appraisal' part of the book but first I shall try to give an outline of some of the major critical responses to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*" (xii).



# Victorian Group News

## Announcements

VICTORIAN BELIEF AND UNBELIEF will be the topic of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Midwest Victorian Studies Association, to be held at Indiana University-Bloomington on April 29-30, 1988. The Association welcomes proposals dealing with established religion and the challenges or alternatives to it; sacred music, art, and architecture; and the general nature of spiritual and moral commitment in Victorian Britain. Eight- to ten-page papers or two-page abstracts should be sent no later than Nov. 5, 1987 to Kristine Ottesen Garrigan, MVSA Executive Sec., Dept of English, DePaul Univ., 802 West Belden, Chicago, IL 60614.

The Victorian Studies Association of Ontario will hold its twentieth annual conference in Toronto on 16 April 1988. Judith R. Walkowitz (History, Rutgers Univ.) will speak about "Melodrama and Victorian Political Culture: The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" and Michael R. Booth (Theatre, Univ. of Victoria) about "Melodrama and Crime." Membership in the Association costs \$10.00 a year and is open to anyone interested in the Victorian period. Membership applications, cheques, and enquiries about the conference should be sent to Dr. Jean O'Grady, Secretary-Treasurer, Victorian Studies Assoc., Pratt 322, Victoria College, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1K7.

The Southeastern Nineteenth Century Studies Association (SENSCA) conference is to be held April 7-9, 1988, at Georgetown University, Washington D.C. The topic for the interdisciplinary conference is "The Outsider and the Outside View" in the nineteenth century. We invite papers on any aspect of the outsider in nineteenth century life and letters—in music, political science, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, economics, literature, history, languages, history of science and technology, art history, linguistics, architecture, American and Afro-American studies, women's studies, etc. Papers must be timed to read in 20 minutes and should reach the Program Director (Leona Fisher, Department of English, Georgetown Univ. Washington D.C. 20057) by Nov. 1, 1987. Papers should be accompanied by a vita and a short abstract (approximately 3 sentences).

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